

# *Il est Interdit d'Interdire: The Transnational Experience of 1968 in Brazil*

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The second round of the 3rd International Popular Song Festival in Brazil witnessed a now-famous confrontation between singer Caetano Veloso and the university student-dominated audience that filled the hall that September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1968. In the midst of an already chaotic performance, in which Veloso could barely be heard above the students' boos, jeers and insults, he abruptly stopped singing and used the microphone instead to rebuke the audience, criticizing not simply their behavior, but also their politicized approach to music. Photographs of the event document the sheer quantity of paper balls and other objects lobbed onto the stage, while the live recording (released soon afterwards as a single) testifies to the vociferous antagonism expressed on all sides in this unprecedented moment of hostility.

Student booing and other expressions of displeasure were of course nothing new. For the previous several years, music festivals like this one, sponsored by various television channels, had become major social and cultural events, and university students attended them in droves. Like other events such as the Cannes Film Festival, the Brazilian music festivals both showcased songwriters' latest compositions and pitted them against one another in fierce competition. It was the songs themselves, not the singers' interpretations, that were theoretically under scrutiny by the juries, but the televised performances before live audiences that united the country's best and most popular musicians nevertheless lay at the heart of the festivals' appeal. Audience participation thus became a fundamental part of the live performances and organized groups within the crowd – quickly dubbed *torcidas*, a term usually applied to fans of a particular athletic team – came prepared with signs and banners to support their preferred

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entries. Much to the chagrin of many an out-of-favor performer, however, they also came prepared to express contempt for those they did not like, and merciless and unceasing boos from certain sectors of the audience became one of the festivals' defining characteristics. Of the many *torcidas* or cheering sections that appeared, left-leaning university students quickly developed a reputation for being the most critical – and the most vociferous.

The university students' attitude to the music festivals as more than artistic competitions and their cheers and boos stemmed from more than simple competitive exuberance. For despite (or partly because of) the military regime then in power and the censorship it attempted to exercise over cultural endeavors, music festivals also became national political events, where the songs' explicit or implicit political meanings elicited strong reactions from the crowd. Indeed, the military *coup d'état* of April 1, 1964 only shook but did not destroy the spirit of "revolutionary romanticism" shared by politically leftist artists and university students, who believed that political consciousness raising by means of art was necessary in order to effect change in Brazil.<sup>2</sup>

Attendance at the music festivals was considered by the students to be both a collective political expression and a worthwhile attempt to influence cultural production and hence the political/cultural messages that would reach national audiences. Among their concerns was the defense of what came to be called Brazilian Popular Music (*Música Popular Brasileira*, MPB). This was an outgrowth of *bossa nova* that merged nationalist and protest song traditions, as opposed to the so-called "yeah, yeah, yeah" of Brazilian rock, dubbed *Jovem Guarda* (Young Guard), which was considered a vacuous and purely commercial imitation of foreign styles. Tel· Cardim, a particularly daring *torcida* leader and celebrity in her own right, later shed light on how politically important participation in these festivals was to many students by stating definitively, "I was a protester. I went to the hall like a lot of people there, a lot of university students, to protest the regime through the Brazilian popular music movement at the festivals. I took firecrackers with me and when I didn't like a song, I popped them off on the stage."<sup>3</sup> From this perspective, university students considered it important to rally around songs they "liked" and to set off fireworks or otherwise disrupt those they did not.

Performers were hardly undaunted by the prospect of playing to such vociferously critical audiences. In his detailed and engaging history of these music festivals, journalist Zuza Homem de Mello describes terrified musicians backstage before the performance betting on which of them would be booed the loudest.<sup>4</sup> Nor did they always remain cool in such tense circumstances. In October, 1967, Sérgio Ricardo, despite being an audience favorite, nevertheless lost his patience when the noisy fans refused to settle down long enough to hear him say a few

words. Growing ever more frustrated and unnerved by their cacophony, he ended up by smashing his guitar against a pedestal, throwing the pieces into the crowd and storming offstage. And, contrary to what some observers at the time hoped, the rise of student-led street demonstrations across the country did not result in quieter audiences at music festivals by satiating young people with these other outlets for expression. Rather, the police repression with which such demonstrations were usually met served to further reinforce the importance of music festivals as arenas still immune to such violence. By September 1968, following many months of intense political activity, the university students approached the 3rd International Popular Song Festival imbued with strong convictions regarding politicized culture and the importance of political expression.

From a related yet different perspective, so did Veloso. At that time a quickly rising star among composers and performers, he fell into neither of the two basic camps of MPB or *Jovem Guarda*. Rather, he was beginning to embark on what would become a rather “unstable bridge” between the two,<sup>5</sup> helping to develop Tropicalia, defined by music historian Christopher Dunn as “a high-impact movement...that appropriated local and foreign musical styles and relativized prevailing notions of cultural authenticity.”<sup>6</sup> In his first festival appearance the previous year, Veloso had defied initial audience resistance to his use of electric guitars and his hybridized style. At that performance, the crowd’s initial boos at hearing the electronic twining of the Argentine rock band that accompanied him were quickly transformed into cries of delight. They were won over by his thoughtful, melodic song, which went on to take fourth place, about a blithe young man on the verge of assuming personal and political responsibilities.

In 1968, however, the scenario was reversed. At the first round of the competition on September 12, held at the theater of the Catholic University (Teatro da Universidade Católica, TUCA) and hence marked by a particularly strong presence of student activists, the young audience applauded furiously when Veloso’s name was announced. But after just a few measures of the strange new sound he presented, a particularly loud student faction began booing. By the end of the number, much of the audience was hurling insults at the stage, furiously rejecting the innovative performance of Veloso and Os Mutantes, the band that was accompanying him.

