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‘Um grito de alarme contra a degenerescência da espécie’: Homosexuality and decadence in the anarchosyndicalist *A Batalha* in the early 1920s

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Introduction: Homosexuality and labour history

The overlap between the history of homosexuality and social attitudes towards it may seem to be somewhat removed from the dynamics of labour movements. The reception of understandings and perceptions about homosexuality in trades unions and political parties, however, are but a microcosm of broader attitudes in society generally and even though they may take on a particular hue in these milieus, they provide evidence of the lines of tension existing within the rejection/tolerance dyad that informs such practices. Although we may perhaps anticipate greater tolerance of alternative or non-mainstream sexualities and expressions of gender within ‘progressive’ labour movements across the globe, this may have more to do with the historian’s subjective expectations than reality. Such positive attitudes were, in the past, and, are in the present, often absent and, in some cases, opposition to homosexuality within labour movements has been marked. The acceptance or otherwise of homosexuality as an expression of greater sexual freedom relied principally on contextual factors such as movements’ relationships with understandings of modernity, the power of science to explain social phenomena and the reception of secularist ideas.

While much has now been written on gender questions within labour movements beyond the mere ‘incorporation’ of women into movement history to embrace the relations between men and women within them,¹ the question of non-reproductive sexuality, whether ‘heterosexual’ or ‘homosexual’,² and the ways in which this was perceived in labour movements, continues to constitute an undeveloped field. This is certainly the case for Portugal and this article seeks

¹ Joan Scott, ‘On language, gender and working-class history’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 31 (1987), 1-13; Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose, ‘Introduction: Gender and the reconstruction of European working-class history’, in *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, ed. by Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 1-33.

² We have opted to use ‘same-sex’ relations and ‘homosexuality’, as well as a number of terms in use during the period, such as ‘pederasty’, ‘Sapphism’, and ‘sexual inversion’ and have avoided using the anachronistic ‘gay’. For the epistemological debates on these issues, see David M. Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

to open up this question for analysis. In the past, despite the advocacy of long-term relationships outside of the tutelage of the church and state expressed in the form of ‘free love’ by anarchists from the late nineteenth century onwards and a commitment to women’s rights and a more open attitude to contraception, for example, the expression of ‘promiscuous’ heterosexual relations outside of marriage and the home was often viewed with suspicion by labour activists as a bourgeois manifestation of libidinous behaviour not fit for anarchists and to be avoided in the ‘new society’ that they attempted to create. The question of same-sex relations, if it was touched on at all, was received less openly still and often formed part of a moralistic discourse on ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ sexual behaviour for both men and women. In the powerful Spanish anarchist movement, a *habitus* composed by rigid gender roles prevailed and ‘effeminacy’ in men was sharply derided and viewed as evidence of a betrayal of the workers’ cause and unbecoming of a morally and politically robust labour movement that sought to distinguish itself from aristocratic or middle-class decadence.³ In France, a limited and somewhat more progressive examination of the ‘scientific’ dimensions of homosexuality took place in E. Armand’s review *L’En Dehors* in the early 1930s.⁴ What allowed for this more inclusive approach was the broad notion of ‘sexual freedom’, an understanding that placed emphasis on choice against the constraints of the state, religion and bourgeois morality.⁵

This article explores the resonance of questions of homosexuality within the predominantly anarchosyndicalist *A Batalha*. *A Batalha* was the official mouthpiece of the largest trade union in Portugal at the time, the Confederação Geral do Trabalho (General Confederation of Labour), and it was published more or less daily between 1919 and 1927. At the beginning of the 1920s, *A Batalha* became one of three principal newspapers in terms of its print-run in Portugal. At its high point, according to one of its editorial board members, some 40,000 copies were printed for each issue. Between 1921 and 1923, this figure approximated some 25,000 copies.⁶ By contrast, most strictly anarchist publications in Portugal, according to João Freire,

³ Richard Cleminson, ‘The construction of masculinity in the Spanish labour movement: A study of the *Revista Blanca* (1923-36)’, *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 24.1 (2011), 201-17; Enrique Álvarez, ‘Man un/made: Male homosocial and homosexual desire within the Spanish anarchist movement’, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 18.1 (2012), 17-32.

⁴ Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers, E. Armand and Abel Léger, *Des préjugés en matière sexuelle. L’Homosexualité, l’onanisme et les individualistes* (Paris/Orléans: L’En Dehors, 1931).

⁵ E. Fournier, ‘Normaux ou Anormaux ?’, *L’En Dehors*, 60 (1925), 1 and 4. There may have been greater acceptance in working-class circles as expressed by the libertarian socialist Daniel Guérin. See David Berry, ‘“Workers of the World, Embrace!” Daniel Guérin, the Labour Movement and Homosexuality’, *Left History*, 9.2 (2004), 11-43.

⁶ Jacinto Baptista, *Surgindo Vem ao Longe a Nova Aurora...: Para a História do Diário Sindicalista A Batalha, 1919-1927* (Lisboa: Letra Livre, 2019 [1997]), pp. 183 and 99, respectively.

reached a print-run of between 1000 and 3000 copies.⁷ *A Batalha* was read primarily by workers in a country where illiteracy rose to approximately 65%. Despite this, it can be supposed that its influence was greater than its publication run as reading aloud in workplaces and in public and passing publications between interested audiences was a common practice in the Portuguese workers' movement.

The reception of ideas on degeneration in the Portuguese libertarian movement

For anarchists, the human being was, above all, a social entity and a product of the environment and the prevailing conditions of existence. People's customs and behaviours were viewed by anarchists as fundamentally determined by the social relations in which they lived and by the institutional and structural context that infused those relations. In addition, in the endeavour to construct a libertarian future and new society, nature was deemed also to play a fundamental positive or negative role. Often in tension, nevertheless, with social determinants, it was understood that nature could be, if not completely altered, at least modified for the good of all.

