

# Between Iracema Beach and the European Union: international sex tourism and women's migration

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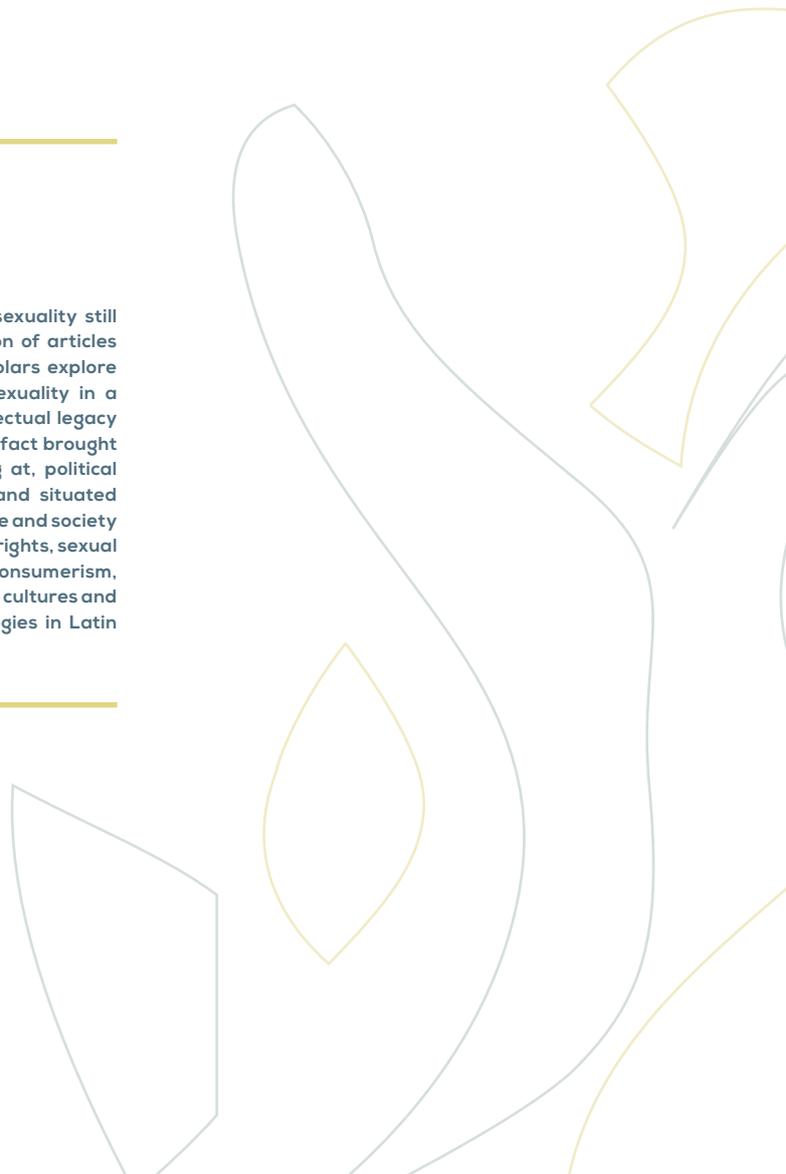
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## Sexuality, culture and politics A South American reader

Although mature and vibrant, Latin American scholarship on sexuality still remains largely invisible to a global readership. In this collection of articles translated from Portuguese and Spanish, South American scholars explore the values, practices, knowledge, moralities and politics of sexuality in a variety of local contexts. While conventionally read as an intellectual legacy of Modernity, Latin American social thinking and research has in fact brought singular forms of engagement with, and new ways of looking at, political processes. Contributors to this reader have produced fresh and situated understandings of the relations between gender, sexuality, culture and society across the region. Topics in this volume include sexual politics and rights, sexual identities and communities, eroticism, pornography and sexual consumerism, sexual health and well-being, intersectional approaches to sexual cultures and behavior, sexual knowledge, and sexuality research methodologies in Latin America.

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## Between Iracema Beach and the European Union: international sex tourism and women's migration\*

Adriana Piscitelli\*\*

I went to Switzerland. I spent three months there. It's really chic: it's the New World [sic]. The man fell in love with me in two nights. He got my passport, he did everything, my friend; he really fell hard...I don't know why. These gringos are all a bunch of fools. *Ave Maria!* But it was good. It's very good, travelling... And in Switzerland, woman, it's incredible turning tricks... it's even too natural. It could be anyone in your family. She's turning tricks, goes out at night, arrives home and it's all treated as if it were normal. In Brazil, it's all about racism. In Switzerland, it's like that, [normal]. So I asked Charles where could I get work in Switzerland. I could work at home doing massages, he said, it's very good work...Over there I worked at [], it was his uncle's massage parlor... Girl, there were so many men it was one a minute. There it was 300 francs for fifteen minutes. It was incredible. I made 20,000 in a week. I had to give half to the house. But there, I didn't pay for food or rent.... I don't regret having worked there.... I bought the furniture for my house, I bought a cell phone, I bought everything. It was a stack of money this high. And because I'm brown, I had a lot of success there. It was incredible.... Nowadays, there are women who go overseas and come back with nothing at all. Maybe a pair of shoes.... I was smart... I didn't even buy a bikini, I didn't spend a dime... Because you can't make 5000 in a week in Brazil. There, it was 20,000 a week. And no one discriminated against me.

22 year old sex worker, Fortaleza, Brazil

According to some authors, the international anti-trafficking debate often conflates forced prostitution, sexual tourism and child prostitution; these terms appearing as synonyms (Doezema, 1998: 42). The connections between these issues, evident at international discussion on the topic (Jeffreys, 1999), are also visible in the debates taking place in Brazil. In our country, these themes have attracted the attention of public opinion and also researchers and policy makers since the beginning of the 1990s. During that decade, the intensification of international tourism in the Brazilian northeast following the launch of direct flights to the region from Europe and the U.S. drew attention prostitution geared towards international visitors. This increase in visibility coincided with an increase in international anxiety regarding the prostitution of minors (Kubitschek, 1997), and with reports that Brazil had become integrated into the global

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circuit of sex tourism (Piscitelli; 1996, 2003). In this context, sex tourism became almost automatically linked, at least thematically, to the international traffic of women and adolescents for sexual exploitation. As a result of this conjunction, the concept of victimization continues to permeate the Brazilian debate on the trafficking of persons and has not only been applied to adolescents and youth, but also to the women involved in sex tourism.

This article examines the factors that impact upon the migration of women from the Brazilian northeast to Europe, either via marriage with foreign men who visit the region in search of sex or via migration involving sex work. I deliberately use the term “migration” in order to underline my view that these women are largely people who leave Brazil in search of social and economic opportunities. Examining the presuppositions present in the national debate regarding trafficking and taking into consideration the perceptions of the women involved in international sex tourism, I argue that the migration of these women should be carefully considered, without labeling it as “forced prostitution”, as is usually the case in this debate. I also argue (and this is my main point) that the *agency*<sup>1</sup> of women in this context of transnational migration can only be understood by taking into consideration its economic, political and cultural aspects.

