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**Ann Mische: Partisan Publics**

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## Exploring Brazilian Youth Activism

“*PARTIDARISMO NÃO!*” With these chants against partisanship, a student rally ended in confusion and heated argument. The rally had been organized in July 1988 to pressure for the democratization of the schools, a theme that succeeded in pulling nearly a thousand teenagers out of night classes in ten schools of the Vila Prudente, a working-class neighborhood in the poorer Eastern Zone of São Paulo. The evening rally took place in a dusty parking lot outside a transit hub, with activists speaking from microphones atop a truck equipped with amplifiers. I was attending the rally with two young friends, Teresa and Miguel, who were both activists in the Workers’ Party (PT) as well as in the Education Movement of the Eastern Zone. They were among those leading a movement to organize *grêmios livres*—autonomous high school student organizations—which had recently been relegalized after decades of prohibition by the former military regime.

The confusion at this rally was not about the *grêmios* themselves, but about the political groups in defense of them. Most of the students, new at such political happenings, were taken aback by what seemed to be a swarm of representatives from organized political groups pushing their way into the rally. Neighborhood militants of the PT were passing out pamphlets proclaiming, “The PT supports the struggle of the students.” Local organizers of CUT, the labor central linked to the PT, had unfurled their banners in the crowd. Representatives of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB) were clamoring to speak from the podium. And when the student organizer leading the rally thanked the PT for use of the sound truck, a large number of students joined in shouting against *partidarismo* (partisanship), although I later found out that the leader of the chants was a militant of the PMDB (Party of Brazilian Democratic Movement).

For weeks prior to the rally, I had accompanied Teresa and Miguel on a flurry of visits to schools in the region to help students organize *grêmios*, often in the face of opposition by school administrators. I also went with them to meetings with teachers, parents, church leaders, party organizers, and other community activists engaged in the broader Education Move-

ment of the Eastern Zone, formed to address precarious educational conditions in the urban periphery. In conversations after the rally, the young PT activists lamented what they saw as the “depoliticization” of the high school movement, which they attributed to Brazil’s twenty years of authoritarian rule. They argued that partisan bickering along with skepticism toward political parties was stripping the movement of “true dialogue” about educational conditions in Brazil.

However, at the same time as they hoped that the student movement would become more political, they agreed with almost everyone else that the movement needed to stay “apartisan,” despite their own intense partisan commitments. The confusion at the rally stemmed from several different ways in which the term *apartisan* was being used. Most high school students, along with Brazilians more generally, equated *apartisan* with “apolitical.” This was based on the idea that politics is for the politicians, associated with ambition, corruption, and dirty power politics, as well as with electoral opportunism and broken promises. This understanding led to the assertion that politics did not belong in schools, churches, or workplaces, a view eagerly promoted by the military regime and still widespread among many school administrators. In this view, *grêmios* should stick to organizing dances and sports competitions and keep away from more combative debate about society or the functioning of the school.

The second use of “apartisan” was as a mask for partisan manipulation. Building on public distrust of politicians, partisan actors wielded the term as a call to arms against their partisan rivals. The PMDB activist who led the chants against partisanship was clearly hoping to discredit the PT, and thereby bring less politicized students under the wing of the more moderate centrist party. Likewise, the PT leaders themselves tried to prevent activists from their main competitor, the PCdoB, from speaking on the podium, arguing that the PCdoB was “just” out to recruit leaders into their more vanguard style of organizing, opportunistically taking advantage of the PT’s hard work raising consciousness in the schools. Unfortunately, by excluding PCdoB students in the name of *apartisans*hip, they reinforced the impression that they themselves were trying to maintain a monopoly for the PT. No one, least of all adolescents just starting out in political militancy, wants to feel like a pawn of someone else’s opportunism.