Such a position has meant that in the historiography of the movement, questions surrounding the existence of the dichotomy of 'good' and 'bad' nature in human beings have predominated and these have been posed largely in response to either a desire to reaffirm or to negate a supposed libertarian optimism, that is, the belief in an intrinsically good human nature and the assertion of this quality as a key to the success of the anarchist project.⁸ Such analysis has passed over almost entirely the permeation of biological understandings of human nature within anarchist morality and in almost all aspects of the doctrine.⁹ In anarchism, the continuity between the individual and society, between nature and culture, informed the morality of the anarchist militant at every level, from individual behaviour through to ideas on political and social organization. The precise relative importance of nature versus culture, however, was a continuing debate within libertarian movements and Portugal was no exception.

⁷ João Freire, *Anarquistas e Operários – Ideologia, ofício e práticas sociais: o anarquismo e o operariado em Portugal, 1900-1940* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 1992), p. 345.

⁸ David Morland, *Demanding the Impossible? Human Nature and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Social Anarchism* (London/Washington: Cassell, 1997).

⁹ Richard Morgan, *The Making of Kropotkin's Anarchist Thought: Disease, Degeneration, Health and the Biopolitical Dimension* (London: Routledge, 2020).

The idea of nature within anarchism, as in many other social and literary movements of the nineteenth century, was founded on a strong positivist and scientific premiss.¹⁰ Anarchist understandings of nature were based on a range of discourses and knowledges, amongst which the theory of evolution and its biological bases was the principal intellectual resource. Ruling this expression of scientism was a belief in the ‘neutrality’ and universalism of certain forms of knowledge, which were products of rational thought based on ‘natural law’. The state, religion and other expressions of authority were deemed to exist in contradiction with this natural law. The consequence of this disjuncture was cultural decay and biological decadence in human beings. The extent of biological and social degeneration, in accordance with the nature-culture relationship, was felt both in the physical ‘quality’ of the species as well as in the moral ‘quality’ of individuals in society. This constituted anarchism’s ‘naturalist’ framework that allowed homosexuality to be considered as morally corrupt and as a phenomenon to be opposed. Same-sex desire, along with other ‘deviant behaviours’, was seen as symptomatic of the broader degeneration of the existing social order. Such behaviours were to be combatted by means of a process of physical and moral regeneration, which would contribute to the ability of the movement to overcome them as a key step on the road to creating the ‘new society’.

Anarchist views on the question of degeneration were encapsulated in Portugal by the influential intellectual figure Campos Lima.¹¹ For Campos Lima, sexuality and reproduction obeyed an evolutionary logic, which in turn contributed to the ‘natural selection’ of the human species. Degeneration would cease to exist once the natural expression of sexuality, in the form of ‘free love’, was brought into harmony with nature. This alignment would only be achieved once the anarchist communist society was achieved. In his words, ‘os degenerados, porque o são, também para se juntarem irão procurar outros degenerados’ [degenerates, for this is what they are, in order to unite will seek out other degenerates] and from this exchange would result ‘a depressão do número de degenerados, porque providencialmente a infecundidade é uma das características da degenerescência’ [the reduction in the number of degenerates because, fortunately, infertility is one of the characteristics of degeneration].¹² Similar thoughts were

¹⁰ David J. Bailey, *Naturalism Against Nature: Kinship and Degeneracy in Fin-de-Siècle Portugal and Brazil* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2020).

¹¹ João Evangelista de Campos was a Portuguese lawyer and one of the most prolific anarchist intellectuals of the period.

¹² João Evangelista de Campos Lima, *O Movimento Operário em Portugal* (Lisbon: Guimarães e Companhia - Editores, 1910), p. 47.

displayed by Jaime Brasil, for whom medicine and morality formed a unity: ‘a moral nova dev[ia] ter por base as leis da biologia’ [new morality should have as its basis the laws of biology] and homosexuality emerged as an ‘aberração sexual’ [sexual aberration].¹³ Homosexuality was for this reason conceived by Brasil as a ‘doença moral’ [moral illness], which should be combatted and extirpated in the same way as physical maladies.¹⁴

The poetic exaltation of ‘aberrações desmoralizadoras’

As has been pointed out, the early twentieth century in Portugal was witness to a certain proliferation of representations of homosexuality in the literary and cultural world. The publication of Visconde Vila-Moura’s *Nova Safo* (1912), Mário de Sá-Carneiro’s *A Confissão de Lúcio* (1914) and Pessoa’s *Antinous* (1918), as well as work by Judite Teixeira, together with the visibility of non-gender conforming individuals on the streets of Lisbon,¹⁵ meant that homosexuality was evident across the different social classes in the period. In 1922, a number of prominent literary and poetic figures, including Teixeira and António Botto, author of the collection *Canções* (1921), were the target of a conservative Catholic campaign led by the Liga de Acção dos Estudantes de Lisboa to have them banned as part of an attempt at the ‘saneamento moral’ [moral sanitization] of the city.¹⁶ Before then, in May 1921, shortly after a particularly negative article in the daily newspaper *A Capital*, *A Batalha* had anticipated this campaign by denouncing the ‘degeneration’ of Botto’s newly published *Canções*. After this criticism of *Canções*, a number of articles in September and October that year uncovered instances of ‘degeneration’ in Portuguese society. In September a ‘repugnant’ case of adultery with lesbian content was denounced in the paper and the following month, the existence in Farnalhão of a supposed ‘mulher-homem’ [man-woman] was detailed in a prominent article. This story overlapped with the first episode of a serialised novel written by Mário Domingues on the ‘revolt of the flesh’ where poetry, decadence and homosexuality were linked. These episodes are now considered in light of anarchist understandings of degeneration.

¹³ Jaime Brasil, ‘A moral nova deve ter por base as leis da biologia’, *Suplemento Literário e Ilustrado A Batalha*, 2.67 (1925), 2. Brasil was also the author of *A Questão Sexual* (Lisbon: Nunes de Carvalho, 1932).

¹⁴ Jaime Brasil, ‘Ainda algumas palavras sobre a moral sexual’, *Suplemento Literário e Ilustrado A Batalha*, 2.71 (1925), 3.