In addition to experimenting with musical styles, instruments and sounds, Veloso and other Tropicalists had decided to begin staging “happenings,” or semi-improvised performances that were meant to involve the audience and transform the event as a whole into a work of art. His presentation at the Popular Song Festival was in fact designed to be just such an event. The song opened with Os Mutantes playing atonal and rhythmically amorphous chords on electric guitars, in response to which a few scattered members of the audience started booing

angrily. Then Veloso, wearing plastic clothes and draped in electrical wires and animal-tooth necklaces, began to sigh, shout and sing his lyrics as he began to rock his hips in an erotically suggestive manner, eliciting jeers and critical comments from the crowd. As Dunn explains, "Until the advent of Tropicalia, performative gestures among MPB artists were limited to arm swinging, discreet dance steps, and suggestive facial expressions."<sup>7</sup> Veloso occasionally interspersed his song with spoken excerpts of a poem by Fernando Pessoa. As a final touch, the performance ended with a surprise guest appearance by U.S. rock star John Dandurand. Veloso later described Dandurand in his memoirs as "an obvious gringo, tall, very white, wrapped in a hippie poncho and without a thread of hair anywhere on his body...who howled and grunted unintelligibly into the microphone."<sup>8</sup> At this, Veloso recalled, the student activists in the audience exploded in "violent indignation." As he described it, "Various well-known figures demonstrated overt hostility to me, and not a few of them interlaced their boos with insults and curses."<sup>9</sup> Although he intended the "happening" to be provocative, the rancorous intensity of the audience's response nevertheless took him by surprise. "The hate (there's no other word for it) that one could see stamped on the spectators' faces went well beyond what I could have imagined," he wrote.<sup>10</sup> However, despite this vociferous criticism and in face of fierce audience opposition, the song was among those chosen by the jury to participate in the next round. Hence when Veloso returned to the same TUCA auditorium three days later for the next round of the competition, and the students came prepared with tomatoes and other missiles, the stage was set for a showdown.

In contrast to the first round of the festival, the mere mention of Veloso's name in the second round was enough to evoke immediate disapproval from the student-dominated audience, many of whom began to hiss even before the singer got on stage. Wearing the same plastic clothes as before (but without Dandurand, who had been banned from appearing by the festival organizers), Veloso showed no signs of tempering his performance, and even exaggerated his sexual hip gyrating dance, thereby infuriating the audience even further. When a large number of spectators collectively turned their backs to the stage in protest, Os Mutantes responded in kind. When the insults hurled at the stage by the students proved insufficient, they began throwing the fruit and vegetables they had brought for this purpose, later adding plastic cups, balls of paper and anything else that came to hand. This demonstration was not inspired by mere disapproval, but by the students' genuine anger at their formerly beloved star.

Veloso was also angry. He had planned to say a few words about recent acts of censorship, but ended up making a speech that was inspired, as he said later "by the faces I could see in the crowd, their anger and foolishness... [As I looked at them,] my rage and my confused enthusiasm grew."<sup>11</sup> He stopped playing

and, shaking with emotion, made his later-to-become-famous recorded speech, demanding, “Is this really the youth that says it wants to take power? You have the courage this year to applaud a kind of music that last year you didn’t have the guts to applaud... You guys are out of it...” Embraced by his friend and fellow Tropicalia originator Gilberto Gil, who had come on stage to offer support and a few choice words to the rebellious audience, Veloso went on, declaring:

But what kind of youth is this?... You know who you guys are equal to? Is there sound in the mike? Do you know who you’re equal to? Those people who attacked [the actors in a recent play]! You’re not different from them at all. You’re not at all different... The problem is, you’re trying to police Brazilian music! ... But Gil and I have opened the path, and what is it you want? I came here to put an end to all of this. Gilberto Gil is here with me to put an end to the Festival and all this imbecility that reigns in Brazil. No one’s ever heard me talk like this before, you understand? And I just want to say this, *baby*, if you are the same in politics as you are in aesthetics, we’re done for.<sup>12</sup>

Declaring his withdrawal from the competition, Veloso then deliberately finished the song out of tune and, finally declaring “Enough!,” walked off stage arm in arm with Gil and Os Mutantes.

At first glance it may seem strangely ironic that only a few months earlier Veloso and Gil were among the dozens of musicians, actors and artists who had joined student activists in their largest demonstration of that tumultuous year. They had assembled 100,000 people in downtown Rio de Janeiro to march in protest against the escalating police violence directed against the students. Furthermore, the song Veloso was performing was inspired by a bit of Parisian graffiti from May, 1968 and was entitled “*prohibido prohibir*” (It’s prohibited to prohibit) and expressed a liberating energy similar to that imbuing the student activities of that year. The lyrics went “Cars are blazing in flames/ knocking down the china cabinets, bookcases, the statues, glasses, dishes, books, yes/ And I say yes, and I say no to no/ I say it’s prohibited to prohibit.” Given this seeming congruence, why did the students attending the performance object so vehemently to Veloso’s admittedly provocative performance? Dunn and others have pointed out the heightened tensions among the *torcidas* that evening, especially expressed in a physical and verbal scuffle that had broken out earlier after a Tropicalista fan displayed a poster insulting a popular protest singer. Dunn proclaims in light of this that “the partisans of nationalist-participant music, mostly university students, targeted Veloso for revenge.”<sup>13</sup> *Inter-torcida*

rivalries could be intense, and escalating tensions undoubtedly helped create a mood of collective agitation. Yet it is the students' underlying nationalist focus that has attracted most attention. Veloso seems to suggest by his comments that students opposed his musically iconoclastic experimentalism because they were imbued with a dogmatic nationalism that colored their artistic interpretation and caused them to consider deviations from traditional aesthetic forms politically suspect. Gilberto Gil succinctly supported this view that evening, when he told newspaper reporters that the student uproar could be blamed on the "idiocy" the Communist Party had "put in their heads."<sup>14</sup> Later observers tend to accept the explanation that in the politically heated tensions between the MPB and the *Jovem Guarda*, Veloso's deliberate use of international sounds and styles made him suspect. Zuza Homem de Mello, for example, tried to express the students' views by writing: "Why aren't [Veloso and Gil] on the left like us? If they were, they would take on the pains of the Brazilian people, they would protest this situation, and they wouldn't keep on clanging that imported music."<sup>15</sup> According to this view, the "imported" character of Veloso's performance is what provoked the students' strong reaction.