The third use of the term *apartisan* was a more careful attempt to distinguish “politicization”—conceived as autonomous political consciousness-raising—from partisan manipulation. This is what Teresa, Miguel, and other young PT leaders meant when they said the movement should be both “political” and “apartisan,” although it was trickier than it seemed. Most *petistas* (PT activists) openly admitted their partisan affiliation, insisting that there is a legitimate role for political parties in pro-

moting institutional change and actively combating the idea the partisan politics is ugly. But they also insisted—at least in principle—that the student movement had to stay autonomous from the party. They promoted *grêmios livres* as autonomous student forums for strong and open debate, with the right to discuss social issues beginning with the schools and moving out into other areas of political questioning. However, this ideal of autonomy was much harder to pull off in practice. It involved a difficult balancing act in which student activists had to provisionally suppress their avid partisan passions—something they were not always successful in doing. While PT activists tried to distinguish themselves stylistically from what they saw as the vanguardist manipulation of traditional leftist parties, they were locked in partisan battles with these parties for control of local and national student organizations.

I begin with this story because it forms a backdrop for much of this book, posing many of the puzzles I wrestled with over many years of experience with Brazilian youth politics. I first arrived in Brazil in 1987, fresh out of college and the recipient of a journalistic fellowship that allowed me to immerse myself in Brazilian culture and politics and write about it for several years in an exploratory fashion.<sup>1</sup> I was in São Paulo from late 1987 through mid-1990, an exciting period in Brazilian history. The country was moving to civilian rule after twenty years of dictatorship and wrestling with the challenges of writing a new constitution, reconstituting civic and political institutions, and staging its first direct presidential elections in thirty years.

While I had grown up among activists in the United States, mostly in the Catholic peace and justice tradition as well as the international NGO community, I found Brazilian opposition politics in the postauthoritarian period to be something of a mind-blower. Drawing on credentials from my family history (as well as some supportive local contacts), I immersed myself in the complex and contentious activist community of the Eastern Zone of São Paulo. Straddling the roles of journalist and participant, I lived with PT activists and accompanied them in wide variety of church-based, community, student, and labor activities in the region. I followed attempts to revive the high school student movement, helped to start a youth group at a Catholic base community, worked with children in a church at the side of a *favela* (shantytown slum), and helped to organize a program for adolescent children of activists at a labor union school. I was endlessly fascinated with a social movement community that was simultaneously more ideological and more grittily grass roots than anything I had experienced.

What astonished me during this period was that most people I knew were not just involved in one movement, but in five or six. The Eastern Zone of São Paulo, along with other periphery neighborhoods, was a

dense network of intersecting movement activity. In the same day, I could accompany activists like Miguel and Teresa from an early morning pamphlet distribution outside a school to a mid-morning health movement assembly at a local clinic to an early afternoon popular culture workshop of the Catholic youth pastoral to a late afternoon meeting of a neighborhood PT “nucleus.” We might end the day at an evening rally at an urban land occupation site, stopping at corner bars for snacks, beer, and camaraderie with other activists along the way.

I also went to many local, regional, and municipal meetings of the PT (and some of its factions) as militants vigorously debated the positions and policies of the new party. Founded by an alliance of labor leaders, church-based community activists, and leftist intellectuals, the PT was born in 1980 as Brazil returned to a multiparty system. It billed itself as an internally democratic socialist party, grounded in Brazilian reality rather than on foreign models. The party was organized through a network of local “nuclei” that engaged neighborhood activists in political discussion as well as in the mobilizing tasks of campaigns. Despite the conflicts described above, partisan engagement seemed to serve a bridging function for these activists. Parties like the PT were a source of inspiration and integration, knitting people together across the particularities of neighborhoods, movements, age groups, and community loyalties.

