

curator was gevraagd. Mijn ego was te groot, vonden ze. Ik moest snappen wat ze voor mij hadden betekend, en aan wie ze me allemaal hadden voorgesteld. Aan mijn PhD-begeleider suggereerden ze dat mijn werk helemaal niet zo indrukwekkend was. Ken je plek, meisje.

De curator van het museum 'kon' niks doen; omdat de erven alle belangrijke bruiklenen bezitten moest ik maar afwachten. Ze had trouwens al lang een slecht gevoel over deze familie, 'ze maken alles kapot wat ze aanraken.'

Uiteindelijk kwam het vonnis binnen in de vorm van een verschrikkelijk rondetafelgesprek waarin ik had besloten dat ik niet zou gaan huilen en over mij heen werd geschreeuwd en gescholden; ik ben een slecht, incapabel, ondankbaar persoon en ontslagen in zowel mijn tentoonstellingsrol als voor het archiefwerk. En naar die PhD kon ik natuurlijk ook fluiten.

Dit is waar het verhaal moeilijk wordt, omdat het zo extreem is en omdat ik zo'n lading wrok over me uitgestort heb gekregen dat ik het bijna ook niet kon volgen. Het leek een *fever dream*, waarin vier personen elkaar helemaal opstookten en ook hun verdriet over eerdere gefaalde plannen – zoals een lokaal museum over de kunstenaar en mislukte internationale samenwerkingen – over mij uitstortten. Waarschijnlijk heeft de familie nooit echt gedacht dat mijn onderzoek hun (groot) vader juist een enorme dienst zou kunnen bewijzen. Ik werd gedegradeerd tot een vijand. De curator vond het jammer voor me en gaf het advies om even iets anders te doen, in een bakkerij werken of zo, want de kunstwereld is echt heel naar.

Toch ben ik aan het doormodderen in die kunstwereld, na veel buikpijn en rare dromen. Ik ben niet persoonlijk bedankt voor mijn werk, ook niet kalm een paar maanden later. De tentoonstelling opperde dat de kleinkinderen jarenlang in het archief hadden gewerkt en daarbij werden de archiefvondsten uit mijn scriptieonderzoek ge-highlight. Zo'n veertig namen worden in de catalogus genoemd; een netwerk vol dank en liefde, maar ik ben hierin niet te bekennen.

Onlangs sprak ik op een conferentie over mijn archiefonderzoek. Nu er een aantal jaren overheen zijn, leek het mij fijn mijn eigen kennis over deze kunstenaar met een groep experts te delen. Even dacht ik dat de familie aanwezig zou zijn, maar bedacht me toen dat ik hun paranoïde houding niet moest overnemen. Ook bij sollicitaties vrees ik soms dat er iets van hun wrok over mij heen hangt, maar ik probeer te bedenken dat ze vast niet iedereen kennen en mijn toekomst vast niet nog erger willen schaden. Maar ze zaten er dus toch, met boze blikken en hun armen over elkaar, ik denk om mij te intimideren. Ze bleken de organisatoren van de conferentie van tevoren boos gemaaild te hebben, wilden er meer over weten en ook niet de toegangsprijs betalen. En ze gingen meteen weg na mijn presentatie.

Omdat de zaal vol zat met andere archiefwerkers, kreeg ik hartelijke en warme reacties van herkenning; meer mensen met jarenlang onzichtbaar werk. Bij de borrel veel warmte en spontane knuffels, een helende ervaring voor mij, maar ook intens verdrietig dat dit machtsmisbruik zo veelvoorkomend is. Voor dit soort verhalen is er geen plek en zelfs onder een pseudoniem wordt me afgeraden hier nog langer over te spreken. Maar ik laat het gaan door het te hebben benoemd.

Fiona F. (pseudonym) is onderzoeker, curator, en kunsthistoricus.

Seppe-Hazel Laeremans

c. WE ARE ALSO PART:

ON GAY LIBERATION GROUP NÓS TAMBÉM

A nachronistically, fabulatively, and obliquely, gay liberation group *Nós Também* narrated the tales of queer life in João Pessoa, a state capital along the coast of Brazil's Northeast. Towards the end of Brazil's twenty-one-year military dictatorship (1964–1985), the group and several adjacent figures collectively produced a series of subversive short films on Super 8, mimeographed manifestos, informal exhibitions, protests, and more.² Each of these fragile cultural productions offers insight into the weight of the contemporaneous censorship laws of the time, which specifically affected those in peripheral positions, such as, among others, queer and trans people.