While the particularities of the night's tensions and the context of student activists' relationship to Brazilian Popular Music go far towards providing a general background for the anger and betrayal expressed by the student audience, they do not fully explain it. Although raucous *torcida* booing was standard festival fare, their reaction this time exceeded previous disruptions, including those aroused by singers who were considered to belong to one camp or the other. Instead, it was this ambiguously crafted piece that brought its young listeners to such a high emotional level. Apart from its inexplicable irony, this scenario points to some of the fissures and contradictions that characterized that moment in Brazilian history. International events were making it clear that youth and "youth culture" constituted a vital political force, despite the fact that the international scene was at times mobilized to undermine Brazilian students' political and cultural authenticity.

Put another way, the above scenario exposes the local manifestations of the 1968 transnational situation, in which debates about national authenticity affected students on many levels. Despite the specific local determinants of Brazilian students' political activity in the late 1960s, their actions cannot be disassociated from the global upsurge of student movements and the attention being paid to youth culture at around the same time. While most scholars would agree that the nearly worldwide student demonstrations of 1968 were more than a synchronous occurrence of isolated student activities, they still struggle to explain the nexus between the local and the global.<sup>16</sup> Most tend to focus on causality, on the degree to which student activity in one area prompted it in another. They seek a

common denominator, such as a critical understanding of U.S. hegemony in the world system, or a shared “international language of dissent” that allowed for new forms of expression.<sup>17</sup> But beyond the question of the ways in which global forces may have fueled local student movements, we know very little about the ongoing dialectic between local and international student movement activity. What significance did the global wave of student uprisings have for domestic processes? What kind of impact did other demonstrations have on local student struggles? In short, what was the relationship between international and local youth culture in 1968?

By re-examining the Brazilian student movement in that year and focusing on the significance of the global wave of student activity for this local struggle, we can view the students’ late-1968 response to Veloso’s performance in a broader context. The international upsurge of students’ political culture and activism in 1968 cannot be seen as having inspired its Brazilian counterpart, but rather as an exogenous and an endogenous force in Brazil, having an impact on the reception, direction and ultimate significance of local student movements. The audience’s vehement response to Veloso’s experimental performance cannot be understood except in the context of a year in which authenticity became a vitally contested category, and in which local and global student movement activities were constantly being compared and played off one against the another.

### **The University Student Tradition in Brazil**

In the January, 1970 edition of the *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*, political scientist Robert Myhr argued that the then-recent wave of “student ferment...in both the ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ nations around the globe” was, in Brazil, at least, “not just a recent phenomenon.” Rather, he noted, Brazilian students “enjoy an important tradition of student political activism that cannot be overlooked,” as it justified student political activity both to students themselves and to their observers.<sup>18</sup> As a historical document, the article reveals how quickly academe turned its investigative tools towards trying to understand the various national pieces to this transnational puzzle. Academically speaking, Myhr was undoubtedly correct in noting that student political activity had a long history in Brazil, which he meticulously detailed in the remainder of the article. But by only going as far as 1945, he failed to observe the continuity of this tradition. In the years leading up to 1968, students’ legitimacy as political actors was publicly and repeatedly disputed, and this would influence how they were viewed in light of the publicity given to international student demonstrations.

As Myhr and others have noted, ever since there have been schools of higher learning in Brazil, students have established a variety of student organizations, political groups and clubs.<sup>19</sup> After 1937, they channeled their energies into the National Union of Students (União Nacional dos Estudantes, UNE), a group that was officially recognized by the government, winning for them both a beautiful building for their headquarters in Rio de Janeiro and a small annual budget. UNE soon joined in the nationwide political debates of the period and leadership positions in the union served as important stepping-stones towards political careers. UNE election campaigns were always fiercely fought and reflected a diversity of political positions. But in the mid-1950s the nationalist, communist and socialist sectors of the student movement allied themselves with two important Catholic youth organizations, and this coalition quickly rose to prominence within the union. Beginning with the 1961 UNE elections, students from these leftist Catholic sectors consistently won UNE leadership positions, thus strongly influencing the union's agenda. This new leadership spearheaded a campaign for university reform that found immense support among the student body. In 1962 they organized a three-month student strike, the most extensive to have ever taken place, in which strikers demanded that one-third of the seats on the universities' governing councils be reserved for students. Although the proposed legislation was ultimately defeated in the congress, UNE remained a visible political force. However, parallel to broader political changes among the left, UNE leaders moved away from student-specific issues and instead allied themselves with labor movements and other bodies demanding extensive reforms from then-President João Goulart. UNE figured prominently as the unions' "obligatory partner,"<sup>20</sup> sharing the stage and the microphone with them at the plethora of political rallies and demonstrations that took place in 1963 and early 1964.

This position earned the student union fierce and powerful critics. "UNE's actions in the anti-imperialist blocs made it a favorite target of those social groups that formed to halt the rise of the popular and nationalist movement, calling for military intervention to put an end to populism," explains sociologist João Roberto Martins Filho.<sup>21</sup> Yet if previously one could always find those who disagreed with the particular political positions students adopted, during this period some also began to publicly challenge their basic right to political participation. In this Cold War era, they proposed that young people were too vulnerable to communist influence and hence should avoid political activity entirely. The Instituto de Pesquisas e Estudos Sociais (IPES, Institute of Social Research and Study), a private foundation established by staunchly anti-communist businessmen in the early 1960s, made the de-politicization of students a top priority. To this end, they funded the publication of books, produced short



films to be presented at movie houses before feature films and hosted conferences and symposia on educational questions.<sup>22</sup> They emphasized university students' national duty to dedicate their efforts to mastering technical skills that would further Brazilian development and argued that political activity were not only a waste of time, but also exposed students to the dangers of "strange, foreign influences." In the film from which this expression is quoted, for example, the student-narrator asserts, "Base political maneuvers...have nothing to do with the university spirit... That's why I, as a Brazilian university student, say: 'let students study.'"<sup>23</sup> According to this perspective, not only were politically active students not "real" students, but they were also described as exogenous forces disturbing the natural, studious peace of the university. Such films were directed beyond the campus to the general movie-going public, as were their messages. Rather than criticizing students' particular political positions, the IPES-produced films sought to undermine the very legitimacy of student political activity.

