



SUBSCRIBE

GIVE A GIFT

LOG IN TO ACCESS  
THE DIGITAL ISSUESIGN UP  
FOR AQ UPDATES

RSS FEED

ENTER ZIP CODE

GO

SEARCH OUR SITE

GO

## ■ AQ WEB EXCLUSIVE

## Gay Pride in the Amazon

JANUARY 11, 2012

BY MANUELA PICQ

Just days before the release last month of the United Nations' **first official report** on gay rights the small Amazon town of Benjamin Constant also marked an important milestone—its first gay pride celebration. The Brazilian town, with over 30,000 people from multiple ethnic backgrounds, sits at the triple border with Colombia and Peru, overlooking the junction of the Amazon and Javari rivers. It is a quintessential Amazon town—a colorful market with abundant local fruits and fish, a deprived economy, high migration, and a rather religious community.

Benjamin Constant, like many other Amazon towns, also boasts a thriving gay community. It is a reminder that gay rights are spreading to the furthest corners of the world, and that the Amazon may be more modern than often assumed.

### Celebrating gay pride across the Amazon

After a full-day LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) forum to discuss education, security, health, and work at the *Universidade Federal do Amazonas*, over 60 participants then paraded a large rainbow flag through town. Transvestites dancing to the gay anthem “I Will Survive” in sexy glittering outfits opened the march alongside anthropology students, followed by a diverse and lively crowd chanting slogans against homophobia and honking motorbikes. The march brought together soccer players and Indigenous lesbians, math teachers and sex workers, and grandmothers and little children.

Benjamin Constant's first gay pride celebration generated some confused looks and awkward smiles, but no violence. Instead, the contagious enthusiasm enticed bystanders to join in as the lively group of perhaps a hundred people made their way to the port. Transportation difficulties prevented others from participating, notably a Tikuna Indigenous group from Feijoal, which got stuck on the way upriver. The crowd would have been larger if the event had not conflicted with the annual Country Drag Queen Contest in the old rubber town of Cavallo Cocha, Peru. (Jackie, the town's recurrent Carnival Queen, had won last year's contest and expectations were high for a repeat.)

Far from being an isolated event, the local celebration echoes a larger trend across the Amazon. In 2011 Manaus (Brazil) celebrated its 12th gay pride event and Iquitos (Peru) the sixth. Over 10 smaller towns along the Amazon River have already held such celebrations and Tabatinga, the military town across the river from Benjamin Constant, has hosted four successful gatherings.

*View a slideshow of the LGBT pride parade:*

*All photos courtesy of the author.*

**FREE TRIAL!**  
Sign-Up to Receive a Complimentary Issue of AQ. No Commitment  
Or, Subscribe and Save 25% Off the Newsstand Price

### NEW, Readers' Survey: Who are your Heroes of Social Inclusion?

Submit your choices by January 25.

Winning submissions will win a free AQ subscription and be included in a special tribute to the topic in the Spring AQ.

» [Vote Now.](#)

#### WEB EXCLUSIVES

##### Brazil and China: Clouds on the Horizon

January 24, 2012

by Lawrence Brainard and John H. Welch



The two regional giants must find some common ground if their relationship is to continue to develop at such a rapid pace. If not, more Brazilian protectionist policies may be on the horizon.

##### AQ Q&A: Antony Bugg-Levine on Impact Investment

January 23, 2012



Nonprofit Finance Fund CEO and AQ author Antony Bugg-Levine speaks with *Americas Quarterly* about how to unleash the potential capital available for this type of investment.

##### Gay Pride in the Amazon

January 11, 2012

by Manuela Picq



A recent celebration in a small Brazilian town reveals that the Amazon is grappling with many of the same gay rights issues as the rest of the world. (slideshow available)

[MORE WEB EXCLUSIVES »](#)

#### MOST POPULAR ON AQ ONLINE

### LGBT rights and homophobia

Despite a reputation for machismo, Latin America has taken center-stage in the LGBT scene. Various countries have developed progressive legislation, from the legalization of sex change in identity documents in Ecuador to same-sex marriage in Argentina and Brazil (over 1,000 gay couples received government welfare support in Brazil in 2011). São Paulo annually hosts the largest gay pride in the world with 3 million participants, and Rio de Janeiro won the title of world's hottest gay destination for the second consecutive year after being elected best Global Destination City for gay travelers in 2009.

In the Amazon, Manaus has brought together activists and entrepreneurs to promote gay-friendly tourism—a marketing strategy supported by the TAM airline company. The Ministry of Justice of the state of Amazonas is developing tools to monitor and strengthen anti-discrimination laws and is offering workshops on gender and sexual diversity.

Some gay pride events have become large public celebrations, such as in São Paulo, while others are more political, for instance defending Trans Citizens in Lima. In the triple border area, the LGBT community has so far not articulated a distinct political discourse, preferring instead to embody its demands in the celebration of beauty and differentiated gender identities. But this LGBT community's lack of a public agenda should not obscure the political dimension of the daily practices of its members.

Homophobia also still kills—and violence is soaring. According to *Grupo Gay da Bahia*, a nongovernmental organization founded in 1980, Brazil follows Mexico with the world's highest number of homosexuals murdered. In its Annual Report on the Assassination of Homosexuals, the NGO detected an increase from 198 murders in 2009 to 260 in 2010. These numbers, unfortunately, are only the tip of the iceberg; most crimes remain invisible in official statistics.