¹⁵ Anna M. Klobucka, *O mundo gay de António Botto* (Lisbon: Documenta, 2018), p. 114.

¹⁶ Anna M. Klobucka, *O mundo gay de António Botto*, p. 89.

On 12 October 1921 the renowned Portuguese anarchist and frequent contributor to *A Batalha*, Pinto Quartim, reflecting on an incident when working at another periodical in the past, wrote a justification of his decision to refuse the publication of a poem that he considered immoral.¹⁷ A woman turned up at the offices of this unnamed newspaper and submitted her work for consideration. Although Quartim admitted to assessing every piece of work from a subjective perspective – ‘leio-os com alma, com todo o sentimento de que sou capaz’ [I read them with all the emotion with which I am capable] – the fourteen lines of the poem brought by the woman, dedicated to her friend (‘um canto apaixonado’ [an impassioned plea]), left him ‘enlevado e perturbado’ [enraptured but disturbed]. Despite this feeling, he was about to declare them ‘magnificent’, but on arriving at the poem’s last line and seeing that it was signed by a female hand, he sat up and stared at the woman who had brought them. Seized by an ‘acesso de revolta expontânea’ [feeling of spontaneous revulsion], he calmly folded up the sheet of paper and declared that the newspaper he worked for was a serious one, a decent publication that was read by families. It could not, therefore, ‘publicar imoralidades destas’ [publish such immoralities]. On receiving the woman’s indignant response, he confirmed that, indeed, the poem contained immoral overtones. What could be more immoral, he continued, than verses that allowed for a woman to ‘cantar a beleza física do seu próprio sexo?’ [extoll the physical beauty of her own sex?]. If the words had been written by a man on the other hand, he would, on his own admission, have certainly published them. Quartim’s article formed part, as we will see, of a broader ‘campaign’ by *A Batalha* to combat degeneracy in society.

António Botto’s *Canções*

The first piece to touch on Botto’s *Canções* in *A Batalha* appeared on 8 May 1921 under the provocative rubric of ‘Haja homens!’ [Let there be men!] in the ‘Notas e Comentários’ section of the newspaper.¹⁸ Although the article was anonymous, it was probably written either by Perfeito de Carvalho, the CGT member who provided *A Batalha*’s title,¹⁹ or by the Príncipe-born journalist Mário Domingues. Perfeito de Carvalho, however, approached the Communist Party in 1921 and stopped collaborating with *A Batalha*, so his authorship of this article is not

¹⁷ Pinto Quartim, ‘Rebeldias’, *A Batalha*, 3.886 (1921), 1. All citations from Quartim in this paragraph are from this same source.

¹⁸ Anon, ‘Haja homens!’, *A Batalha*, 3.752 (1921), 1.

¹⁹ Jacinto Baptista, *Surgindo Vem ao longe a nova aurora*, pp. 12, 42-47.

certain. Whoever the author was, the article did not provoke any particular immediate response or reaction but it certainly set the tone for future commentary on the subject.

Before examining the piece in *A Batalha*, it is worth recalling the mood set by a review of Botto's work that appeared in the Lisbon-based newspaper, *A Capital*, a few weeks previously.²⁰ In a reference that would be picked up by the later writer in *A Batalha*, the author of the piece in *A Capital*, Armando Ferreira, remarked on the appearance in a bookshop window, not only of Botto's *Canções*, but also a photograph of the author, 'nusinho até aos ombros e de olhos em alvo' [fully naked down to his shoulders and with his eyes raised aloft].²¹ This feminine 'pornographic' pose was nothing less than a threat to morality, which 'virá perverter, debilitar a nossa raça' [will pervert and weaken our race].²² The similarities with the later piece in *A Batalha* are striking.

The *A Batalha* article on Botto's work, some eighty lines long, began by relating the appearance of a portrait of a man in a bookshop window. There was, the author stated, nothing unusual about that, except that when one looked more closely, it could be seen that this man had taken on 'hábitos de mulher' [a womanly demeanour].²³ There was something immoral and suspect about the picture as the figure's shoulders were bare, indicating 'propósitos exibicionistas' [exhibitionist tendencies] (a term also used by Ferreira).²⁴ The link to homoeroticism was quickly made by the author and the portrait, the writer stated, was designed to attract the 'os olhares ardentes' [the burning looks] of the male gaze (and was evidently quite successful, not only in the case of the person writing, at least in respect of a *burningly indignant* gaze).²⁵ Soon it was discovered that the man in question was none other than 'António Boto [sic] e Boto é poeta e o poeta é pederasta' [António Boto [sic] and Boto is a poet and the poet is a pederast].²⁶ This allegation of 'pederasty', a label used to describe homosexuality in general and sometimes for a predilection for young men or boys, was common in the period in Europe. Homosexuality was often associated with the dilettantism and dandyism of the aristocratic class, a sector of

²⁰ Anna M. Klobucka, *O mundo gay de António Botto*, pp. 86-92.

²¹ Armando Ferreira, 'O livro da D. Antónia. 'Canções' ... a elle!', *A Capital*, 3759 (1921), 1; Anna M. Klobucka, *O mundo gay de António Botto*, p. 87.

²² Armando Ferreira, 'O livro da D. Antónia'; Anna M. Klobucka, *O mundo gay de António Botto*, p. 87.