The students under attack were generally referred to as "professional students," indicating both the conspiratorial nature of supposed communist agents trained to pose as students, and the financial rewards (as opposed to moral or humanistic ones) they presumably gained from their involvement. Such attitudes were not limited only to Brazil, but appeared throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, for example in the 1959 "leadership seminars" sponsored by the U.S. State Department which brought Latin American student leaders to the U.S. in order to modify their "unfavorable and suspicious attitudes." In their post-seminar evaluations, the U.S. officials reported that most of the Brazilian participants were "student politicians who were in the universities primarily for political purposes."<sup>24</sup> An IPES-sponsored publication a few years later railed against UNE for being an "instrument of subversion.." The author asserted that UNE leaders were working in the interests of Bolshevik agents "from whom they probably receive money," and repeatedly argued that the union spent much more than it received in government funds, lavishing large salaries and expensive vacations on its leaders.<sup>25</sup>

Yet at the same time U.S. officials and IPES members were criticizing what they considered "inauthentic" students, political and cultural authenticity were also becoming central concerns within the burgeoning student movement. The nationalist, populist political direction of UNE leaders and many other students went beyond economic nationalism to endorse a newfound dedication to what many called "Brazilian solutions to Brazilian problems." They strongly repudiated U.S. interference and demanded that the members of society and the state transform the country together. Marcelo Ridenti has perhaps best captured the prevailing sentiment of the early 1960s by defining it as an era imbued with a spirit of "revolutionary romanticism." Left-wing artists, intellectuals and students

shared a utopian vision of an alliance between themselves and “the people” which aimed at constructing a Guevarian “new man” that would revolutionize Brazil. The model for this new man, Ridenti asserts, “lay in the past, in the idealization of the authentic man of the people, with rural roots, from the interior of the country – the heart of Brazil – supposedly uncontaminated by modern urban capitalism.”<sup>26</sup> With this in mind, students sought to become involved with the popular classes and influence them. To this end they spent their vacations promoting literacy and political consciousness among rural workers, organized labor unions and spent time in factories and began realizing the role of popular culture as a potentially revolutionary force that could and should reflect the country’s needs and aspirations.

Indeed, students and artists together viewed the relationship between political organization and cultural production and promotion as crucial. Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda says she remembers “the incredible 1960s” as being deeply shaped by “debates about the recruitment and revolutionary effectiveness of the poetic word, of the word that, at that time, appeared very powerful, a tool even, in plans for taking power.”<sup>27</sup> This alliance between artists and students took concrete shape in late 1961 in the form of the Popular Cultural Center (Centro Popular de Cultura, CPC), a combined effort of a group of politically-minded writers, actors and musicians and the leaders of UNE. Their goal was to produce and disseminate what they considered “popular revolutionary art,” or art that would both reflect and speak to the masses, thereby inherently reflecting society’s need to transfer power to the people. They staged street performances in factory entrances, published pocket-sized books of poetry and short stories at affordable prices and sponsored productions by young filmmakers. In addition to promoting cultural events throughout the Rio de Janeiro region via the UNE headquarters in that city (where they also began constructing a large theater), students and artists created a program called “Flying UNE.” For several months in early 1962, and again in 1963, they toured with their politically engaged cultural productions to remote areas of the country while simultaneously laying the groundwork for the founding of a dozen regional CPCs, many housed in universities.

The early 1960s thus saw a period of student-based intense political and cultural activism on the one hand, and a growing criticism of such activism on the part of certain social sectors on the other. What bound these two phenomena together was their focus on national authenticity, which was a central element of both positions, albeit defined and articulated very differently by each side. Nor did such divergences remain at the verbal level only, but gushed forth in a tide of escalating tensions during the early months of 1964. An ever-increasing succession of popular pro-Goulart political rallies was met with counter-demonstrations by the anti-communist and anti-populist opposition, most famously

in the “Marches of the Family, with God, for Freedom.” Finally, in the early morning hours of April 1, military forces staged an outright *coup d'état*. By April 4, Goulart had been forced into exile in Uruguay, and military leaders quickly assumed executive office.

Such a radical change in government could not fail to have an impact on the student movement. On the day of the coup itself, the UNE headquarters suffered a break-in and a fire obliterated the CPC theater and destroyed the union's offices. Soon thereafter, the government re-appropriated the building for other uses and subjected over 700 UNE members to military police inquiries, including official investigations into suspected subversive activities. The allegations raised against the students echoed those of the earlier IPES publications. Then-UNE President Jos Serra later recalled, “After the coup they decorated my office with a photograph of Stalin, displayed in all the papers as if it were mine. They said that President Goulart had paid us in dollars, kept a luxury apartment for us in Rio and gave us a car with a chauffeur.”<sup>28</sup> Through such allegations not only Serra, but the very legitimacy of student politics came under attack, as they intimated that the UNE leadership had been directed from above. Even well meaning student members, it was implied, had inadvertently acted against the nation's best interests. Meanwhile, government officials installed special commissions within the universities to monitor activities, a measure the remaining UNE leaders quickly denounced as “cultural terrorism.”<sup>29</sup> Their choice of expression indicates that they viewed political suppression and cultural silencing as inseparable, both to be opposed in equal measure.

Despite these hurdles, the union was not in immediate danger of being dismantled or closed down by the new government. This owes in part to the government's recognition that most university students hailed from the middle and upper classes – precisely the groups on whose support the new regime depended. Indeed, some prominent student organizations had initially supported the coup.<sup>30</sup> Although left-leaning students often faced persecution, and the universities most known for political activity became subject to increasing intervention, military officials did not attack the student organizations with the same ferocity with which, for example, they devastated the labor unions or the peasant leagues. In fact, officials initially allowed the student organizations some leeway because of their conviction that “real” students had not provoked the recent spate of demonstrations, but had merely fallen under the manipulative sway of infiltrators into their ranks. Although President Castelo Branco met with other officials soon after taking office in order to discuss the “problem of the university,” the published speeches of several of those in attendance reveal that they considered student activity at that time an aberration that would soon come to an end. Then Minister of Education, Suplicy de Lacerda, stated that “the

communist revolution [would] only be made through the *inauthentic* university,” while Castelo Branco himself argued that university students would soon only concern themselves with “the constant cultural progress of the country.”<sup>31</sup> Thus rather than banning UNE, the regime undertook a campaign to make it “extinct” by rescinding its official status and budget while simultaneously founding new student organizations for which elections were mandatory. In this way, officials believed, an “authentic elite”<sup>32</sup> would be given the chance to head these student organizations, while UNE, bereft of its populist state subsidies and the legitimacy lent by official recognition, would quickly wither and die.