This is not to say that there were not tensions, disputes, and frequent complaints of “depoliticization,” as described in the story above. These were part and parcel of these activists’ daily lives, which were often exhausting, stressful, and personally costly in terms of finances and family life. At the same time, there was a sense of exhilaration in the late 1980s, as activists were simultaneously building the party, the popular movements, and civic institutions like student organizations, labor unions, health councils, church groups, and community associations. This grassroots enthusiasm carried over into the election campaigns that occurred every few years: for state governments and the national legislature in 1982, the constitutional assembly in 1986, municipal governments in 1985 and 1988, and finally for president in 1989. This intense electoral schedule was sometimes at the expense of the popular movements, as activists were sucked out of local communities into campaign activities (and when the PT won legislative or executive seats, into government bureaucracy). Election activity rose to a fever pitch in the 1989 presidential campaign for the PT’s candidate, Luis Inácio (Lula) da Silva, who came within few percentage points of winning the presidency.

And then, following Lula’s narrow defeat in 1989 by Fernando Collor de Melo, some of the air seemed to go out of the activist community. Perhaps, as many claimed, they were exhausted by so many years of intense, full-time, self-sacrificing activism. Perhaps there was a generational

effect, as young activists got older and decided it was finally time to get their own lives in order. Or perhaps, with the installation of a directly elected president, a new period had begun in Brazilian politics, as the country moved from democratic “transition”—dominated by regime/challenger polarities—to “consolidation,” with elite and opposition groups sorting out more complex institutional roles. In any case, between the time I left Brazil in 1990 to begin my graduate studies and returned in 1994 for two years of systematic research, there was a marked change in activist mood and rhythm. “It’s not like ’89,” I was told mournfully by activist friends from the Eastern Zone. They lamented the “crisis” of the popular movements and described the reshuffled internal politics of the PT, which was increasingly polarized between factions advocating more institutionalized paths to “democratic socialism” and those demanding a return to the PT’s more radical challenges to capitalism and neoliberal reforms.

#### SHIFTS IN THE CIVIC-PARTISAN LINK

In the mid-1990s, I changed the focus of my research from grassroots organizing in the urban periphery to student activism of various types, based mostly in the universities. While I maintained contact with some youth organizations linked to popular movements—particularly sectors of the Catholic youth pastoral—I was interested in the expansion and diversification of student activism as Brazilian democracy consolidated. While urban popular movements were in a self-described crisis, the student movement had received an infusion of energy during the exuberant 1992 movement to impeach President Collor de Melo on corruption charges. High school and college students hit the streets in unexpectedly large numbers as part of a broad civic movement for “ethics in politics.” Following Collor’s impeachment, there was a surge in student organizations across the country. At the same time, Brazil’s traditional, partisan student movement faced challenges from innovative new forms of student associations which were self-consciously “apartisan,” including groups organized around race and gender, professional identities, and business involvements. Once again, many student activists participated in several kinds of activism at once.

In this more diversified field of student politics, the arguments about partisanship and politicization that I had witnessed in the late 1980s were back, but in a new guise. Most activists—even those from the PT—no longer wore their partisan identities on their chests as a badge of honor. While factional competition still dominated traditional institutional venues like student or party congresses, other more emergent forms of student

organizing tiptoed around issues of partisan identity, pushing references to parties underground. There seemed to be a wedge driven between the ideas of being “civic” and being “partisan,” which had previously been seen by activists as closely linked. This put partisan activists who had come of age in the late 1980s on the defensive as they moved on to new roles in university activism. In some cases, I witnessed an odd form of civic one-upmanship, as partisan factions competed to seize the moral high ground and present themselves as more “ethical,” “democratic” and “nonsectarian” than their rivals. This led to an unexpected (and sometimes deceptive) veneer of cross-partisan collaboration.

An example can be seen in a national student seminar on science and technology that I attended in May 1996. The seminar was organized in the northeastern state of Bahia under the auspices of the National Student Union (UNE). During most of the 1990s, UNE was controlled by students linked to the PCdoB, although other parties participated in UNE’s directorate under a system of proportional representation. The seminar was organized by UNE directors linked to the moderate wing of the PT. The goal of the seminar, according to the PT organizers, was to create a space to discuss the future of the university that would be “elaborative,” not “deliberative,” that is, oriented toward discussing ideas rather than making policy decisions or disputing organizational control. They explicitly wanted to avoid the highly competitive partisan dynamics of most student movement events, which made such discussion very difficult.