²³ Anon, 'Haja homens!', *A Batalha*, 3.752 (1921), 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

society that took on fashionable trends to fill its spare time in lieu of productive work.²⁷ In Portugal, literary works began to examine the phenomenon of pederasty (or sodomy) in the late nineteenth-century; probably the first to do so was Abel Botelho in his representation of the *Barão de Lavos* (1891).²⁸ Botelho's *Barão de Lavos* was in fact the first volume of the author's five-part series on 'Social Pathology'.²⁹ The third volume, *Amanhã*, was inscribed with the author's sympathy towards anarchism and focused on the new tomorrow that the movement heralded. It also, as Gameiro has pointed out, sealed the relationship between pederasty and the aristocracy; at play was 'um idêntico processo "degenerativo" nacional' [an identical process of national 'degeneration'] within literature and scientific positivism.³⁰

Pederasty was a category that came before the later, more elaborate concept of 'sexual inversion', a category that began to be disseminated at the end of the century.³¹ Rather than provide a clear break, nevertheless, between older categories of 'perversion', pederasty and sodomy, such work employed a profusion of terms for the phenomenon. Despite declaring that there was clear water between pederasty, tribadism and sexual inversion,³² one author, Adelino Silva, fused 'uranism' and lesbianism with 'sexual inversion'.³³ A similar pattern was to be seen in the slightly later volume by Pereira dos Santos on homosexuality, perversion and Sapphism.³⁴

The writer in *A Batalha* continued by stating that Botto had decided to publish his work rather than keep it in the family (perhaps a reference to a typical closeted experience of aristocratic families that hid their homosexual son), and therefore had to accept the voice of the critic. In a searing allegation about the frequency of Botto's relations with men, the author went on to say

²⁷ Alberto Mira, *De Sodoma a Chueca. Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España en el siglo XX* (Madrid: Egales, 2004); Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García, *'Los Invisibles': A History of Male Homosexuality in Spain, 1850-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), pp. 250-51.

²⁸ Robert Howes, 'Concerning the eccentricities of the Marquis of Valada: Politics, culture and homosexuality in Fin-de-Siècle Portugal', *Sexualities*, 5.1 (2002), 25-48.

²⁹ Miguel Vale de Almeida, 'O contexto LGBT em Portugal', in *Estudo sobre a discriminação em função da orientação sexual e da identidade de género*, ed. Conceição Nogueira and João Manuel de Oliveira, (Lisbon: Comissão para a Cidadania e Igualdade de Género, 2010), pp. 45-92 (p. 72).

³⁰ Octávio Gameiro, 'Do Acto à Identidade: Orientação Sexual e Estruturação Social', Master's Thesis (Lisbon: Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade de Lisboa, 1998), cited in Miguel Vale de Almeida, 'O contexto LGBT em Portugal', p. 72.

³¹ Adelino Silva, *A Inversão Sexual. Estudos Medico-Sociaes* (Porto: Typographia Gutenberg, 1895).

³² Adelino Silva, *A Inversão Sexual*, p. 42.

³³ Richard Cleminson, and Francisco Molina Artaloytia, "'Simulando assim a cópula normal" – sapphists, tribades, fricatrices and lesbians: Between biomedical taxonomical categories and identity in Portugal (1895-1930)', *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 29.2 (2016), 113-133 (116-117).

³⁴ *Ibid*, 117-118; Albano Pereira dos Santos, *Perversão Sexual* (Famalicão: Typographia Minerva, 1903).

that Botto's verses were in fact less well known than his body, which was, 'well versed' in contact. This, Botto's body, was the 'volume' that had been 'bem folheado' [well leaved through]. The fact that Botto was renowned for his public 'queer' identity, and that he cultivated such an aura, is unquestionable in light of such discussions in *A Batalha* and other sources at the time.³⁵ Those men who had had contact with Botto had nothing to lose as they had already forfeited everything: 'já perderam tudo quanto possa dignificar um homem' [had already lost everything that could make up the dignity of a man]. But the poems were dangerous for the unprepared. They could pervert the unwary and, as a result, any 'homens viris podem efeminar-se' [virile men could become effeminate]. This was because the author, like the book, 'tende a contrariar a Natureza' [tends to subvert Nature], 'a contaminar uma geração inteira' [to contaminate an entire generation], just as alcohol destroyed the body. The book was, in a word, prejudicial for the whole of humanity and if its words were taken seriously, it would destroy the human race in two or three generations. The seemingly all-powerful force of homosexuality to corrode drew on a twin interpretive frame. On the one hand, European sexual psychiatry had posited, since the end of the nineteenth century, a shifting relative importance between the role of heredity and the environment, broadly understood, to affect one's sexual desires and expression. The development of the sexual sciences in Portugal, as work such as that by Silva and Santos show, had also displayed this trend.³⁶ The fact that a mere portrait could 'turn' one from one's natural sexual development, understood as heterosexuality, confirms how powerful the 'wrong' kind of environment was conceived to be. On the other hand, as illustrated above, this more environmental explanation for sexual decadence was reinforced by anarchism's own willingness to position the causes of degeneration somewhere between the malleability of human nature, a strong role for environmental factors in crime, degeneracy and the 'evils' of the capitalist world, and 'natural' or biological causes of illness. That homosexuality, as a practice that derived from the degradation of the society and from the transmission of diseases such as alcoholism, was understood as 'contagious' by anarchists was utterly logical.

What was to be done, therefore, with Botto's *Canções*? Should the volume be burned or banned? Certainly not. Botto, the writer in *A Batalha* urged, had as much right to propagate

³⁵ Anna M. Klobucka, *O mundo gay de António Botto*, p. 13.

³⁶ Richard Cleminson and Francisco Molina Artaloytia, 'Entre los 'vicios genésicos' y la normalización de la homosexualidad: A *Vida Sexual* de Egas Moniz', *Ayer. Revista de Historia Contemporánea*, 87.3 (2012), 67-88; Richard Cleminson and Francisco Molina Artaloytia, "'Simulando assim a cópula normal'".

vice as *A Batalha* had in combatting it. It was necessary, therefore, to fight it, but through the medium of enlightened knowledge. The book's contents should be read, the author continued, but virility, health and beauty should take their place. In addition, those writing poetry should be encouraged to write clean verses: 'É preciso purificar a atmosfera literária que nos rodeia' [It is necessary to purify the literary atmosphere that surrounds us]. Finally, it was necessary to prove to women that there were still men who were capable of fulfilling 'a obra grandiosa da Natureza' [the all-important mission of Nature] and who were 'aptos a perpetuar a vida' [fit to reproduce life].