A short time later when Suplicy de Lacerda reflected on those early days, he proclaimed that at first “the Revolution found universities full of agitators and petty thieves transformed into leaders.” Speaking of their influence as if it were a contagious disease, he warned that “colonies of viruses among students threaten the future of the entire population,”<sup>33</sup> re-emphasizing the idea that inauthentic political agitators had infiltrated the universities. In fact, by this post-‘64 period, the phantom of the “professional” student had become so prevalent that student activists knew they would be questioned about it. Thus when U.S. consulate officers in Rio de Janeiro hosted a confidential meeting with an UNE leader in early 1965, the young man took pains to emphasize that professional students could not gain much prominence within the union as those positions “were reserved for genuine students.”<sup>34</sup>

Thus, despite a long history of student activism dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the political legitimacy of university student activists was publicly and repeatedly challenged during the Cold War years of the 1950s and 1960s. If on the one hand this meant that students felt an added need to assert their authenticity, such as the UNE leader who assured U.S. officials that “professional students” had no place in the union, on the other hand this Cold War conviction spared the union from immediate post-coup destruction. [Unclear sentence. RE] Yet once student activists in Brazil began to reassert themselves and news of student activity abroad began to make headlines, Cold Warriors would become even further convinced that insidious international forces were taking hold in Brazil.

## **The International Youth Rebellion**

Over the first four years of military rule, a large number of university students, including many of those who had initially supported the coup, gradually turned away from the regime. Despite the efforts of military officials to discourage student political activity, they engaged in increasingly outspoken public political protests and eventually realigned UNE and other student organizations to

focus predominantly on an anti-dictatorship campaign. This stemmed from a combination of the regime's failure to remedy long-standing educational issues such as overcrowding, its repressive intervention in university affairs in the form of military occupations and invasive monitoring and its increasing restriction of political expression. Yet the most critical catalyst of student opposition to the military regime lay in the physical repression that was increasingly directed against student groups. Especially from 1966 through 1968 with differing degrees of intensity, military police began invading student gatherings, repressing student demonstrations and engaging in a higher level of state-sanctioned violence than ever before. The response of the public and the media to student activity varied, as did the intensity of this activity. But for a period of several months in 1968 – basically between March and October – the student movements experienced some of the most intense scrutiny in their history. Beginning with the March 28<sup>th</sup> police killing of 17-year old Edson Luis de Lima Souto, and continuing up to the police invasion of the UNE October congress and the mass arrest of all those present, student demonstrations reached new highs of participation and public attention.

Although prior to this period Brazilian newspapers had always given full coverage to student demonstrations, this was even more the case after the death of Lima Souto, largely due to the surge in student mobilization that made such demonstrations front-page news. Over 50,000 people turned out for Souto's funeral in Rio de Janeiro, while demonstrations of solidarity took place for several days afterwards in almost every major Brazilian city. This event thereby initiated a spiraling series of protests, as state repression of mourners in one city would hit the headlines the next day, provoking further solidarity demonstrations by students in other areas.

Student protest marches not only became more frequent, but they also began to amass larger numbers of participants and sympathizers. Indeed, security agents at this period lamented in their reports the fact that onlookers had sided with students in their confrontations with the police – booing the officers, applauding the students, throwing confetti out of the windows of downtown buildings and showing other signs of support. As one report stated: "...we feel that [the public] is enjoying mocking the police; the dashing about of the cops has been transformed into a game for those who, if they were only enlightened, would go home in an orderly fashion...But that didn't happen: as long as the soldiers are on the streets, the public's fun continues."<sup>35</sup> This expanding support was also evident in the aforementioned June demonstration referred to as the "March of the 100,000." Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil and many other musical and theatrical celebrities, along with coalitions of nuns and priests, mothers' associations and thousands of others publicly joined students in protest against the recent

violence. Newspapers the following day were replete with photographs of the many famous participants, and much emphasis was placed on their willingness to sit down on the city's streets at the student speakers' request in order best to hear their speeches. Thus student protests became big news and as a result received widening coverage.

Yet in part the attention focused on Brazilian students also reflected the wider attention generally being paid to students. As violent mobilizations intensified not only at home but also abroad, the "student question" became a hot news topic both nationally and internationally. In the weeks leading up to the death of Lima Souto, students in Madrid, Rome, Louvain, Warsaw and Tokyo all confronted police in security officers' occupations of universities and street demonstrations, and stories about these events frequently appeared in the headlines. In the months following Lima Souto's death, such happenings became even more commonplace as journalists struggled to understand what lay behind the phenomenon and its origins. At times one student uprising was declared to be the direct result of another, such as an editorial in the *Estado de São Paulo* claiming that Czech student demonstrations were responsible for the rebellion sweeping the rest of Eastern Europe. Similarly, demonstrating French students were said to have received "a certain contagion" from their German counterparts.<sup>36</sup> Journalists also kept a wary eye open for signs of connections between Brazilian students and their opposite numbers abroad. They began taking note of any anti-Vietnam War themes in Brazilian students' demonstrations, duly recording any anti-U.S. slogan or comments and reporting rumors that a Vietcong flag would be displayed at an upcoming student demonstration. In one issue of the photo-magazine *Manchete*, a story about Lima Souto's funeral was followed by an article entitled "The Universal Rebellion of Youth" that included pictures of students being beaten by police in Sweden, Belgium, the United States, France, Italy and Japan. Such a juxtaposition of one news item (Lima Souto's funeral) with another (student rebellions elsewhere) emphasized the importance of each as well as implicitly suggesting a link between them. Thus global events served to increase the attention paid to local demonstrations.