My arguments are based on an analysis of a specific type of heterosexual sex tourism taking place in Fortaleza, which is concentrated on a certain part of the city: Iracema Beach. In this brand of tourism, which is linked to the desire for social mobility among part of the local population, and the actual migration of some women, international visitors establish sexual and romantic relationships with women from the lower and lower middle classes in Ceará and other states in Brazil.<sup>2</sup>

I begin by commenting upon the Brazilian debate regarding trafficking of women and youth, outlining the context in which these discussions take place. I then examine the economic, political and cultural factors that contribute to the migration of women in the context of the sorts of sex tourism that I analyze. I explore how these factors are expressed in terms of conceptions of gender, race, class and nationality in such a way that local and foreign tourists are situated unequally: to put it simply, native women are

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<sup>1</sup> “Agency” is understood here as the capacity to make things happen. According to Giddens, who sees the agent as someone who can produce an effect, Agency implies power. To be an agent means being capable of exercising a series of powers, including the power to influence powers exercised by other people. The concept of “agency” deals with power as transformative capacity, in an approach that sees resources as structured properties of social systems, that impinge upon and are reproduced by agents during the course of their interactions. Power, however, is not a resource. Resources are the means through which power is exercised. In this sense, power presumes regularized relationships of dependency and autonomy. Seen from this perspective, all forms of dependency offer resources through which subordinates can influence the activities of their superiors (Giddens, 1984: 9; 15, 16).

<sup>2</sup> The research on which this text is based was financed by the Fundação Carlos Chagas/MacArthur Foundation at its early stage, and later supported by the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo, CNPq, and the Guggenheim Foundation. Field work was undertaken in collaboration with Jane Guedes Horta, Célia Cruz and Maria Lucia Plantenga. I would like to thank Albertina de Oliveira Costa, Antonio Jonas Dias Filho, Flavio Pierucci, Heloisa Pontes, Magali Marques, Maria Filomena Gregori, Maria Luiza Heilborn, Mariza Corrêa, Mary Castro, Mônica Tarducci, Sergio Carrara, Suely Kofes and Verena Stolke, who contributed important questions to the research and Ana Maria Medeiros da Fonseca and Kamala Kempadoo for several points raised in the text.

intensely sexualized while foreigners from the northern nations are perceived as ideal partners. Finally, I look at how these differences are activated within both foreign and domestic perceptions, seeking to show that the women who are targeted by these concepts utilize them in order facilitate their migration to what they see desirable “new worlds”.

## 1. Debates on trafficking and sex tourism

The topic of international trafficking of women is not new in Brazil. According to historians, an intense debate over “white slaves” erupted in the country in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, trafficking was seen to be a major public problem. From 1870 to 1940,<sup>3</sup> stories of European women (mainly poor Jews from Eastern Europe) forced into prostitution in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Buenos Aires were common fair in the nascent Brazilian mass media. All three of these cities were undergoing massive growth at the time, driven by European migration. According to the stories, the trafficking networks were dominated by internationally mobile French or Polish pimps. While the French controlled upper class prostitution, the “Pollacks” took charge of supplying lower-class brothels with women (Rago, 1989: 150). According to the stories, the “Pollacks” recruited their victims by marrying young women from the impoverished small towns of Poland, Russia, Austria, Turkey and Romania, importing women into Brazil and Argentina and establishing brothels in those countries principal cities. The most commonly reported story claimed that after marriage, the young women would be taken to Paris or Marseilles and, from there, would be shipped to Rio, São Paulo, Montevideo and, finally, Buenos Aires (London, 1927, apud Rago, 1989).

Historians that have analyzed the social and political uses of these “white slavery” narratives claim that they contributed to the formulation of two articles of the Brazilian Penal Code in 1890 (Arts. 277 and 278), which defined the exploitation of prostitution as a crime. Careful analysis of the empirical evidence regarding these stories, however, indicates that trafficking was nowhere near as widespread a crime as the news of the times made it out to be. Research conducted in the records of several criminal courts in Rio de Janeiro, for example, shows that between 1890 and 1928, cases of international trafficking of women amounted to only a small portion of the case load involving prostitution. Most prostitution crimes revolved around other types of exploitation, in particular abusive contracts imposed by hotel owners on prostitutes (Pereira Schettini, 2002).

According to historians cited above, reports of trafficking and the struggle against it in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Brazil served one main purpose: they allowed Brazilian governments to present themselves as the representatives of a modern and

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<sup>3</sup> According to Pereira Schettini (2002), the first stories of Jewish “white slaves” in Brazil were published in 1870.

progressive nation. At the international anti-trafficking congress organized by the League of Nations and several European states, trafficking stories were widely spread by the Brazilian delegates as a means of demonstrating the superiority of their country's cities to Buenos Aires (at that time widely considered to be one of the main centers of international trafficking in women). Historical analysis by the same researchers suggests that, in the sphere of Brazilian domestic politics, trafficking stories contributed to the construction of a moral threat to Brazilian society and families, which served to justify the implementation of violent policies geared to the moral "cleansing" of the country's cities. In a context of preoccupation with the social and political problems surrounding international immigration, these policies focused on poor immigrants (Pereira Schettini, 2003). At the same time, however, the focus on "white slavery" ended up shifting attention away from the large numbers of Brazilian-born women—the so-called "national prostitutes"—involved in prostitution, including black slaves. White foreign prostitutes, particularly those from the lower social strata, worked in the same neighborhoods as the "national prostitutes", often right alongside the black and *mulata* Brazilians engaged in the sale of sexual services. Legal cases against owners who forced their slaves into prostitution were being processed by the courts at the same time (the 1870s) that the first stories of "white slavery" appear in Brazil.<sup>4</sup>

Today's trafficking reports differ from those early stories in many respects. For one thing, in the past, Brazil "imported women". Today, instead of receiving large numbers of European immigrants, the country exports citizens (legally or no), mainly to the so-called "first world" nations. Brazil appears in reports as a major exporter of "trafficked women" and a substantial "supplier" for international mafias (Petit, 2004: 9), even, in fact, as the main South American "exporter of slaves" to Europe (Massula & Melo, 2003: 15). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century stories, the pimps associated with the traffic in women were almost exclusively perceived to be foreigners. While foreigners still appear as important intermediaries and agents in trafficking, the principal recruiters in today's trafficking stories are Brazilian.

Alongside the changes in the trafficking routes cited and the ethnic and national identities attributed to the main trafficking recruiters, today's trafficking stories utilize a different gender symbolism. Historians believe that the popularity of European prostitutes in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Brazil may have been due, at least in part, to the view that Brazil needed to acquire "civilized European values". In this process, European women substituted black and brown Brazilian women as the principal object of Brazilian male desire (Rago, 1989). By contrast, during the 1990s, trafficking stories involving Brazilian women and adolescents highlighted their "racial exoticness" and "extreme sensuality" as important factors in the demand for Brazilians in the international sexual market (Leal, 2003).

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<sup>4</sup> Pereira Schettini (2002) describes the case of one judge who managed to liberate 186 black slaves working as prostitutes in 1870.

Brazilian historians' readings of earlier waves of concern regarding trafficking in Brazil highlight the need to carefully and critically examine data and to pay attention to the social and historical contexts in which these stories erupt, as well as to their internal and external political uses. Only when we take these factors into consideration can we begin to understand how and why these narratives were disseminated in the past. Similar care, however, has not been taken with regards to analyzing contemporary trafficking reports. In order to understand why this critical reading of today's trafficking stories has not yet occurred, we need to understand the characteristics of the debates regarding trafficking as they currently stand in Brazil.