'Haja homens!' received no direct responses in subsequent issues of *A Batalha*, but three months later a piece appeared on the subject of the 'degeneration of the species'. Botto was not mentioned here, but the tenor of the article matched the style and content of the previous piece. On 27 August 1921, under the general rubric of 'Um problema patológico-social' [A problem of social pathology], the anonymous author launched 'Um grito de alarme contra a degenerescência da espécie' [A cry of alarm against the degeneration of the species].³⁷ The association between social pathology and degeneration was thereby sealed and this August article was followed by a further discussion in mid-September of a case of 'repugnant adultery' that was used to justify the campaign by the paper against degeneracy in society.³⁸ The August article was a long piece and occupied most of the left-hand columns on the front page of *A Batalha*, reflecting the importance that the editors gave to the issue.

The opening lines of the article centred on a double bind: following anarchist understandings, while the bourgeoisie conserved a society that was rotten to its core, it refrained from dealing with questions that were unsavoury. This was doubly hypocritical as those same issues had been generated by the immorality of the bourgeoisie in the first place. In contrast, as revolutionaries, readers of *A Batalha* noted 'o que há de bom e de puro' [what is good and pure] and were not afraid to pinpoint 'o que existe de pôdre e de falso' [that which exists that is corrupted and false].³⁹ Women, but also (male) heads of family had a duty to extirpate what was erroneous and that included the rising tide of so-called 'sexual inversion', another category made popular by nineteenth-century sexologists. Sexual inversion was a more sophisticated

³⁷ Anon, 'Um problema patológico-social. Um grito de alarme contra a degenerescência da espécie', *A Batalha*, 3.848 (1921), 1.

³⁸ Anon, 'Um adultério repugnante. Um caso que justifica o alarme de A BATALHA contra a degenerescência da espécie', *A Batalha*, 3.862 (1921), 1.

³⁹ Anon, 'Um problema patológico-social'.

category than pederasty or ‘Sapphism’ (even though the terms were often juxtaposed) and allowed for an analysis of the individual’s sexual predilections, as well as what may now be termed their ‘gender deviance’, that is, their non-conformity to the prescribed gender roles for men and women. Men acted ‘like women’ and vice-versa in respect of their demeanour, desires and sexual practices. Sexual inversion as an idea also allowed for an examination of the relative importance of the tainted heredity and the negative environment in which the individual grew up. *A Batalha* was ready to ‘vir pôr a claro, a nú, a inversão sexual que tomou de assalto furiosamente, impetuosamente as duas últimas gerações’ [expose clearly, for all to see, sexual inversion, which has taken the last two generations furiously and impetuously by assault], a phenomenon that was achieving ‘proporções alucinantes’ [frightful proportions] as a kind of ‘homosexual scare’.⁴⁰ Those that were interested in creating beautiful children, who were devoted to ‘o futuro da vossa raça’ [the future of your race],⁴¹ were assailed by the rise of pederasty and Sapphism.

This comment came at a time when, simultaneously, in the pages of *A Batalha* there had been long debates on the need to reduce the number of children born as a mechanism of working-class combat against the established order as part of the programme of Neo-Malthusianism. This had many adepts in libertarian circles and it was no-one less than Quartim who would publish an article in *A Batalha*’s illustrated supplement two years later against the ‘obligation to procreate’.⁴² It can, of course, be argued that the two were not contradictory. The creation of new healthy human beings through the exercise of ‘normal’ sexual relations would fulfil libertarian designs on population improvement. Pederasty and Sapphism were ‘monstrous’ attacks on procreation, against the ‘razão de criar’ [call to procreate].⁴³ In a word, ‘O pederasta vive para morrer’ [The pederast lives in order to perish],⁴⁴ sealing the association between homosexuality and death, whether individual or collective.

As in the above earlier article, the author of this piece provided an explanation of such a puzzling ‘anti-natural’ phenomenon. In accordance with anarchist understandings of the importance of the environment, it was declared that pederasts were ‘doentes duma doença

⁴⁰ Anon, ‘Um problema patológico-social’.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Richard Cleminson, *Anarchism and Eugenics: An Unlikely Convergence, 1890-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 137-139; Pinto Quartim, ‘A obrigação de procriar’, *A Batalha. Suplemento semanal ilustrado*, 1 (1923), 3.

⁴³ Anon, ‘Um problema patológico-social’.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

estranha que os ambientes de degradação geram’ [sick with a strange disease that degraded environments create].⁴⁵ It was further stated that pederasts hated women, a complex that made them act as women in an attempt to substitute them. The pederast was ‘tímida como uma donzela’ [timid as a damsel], his voice was ‘frágil e efeminada’ [fragile and effeminate] and he engaged in female pleasures.⁴⁶ In an association that placed the pederast as an effeminate partner, he was seen to fall madly in love with virile men, whom he pursued ‘como aquelas donzelas românticas dos fascículos baratos que se entregam por aí’ [like those romantic young girls in a penny dreadful who give themselves over at the drop of a hat].⁴⁷

Pederasty, the article continued, had become popular among snobs and those seeking itinerant pleasures, but it was spreading further as a contagion ‘que se poderia adquirir como o fumar’ [which could be acquired like the smoking habit],⁴⁸ in a move that showed how far sexuality was seen by some anarchists to be plastic and mutable. Women were not immune from such practices and acted inversely to men. Sapphic women, a term itself already becoming slightly outmoded among the proliferation of terms in the 1910s and 1920s,⁴⁹ satisfied their desires ‘com mais paixão (paixão doentia, é claro) do que muitos cônjuges’ [with more passion (sick passion, of course) than many married persons].⁵⁰ In explaining the mechanism of Sapphic attraction, the author rehearsed the ways in which pederasty operated: ‘A maioria destas vítimas do safismo não são doentes por natureza, são viciadas pelo meio ambiente, possivelmente regeneráveis’ [The majority of the victims of Sapphism are not sick by nature; they acquire vice through their environment and can potentially be regenerated].⁵¹ This latter point, on the possible recuperation of the homosexual and Sapphist, was common in anarchist thought and provides further testimony to the power of the environment to do good as well as ill. Given the scourge that was being caused by this new ‘disease’, what, the author asked, could be done in the case of male homosexuals, ‘para que o pederasta se torne verdadeiramente um homem’ [so that a pederast becomes a true man]?⁵² The key was a medical and scientific approach. The author also argued that any conglomeration of animals, human or otherwise, led to corruption. In a critique of ‘civilization’ and the over-crowded conditions in which humans

⁴⁵ Anon, ‘Um problema patológico-social’.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Richard Cleminson and Francisco Molina Artaloytia, ‘Entre los “vicios genésicos” y la normalización de la homosexualidad’.