Crimes against homosexuals, as noted in the **UN report**, are particularly macabre. The assassination of the Amazon gay singer Omar Faria—brutally strangled and stabbed last September—showed the signs of mutilation and cruelty that often mark homophobic violence. **Transvestites** are particularly vulnerable. They transgress gender roles most openly, and suffer correspondingly higher levels of violence. **Transphobia** has dramatic consequences on their physical well-being as well as on their education and economic opportunities. Many work in beauty salons and in the sex industry, with professional choices often dictated by limited educational opportunities and burdened by violence.

With the constant threat of violence, it is no surprise that the Manaus government and civil society activists discussed security alternatives during the 2011 municipal conference on LGBT rights. According to Francisco Nery Furtado, the forum coordinator, every two weeks a homosexual is assassinated in Manaus, with no responsible criminals yet identified. Although government discourse constantly reiterates a commitment to address, resolve and punish homophobic crimes, in practice, they are often treated with impunity.

### Sexually modern Amazon

To look at the Amazon through gay lenses is revealing on multiple fronts. First, it sheds light on global dynamics of gender that are often overlooked. LGBT politics are everywhere, all along the Amazon, highlighting the extent to which the “local” and the “global” are permanently interacting with and redefining each other.

Second, a look at gender identities shatters flattening generalizations about the Amazon region. Gay pride activities depart from the imagination of an a-temporal and homogenous Amazon to reveal instead a diverse, complex society. Our surprises reveal our assumptions. The surprise of finding gay pride in the Amazon is embedded in the assumption that it is not a place of political modernity.

Well, it turns out that there are manifestations of gay pride deep into the Amazon, that people who live in isolated areas without electricity listen to Lady Gaga's “Born This Way” (on their Blackberries), and that there are homosexual couples in Tikuna Indigenous communities. Perhaps most importantly, it turns out that people in the Amazon practiced diverse sexualities before globalization gave them the political language and songs to say so.

The first gay pride demonstration in Benjamin Constant may be opening public spaces to discuss sexual identities from a political standpoint, expanding the rights of LGBT citizens and facilitating alternatives to exit the closet. But it is not creating new sexualities. The multiplicity of sexualities was always there, before globalization, as everywhere else.

What was missing, perhaps, was the outsider's capacity to identify diversity. Through sexuality and equipped with LGBT language, the outside eye is perhaps more inclined to discern complexity, even modernity, within the Amazon.

**To read more from *Americas Quarterly*, sign up for a free trial issue of the print magazine. No risk, no commitment.**

1. Brazil and China: Clouds on the Horizon
2. Caribbean Lags Behind U.S. in Broadening Sexual Rights
3. AQ Video: Holistic Community Development in Central Brazil with Bunge Foundation
4. China's Military Activity in Latin America
5. AQ Q&A: Antony Bugg-Levine on Impact Investment

### On AQ's Social Inclusion Portal

**Jan. 20: USAID convenes a forum of business leaders to discuss the effectiveness of developmental public-private partnerships.**

**Plus, read more on public and private efforts that promote inclusion and economic growth.**

» **Go to the Portal.**

### Follow AQ on



### Issues in Depth

**2012 U.S. Elections: Follow AQ coverage of U.S. presidential candidates' positions on issues affecting the Americas. Updated January 13, 2012.**

### FEATURED TOPICS

Unemployment	Alternative energy
Gay Pride	Venezuela
Entrepreneurship	Enrique Peña Nieto

### NOW ON AS/COA ONLINE

**Brazil and China: Clouds on the Horizon**

Jan 24, 2012

Without finding common ground, the two regional giants may not continue to develop at such a rapid pace. In fact, more ...

**Bolivia Inks Anti-Drug Accord with Brazil and the United States**

Jan 24, 2012

The January 21 signing of a narcotics-monitoring pact shows that, while Bolivia's tense relationship with the United ...

**Interview: Paula Barreto on Lula, Son of Brazil and Brazilian Filmmaking**

Jan 23, 2012

Brazilian movie producer Paula Barreto spoke to AS/COA Online about Lula, Son of Brazil, a film about former Brazilian ...

Login or register to post comments

SHARE



**AQ MEDIA PARTNERS**

**FINANCIAL TIMES**

World

**Peru sets up close scrutiny of Conga mine**

12 hours ago

International consultants to review US company Newmont's environmental impact study after local concern water supplies are ...

Companies

**Peru sets up close scrutiny of Conga mine**

12 hours ago

International consultants to review US company Newmont's environmental impact study after local concern water supplies are ...



**Hinchas de balonmano croatas y serbios se pelearon en Novi Sad**

2 minutes ago

Un hincha croata resultó levemente herido y una quincena de vehículos con matrícula de Croacia sufrieron daños en unos ...

**El Papa implora la unidad de los cristianos para que el mundo crea en Cristo**

2 minutes ago

El papa Benedicto XVI imploró hoy de nuevo en el Vaticano la unidad de los cristianos, que dijo es "necesaria" para que el ...

**INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD**  
ON THE ECONOMY, THE BUSINESS AND DEVELOPMENT FOR POLICYMAKING AND BUSINESS IN LATIN AMERICA

**Insights from the Field** is a quarterly bulletin produced in Buenos Aires, Argentina with the aim of promoting perspectives from within the region on politico-economic and security issues affecting Latin America.