Currently, the debate regarding trafficking of women and adolescents in Brazil is basically dominated by international and national activists and government agencies. Although it has become an important public issue, migration studies have so far offered up little information about it. Until very recently, migration studies in Brazil concentrated on migratory flows from Brazil to the countries of the northern hemisphere. This research indicated that during the 1990s, the Brazilians who were living overseas tended to be young men drawn from the country's urban and lower middle classes (Bogus, 1995; Patarra, 1996). Official numbers regarding Brazilian migration should be managed with care, however, given that they tend to be based on official sources while a large portion of Brazilian migration is undocumented, irregular, or illegal.<sup>5</sup> In any case, it is important to understand that even according to these researchers, the majority of Brazilian immigrants (72%) to certain countries was already made up of women in their 20s and 30s in the 1990s (Bogus & Beozzo Bassanezi, 2001).<sup>6</sup> Although we know relatively little about the migrants involved in overseas sex work during this period, these studies highlight the fact that the countries that have received large numbers of female Brazilian immigrants are also those that host organizations that have attempted to prevent the material and sexual exploitation of Brazilian women (Sprandel, 2001).

While academic studies say little about trafficking, a growing amount of information regarding the phenomenon has been produced by the media (CHAME, 2000, 2001), social movements, NGOs (CECRIA, 2002; Leal and Leal, 2002) and, more recently, by government agencies (Ministério da Justiça/Nações Unidas, Escritório contra Drogas e Crime, 2004). According to these sources, some 75 thousand Brazilian women have been forced into prostitution in Europe (Massula & Melo, 2003: 15). Furthermore, these sources claim that sex tourism and trafficking are strictly interrelated, with sex tourists serving as a recruiters of trafficking victims (CECRIA, 2000: 12; Leite, 2000). Since the second half of the 1990s, many of these agents and organizations producing

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<sup>5</sup> One telling example of how official numbers can be misleading has been offered by Costa (2004). According to this author, the U.S. American census of 2000 reported 181,076 Brazilians living in that country and only 20,358 in the city of New York. Information collected through the Brazilian Consulate in New York, however, suggests that almost a million Brazilians were then residing in the U.S., with some 300 thousand present in the five states under that consulate's jurisdiction.

<sup>6</sup> Studies conducted in the 21st century point out changes in the profile of the Brazilian migrants who arrive in the U.S. While the middle class dominated the migrant population in the 1980s, the end of the century saw a shift towards men and women from the lower classes (Costa, 2004: 16, 17). It is plausible that the patterns of migration to Europe also changed similarly.

information on trafficking in Brazil believed that while sex workers were an important target population for trafficking recruiters, many—if not most—women recruited into sexual slavery overseas were drawn into traffickers' networks through promises of marriage or overseas work made by visiting foreigners (CHAME, 1998, 2000, 2001). More recent documents have emphasized regional differences in the organization of trafficking networks. Traffickers operate differently in Goiás and Ceará, two states widely considered to be important suppliers of sexual slaves for the international market.<sup>7</sup> In Goiás, trafficking is regarded as exclusively linked to international networks, whose victims generally do not work as sex professionals in Brazil. In Ceará, however sexual tourists are thought to be the main link between Brazilians and international trafficking networks. Local women's ease of access to foreigners interested in commercial sex is seen as a factor which draws the Brazilians into the hands of traffickers. In this context, the presumption is that the women who are the targets of international traffickers had earlier experiences with prostitution in Brazil (Ministério da Justiça/Nações Unidas, Escritório contra Drogas e Crime, 2004). These reports linking sex tourism and trafficking differ in one important aspect: while some documents consider sex tourists and marriage and employment agencies as potential paths into trafficking networks (CECRIA, 2002: 54-56; Portella, 2003), others see sex tourists as direct recruiters of trafficking victims (CHAME, s/d: 22).

I do not deny that sex tourism and trafficking might be contextually linked. It is important to point out, however, that this relationship is not automatic. Aside from this, the historically and currently dominant conceptions regarding trafficking in the Brazilian debate make the consequences of this linkage problematic. The contemporary narrative regarding trafficking constructed in news, documentaries, and politically-oriented reports is relevant, calling attention to a problem that should not be ignored. Between 2002 and 2003, the Brazilian justice system opened 36 anti-trafficking cases in four states (Goiás, Ceará, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo). Of these, more than half (51%) were from 2003 (Ministério da Justiça/Nações Unidas, Escritório contra Drogas e Crime, 2004). In 1996 and 2000, two Brazilian women working in brothels in Tel Aviv and Bilboa died in circumstances that suggest murder (Leal and Leal, 2002: 183). Aside from this, studies by Brazilian NGOs have made significant contributions to a critical reading of current anti-trafficking laws.<sup>8</sup> Part of this material, however, raises problems regarding research on trafficking in other parts of the world (Murray, 1998: 55).

There is no doubt about the importance of disseminating trafficking stories, drawing

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<sup>7</sup> An analysis of court cases regarding this crime figure in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Goiás and Ceará courts was undertaken by Marcos Colares (Ministério da Justiça/Nações Unidas, Escritório contra Drogas e Crime, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> The main criticisms to Brazil's anti-trafficking law have to do with the fact that it ignores trafficking within the country's borders, only considers trafficking when it is linked to prostitution, and focuses exclusively on women (ignoring men, children and transgenders) (Massula e Melo, 2003). The bill's scope was expanded by the Child and Adolescent Statute of 1990, which typifies child pornography and the sexual exploitation of children as crimes (Arts. 241 and 244). In March 2004, Brazil also ratified the Palermo Convention (the United Nations' Convention against Transnational Organized Crime) and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children.

public attention of the public, and giving it leverage on national and international agendas. However, the Brazilian debate regarding trafficking has been largely subsidized by documents that reproduce the same problems that have been noted with regards to trafficking research in other parts of the world (Murray; 1998; Kempadoo, 2001; 2003); namely, the conceptualization of trafficking, the sources used, and the treatment of the data drawn from those sources.<sup>9</sup> Reports are reproduced and legitimized with lightening speed, not only by the media, but also by international human rights defense organizations and their often problematic conclusions are thus now acquiring the status of indisputable fact within the anti-trafficking universe. Because of this phenomenon, when talking about trafficking in Brazil, we must be careful to examine the facts, arguments and conclusions presented by these reports.

First of all, we need to consider the context in which trafficking stories and reports are created and presented. According to the current Brazilian Penal Code's Article 231, "trafficking in women" is defined as promoting or facilitating the entry or exit of women to or from Brazil for the purposes of prostitution. In those cases in which violence, fraud or grave threats are employed, the crime is considered to be greater. Note that this definition of trafficking means that a sex worker who travels across an international border in order to voluntarily work as a prostitute in a situation where neither her liberty nor human rights are compromised can be considered a "trafficking victim" under Brazilian law. Meanwhile, the current debate regarding trafficking of persons, both in Brazil and internationally, revolves around the concept that trafficking involves forced prostitution. This concept of trafficking has been heavily influenced by the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, an addition to the United Nations' Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, also called the Palermo Convention. This Protocol was ratified by the Brazilian government in March of 2004 and it defines "trafficking in persons" in the following manner:

"Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (Article 3-a).