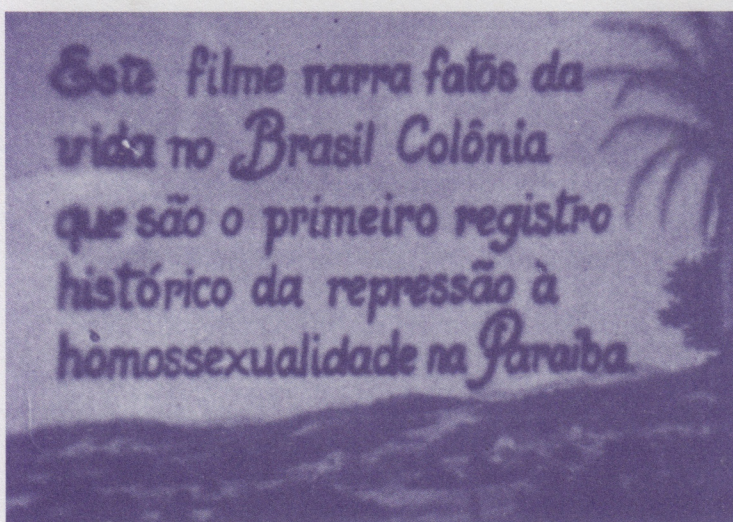
Censorship, here, had both a face and a uniform, meaning its conditions did not just consist of abstract pressures. In 1981, for example, federal police agents fired tear gas and rubber bullets into the audience during a screening organised by affiliated filmmaker Pedro Nunes. The following year, when Nunes sought to premiere his film-cum-manifesto on sexuality, *Closes*, he was first required to screen it to a public censor from the *Public Entertainment Censorship Division* (or *DCDP*), accompanied by seven armed soldiers.

Now, around forty-five years later, I visit three members and adjacent makers of *Nós Também*, Pedro Nunes, Bertrand Lira, and Henrique Magalhães, over the course of several weeks, during the height of a January summer. As I return to the city, I realise I had forgotten the taste of pitombas, as well as the way the humidity here sticks to one's thoughts.



Film still from *Baltazar da Lomba*, directed by *Nós Também*, portraying an intimate scene between actors João Valença and Marcelo Fidelis. Image courtesy of the filmmakers

- 1 The name of the group, *Nós Também*, stemmed as a response to another gay liberation group called *Somos*, which was then based in São Paulo. They proclaimed, in their very name, "We Are" and so the Paraíba group said "We Are Too." Later this then simply became *Nós Também*, or "Us Too".
- 2 A series of these short films are available both informally through YouTube and formally through CinéLimite, a volunteer-led digitisation and distribution initiative. These include *Baltazar da Lomba* (1982) by *Nós Também*, *Closes* (1982) by Pedro Nunes, *Perequeté* (1981) by Bertrand Lira, *Miserere Nobis* (1983) by Lauro Nascimento, and *Era Vermelho Seu Batom* (1983) by Henrique Magalhães.



Film still from *Baltazar da Lomba*, directed by *Nós Também*, including one of the introductory title cards. Image courtesy of the filmmakers

I first came to know of Henrique Magalhães' practice through a dear and older friend, and meet the illustrator and publisher, and his partner Domingos, one early Tuesday afternoon in their apartment overlooking the city. There, we share tiny cups of coffee and exchange fond and unhurried anecdotes on the balcony before moving to their kitchen counter. He lays out four thick cardboard folders. Henrique, in and out of the context of *Nós Também*, frequently worked as a graphic designer, and would facilitate the printed matter for the group, which he has since carefully held onto.

While leafing through leaflets published by *Nós Também*, we stumble upon a twenty-page-long booklet contextualising the group's final film, from 1982, titled *Baltazar da Lomba*. The film portrays the historical figure of the same name, the first person punished for sodomy in Paraíba since Portuguese colonisation, in this very city, in 1595.