At the same time, the PT leaders admitted, they were trying to expand the influence of their particular camp in the student movement. To this end, they neglected to include other political forces—including rival PT factions as well as the PCdoB—in the organization of the seminar. The leaders of UNE from the PCdoB were furious when they learned of the seminar, and promptly sent UNE’s president, Renato, as well as local PCdoB leaders to participate at the last minute (much to the chagrin of the PT organizers). In behind-the-scenes conversations, both PT and PCdoB leaders told me that they were expecting a mudslinging partisan showdown, in which each side attempted to publicly discredit the other in the eyes of less militant students.

To my surprise, almost the opposite happened. In backstage meetings, both PCdoB and PT leaders lamented the partisan tactics of the other side, but then resolved to combat this by publicly taking an ethical stance (an approach I call “ethics as a tactic”). When UNE’s president, Renato, met with his local PCdoB copartisans, he fielded anguished comments about exclusion and attack by other forces, to which he responded by affirming the difficulty in facing groups that were not as “broad, democratic, inclusive, and unified” as they were. In a follow-up tactical meeting, PCdoB leaders argued that they would be better able to win the sym-

pathies of the student body by combating the “politics of denunciation” carried out by the PT. Activists were directed to avoid factional squabbling and maintain a strong participation “at the level of ideas and projects.” This in fact they did—I was impressed by the thoughtful, well-prepared commentary of the PCdoB activists, who neither descended into ideological slogans nor circled around in vague, disorganized reflections, as some PT students tended to do.

The PT activists, for their part, attributed the absence of overt partisan dispute to their own more open-ended, dialogic, grassroots style of leadership. In the final evaluation session, they produced a document with “practical proposals” for the student movement that was supposed to synthesize the discussions of the seminar, but in fact was written almost entirely by one PT leader. The PCdoB leaders, not to be outdone, promptly presented their own document. In a conciliatory gesture, students resolved to circulate both documents nationally as the resolutions of the seminar. In closing, leaders praised the seminar as a democratic, participatory space, “not of disputes, but of action contributing to a permanent space for elaboration.”

This conciliatory space, however, was fragile. At a group lunch following the seminar, youth from the two parties initially gravitated to opposite tables. “Let’s unify!” clamored the PCdoB leaders jovially, “everyone together!” Clearly reluctant, the PT activists slowly dragged themselves to a newly joined long table, encouraged by a few go-betweeners. However, the single table did not mean unification. With me and another leader in the intervening positions, there was almost no communication between the two ends of the table. Shortly, lunch was served, and the attempt at conciliation became pro forma.

While similar in some ways, this episode also shows a shift from the student rally described earlier. In both cases, partisan factions confronted a student body that was highly suspicious of partisan motives and disputes. Rival partisan factions were wary, if not hostile toward each other, nursing histories of mutual accusation and distrust. Each side congratulated itself on being more virtuous and democratic than the other. While sincere to a degree, these claims also masked competitive, exclusionary, even manipulative tactics on both sides that lurked not far beneath the surface. The main differences from the late 1980s were in the dynamics of partisan expression—or rather nonexpression. The late-1980s activists took every opportunity to proudly affirm their partisan affiliations, even as they wrestled with the near impossible task of keeping social movements “autonomous” from the parties. The mid-1990s activists downplayed their partisan affiliations as much as possible, even as they took advantage of ostensibly “civic,” nonsectarian events (like a science and technology seminar) to advance masked partisan interests.