In relation to the passionate discussions now underway in first world countries regarding the trafficking of persons, note the obsession of certain vocal groups within those

<sup>9</sup> For an in-depth discussion, see: Piscitelli, Adriana: Visions of the New World, female migration discussed in the context of international sex tourism in Brazil. Paper presented at a conference organized by the Center for Latin American Studies/CERLAC, at the University of York, Canada, in March 2004 (unpublished).

nations regarding the “invasion” of “aliens” or “outsiders” (Lutz, 1997). Critical readings of the Palermo Protocol have pointed out that it is quite vague on several key points. It doesn't define what the “exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation” is, for one thing; nor what constitutes “abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability”. The result has been that, even though there is consensus that trafficking involves the transport of people using coercion or fraud in order to insert them in exploitative situations that are analogous to slavery, there are many different interpretations regarding what is and what is not trafficking, based upon different groups' interests and political agendas.<sup>10</sup>

According to these critical readings of the Protocol, although trafficking is considered to be a major problem by governments, feminist organizations and groups that defend sex workers' rights, there is no agreement upon a precise definition regarding what trafficking actually is, or what policies should be used to fight it. On the governmental level, definitions regarding what is and what is not trafficking have been inserted into broader policies for the repression of transnational organized crime and the violation of migration laws.

Among feminists (who certainly do not hold to any unified position regarding the women's trafficking), abolitionists have tied the anti-trafficking struggle to their goal of eliminating prostitution.<sup>11</sup> Repeating arguments and positions that were present in the debates regarding pornography in the English-speaking world during the 1980s (Piscitelli, 2003: 215), these groups affirm that prostitution reduces women to objects and is always necessarily degrading and damaging to women. Abolitionists thus do not recognize any distinction between forced prostitution and free prostitution. They believe that by tolerating, regulating, or legalizing prostitution, states are engaging in the violation of human rights. In the abolitionist perspective, all prostitution is a form of sexual slavery and trafficking in persons is intrinsically linked to prostitution.

Other feminist tendencies in the trafficking debate are aligned with the viewpoints of groups who support sex workers' rights. These groups believe that prostitution is a form of labor and they differentiate between forced or child prostitution and voluntary prostitution by adults by their own free will. They also contest the linear equation drawn by the abolitionists between trafficking and prostitution, seeing voluntary prostitution as a form of exchange and state laws which criminalize or penalize adults engaged in sex work as a negation of human rights.

The echoes of these discussions can be ascertained in Brazil. At a time when Brazilian illegal immigration has acquired greater visibility (Assad, 2004), the National Report

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Anderson & O'Connell Davidson (2004)

<sup>11</sup> “Abolitionist” is an ‘emic’ term: a word used in discussions regarding prostitution to designate the position that all forms of prostitution are abusive and must be abolished, even when the exchange involved is consensual (Chapkis, 1997).

on the Trafficking of Women, Children and Adolescents for Purposes of Commercial Sexual Exploitation (PESTRAF),<sup>12</sup> has become one of the primary sources feeding debate in Brazil. For this reason, PESTRAF offers a privileged case to reflect upon the ways in which the international concept of trafficking as forced prostitution has been treated within the Brazilian debate. The report analyzes trafficking by studying courts cases, case studies and stories produced by popular media, classifying prostitution (forced or free), pornography and sexual tourism as forms of violence (Leal & Leal, 2002: 44).

PESTRAF carefully provides figures regarding the trafficking of Brazilian women (CECRIA, 2002; Leal & Leal, 2002). The study traces out trafficking routes by linking information obtained in the media with other Federal Police sources. Its statistics (regarding trafficking victims and recruiters) are based upon news stories which the study accepts without critique. Although PESTRAF seems to take into consideration the perceptions of the women involved in the cases it studies, it presents all the sex workers it quotes as “trafficking victims”, even when women claim to have voluntarily left Brazil in order to labor as prostitutes overseas without being forced, controlled, lied to, or meeting any violence whatsoever. In fact, the study classifies women as “trafficking victims” even in cases where the conditions of overseas sex work were considerably better than those they encountered in Brazil (CECRIA, 2002: 121-134).

PESTRAF's count of “trafficking victims” is increased by stretching the concept of trafficking, as understood by the Palermo Protocol. The study claims to follow the Protocol's definitions but, in fact, expands greatly upon them by presenting a view of trafficking which includes “structural pressures and subjective actions”. It does this by introducing the concept of “induced consent” or “cooptation”, conceived as a form of abuse that creates an apparent agreement, but one which is based upon the incorporation of the arguments of the co-opting group into the beliefs of the group that “chooses” (CECRIA, 2002: 25). The research is founded upon the notion that women who have little hope and fewer options for improving their lives do not have the independence and autonomy necessary to make choices for themselves.

This belief in female vulnerability is nothing new, particularly when it is applied to women of the global South. By denying that women from the country's poorer strata and regions can make meaningful choices when they become involved in unequal relationships, PESTRAF allies itself with ideological formulations that deny agency to third world migrant women in a global context involving the transnationalization of sexual markets (Kapur, 2003; Kempadoo, 2001: 31). Jo Doezema calls attention to the focus on poverty present in many reports regarding “forced prostitution”, highlighting how poverty itself is often perceived as if it were coercive force. According to Doezema,

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<sup>12</sup> Internationally coordinated by the International Institute for Human Rights of the University of De Paul (Chicago) and by the OAS, the study also had funding from international NGOs (POMMAR, Save the Children), and U.S. agencies such as USAID.

this approach reveals a base rejection of prostitution as a profession, believing that no “normal” woman would choose this sort of work unless she was “forced” to do so by poverty (Doezema, 1998: 43, 44). The author also argues that that perspective has classist and racist implications, in that even those who accept that wealthy or middle class western women might “voluntarily” enter into prostitution deny the same choice to women in developing nations.<sup>13</sup> Doezema's arguments are supported by a close look at those Brazilian women who do attempt to migrate, following the invitations of sexual tourists. These women's lives and experiences raise issues destabilizing the linear connections established in the Brazilian debate on sex tourism and trafficking in persons.

## 2. Between “gringos” and “natives”

Fortaleza is considered one of the main Brazilian hubs of international sex tourism. It is an industrial town, and most of all, a tourist attraction for its beautiful beaches and night life. Tourism is the most rapidly growing source of employment in the state of Ceará.<sup>14</sup> In Fortaleza, however, international tourism is also seen as worrisome, due to its strong association to sex tourism.

With a population of 2.1 million, Fortaleza is one of the fastest growing cities in Brazil, also surrounded by one of the poorest de metropolitan areas in the country (IBGE, 2000). Like many other nations in the global south, Brazil invests heavily in international tourism and hopes to increase this industry's percentage of the Gross Domestic Product and of the country's jobs.<sup>15</sup> In Fortaleza, from the mid-1980s on, this increase in tourism has been reflected in the enormous increase in the number of hotels, as well as in the transformation of once deserted beaches into posh resorts.