⁵⁰ Anon, ‘Um problema patológico-social’.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

had to live, the author also mentioned the dangers brought by same-sex environments such as boarding schools. Again, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sexology, as well as anarchism, was deeply concerned with the perverse effects that single-sex establishments such as prisons, barracks, convents, schools and ships entailed. But the anarchist critique of civilization also harboured a preference for ‘nature’ as a quasi-autonomous force. Nature, in turn, would purify the personal and public realm.

Finally, at the end of this long piece, the author detailed what was necessary to resolve the issue and ‘de vibrar nm [sic] golpe mortal nesse vicio degradante’ [deal a deathly blow to this denigrating vice].⁵³ The suggestions were quite programmatic: the complete abolition of militarism (on the grounds that it fermented what may be termed ‘homosocial’ contact); coeducation in schools; the destruction of the notion of ‘honestidade’, that is, virginity and secretiveness around sexuality; and, the promotion of ‘free love’, which would elevate love to its true heights. In the case of real illness, the author urged science to try to find a cure. It was only by creating a different kind of environment that one would arrive at the ‘Revolução, a grande Revolução purificadora’ [Revolution, the great purifying Revolution].⁵⁴

Some three weeks later, on 13 September 1921, *A Batalha* published an article about a case of adultery, entitled ‘Um adultério repugnante’ [A repugnant act of adultery]. What is notable about this piece is that it was framed as a contribution to the paper’s campaign against immorality and degeneration. Its subtitle, reinforcing these themes, read ‘Um caso que justifica o alarme de A BATALHA contra a degenerescência da espécie’ [A case that justifies the alarm of A BATALHA in respect of the degeneration of the species].⁵⁵ The act of adultery, so the story went, was in fact partly about a case of same-sex love between two women in the central city of Coimbra. The article related the plight of a Lisbon art gallery owner, José Joaquim Dias, who had been the victim of a ‘burla tremenda’ [tremendous deception].⁵⁶ Some time ago, two women, Laureana do Carmo and Maria Serra, visited the gallery. The owner and Carmo became close over time and decided to marry. Laureana began to ask the fifty-some year-old Dias for money to purchase clothes and furniture. Dias obliged. He was then invited to visit and he made his way to her house at Rua dos Estudos, 38, Coimbra. He began to gather

⁵³ Anon, ‘Um problema patológico-social’.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Anon, ‘Um adultério repugnante. Um caso que justifica o alarme de A BATALHA contra a degenerescência da espécie’, *A Batalha*, 3.862 (1921), 1.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

information about the two women, in the knowledge that they lived at same address and perhaps in response to some inkling that all was not well. Dias decided to proceed with the marriage, however, and this duly took place. Afterwards, he returned to Lisbon and repeatedly asked his now wife to come to the city. Laureana refused, stating that she did not want to leave her friend Maria. Dias returned to Coimbra but found that his wife no longer treated him ‘com o mesmo carinho e solicitude’ [with the same affection and solicitousness].⁵⁷ One day, after asking the servant where his wife was, he received the reply that she was in the bathroom with her friend Maria, something that occurred practically on a daily basis. On this occasion, Dias resolved to intervene and on opening the bathroom door, ‘Deparou-se-lhe então um espectáculo immoral e repugnante’ [An immoral and repugnant spectacle was revealed to him].⁵⁸

It turned out that Maria Serra was his wife’s lover and she had planned the whole operation, including the misappropriation of Dias’ wealth. Eventually, he was informed by a neighbour that the house had been transferred to Maria Serra. Dias later found out that the two women were from Tondela, Beira Alta, and that they had often shared a room when girls. In light of the ‘boatos torpes’ [unsavoury rumours] that were circulating in the village, Laureana’s parents told Maria to stay away. Maria then kidnapped Laureana, took her to Coimbra and lived with her as ‘mulher e marido’ [wife and husband] for twelve years. The immorality of the case, the author confirmed, justified its inclusion in the campaign begun by *A Batalha* the previous month. Doctors, teachers and parents should study this case in order to prevent the spread of this ‘nova lepra’ within society.

Sexual inversion: the “mulher-homem” de Famalicão

Just a few days later, sexual inversion took centre stage once again in *A Batalha*. In an article entitled ‘Contra uma inversão sexual - A “mulher-homem” de Famalicão’ [Against sexual inversion – The man-woman of Famalicão],⁵⁹ published on 22 September 1921, lurid details were provided on a further example of ‘sexual immorality’. This article was followed by a letter, a week later on October 1st, sent by someone from Famalicão praising *A Batalha*’s ‘noble campaign against immorality’, but also pointing out that the specific details

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ J. Gomes Dos Santos, ‘Contra uma inversão sexual - A ‘mulher-homem’ de Famalicão’, *A Batalha*, 3.873 (1921), 1.

of the case were incorrect. The author of the original September article, J. Gomes dos Santos, began by praising the fact that the paper had published details of the ‘extravagante e repugnante’ [extravagant and repugnant] Coimbra case of adultery discussed above. The story of this particular example was as follows: some time ago, a widow was left in charge of six children in the northern town of Vila Nova da Famalicão. The eldest of these children, Arminda Sampaio, on the death of her mother, assumed overall responsibility. Arminda entered into relations with another girl and left her siblings, now grown up, under the supervision of one of the male siblings. Because of this brother’s lifestyle (no further details were provided), he did not take care of them as required and they were left to their own devices. Arminda, known as the ‘mulher-homem’ of Famalicão, had gone to live with her childhood sweetheart. They lived together for a number of years.

