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Dialectical Anthropology

An Independent International Journal in the Critical Tradition Committed to the Transformation of our Society and the Humane Union of Theory and Practice

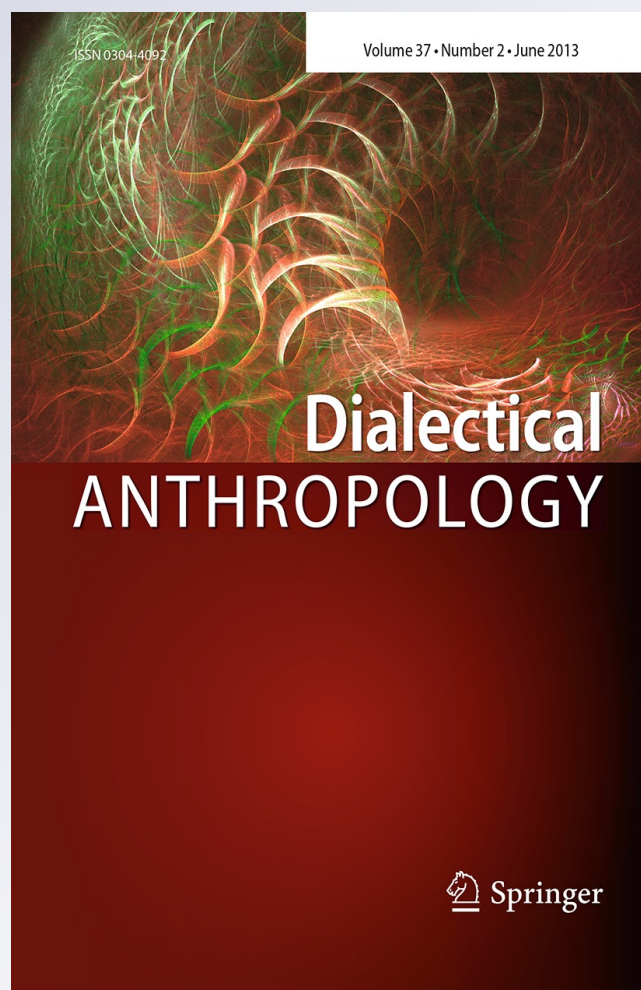
ISSN 0304-4092

Volume 37

Number 2

Dialect Anthropol (2013) 37:195-227

DOI 10.1007/s10624-013-9296-z



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The Myth of Maria and the imagining of sexual trafficking in Brazil

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Published online: 27 February 2013
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Abstract Based upon the contradictory definitions of the crime, the Brazilian movement against trafficking in persons situates itself as a “struggle against modern slavery.” Within this moralistic context, the movement has frequently utilized invented statistics and apocalyptic declarations regarding trafficking in order to achieve greater “advocacy value” among members of the Brazilian public. A key component of this discursive formation has been the creation and promulgation of a mythological view of a “typical” trafficking victim’s experience: what we call “The Myth of Maria, an exemplary trafficking victim.” The present article seeks to follow the history of the Myth of Maria, developing an initial chronology mapped out and analyzed by Adriana Piscitelli in 2004 and extending this into the post-2006 period when Brazil established its first national policies and plans to combat trafficking in persons. We then analyze how the myth ignores many of the realities revealed by the past decade of ethnographic research into trafficking in Brazil. Finally, we conclude with a structuralist hypothesis (drawn from the field of feminist anthropology) regarding the Myth’s continuing unabated popularity among almost all actors in the political field of anti-trafficking policy.

Keywords Trafficking in persons · Brazil · Myths · Immigration · Public policy

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Maria wakes early, rising before the sun. She takes two different buses to get to the posh neighborhood where she works. She arrives home, exhausted. She knows that her life can be more than this. Maria has a dream: she wants to give a better life to her son and her parents. Maria is beautiful. One day, she receives a proposal to work in a club in Spain. She's wary, but the money's good, so they say. It can guarantee the Future.¹ Without knowing what to expect, Maria decides to risk it.

Maria doesn't yet know it, but she will have the same destiny as the other 75 thousand Brazilians who've been trafficked to Europe. As soon as she arrives at the nightclub, she learns she must pay for her ticket. Her passport is taken from her by the pimps so that she can't escape. She won't see any of the money that was promised to her. She may be prohibited from going out, or even beaten. But one thing is for certain: Maria will be forced to prostitute herself (Summa 2005).