In 2001, foreign tourists amounted to only 9.4% of the total number of city visitors (Governo do Estado do Ceará, 2002).<sup>16</sup> International tourism, however (predominantly male), is extremely visible in Fortaleza's tourist areas. In those regions it is quite common to see foreign white men accompanied by young local women, who are generally perceived as “darker”.

In Brazil, public debate regarding sex tourism (often defined as synonymous to prostitution of minors) transformed this fearful connection into a national preoccupation.

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<sup>13</sup> Doezeza's argument is clearly expressed in the current debates surrounding female prostitution in the third world. See: Aguilar (2000).

<sup>14</sup> IPLANCE (1996), SINE (1996). In: Coriolano (1998).

<sup>15</sup> According to Embratur, tourism accounts for 5.5% of Brazil's Gross Domestic Product and 3.3% of its jobs. The government hopes to increase these figures (EMBRATUR, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> In 2002, the city received 1,450,000 Brazilian tourists, of which only 172 came from overseas (Governo do Estado do Ceará, 2002).

In the early 1990s, one could see foreigners entering into the lobbies of the best hotels in Fortaleza with 13 or 14 year old girls on their arms, but visible signs of this sort of sexual exploitation have since disappeared.<sup>17</sup> Public pressure led to the elimination of sexualized images of women in government ads promoting tourism. Likewise, government campaigns against the sexual exploitation of children by foreigners were launched.<sup>18</sup>

These actions stimulated research into the phenomenon of sexual tourism. Social science studies shed critical light on the blame placed on foreign male tourists for the prostitution of minors in Fortaleza. Research showed that in the late 1990s, prostitution in the city involved adolescents and that this was not simply a characteristic of the tourist areas. Studies were also clear to show that while tourists were a substantial portion of the city's prostitutes' clientele, Brazilian tourists were as well-represented as foreigners and both groups of tourists, taken together, were a minority in comparison to local clients (Pacto de Combate ao Abuso e Exploração Sexual de Crianças e Adolescentes, 1998).

In spite of these findings, however, foreign sexual tourism continues to be seen as one of the main sources of the sexual exploitation of children in Fortaleza (Petit, 2004).<sup>19</sup> Cases involving foreign "pedophiles" are repeatedly reported by local newspapers. It is important to point out, in this context, that "pedophile" is not used as frequently by the media when it comes to describing Brazilian consumers of commercial sex (Landini, 2003).

Sex tourism involving young adults is not necessarily a crime in Brazil.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, it too has created anxiety among Brazilians. It is perceived as an activity associated with drugs and, above all else, the international trafficking of women. The women of Fortaleza who become involved with tourists seeking sex confront this anxiety by stating their own views and experiences of sexual tourism.

The women who engage in what some local residents call "middle class sex tourism", exchange sex for goods and material advantage, by becoming involved with foreign visitors who are themselves often romantically inclined and who often do not pay for sex

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<sup>17</sup> Although the fieldwork I conducted in Fortaleza dates from 1999-2002, I have accompanied the transformations that tourism has brought to the city since 1985.

<sup>18</sup> A National Campaign for the End of Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Sex Tourism [directed] Against Children and Adolescents was launched nationwide in Brazil in 1995. It involved actions both in Brazil (with the establishment of hotlines to report sex tourists involved with children) and overseas. As part of this campaign, Brazil signed treaties with Italy, France, Germany and England, seeking to punish sex tourists in their countries of origin, as well as in Brazil. "O Brasil é moda", Isto é issue 1681, 19/12/2001.

<sup>19</sup> The recent Report by the Human Rights Commission regarding the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography involving children (Petit, 2004: 9) affirms that sexual tourism in is one of the most widespread forms of the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

<sup>20</sup> In legal terms, voluntary prostitution of women over the age of 18 is not a crime. According to the Penal Code (arts. 227, 228, 229 and 230), only exploiting or promoting prostitution is illegal.

upfront.<sup>21</sup> One 27 year old native of Fortaleza, who survives economically exclusively on the basis of resources offered to her by international travelers, explains:

I arrived there and soon found myself an Italian... from Milan. He became interested in me and said he liked me, right? So we stayed together until the day he left. We went to the beach, stayed in the hotel, understand? So when he left he gave me a cell-phone as a present.<sup>22</sup> Right the first time, the first Italian I went with gives me a cell-phone. And I had never even seen a cell-phone before... He also left money, clothes and the things he bought for me at the shopping mall.

The women are young, mostly in their 20 (although at the beginning of my research, some of my interviewees were around 16 or 17 years old). According to local patterns, the color of their skin is “*moreno*” or “*moreno claro*” (brown or light brown). They are members of the lower and lower middle classes. They are, however, far from being members of the poorest strata of Fortaleza’s society and they are not illiterate. In general, they live in housing projects for low income families, but not in the most poverty-stricken areas of the city. They also have a level of formal education that is relatively high when compared to the women who engage in the poorest forms of prostitution in Fortaleza. Some swapped their first local boyfriends for foreign men. Others sought out their first “helper” (an important emic category among these women) among the local population of older men, later exchanging this “old man who helps me out” (Fonseca, 2004) for a foreigner. Finally, others entered into the international sexual tourism circuit only after selling sex to local men and Brazilian tourists.

From the local point of view, young women from the lower and lower middle classes who become involved with foreign men are considered to be prostitutes, especially if they are classified as darker-skinned. An explanation regarding Brazilian racial categories is in order here. In Brazil, race has not traditionally been defined by the black/white binary, based on blood, as is the case in the U.S. With the globalization of trans-Atlantic black movements, however, the binary classification has come to coexist alongside the more traditional and more complex Brazilian system of classification (Fry, 1995-6). This latter system is based upon a continuum of color which, taking phenotype into consideration, includes racially mixed categories such as *mulata* and *morena*. The racial definition of a person is based not only on the color of their skin, but also the texture of their hair and their facial features. Classification, however, is also shifting and fluid and social qualifiers such as level of instruction and class may end up having more weight than phenotype when all is said and done. In a manner analogous to the observations that

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<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the great diversity of relationships classified as or linked to sex tourism, see Kempadoo, 2000; regarding the vague borders between prostitution and other forms of sexual involvement within the broader framework of sex tourism, see: Opperman (1999), Cohen (1982; 1986).

<sup>22</sup> Context note: when this interview was conducted (during my 1999-2002 fieldwork), cell phones were not as ubiquitous as they were to become less than 10 years later. In Fortaleza at that time a cell-phone was a gift of considerable value, perhaps the equivalent of a decent laptop computer today (2012).

Nadine Fernandez has made regarding Cuba (1999), in Brazil, money can whiten and socially stigmatized behavior can darken a person, at least to a certain point. As a result of these conceptions, light-skinned women of the middle classes who become involved with foreign tourists can avoid being labeled “prostitutes”. Meanwhile, this label tends to adhere to those women from the lower classes and/or darker women who accompany foreign men.

Some of the women I interviewed consider themselves to be sex workers, but many do not see themselves in these terms. The women in this latter group tend to have low-paying, stable jobs and do not do *programas* (“program,” a word which refers strictly to sex for direct and immediate payment, with times, types and prices of sexual activity all previously agreed to). They do, however, accept and generally ask for presents and financial contributions to meet their immediate and middle term needs. These presents may include clothes, watches, perfumes, cell-phones, payments for medical treatment and rent, allowances and even the resources necessary to start their own small businesses.