Dias pondered how many such cases unbeknownst to society existed but praised the initiative taken by *A Batalha* ‘para moralizar esta sociedade corrompida’ [in order to distil morality into this corrupt society].⁶⁰ Gomes dos Santos signed off the article in the hope that help would come to ‘tantas desgraçadas’ [so many unfortunate women] who had been corrupted by ‘essas viciosas’ [those women steeped in vice]. On the face of it, the case of Arminda was nothing more than one of lesbianism, but the fact that the individual was known as a ‘man-woman’ poses certain questions. Rather than a case of cross-dressing or a ‘hermaphrodite’ woman who married,⁶¹ of which numerous examples were related in the annals of sexual science during this period, however, the nomenclature reflected more of a folk understanding of lesbianism. Its association with ‘deviant’ anatomy was one that often accompanied stories of ‘sexual inversion’ in this period and served to police the sexuality of the population. The story of Arminda, nevertheless, was still located in popular understandings of anatomy and sexuality rather than within ‘scientific’ discourses on sexual inversion or homosexuality.

Little over a week later, a letter arrived at the offices of *A Batalha* aiming to clear up some errors in Gomes dos Santos’ earlier account. Raúl Sampaio corrected some details about the profession of the deceased father but, more important for this study, gave some precise

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Alice Domurat Dreger, ‘Hermaphrodites in love: the truth of the gonads’, in *The Erotic Imagination: French Histories of Perversity*, Vernon E. Rosario (ed.) (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 46-66; Alison Oram, *Her husband was a woman! Women’s gender crossing in modern British popular culture* (London:, Routledge, 2007).

indications about the whereabouts and nature of Arminda.⁶² Sampaio wrote that while praising the campaign by the paper against immorality and especially Sapphism, it was important to be careful with tendentious information, especially that provided by someone who employed a pseudonym – there was no such person as Santos registered in the locality. Sampaio listed a number of ‘lies’, among which were the fact that the supposed victim, Arminda’s friend, abandoned her family; in fact, she had lived away for years as she was a teacher in another town. He supplied other details about the family economy and the support provided by the brothers in the household. But the situation of the family worsened and Arminda had no option but to leave the house and lodge with her teacher friend. Furthermore, Sampaio, and various inhabitants of the town, were prepared to swear as to the religiosity of Arminda. Whatever the truth of the personal situation of the ‘man-woman’ of Famalicão, what is notable is that any connections between Arminda and her companion were presented as evidence of ‘Sapphism’ and this was sufficient to deride her publicly in the newspaper *A Batalha* and in society at large.

‘A Revolta da Carne’

A few days after the discussion of the Famalicão case, on 7 October 1921, *A Batalha* began publishing in serial form a story written by Mário Domingues with the title ‘A Revolta da Carne’ [The Revolt of the Flesh].⁶³ This *romance* contained numerous passages on the subject of homosexuality, Sapphism and some direct references to an ‘unmanly’ poet. The novella was written in tune with a modernist style of heightened emotions and transgressive tropes. In this sense, Domingues’ work drew on a tradition that exemplified what Anna Klobucka has called ‘the haunting of the Portuguese modernist repertoire by the specters of decadence’,⁶⁴ one of which was homosexuality. The first part introduced the main characters of the novella under the general heading of ‘Ignorância dos pais, perdição dos filhos’ [The ignorance of parents and the decay of children]. The ‘impetuous’ daughter, Leonor, or Lili, whose parents were Jerónimo and Teresa de Jesus, was at a crucial stage of her development and required a strong steer from them. The first part of the novella, however serious, employed a somewhat tongue-in-cheek approach to the family, which was represented as forming part of the emerging nouveau riche and, as such, was obsessed with their offspring’s chances in society. Later parts, appearing on

⁶² Raúl Sampaio, ‘Campanha contra o safismo’, *A Batalha*, 3.878 (1921), 3.

⁶³ Mário Domingues, ‘A Revolta da Carne’, *A Batalha*, 3.882 (1921), 1.

⁶⁴ Anna Klobucka, ‘Portugal’s First Queer Novel: Rediscovering Visconde de Vila-Moura’s *Nova Safo* (1912)’, *Journal of Lusophone Studies*, 4.1 (2019), 40-63 (42).

an almost daily basis, explored the infatuation of Lili with a poet in the neighbourhood, an António de Meneses. The passionate love that sprung forth between them was depicted by Domingues as somewhat over-intense, almost sickly and the trope of the weak and emotional poet gathered strength as the days passed.

Meneses' irregularities were addressed by the girl's tutor, Dona Emília. Dona Emília embraced Lili, discussed the way men loved, and stroked her neck as Lili cried into her shoulder.⁶⁵ Leonor 'tomava ingenuamente por amizade as palavras da professora' [ingenuously took her teacher's words as words of friendship].⁶⁶ The tutor explained to her ward that it was the delight of men's caresses that Lili was looking for, 'beijando-a voluptuosamente nos lábios vermelhos' [kissing her voluptuously on her red lips].⁶⁷ This action was the prelude to an assault: 'E com a voz trémula, os olhos plenos de scintilações lúbricas, arremessou-se violenta sôbre a jovem, puxando-lhe as roupas furiosamente' [And with a tremulous murmur, her eyes filled to the brim with lubricious sensations, she launched herself violently on the young woman, tearing furiously at her clothes].⁶⁸ Lili managed to push D. Emília away and ran from the room. The attack, nevertheless, occasioned a profound change in Lili. The teacher's advances had left her with contradictory feelings; on the one hand, 'de beleza e de sonho' [of dream-like beauty] and, on the other, 'de nojo e de revolta' [of revulsion and rejection] with ensuing nightmares and a resultant kind of fit.⁶⁹ A doctor was called and he advised that the girl had clearly undergone an emotional shock and, in a somewhat improbable move, suggested that the cure was rest and... marriage.⁷⁰ It is at this point that D. Emília hatched a plan. Instead of the daughter marrying a man of Lili's parents' choice, she designed to send a perfumed letter of marriage proposal ostensibly from Lili to the poet next door, to 'êsse rapaz louro e imberbe' [to that blond and beardless youth].⁷¹ The poet accepts and Lili prepares to marry. Evidently, all does not go according to plan but the twists and turns of the story are not recounted here over the some twenty-five episodes that are still to come.⁷² Developments included the tale of Lili sleeping with one of the young male servants, references to the 'pederastic' past of a new female servant's male line, excessive masturbation and the attempt at an arranged marriage.