As I watched events such as these evolve over a period of a decade, I wrestled with the problems and possibilities of both approaches. While more openly sectarian and contentious, the earlier orientation often seemed more vigorous and generative, encouraging activist to throw themselves into the elaboration of proposals for reforms as well as into the hard work of building civic institutions, often from the ground up. While apparently more conciliatory and nonsectarian, the later events seemed to lack some of the drive of the earlier period. The suppression of open partisan dispute sometimes led to richer discussions, but also, in some cases, to an odd sense of paralysis. It was often unclear where those discussions were leading, and how they could contribute to social reforms.

Mid-1990s activists were clearly hungry for what they often called “elaboration of projects,” especially as socialist ideals became more ambiguous and involvement in democratic institutions became more absorbing and complex. Many activists complained bitterly that the competitive climate of the traditional student movement prevented such elaboration, disintegrating instead into rigid ideological posturing and backstage manipulation. The emerging new forms of student organizing—such as those oriented around racial, professional, or business identities—actively suppressed partisan affiliations in order to create less competitive spaces for dialogue and project formation. While I certainly saw advantages to this approach, it also left me perplexed and concerned. Does becoming more “civic” necessarily entail curtailing partisan challenges? Or, as the 1980s activists argued, is some degree of partisanship necessary for the elaboration of projects for reform in a complex and contentious field—as well as for acquiring the institutional power necessary to implement those reforms? If so, how can activists mediate between the partisan and civic dimensions of their multiple affiliations as they form new types of publics in an emerging democracy? These are the thorny questions from my Brazilian experiences that inform the analysis and arguments ahead.

#### RESEARCHING NETWORKS IN FLUX

In studying changes in civic-partisan relations in Brazilian youth politics, I faced a number of challenges. I did not simply want to understand the characteristics of organizations, nor of the individuals who belonged to them, but rather to examine the intersection of multiple networks—student, religious, NGO, antidiscrimination, professional, and business, as well as partisan—in a changing field. Moreover, I wanted to study not just the structure of relations, but also the way that individuals and groups made sense of these networks and responded to the opportunities and

dilemmas that they posed. This meant that I had to conduct my research on several different levels, ranging from in-depth interviews and participant observation to more formal analysis of affiliations and careers.

The ethnographic component of my work was particularly daunting, since it did not conform to the usual understanding of ethnography, which focuses on intensive immersion in a culturally cohesive setting. How do you study something that is mobile and shifting, composed of sprawling, fluid, and contentious networks with multiply affiliated activists and overlapping institutional sectors? The political context that I encountered in São Paulo was both structured and chaotic, morphing underfoot just as I thought I was starting to understand it. I found that in order to penetrate this multilayered world, I had to be more than a neutral fly on the wall. Rather, I had to embrace my contradictory position in what theorist Georg Simmel describes as “intersecting social circles.” As a Simmelian “stranger,” I sought to maintain an outsider’s fresh perspective as I moved between social settings and engaged, sometimes intensively, with insiders.<sup>2</sup> This was easier said than done, subject to continual improvisation, learning, and revision as I wrestled with a number of interesting tensions.

#### *Trying to Talk to Everyone*

Since I was interested in studying activist networks in a multiorganizational field, I did not have the luxury of spending extensive time within a single organizational setting. Rather, I found myself trying almost impossibly to keep up with the schedules and activities of several different sectors at once. This meant that I made some sacrifices of depth in favor of breadth, although I think that those sacrifices were necessary in order to understand Brazilian activism as a field and not just as a collection of isolated groups. I encountered many of the same activists in several types of settings (for example, in student congresses, party caucuses, religious assemblies, popular protests, or civic forums), although most did not participate in quite so many different kinds of events as I scrambled to attend. I came to know some regions of the field better than others, and some groups no doubt felt hurt that I didn’t spend more time with them. Nevertheless, my experience of moving from place to place—often dragged by busy activists themselves—did approximate their own experience of traveling across networks, shifting identities and practices as they went.