In a slightly circuitous fashion, the international coverage of Brazilian events also contributed to the significance of these interconnections. As foreign observers began paying serious attention to the "worldwide wave of student rebellion," or as a *Time Magazine* essay put it "Why Those Students Are Protesting," they included Brazilian students in their long lists of activists then demonstrating, further reinforcing the idea that they were somehow connected.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the manner in which the foreign press related to Brazilian students was remarked upon at home. Such was the case with *Time*'s July 5<sup>th</sup> article on Brazilian student mobilization that paid particular attention to one central student leader, Vladimir

Palmeira.<sup>38</sup> In a subsequent interview with Palmeira that appeared in the Brazilian publication, *Realidade*, the reporter specifically mentioned the *Time* article in order to emphasize Palmeira's prominent role.<sup>39</sup>

Further examination of the "International Rebellion of Youth" however, reveals the extent to which this kind of international juxtaposition also threatened to drain Brazilian students' efforts of their political meaning. The editor's conclusion was: "A common thread ties all the movements: they want to overthrow the *establishment*." (The word "establishment" appeared in English in original.)<sup>40</sup> Leaving aside for a moment the dismissive tone of this comment, it demonstrates how such generalizations limited the scope of student demands. In one sense, all these young people *were* struggling against the established power system in their respective countries, whether it manifested itself as an authoritarian university administration, racism in institutions and practices, an unaccountable military or a repressive dictatorship. Yet such a lumping together of vastly different agendas under the heading of "overthrowing the establishment" suggested an infantile knee-jerk response to authority, while the use of the English word "establishment" implied that students everywhere were either imitating the U.S. and England or at least were being influenced by them. However inaccurate, this general idea was widespread among those trying to make sense of the wave of student activism at that period. Brazilian reporters frequently asked students what they were reading, noting the rise in popularity of foreign authors such as Herbert Marcuse and C. Wright Mills, as if this could explain local events. Even a supportive politician like Federal Deputy Ernani do Amaral Peixoto believed that the international situation was partially responsible for the Brazilian students' behavior. In a press interview Peixoto defended students by noting that those he had witnessed at Lima Souto's wake were all well-behaved young leaders, further proclaiming that the problem with youth everywhere lay in the ability of the media to report student demonstrations around the world instantly, making rebellion practically "inevitable."<sup>41</sup> The global wave of student uprising helped focus attention on Brazilian students' political action, but it also threatened to drown their political messages in a sea of generalizations.

In this context, Brazilian students were in an ambiguous position with respect to the global uprisings. The fact that they followed the news from abroad was emphasized by reporters who entered student-run areas during the many university occupations that year and routinely noted large bulletin boards where students collected and displayed clippings about demonstrations around the world, updating them frequently. Nevertheless, they struggled to convey to reporters and others their dissociation from these same movements. One sociology student claimed to a reporter that Brazilian students had little in common with protest movements abroad, stating: "We in sociology have been accompanying these

student crises all over the world and we've discovered that the only constant in all of them is the lack of attention to young people's small demands by adults who are fixated on defending outdated concepts."<sup>42</sup> In a different interview, two student leaders told reporters, "We have to demystify that story about generational conflict, youth power and other stupidities. . . It's not about kids against old men, but oppressed against oppressors." When asked about any connections between their struggles and those in Europe they replied negatively, stating "Not that we wouldn't like that. But in the international sphere UNE's position should be to enter the anti-imperialist fight of the student movements in Asia [and] Africa. Although we do think European students' struggle is fair."<sup>43</sup> While international comparisons may have brought students additional attention and even inspiration, they struggled to keep their own message clear.

Yet students also quickly learned to tap the symbolic richness of the international context for their own purposes. A spokesperson for a student organization at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro demanded leniency from military authorities in early June by pointing out that Brazilian students were "not taking the French line", i.e. not overturning cars or using other violent methods, and thus should be left free from harassment.<sup>44</sup> In other cases, students used the specter of France to demonstrate their strength. At a large UNE rally, one of the union's vice presidents told the enthusiastic crowd, "Our generals can relax. What happened in France won't happen here – It's going to be much worse."<sup>45</sup> In this way the international scene could be mobilized to emphasize students' potential for violence.

The international context might also be viewed as contributing to Brazilian students' intense focus on symbolically nationalistic demonstrations. Students ritualistically sang the national anthem, carried the national flag, and made frequent references to their patriotism in posters and signs. At the funeral of Lima Souto, for example, the boy's coffin was draped in a Brazilian flag, mourners passing the coffin repeatedly sang the national anthem and placards read "Brazil, your children die for you."<sup>46</sup> Students often presented themselves as the legitimate defenders of the nation in their literature and speeches as opposed to the U.S.-supported military officers who had overthrown the government. Such symbolic demonstrations of nationalism and patriotism had begun well before 1968, but they were given a new impetus when Brazilian students felt themselves threatened by globally-based (mis)understandings of their movement.

It is thus clear that Caetano Veloso's September 1968 "happening" needs to be reconsidered within this context of transnational student activism. Veloso and Os Mutantes' deliberately provocative experimental performance, especially its implicit critique of the *torcidas'* dispute about cultural production, reverberated loudly in the TUCA hall. Veloso, an artist who had recently come out in public



support of the student movement, was now intentionally goading a student-dominated audience in a university theater. As he wrote later in his memoirs, he did not consider “*prohibido proibir*” to be a very good song and had not planned on entering it into the contest. In fact, his manager had insisted he participate and had convinced him to submit the piece. Faced with this unexpected and not entirely desirable situation, Veloso decided to turn the event into a “happening” in which the spectacle would extend well beyond the song itself.<sup>47</sup> Thus his performance was fraught with connotations aimed at provoking thought and controversy. For example, Veloso’s mingling of electrical wires and animal tooth necklaces can be interpreted as drawing a parallel with turning either the “traditional” or the “modern” into a fetish as the MPB and *Jovem Guarda* respectively were accused of doing. In addition, his decision to introduce the song with long measures of atonal electric guitar music could provoke either camp, emphasizing as it did that the instrument should be given a primary place on the Brazilian stage while aggressively rejecting its harnessing to “yeah yeah yeah” melodies.