Not all of these women intend to migrate. Some do not want to abandon their families, which they often support. Many of these women, it should be noted, were mothers at 15 or 16 years of age. Others fear that they will be badly treated or even enslaved if they leave Brazil and they point to reports and stories of Brazilian women who encountered these sorts of problems overseas. However, some of the young women who see themselves as sex workers, and a majority of the women who do not, dream of a better future in a foreign country, usually in Europe. Occasionally, they also look to the U.S. as a potential destination, even though visas for that country are harder to obtain.

In the loosely organized context of “middle class prostitution,” there are many intermediaries or “agents”. There are also, however, many independent sex workers who are fiercely proud of their autonomy. In any case, among both sex workers and women who reject the idea that their exchanges with foreign men are a form of prostitution, a relationship with a foreign boyfriend is considered to be the easiest and quickest way to achieve the dream of migrating. The idea is that these relationships can provide the means of overseas travel (passports, tickets and even the necessary funds to be able to arrive in Europe as a tourist) without the women incurring debt or needing to rely on third parties. These young women live and breathe in an atmosphere filled with stories of successful marriages with foreigners, which tend to emphasize how quickly the women in these relationships were able to acquire apartments, bars, restaurants and beach property. The stories indicate that these sorts of relationships create social mobility and the young women who listen to them consciously take the risk of going overseas at the invitation of foreign “boyfriends” because they feel that the possible benefits outweigh the risks.

In this context, while on the one hand female social networks can alert women to the possible problems involved in migrating under these conditions, on the other hand,

they feed their dreams, offering concrete examples of economic success overseas and creating the view that the women are appreciated to a much greater degree outside of Brazil than they ever will be in Fortaleza. According to a waitress who had recently come back from Holland:

Over there, I felt that I was more beautiful, more valued. Do you know why, Adriana? Because, look, I'd go to a restaurant with him... a café where they'd serve everything. And you'd see all these Dutch men and women together! Beautiful! Just like dolls... And then a dark girl would come in—a Moroccan, really black... and they wouldn't look, because they knew what kind of race that was. But if a tanned Brazilian woman showed up, with curly hair and a t-shirt and mini-skirt! Well, those men would just be drooling! Drooling, drooling! Sometimes, I was like "I hope the guy I'm with doesn't get angry!" But he was like "No. It's great for my ego!" So, like, how does a Brazilian girl get to be with a Dutch guy? But he's like, "Look at me here with my beautiful brown Brazilian woman!" So it's good for my ego and it's good for his ego. He's a Dutch guy and he has a Brazilian woman next to him. Just last night he was telling me this.

The transnational contacts these women form, feeding their desire to migrate, also reinforce, on a global level, the migratory dreams of earlier generations of northeastern Brazilians who sought social mobility in the cities of southern Brazil. Today, the women see these cities as relatively inferior compared to those in Europe and the juxtaposition of Brazil with Europe tends to set Brazil as inferior in all regions and at all levels. Although extreme poverty is not what pushes these young women to migrate, economic factors certainly play a role in cultivating their desire to migrate. Economic concerns, however, are intricately interwoven into a series of worldviews which only become intelligible and logical when we consider the political factors that permeate the relationships forged between native women and foreign men.

Analyzing the motives that lead sex workers to leave Curacao, Kamala Kempadoo (1998) calls attention to the importance of situating the economic aspects of migration into the wider patterns of gender that impact upon young women's lives. These include the division of labor, available economic opportunities, relations to native men of their own social strata, and also their social position according to local views of class and race. When we take these factors into consideration in the case of Fortaleza, we can see that the women I interviewed are affected by what they consider to be extreme forms of local machismo. This is characterized by intense possessiveness, aggressiveness, emotional distance, lack of respect and infidelity. The women also encounter racial and class barriers that they perceive as insurmountable. If they consider foreign travelers to be an escape route from what they consider to be imprisoning nets, they nevertheless do not think that just any foreign tourist looking for sex can help them realize their dreams of migration.

International research on sex tourism highlight the heterogeneity of this universe, changing according to the sex and age of the people providing sexual services, the sexual orientation (or other characteristics) of the consumers, the participation of agents or intermediaries (or the lack of it), the integration of sexual services into formal or informal spheres of employment, whether it is full- or part-time, etc. (Mullings, 1999). The literature draws a primary distinction between tourists who seek out the best bargain for explicit and focalized encounters, preferring multiple and anonymous relationships, and those who believe to be involved in authentic and reciprocal, both sexual and emotional, relationships, who do not see the women they meet as prostitutes and, accordingly, do not see themselves as clients (O'Connell Davidson, 1996).<sup>23</sup>

The majority of the foreign men that I interviewed in the context of sex tourism in Fortaleza claimed to not frequent prostitutes in their countries of origin. They considered the sex workers of their countries expensive, cold and restrictive. Most of them claimed to have visited several sex tourism destinations, such as Thailand, the Philippines, Cuba, Costa Rica and Venezuela, as well as Brazil. They are quite diverse in terms of their national origins, ages, education levels and income.<sup>24</sup> Many have decided to continue living in Brazil after visiting, and abandoned—at least temporarily—other sex tourism destinations.

For some of these tourists, Fortaleza seems an endless red light district, where innumerable sexual experiences can be had at relatively low prices. According to Luiz Fernando Dias Duarte's observations on modern sexuality (2004), these travelers seem to embody an accentuated form of hedonism, seeking pleasures entirely unconnected to emotional investments. The spirit of transgression that seems to transfix relationships with native women seems to be related to this disconnection. This seems more relevant to an understanding the scene than any particular sort of sexual practices the men might engage in. According to one 33 year old English tourist, the co-owner of a beauty salon, "there are women of all colors here. Dark, intermediate, light. I've slept with many of them. In my first two days here, I went crazy".

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<sup>23</sup> Such distinctions are also claimed by women sex tourists from northern nations who travel to southern nations in search for sex. And if to northern men sex tourism works as a form of re-claiming, on a global scale, of traditional patterns of masculinity and feminine submission that are currently disappearing in first world countries; when the sex tourists are women from northern countries, it is seen as a chance for those involved to explore new ways of negotiating masculinity and femininity. Some authors have noted the presence of this idea in advertisements circulating in northern countries that invite women to engage in "adventurous" travel, which promise an "empowering" experience of travelling to places "free of traditional gender roles and expectations" (Pruitt & Lafont, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> The "middle class sexual tourism" circuit includes a wide variety of international visitors, mainly from Italy, Portugal, Holland, Germany, France, England and the United States, as well as some Latin American countries. There are married and single men; young men in their 20s and 30s and also men in their 50s, 60s and even 70s. The men have many different forms of employment and include manual laborers, language professors, journalists, small businessmen, lawyers and international financial consultants. Among the men I interviewed, some were high school graduates, others had higher education from technical schools and still others had university degrees. Their monthly income varied between USD 1000 (an Argentinean) and USD 12,500 (a U.S. American).