As I delved into this world, I explicitly sought out participants from a wide range of groups and attempted to understand the accounts of contending factions. While this helped me to understand the range of perspectives in play, it occasionally led to tensions and difficulties. Activists who had welcomed me into their discussions and bar sessions were sometimes alarmed to find me being equally friendly with opposing groups. My pat-

terns of sociability at cross-network events were intently studied; it was disconcerting to find myself in the position of the “observer who is observed.” I found that as my own position in these networks became clearer—and as I took care to segment my more sensitive or reflective conversations—most of the factions welcomed my attention (and again, were hurt if they felt slighted). However, they varied in the degree to which they let me into their internal deliberations. While I attended backroom negotiations, strategy sessions, internal showdowns, and painful self-evaluations of some PT factions, I was only able to conduct personal interviews or attend outer-layer public meetings with the more hardcore communist and Trotskyist groups.

#### *Becoming a Node in the Network*

As I moved from place to place, talking with different people and trying to understand the play of events, I found myself unexpectedly becoming a node in the network. Activists would often pump me for information and analysis of what was going on in other groups or sectors. The Catholic activists, for example, were very interested to hear about the student movement congress, which only a few of them attended. More problematically, the different partisan factions were eager to know the views of their opponents. I tried never to pass on information that was expressed to me in confidence, or that I thought was sensitive for ongoing negotiations or the reputation of a group. Nevertheless the cross-network flow of information, gossip, and analysis was so fast and furious that it was almost impossible not to become caught up in the exchange. For the most part, the information I shared was redundant and harmless—if they hadn’t heard it from me, it was very likely that they would hear it from the next person they ran into. But occasionally, what I assumed was “common domain” information turned out not to be so for some actors, triggering alarm and renegotiations in the surrounding networks.

#### *Letting Them Know I Know*

The fact that I often had valuable insider knowledge created some dilemmas, but also opportunities for deepening my exchanges. As I conducted interviews with leaders of the more closed and guarded groups, I realized that they often initially treated me as they would a journalist. They offered prepackaged, highly ideological, and persistently upbeat views of events, largely devoid of genuine analysis and reflection. To get below the surface, I had to signal that I knew more than they thought I knew—for example, by asking a pointed question about internal disputes, or showing my understanding of the contradictions and dilemmas they

were facing. I would sometimes see them look at me quizzically, realize that I was more of an insider than they expected, and then drop the interview down to a whole new level of reflective dialogue. After one such interview—which ran far longer than I had initially hoped—one of the more suspicious leaders of the radical Trotskyist PSTU (Unified Socialist Workers’ Party) smiled broadly, shook my hand, and declared that it had been a “good interview.” This flies in the face of the “ethnographer as sponge” model; in order to get good information from my intelligent and savvy subjects, I had to show that (like them) I was a thoughtful analyst of the unfolding situation.

*“Our Friend from the CIA”*

The most difficult part of my fieldwork experience was fending off the barrage of jokingly voiced, back-slappingly delivered references to me as “*nossa amiga da CIA*.” Even some activists with whom I had conducted probing interviews and maintained warm, long-term relationships thought it was hilarious to tease me in this way, part of the natural price of being a *gringa* in this anti-imperialist setting. Since I had spent previous time in Brazil and had influential friends to vouch for me, for the most part these jokes were minor irritations, although people always looked curiously to see if I reacted defensively or good-humoredly. However I made one serious misstep in releasing a very long and detailed questionnaire at a national student council attended by three hundred high-level activists from around the country. While I had developed a stock of trust among São Paulo leaders, activists from other states encountered me for the first time in the gossip-heavy fishbowl of the meeting. Students joked about “filling in their own CIA file” and came up to inquire as to whether it was true that one of the radical Trotskyist factions was boycotting my questionnaire. (It was; in contrast, the PCdoB left the questionnaire up to the “conscience of each person” while most PT youth filled it in happily.)