The story of Baltazar da Lomba only marginally follows similar convictions of Felipa de Souza, convicted for "nefariousness" and lesbianism, and Xica Manicongo,³ who was sentenced for both (t)he(i)r sexual activities and gender-nonconforming dress.⁴

Henrique tells me that it was important for the group's members to historicise that moment as the first record of the repression of homosexuality in Paraíba, and specifically to show how homophobia in the Brazilian context functions as a form of repression rooted in colonisation. Beyond that, it was a reconstruction of a history that had been at least partially lost through deliberately skewed and unfaithful retellings, as well as centuries of suppression of queerness.

It is from a similar impulse, I think, that writer and scholar Saidiya Hartman develops the notion of critical fabulation in her 2008 essay *Venus in Two Acts*. There, she reflects on fiction's potential to reconstruct histories effaced by colonial violence. The critically fabulated story, in its exaggeration and its willingness to imagine, holds an incredibly fruitful position for exactly those histories that are lost or suppressed, whether through censorship or erasure, in the reconstruction of collective memory.

Henrique's thoughts are then extended by the words I read by fellow member Gabriel Bechara, in the introductory

text of this rich, dusty, and dactylographed publication, where he writes how "the objective of the film wasn't merely to document, but rather to present the story as a starting point for further discussion."

I tell Henrique how I have been moved, many times over, by the many defiant strategies deployed by him and his fellow members to make their stories public during such a time of political and social suppression, and persistent surveillance and control. No small amount of courage was required to be as provocative and unruly as they were.

One such provocation we chat about over another round of coffee, appears in the film's intermissionary scenes, where the film crew themselves, in their clothes and hairdos unmistakably reminiscent of the early 1980s, are shown alongside the characters set in the late sixteenth century. This self-declaration, and self-portraiture, defied every demand of a regime that for decades had pushed queer people into marginal, invisible, and silent positions in Brazilian society.

The significance of such an act of self-inscription into a partially lost or effaced history should not be underestimated. And this, I believe, holds as much for the members of *Nós Também* in their turn towards Baltazar da Lomba, as for both me and you, now four decades later, in our turn towards *Nós Também*.

Nearing the end of the twenty-minute short film, as Baltazar da Lomba escapes in search of freedom, he finds it by crossing a river in a small wooden boat into the neighbouring state of Pernambuco, to the south of Paraíba. There, the main character encounters, quite wonderfully, both liberation and the gay liberation group *Nós Também* themselves. The members kindly welcome Baltazar, surrounding a small burgundy car, before heading out to a carnivalesque scene in the nearby city of Olinda.

I note to Henrique how, specifically because of this scene, the film reminds me of Jarmanesque reinterpretations of historical figures. In Derek Jarman's 1991 *Edward II*, for instance, a medieval scene is anachronistically overtaken by a bravura of queer AIDS activists. I am, I continue to share across the kitchen counter, drawn to read into this parallel how anachronisms as queer narrative tools insist that neither persecution nor resistance are historically confined, and rather, both are living traditions that refuse the chromonormative linearity of History. He replies ...

"It indeed was the Carnival in Olinda we went to. The idea was to show that Baltazar's rebellious and freedom-seeking spirit was not stuck in the past. Rather, it continued to live on in 1982. I still believe that to be the case today. And in a very similar way, the work of *Nós Também* always had that somewhat carnivalesque quality. In the film we deliberately placed ourselves inside Baltazar's story. Those scenes at the beginning, when the narrative cuts and the team appears directing, setting things up, discussing the film—it was our way of saying that we are also part of this history."

Seppe-Hazel Laeremans (BE, they/them) is a queer graphic designer, editor and host based in Tallinn. In their practice they think through queered notions of fabulation, il/legibility, and whimsy.

3 Xica Manicongo was an enslaved Congolese person displaced to Salvador, Bahia, recorded by the Portuguese Inquisition under her Christian name Francisco, and accused of sodomy for refusing to wear men's clothing. *Nós Também*, following the colonial archive, refers to her as Francisco throughout their writings. Her name Xica was posthumously given by Black travesti activist Majorie Marchi, who in the early 2000s reclaimed Xica Manicongo as the first travesti (a distinctly Latin American gender identity) in Brazilian recorded history.

4 All three stories were largely rediscovered through documents from the Portuguese Inquisition in the early twentieth century, which back then caused considerable debate around questions of national identity, particularly within academic and intellectual circles.