But for other men, sex tourism only increases their selection of available options of stable, emotionally-charged relationships. Some take one single lover, at a low or medium cost, to whom they will send money on a monthly basis and whom they will visit 3 or 4 times a year. Meanwhile, they will maintain other relationships, including marriage, in Europe. A young woman who survives on “programs” with foreign men describes the importance of the “help” offered her by a married Portuguese man, whom she sees as an extremely responsible family man:

He's a very conservative person, you know. He won't ever do it without a condom. That's because he has his family, his wife, so he's afraid, see? On this point, he's got his head together, he's got good judgment. He's very responsible when it comes to his family. After I met him he began to send me money every month... Girlfriend, he sends me 300 dollars every month. So that's, what, 700 *reais* a month. One month He sent me 400 dollars and that was almost 1000 *reais*. Girl, you're crazy! It's a hell of a lot of help! Even if I were working here, my salary wouldn't amount to half of what he gives me. So he's a very good person, you know? He's worried about my welfare and everything.

Still other men see sexual tourism in Fortaleza as a means of obtaining spouses who incorporate a certain style of sexuality, characterized by color, considered exotic and extremely attractive, and yet who supposedly represent traditional patterns of femininity. Some even hold the expectation that with a Brazilian woman they will be able to realize their desire to become a father; something which they feel is increasingly difficult with European women, who are seen as ever more reluctant to become mothers.

The voices of these men and women place sexual tourism—a phenomenon generally thought of as exclusively dominated by esthetic, erotic and sensual considerations—as an ideal means to link their sentimental and even conjugal pleasures to sexual delight. The foreigners who believe this are precisely the men most sought after by the local women. In this milieu, women employ a set of practices in order to obtain material benefits from their foreign boyfriends, while at the same time distancing themselves from pre-conceived notions regarding sex work. In the words of one 27 year old hair dresser, divorced from a native man 20 years her senior:

He's an Italian and he's 52...I'm a totally perfect, honest, housewife. Because in these sorts of things, you've got to play the role of a good girl, a difficult girl. We spent a week just dating, eating out, and I got to know places I'd never seen before. I said I was working in my friend's salon. So he says: “Don't you want to start your own business?” And I said: “How am I ever going to do that with my miserable salary?” So he goes: “How much do you make?” “150 *reais* a month, the minimum wage.” Actually, at the time it was 137. So he says: “How do you live on that?” “I live with my mother.” I was... in a difficult situation... So he gave me \$4,000. He sent it via an international money order. And I couldn't believe it, right? That was the first time.

So I bought my salon, everything. I took a class... And he didn't even realize what was going on.... So far, he's sent me about 10,000 *reais*... But then again, I was really clever. He'd call me. Almost every time he called me, I'd ask for money. Two hundred, three hundred dollars... One thousand *reais*. "Oh, I'm sick. Aw, I broke my leg. There's a lump in my breast and I have to get it out." I almost ran out of diseases. But if you don't do it that way, you won't get what you want. You have to get money together. I had to buy a lot of things. But I never charged for sex, never did a "program". Never in my life.

These strategies contribute to a climate of uncertainty which envelops these international encounters, stimulating the idea of "romance" and opening up possibilities for trips overseas. Such tactics can also be understood as signs of the capacity of native women to exercise their agency. These tactics, however, also coexist with other practices that seem to contradict this notion. Foreign men are often idealized in this context and seen as incorporating the best sorts of masculinity. At the same time, the native women incorporate attributes projected upon them by foreign men which place them in an inferior position. These traits are made visible by the relation between native and foreign, masculine and feminine, where notions of gender gain meaning as they become intertwined with concepts of nationality.

### 3. Gender, race and nationality

The current literature on the topic makes it possible to affirm that the shifting geography of sexual tourism (intimately associated with political, economic and cultural factors) is related to certain factors affecting tourism in general. In particular, the desire to consume an "authentic" experience intimately tied to "new" destinations. That is something which increases the tourist's own value, conferring a certain distinction on them. As is the case with any tourist destination, the places in the sex tourism circuit lose value if they become too popular and reach a point of saturation (Mullings, 1999; Piscitelli, 2002). Not every poor region of the world, however, becomes a sex tourism destination.

A quick scan of internet websites dedicated to travelers looking for sex will show that, in Latin America, certain poor countries popular as tourism destinations, such as Peru, evidence a much smaller "pull" for sex tourists than others like Brazil. Even in Peru, the women of the jungle and coastal regions are considered much more attractive than the indigenous women of the mountains (Piscitelli, 2004). What is clear, looking at those websites, is that it is not enough for a place to be poor or offer cheap sex for it to become a sex tourism hotspot: it also must be identified with certain styles of sensuality, linked to gender and racial markers, which tend to be concentrated in certain regions or countries which notoriously produce those styles.

The foreigners seeking sex whom I interviewed in Fortaleza believe that the tenderness, simplicity and submission which they attribute to local women is the expression of an “authentic and submissive femininity” that has supposedly disappeared from Europe. But these apparently positive readings of native femininity sexualize young Brazilian women and simultaneously situate them as inferior to European men. The local attributes of femininity are understood by these men as characteristic of a singular sensuality, marked by simplicity, but are also associated with a supposed lack of intelligence. The “heat” of the young natives (attributed to both women who do “programs,” and women who do not) is seen as direct evidence that these women are involved in prostitution. This, of course, situates the feminine “other” as inferior. It is a classification also intimately linked to the structural positions Brazil and the men’s home countries occupy in the sphere of international relations and it predominantly affects poorer women and those from the lower middle classes.

The young women who become involved with sex tourists also delineate understandings of gender which are connected to contrasting views of Brazil and their male partners’ home countries. Many of the women I interviewed see local forms of masculinity as inferior and associate superior masculine attributes to foreign men. Styles of sexuality assume particular meaning when they are aligned with such distinctions. Demonstrating an appreciation that highlights their relative autonomy with regards to sexual performance, the women I interviewed see as more positive those styles of masculine sexuality which demonstrate tenderness, companionship and generosity. These styles “soften” foreign masculinities in the eyes of the women and, while they may be perceived as being more common among the men of this or that country, they are always linked to the masculinities of foreign visitors from the global north.

The entanglement of gender and nationality present in their world views is expressed by foreigners’ and natives’ understandings of color. In a universe where the body is appreciated according to esthetic criteria, the most highly prized masculine traits are also always associated with beauty, set in contrast to the ugliness attributed to local men. The estheticization of men from “over there” does not precisely obey any fixed physical patterns. This beauty, however, which expresses the criteria used to construct hierarchies of masculinity, is almost always associated with whiteness, an ideal which stretches beyond simple phenotype traits. When it is projected upon Europeans, it becomes an ideal also referred to a given place.

The readings of native femininities by foreign visitors are likewise characterized by color. One color in particular—*morena*, or brown—synthesizes the entwined differences embodied by local women. According to the foreign visitors, *morena* is intimately linked to Brazil and is likewise associated with “better women” and “hot women”. The ambivalences that are part of this appreciation of color are deeply connected to an estheticization of the feminine that situates Brazilian “beauty” in an inferior position. By synthesizing the values which permeate the sex tourism circuit in Fortaleza, colored beauty reflects its unequal relationships.