Yet while both sides of the *torcida* debate could find plenty of reasons to be irritated by Veloso’s performance, the song itself was aimed particularly at leftist student activists. Inspiration for the piece came from a Parisian graffito that read “*Il est interdit d’interdire*,” a photograph of which was published in *Manchete* magazine where it was seen by Veloso (and undoubtedly by many others). Brazilian student activists explicitly rejected the kind of anarchistic or hedonistic philosophy that would have inspired such a slogan, engaging as they did in fierce ideological debates about finding the best means of overthrowing the dictatorship. Furthermore, they had made graffiti slogans a central part of their mobilizations, bedecking the nation’s cities with “Down with the Dictatorship” and other such phrases. Veloso’s lyrics further suggested an anarchic overturning of the established order in the images of wanton destruction of “statues, glasses, dishes” and even bookcases and books. Not only disappointing in its failure to faithfully represent Brazilian students’ political perspectives, this portrayal of youth activism was painfully reminiscent of the way Brazilian students had been misinterpreted as seeking to “overturn the establishment.” Coming after months of being misunderstood through comparisons with other students’ movements and messages, Veloso’s song poignantly expressed many of the themes the students had recently been confronting. While the “imported” elements of Veloso’s work undoubtedly played a role in the students’ response, only the correlation of the event as a whole with students’ own particular struggles can help explain the violence it unleashed.

## Conclusion

When Caetano Veloso presented a mixture of musical styles, alternative cultural expressions and French student movement slogans in his performance before an audience made up mainly of student activists, he was stepping into a political and cultural minefield. Even he was taken aback by the students' hostile response to his controversial performance. More than simply protesting against Veloso's refusal to follow accepted MPB norms of protest music, students threw tomatoes, eggs and paper balls with the vehemence of those whose most important struggle threatened to be lost in a transnational wave of conflation and unfortunate comparisons. It was unbearable that a beloved musician and seeming political ally had deliberately spotlighted this problem in such a provocative manner in a student-dominated university auditorium.

Beyond adding to our understanding of this particular incident, a close look at the Brazilian situation in 1968 reveals that the local student movement was inextricably involved in the international student scene of that year. In addition to any parallels between the numerous student mobilizations of that year or the links between them, the very fact of their relative simultaneity had a profound influence on the local situation. In other words, the transnational dimensions of 1968 played a fundamental role in the student movement in Brazil, having an impact on students' actions, thinking and responses, as they inevitably played a role in student mobilization worldwide.

## NOTES

1. I would like to thank Vania Markariam and the anonymous reader at the *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* for their thoughtful comments on this article.
2. Marcelo Ridenti. *Em Busca do Povo Brasileiro: artistas da revolução, do CPC à era da TV*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 2000.
3. Cited in Liv Sovik, "Globalizing Caetano Veloso," in Charles A. Perrone, and Christopher Dunn, eds. *Brazilian Popular Music and Globalization*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001, 99.
4. Zuza Homem de Mello. *A Era Dos Festivais: Uma Parábola*. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2003.
5. Joaquim Alves de Aguiar, "Panorama da Música Popular Brasileira." In *Brasil: O Tránsito da Memória*, edited by Sanj Sosnowski and Jorge Schwartz, 141-74. São Paulo: Edusp, 1994; 147.
6. Christopher Dunn, "Tropicalia, Counterculture, and the Diasporic Imagination in Brazil," in Perrone and Dunn. *Brazilian Popular Music and Globalization*, 73.

7. Christopher Dunn. *Brutality Garden: Tropicalia and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001, 131.
8. Caetano Veloso. *Verdade Tropical*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997, 301.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, 302.
11. *Ibid.*, 302-3.
12. Cited in Homem de Mello, 277. For sake of brevity and clarity, I have noted only portions of Veloso's lengthy impromptu speech.
13. Dunn, *Brutality Garden*, p 135.
14. Carlos Calado. *Tropicalia: A história de uma revolução musical*. São Paulo: Editora 34, 1997; p 223.
15. Zuza Homem de Mello, p 279-280.
16. Most analyses of individual student movements take pains to assert the domestic specificity of the movement's political origins, even as they acknowledge the international situation as part of a general context of change and protest. A recent example of this is Elaine Carey's study on 1968 in Mexico, in which she argues that "[t]he Mexican student movement was part of the international student protests, but more importantly, it must be understood as part of a continuum of social protests in Mexico." (Elaine Carey. *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power and Terror in 1968 Mexico*. Edited by Lyman L. Johnson, *Dialogos*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005, 3,5.) In the literature on the Brazilian student movement, books like Daniel Aarão Reis Filho and Pedro de Moraes' *1968: A Paixão de uma utopia* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1998) include a detailed chronology of Brazilian and international events side by side, but they do not attempt to explain the relationship between them. Other volumes include articles or chapters on student movements from multiple national locations, presumably in hope that readers could forge their own comparative understandings of the international dimensions of 1968. (See, for example, Marco Aurélio Garcia and Maria Alice Vieira, eds. *Rebeldes e Contestadores 1968: Brasil, França e Alemanha*. São Paulo: Editora Fundação Perseu Abramo, 1999; Amanda Eloina Scherer, Gisele Marchioni Nussbaumer, and Maria da Glória di Fanti, eds. *Utopias & Distopias: 30 Anos de Maio de 68*. Santa Maria: Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, 1999; and João Roberto Martins Filho, ed. *1968 Faz 30 Anos*. São Carlos, SP: Editora da Universidade de São Carlos, 1998).
17. Antonio Mendes, Jr. argues that events in Europe, especially in France, radicalized the Brazilian student movement. Antonio Mendes Junior. *Movimento Estudantil no Brasil, Tudo é História*. São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, S.A., 1981. Two scholars who have tried to understand 1968 as an international phenomenon are Immanuel Wallerstein and Jeremy Suri. Immanuel Wallerstein, "1968, Revolution in the World-System." In *Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World-System*, edited by Immanuel Wallerstein, 65-83. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991; Jeremy Suri. *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Detente*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2003.
18. Robert O. Myhr, "The University Student Tradition in Brazil." *Journal of Interamerican and World Affairs* 12, no. 1 (1970): 126-40.