⁶⁵ Mário Domingues, 'A Revolta da Carne', *A Batalha*, 3.887 (1921), 3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Mário Domingues, 'A Revolta da Carne', *A Batalha*, 3.888 (1921), 3.

⁷¹ Mário Domingues, 'A Revolta da Carne', *A Batalha*, 3.889 (1921), 3

⁷² The final episode was printed on 17 November 1921. See Mário Domingues, 'A Revolta da Carne', *A Batalha*, 3.917 (1921), 3.

What is significant about the piece is the faithful reproduction of certain motifs: the notion of the ‘decadence’ of the *nouveau riche*, the potential abuse on the part of private tutors,⁷³ the effeminacy or not quite sufficiently masculine aspect of the poet, perhaps a cypher for Botto, the seductive and improper wives of the ‘deviant lesbian’, the influence of compromised heredity, adultery, prostitution, syphilis and death. Coming at a time when criticism of poets such as Teixeira and Botto and, more broadly, homosexuality and lesbianism, was voiced in *A Batalha*, it would be hard to dissociate the literary characters in Domingues’ *feuilleton* from the ‘decadent’ morality of these real life figures.

Conclusion

Over the last two decades, anarchism in its various expressions across the world has been at the forefront of LGBTQ struggles, displaying an ability to act in intersectional manner and in accordance with its principles of horizontalism.⁷⁴ It has largely rejected its own earlier opposition to non-normative sexualities in favour of the integration of the struggle for individual and collective sexual freedom as part of its programme. The fact, nevertheless, that a movement which claimed to go against the fundamental values of society in the past through its advocacy of anti-authoritarianism and by defending the ultimate freedom of the individual, condemned same-sex sexuality, is a conundrum that demands explanation. Recourse to a transhistorical ‘homophobia’ is insufficient.

In his book, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide*, Boaventura de Sousa Santos,⁷⁵ puts forward the concept of the ‘enabling contradiction’, an apparatus that can be profitably engaged for the case in hand. At first sight, it may appear that anarchism, as a libertarian ideology, would have embraced other expressions of sexuality as part of its strategy of resistance against conventional order and morality. This, as we have argued, however, is more a historian’s expectation than reality. As such, the ‘contradiction’, which turns out not to be one, is in fact, an enabling factor allowing us to understand why anarchism aligned homosexuality with degeneration and opposed it as a sexual option. As Santos writes: ‘An

⁷³ Graça Abranches, ‘Homens, Mulheres e mestras inglesas’, in *Entre ser e estar: raízes, percursos e discursos da identidade*, ed. by Maria Irene Ramalho and António Sousa Ribeiro (Porto: Afrontamento, 2001), pp. 255-305, as discussed in Anna Klobucka, ‘Portugal’s First Queer Novel’, p. 44.

⁷⁴ An example is the Colombian anarchosindicalist ULET (Unión Libertaria Estudiantil y del Trabajo) whose activities can be seen at <http://www.uletsindical.org/> (consulted 8 December 2020).

⁷⁵ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide* (Boulder/London: Paradigm Publishers, 2014).

enabling contradiction is a contradiction that recognizes the limits of thinking or action in a given period or context but refuses to view them at a distance or with reverence, as is typical of conformist thinking and action. An enabling contradiction is inflexible with the limits and rather comes as close as possible to them and explores their own contradictions as much as possible'.⁷⁶

For libertarians, the relationship between biology and society was regulated through positivist and scientific discourses, which attempted to resolve the apparently arbitrary form of institutionalised power and coercion established by the state and capitalism. Despite the anarchist critique of one of the cornerstones of liberal ideology, which saw the relationship between social order and individual freedom as in need of regulation and control, anarchism fell into the practice of engaging in normative social control with respect to individual behaviour and, specifically, in the realm of sexuality. Despite its opposition to the state and coercive relations, anarchism sometimes drew on shared tools such as a 'rational' organization of the public sphere. In regards to some aspects of sexuality, particularly homosexuality, no epistemological break was performed by anarchism and it rehearsed the same relationship between social order, concepts of nature, and individual freedom, which sought to limit the latter in benefit of the 'social good'. As a practice that would not reproduce the species, and which would even hasten its downfall as unproductive, homosexuality was rejected by anarchism as anti-evolutionary, tainted with uselessness and even as an individual digression from 'natural' and 'rational' expressions of sexuality.

Rather than ignoring these overlaps or airbrushing them out of history, we can invoke what Halberstam has termed a 'traitorous' or 'disloyal historiography' as a heuristic tool,⁷⁷ not to condemn anarchism from the privileged position of today, but to understand its historic roots and the tensions that persist in today's movement. There were different accounts of homosexuality present in Portuguese (and other 'national' expressions of) anarchism and, as with other issues, there was no hegemonic voice. During its period of greatest influence, nevertheless, the 1920s, Portuguese anarchist interpretations of homosexuality coalesced around negative responses and, in the absence of a powerful individualist tendency where such

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 238.

⁷⁷ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 171.

ideas may have been revised,⁷⁸ the movement broadly came to associate homosexuality with degeneration. The *habitus* of masculine workplaces and movement dynamics reinforced such an association. It was only in the 1930s within small circles, that this began to be reconsidered, as evinced by the shift in Jaime Brasil's work. Quite what was experienced by members on the ground, however, can only be guessed at.

⁷⁸ Such a revision had certainly not taken place by 1924. See Lion de Castro, 'Secção Naturista. Questões sexuais - O Safismo', *A Batalha*, 6.1732 (1924), 3; 'Secção Naturista. Questões sexuais - A pederastia', *A Batalha*, 6.1740 (1924), 3.