These tensions were alleviated some months later when I published an article on youth networks in *Teoria e Debate*, the theoretical journal of the PT. The article was widely read and gave me instant legitimation among even some of the most suspicious activists. “Do you remember when we thought you were CIA?” one of the aforementioned Trotskyists laughed near the end of my visit. As other political researchers no doubt know, there is no good response to these sorts of suspicions. I found that the only answer that worked somewhat was to grin and say, “You guys are going to be really disappointed when you find out that I’m just a sociologist.”

*Which Side Am I On?*

One of the dilemmas of studying partisanship (and all politics is about partisanship in one way or another) is that one comes to acquire varying degrees of sympathy with the different camps. While I tried to get underneath the stereotypes, and was wary about critical assessments proffered by opposing groups, I came to “like” not only the ideas and proposals, but perhaps more important, the styles of some groups more than others. Because of my family’s own history of Catholic activism, I easily engaged in the intimate rituals and reflections of the Catholic youth pastoral and felt more at home in open-ended discussion groups than in hard-hitting ideological slugfests. I’m sure the activists came to sense those sympathies, although I tried to maintain a critical eye for the difficulties and tensions of these more appealing groups. Perceptions of my affinities were bolstered by my history of living and working with grassroots PT activists in the 1980s; for the PT’s partisan rivals, the immediate danger was not that I was CIA, but that I was too close to the PT, and might intentionally or unintentionally pass on sensitive information.

I tried to break out of a pattern of spending too much time with those I was stylistically and ideologically comfortable with, trying instead to seek out more “foreign” points of view. I lobbied hard (if unsuccessfully) to be allowed to attend internal meetings of the PCdoB, to the point that I became something of an irritant even to the PCdoB leaders who were trying their best to help me out. (I was, however, allowed to attend the more public meetings of their associated youth organization, the Union of Socialist Youth.) I had a challenging, if ultimately thoughtful and productive encounter with the Coordination of Black University Scholars, who were less concerned that I might be from the CIA than with my position as a white researcher objectifying black subjects. I also spent time on the other end of the spectrum with more conservative business-oriented youth, among whom I had the unexpected experience of feeling myself underdressed and socially ungraced. I tried always to understand the strengths of those I felt skeptical of, and the limitations of those I felt sympathy for, and in this way to challenge my own preconceptions.

*“Thinking the Problem of Youth”*

In the end, I did not want to completely submerge my own sympathies, since they were the product of my developing understanding and analysis. The context I was studying was highly self-reflexive. Not only activists, but also their assorted local advisors, supporters, and researchers were engaged in a continual dialogue about youth and politics in Brazil. For the most part, this dialogue was carried out under the implicit assumption

that political participation of youth is a good thing, that Brazil needed more of it, and that there were ways it could be nurtured, stimulated, triggered, ignited, detonated, deepened, or enriched, depending on one's preferred metaphor of mobilization. Toward the end of my two years of fieldwork, I was increasingly called on to enter the dialogue, joining the ranks of the locals who were "thinking the problem of youth," as one of the PCdoB youth advisors put it. Some groups invited me to give short presentations or contribute to their informal discussions of youth politics (which I was happier to do in a reflective rather than a strategic mode). My article on overlapping youth networks in the PT journal especially seemed to have touched a nerve, perhaps because it pinpointed live tensions activists felt in juggling multiple involvements. The article was widely used as a discussion text in student, religious, partisan, and community youth groups. Activists often wanted to talk to me about ways I had gotten it right, as well as about the ways in which I hadn't quite.

Perhaps the biggest compliment came right before I left, when one of the PCdoB leaders put his arm around my shoulder and said, "Ann, you have to come back to Brazil! You have to become an advisor to youth politics! But you can't just do it for the PT!" In my position as a Simmelian stranger, I had succeeded, at least in some measure, in transcending local cleavages and digging under the skin of these complex and shifting political networks. This book is my attempt to give voice to the contradictions and possibilities of these networks. I hope to continue to contribute to this Brazilian dialogue, as well as to the discussions of others who are struggling to combine civic and partisan commitments in a world that so often asks them to choose between them.