19. Perhaps the most oft-cited work in this regard is that of journalist Artur Poerner, *O Poder Jovem: Historia da Participação Política dos Estudantes Brasileiros*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1968.
20. João Roberto Martins Filho. *Movimento Estudantil e Ditadura Militar 1964-1968*. Campinas, Papirus: 1987; 61.
21. *Ibid*, 62.
22. For the role of IPES on education, see Maria Inês Salgado de Souza, *Os empresários e a educação: O IPES e a política educacional após 1964*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1981. For the role of IPES in encouraging the 1964 coup d'état, see René Armand Dreifus, *1964, a Conquista do estado*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1981.
23. "Deixam o Estudante Estudar" (date unknown, made sometime between 1962 and 1964), Arquivo Nacional do Brasil, Seção de Gravação, Som e Imagem, Caixa 8. This film can also be found in the collection recently compiled by Denise Assis, *Propaganda e Cinema a Serviço do Golpe, 1962/1964*. Rio de Janeiro: Mauad, FAPERJ, 2001.
24. Bureau of International Cultural Relations, "An Evaluation of Latin American Student Leader Seminars, 1959" Decimal File 1955-1960; Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs; Records of the Plans and Development Staff, Evaluation Branch, 1955-1960; State Department Central File; Record Group 59; National Archives at College Park, MD.
25. Sonia Seganfredo. *UNE Instrumento de subversão*. Rio de Janeiro: Edições GRD, 1963, 10.
26. Ridenti, *Em Busca do Povo Brasileiro*, 24.
27. Heloisa Buarque de Holanda. *Impressões de Viagem: CPC, Vanguarda e Desbunde: 1960/79*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1981, 15.
28. José Serra, in *História da UNE: depoimentos de ex-dirigentes, volume 1*. (São Paulo: Editorial Livramento, 1980), 29.
29. Diretoria da UNE, "Aos Estudantes e Ao Povo Brasileiro," pamphlet, Guanabara, julho de 1964; in Departamento de Ordem Política e Social; Setor Secreto, Pasta N° 4; Arquivo Público do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.
30. The state-level student organizations of Pernambuco, Minas Gerais and Paraná and the city-level organization of Rio de Janeiro had elected more moderate leadership a short time previously, and all four organizations consequently escaped the initial wave of regime repression. See Martins Filho.
31. Ministério da Educação e Cultura, Diretoria do Ensino Superior, *A Universidade e a Revolução Nacional*, 1964; emphasis added.
32. In a newspaper interview Minister of Education Suplicy de Lacerda said the new organizations were aimed at "saving the university, instituting an authentic elite, and leaving UNE aside." *Estado de São Paulo*, October 21, 1964; cited in Martins Filho, p87.
33. *Diário de Notícias*, August 13, 1965, cited in *História da UNE*, 34.
34. Confidential Airgram from American Embassy, Rio de Janeiro, to Department of State. Subject: New Position of the National Student Union; View of UNE President Alberto Abramo Abissmara, February 5, 1965. Although this embassy document lists Abissmara as President of UNE and part of a moderate anti-communist contingent, no later histories of UNE, including those compiled by DOPS, mention him as having occupied this position.

Rather, they tend to describe the period after Serra's exile as one of "reorganization" with the presidency left open until the July 1965 election of Antônio Alves Xavier. Most probably Abissamara's prior ascension to that position was contested by other factions and later rendered illegitimate.

35. GB-Secretaria de Segurana Pnblica, Departamento de Ordem Poltica e Social, Divis7o de Operay7es, Servino de Buscas, Set7no de Buscas Ostensivas, Informe, Movimento Estudantil, 2 de julho de 1968; in Departamento de Ordem Poltica e Social; Setor Estudantil, Pasta N° 38; Arquivo Pnblico do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.
36. "Tudo comenou em Praga" *Estado de S7o Paulo*, March 19, 1968, p 12; "Luta atinge a Sorbonne," *Estado de S7o Paulo*, May 4, 1968, p 7.
37. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address the impact which Brazilian student movement activities in 1968 had on other national processes. However, *Time* coverage of that year makes it clear that, to some U.S. observers, the Brazilian (and undoubtedly other) movements worked to reinforce U.S.-centered visions of causality. *Time* repeatedly explains 1968 as having begun in the U.S. and sees Brazilian students' "sudden" appearance in March of '68 as further evidence of this. See, for example, "Why Those Students are Protesting," *Time Magazine*, May 3, 1968, 23-25.
38. "Brazil: Surpassing all Limits of Unpopularity," *Time Magazine*, July 5, 1968, 34.
39. Marcos de Castro. "Eis o que pensa um novo lider da esquerda." *Realidade*, August 1968, 62-70.
40. "A Rebeli7o Universal dos Jovens," *Manchete*, April 13, 1968, 16-23.
41. Ernani Amaral Peixoto, April 9, 1968 speech and 1968 interview. Funda7no Get7lio Vargas, CPDOC, Arquivo Ernani do Amaral Peixoto, S7rie Deputado Federal II, Pasta II.
42. "A Culpa da Viol7ncia," *Veja*, September 11, 1968, p.22.
43. Lu7s Travassos and Lu7s Raul Machado, interviewed in Jos7 Carlos Mar7o, "Para 7les UNE n7o representa estudante," *Realidade*, July 1968, 38.
44. Telegram from American Embassy, Rio de Janeiro to Secretary of State, June 4, 1968, No Subject; Subject-Numeric File 1967-1969; Culture and Information, Education and Culture, Brazil, 9-3; State Department Central File; Record Group 59; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.
45. Luis Raul Machado, quoted in Mar7o, "Eles Querem Derrubar O Governo."
46. "Crise Estudantil Alastra-se 7s Principais Cidades do Pa7s" *Correio da Manh7*, March 30, 1968, p 1.
47. Veloso, *Verdade Tropical*, 297-299.