The relationships established in this universe show the workings of gender and race as metaphors for the economic, political and cultural power inherent in these transnational relationships. The two categories play an active role in the procedures through which natives are made inferior and foreigners superior. However, sexualization and racialization are not limited to foreign visitors. They are also present in the rude ways in which the local population discriminates against my female interviewees when they are accompanied by foreign visitors. And sexualization, it must be recognized, is also a part of the perceptions that these women have of themselves.

The relations between the femininities established by these young women reiterate many of the attributes appreciated by foreign men. In contrast to the European styles considered above, Brazilian femininity seems to be characterized by qualities that foreign visitors attribute to these young women. Such ideas regarding the native temperament and the relationship they maintain with an intense sexuality are integrated into native women's view of self. "We're hotter," my female interviewees often say, reproducing the view that the native temperament has a characteristic sensuality which makes it *sui generis*. Such claims reveal the persistence, within local ways of thinking, of the same elements by which foreign men sexualize Brazilian women.

Such claims can be read as a form of cooptation of the locals, whereby dominated populations end up incorporating the dominant discourse into their own ways of seeing the world. In the universe under study, however, sexualization is intimately linked to the possibilities for "agency" which these young women manage to forge. Although the relationships they get involved in are an expression of these women's subordinate position in the global system, by incorporating the extreme sexuality that is attributed to them, the women create ways to destabilize simplistic understandings of inequality. They integrate the transmission of sexual and romantic knowledge into their relationships with foreign men and this is understood as something that gives them a certain higher ground. This view of things is clearly expressed by a 26 year old waitress involved in a relationship with a Dutch man who invited her to Amsterdam:

Because on Friday there's a T.V. channel that has... those women who make porno films!... And I watch it with him. He gets all shy, right? He's really shy about these sorts of things. So, one day we stayed at home, playing with the internet and drinking wine, right? It was getting on towards midnight. I said "I'm going to take a shower." I took it and put... I spread oil all over my body, almond oil. I put on some stockings, a G-string—I like these sorts of things, all right? I put on perfume and tied my hair back... And there in the house there's a curtain that's made up of little water drops. So I got out there between the drops and started shaking around... and he wouldn't look! "Look at me!", I said and he did. "Oh my, don't do that," he said, "I'm getting hard." So I was like "Oops! He likes it!" So then I sat on his lap. And he was like, "Momma let me work! I'm getting hard and I can't control myself!" So I got down on all fours on the sofa, then, and stripped! He sat there without moving, but he liked it,

see? So I was like “Take your clothes off! Take ‘em off!” And there I am, on the sofa, talking trash. Girl, when that man took off his clothes, he was as big as a donkey!

Using the sexualization which targets them, these women negotiate access to material benefits and to improvements in their position within the relationship. One can argue that in optimal circumstances, these sorts of negotiations open the way for agency to operate at the micro level within these transnational couples. The benefits obtained through these relationships have important consequences, however, permitting young Brazilian women to widen their spheres of decision and influence at the local level. Patrícia Pessar and Sarah Mahler argue in favor of considering cognitive processes (such as imagination) as substantive to understand agency. We must pay attention to how images, meanings and values circulate in the global economy, promoting or restricting mobility (Pessar & Mahler, 2001). In the views of the young women involved in middle class sex tourism in Fortaleza, their relationships with foreign men widen their worlds and help them imagine other possible universes. Their careers allow us to perceive that, even while they embody extreme sensuality; these Brazilians oppose initiative, autonomy and rationality to the submission, simplicity and dependency attributed to them.

#### 4. Conclusion

The fact that sex tourism can, under certain circumstances, facilitate human trafficking does not mean that the women who migrate using the sex tourism circuits should be indiscriminately labeled as victims. In Fortaleza since 2003, the police have dealt with one case which could be considered trafficking for sexual exploitation. According to the information available in this case, a network of local agents has been discovered, allegedly connected to international networks operating principally in Spain.<sup>25</sup> Local agents recruited young women in prostitution zones located in the city's most poverty-stricken neighborhoods, where the clients are local men, not foreign tourists. The international connection discovered by the police exists, however, alongside a loosely organized sex tourism scene involving many different types of women, including autonomous sex workers who seek a better future for themselves through migration to the global north, whether through marriage to a foreigner or sex work overseas.

Our analysis of sex tourism in Fortaleza suggests that, in this context, women migrate searching for opportunities for social mobility which are largely barred to them in at home. Following clearly demarcated objectives, these women employ practices in which many types of agency are clearly present. The concept of mobility that is constructed through these international connections, however, is not limited to economic expectations alone. Migration to European countries means much more than escaping poverty: it signifies the desire for and consciousness of a right to a political and social position that is entirely

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<sup>25</sup> Information furnished in 2003 by the police agent responsible for the “Tourist Support Division” of the Fortaleza Police.

different from that which one currently occupies. This consciousness is paradoxically acquired through the contacts forged in Fortaleza's sex tourism circuits. This is probably one of the reasons why NGO campaigns which preach against migration associated with sexual tourism and trafficking have not been very successful in the city. NGOs alert natives to the perils Brazilian women face overseas and/or offer professional training as an alternative to sex work. Said training, however, is generally limited to jobs such as manicurist or beautician, professions which many of my interviewees have already been involved in and which pay relatively low salaries.

The ways in which these women perceive European styles of femininity synthesize their desire and, at the same time, highlight the idea that said styles are connected to certain opportunities that the Brazilian women are seeking. In the words of a 22 year old former sex worker, who left prostitution after marrying an Italian and today is a resident of Italy:

The Brazilian woman... is really needy.... The Italian woman is accustomed to getting everything she needs. She doesn't give up that much... I was in Italy and I was impressed by how the Italian women were beautiful! The Italian men say that they are stuck up, because the women there value themselves. They are beautiful and independent, you know? There are only a few of them. They run the show. Here [in Brazil], no. When an Italian man smiles at a Brazilian girl, she smiles right back. Precisely because she needs a smile... A nice word or two: "Gosh, you're so beautiful!" and she just melts.... Because she's not used to that. If she was, she'd certainly value herself as much as the Italian women do.

The indiscriminate conflation of forced prostitution, sexual tourism and child prostitution is a strategy that certainly reinforces one of the objectives of those who participate in the international debate regarding trafficking: it helps them inflame public opinion. However, in spite of this strategy's success in forcing society to contemplate the problem of trafficking, we must ask ourselves what are the effects of establishing a linear relationship between those quite diverse problems. The strategy of conflating those issues prevents us from perceiving the realities of the women who employ their sexuality to have access to international and social mobility via relationships established with sex tourists. It is worth pointing out, in this context, that migration—even when it is illegal—should not be confused with trafficking. The Asian Migrant Center (2000) calls attention to the need to understand trafficking as yet another form of migration. This is an observation that I agree with. The Center also remarks upon another strategic problem that is being created by the struggle for human rights: to put an excessive emphasis upon trafficking is to disconnect it from its proper context in relation to migration.

By uniting with hegemonic international discourses regarding trafficking and occluding the complexities surrounding Brazilian women who migrate via the transnational sexual market, certain tendencies in the Brazilian debate offer "Third World" arguments favoring the control and restriction of migrant labor. More specifically, and borrowing the words

of Kamala Kempadoo (2003), these approaches tend to contribute to greater police control over the mobility, bodies and sexuality of the women of the global south.

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