-Journalist Renata Summa, describing how "dreams become nightmares" in a report on trafficking in persons, Summa 2005.

Meet Maria, an exemplary trafficking victim

It is 2012, 8 years after we began to seriously study the then-nascent sexual panic of trafficking in persons in Brazil. By now, we can tell you, shot by shot, almost frame by frame, how Brazilian journalists and activists will present the "crisis" of trafficking in persons in any given media production; how they will attempt to cast a "human" face upon the crime.

First, we meet the victim: Maria da Silva (or, sometimes, dos Santos²), an innocent young, beautiful woman, black or of mixed race. Maria lives in a *favela*³ or working-class suburb of one of Brazil's major cities. She is poor, but honest and hardworking and she has big dreams—dreams, in fact, too big for her restricted circumstances to contain. Maria, you see, wants to be a star (or, alternatively, wants to live the life of the middle class, married mothers she sees portrayed in the *telenovelas* she avidly watches) and it doesn't seem that this is going to happen in the community she's grown up in (Fig. 1).

Then, one day, Maria goes to the beach (it is almost always the beach) where she meets... well let's just call him "this guy," because he usually isn't given a name. He is the villain of our morality play. He is inevitably European, white, blue-eyed, and blond-haired. Almost always, he's described as a "prince." He literally promises Maria the world. If she comes to Europe (or, occasionally, the United States) to work as a dancer, maid, or model, he will make her every dream come true. Alternatively, he declares his undying love for Maria and promises her a house,

¹ Capitalized in the original.

² It should be noted that "Maria da Silva" is a generic place holding name in Brazil along the lines of "Jane Doe" in the United States. "Maria dos Santos" or "Ana Maria da Silva (or dos Santos)" are similarly generic.

³ Slum or shantytown.



Fig. 1 Maria dos Santos, victim. A flyer produced by the Brazilian anti-trafficking organization Projeto Trama. According to the text, Maria travelled without permission to work in her destination country and is now in danger of “being sexually exploited, [or] suffering violence and humiliation.” The red phrase on the right says “In case of being mislaid,” a phrase in Portuguese general only applied to luggage or parcels, implying Maria’s absolute passivity and lack of agency

children, a car, and a loving life if only she will marry him and come live in the magical land of Oz (or Verona, or Frankfurt, or Miami—the narrative generally doesn’t make much distinction between these places).

“This guy,” of course, is a lying son of a bitch. In reality, he works for a shadowy (never described, never named) “international mafia.” His job is to recruit innocent young Brazilian women like Maria for work as sexual slaves in the brothels of his home country.

Maria, innocent, poor, uneducated mulatta girl that she is, falls for this guy’s line and accepts his all-expense-paid trip to Wonderland (or is it Germany?). There, she discovers her destiny as a slave, in a reveal that is worthy of any *telenovela* she has ever watched. She is beaten and forced to do sex work (which, of course, she’d never dream of doing back in Brazil). She has all her documents taken away from her and she’s locked in an apartment or room. If Maria tries to escape from her imprisonment, she’s met with violence: beaten, raped, occasionally even shot. If she tries to go to the police, she finds all hands turned against her. Her final destiny, if she’s lucky, is to be imprisoned and deported back to Brazil (this is termed “rescue”). If she’s unlucky, she dies overseas, far from home, friendless and alone.

As the story ends (or, occasionally, as it begins), we who listen to, watch, or read it are informed that the story’s goal is “to alert people to the true situation which Brazilian women who seek social stability and a living wage overseas, or even when

they seek to marry a European in search of a better style of life.” Its authors’ “goal is to inform and sensitize society regarding the often unknown reality of migration and the international traffic of women.”⁴ This, then, is not just one story or a unique story: it claims to be *the* story, the *true* story. *Reality*. Exactly what has happened to 75,000 Brazilian women in Europe (or is it 15,000 worldwide?) And it is not a story which is applicable to just any Brazilian immigrant, but in particular to women who seek a better life overseas—in other words, women of a certain class (poor) and color (black, mixed, Native—in other words, not white). Furthermore, it is a story which shows that *immigration* and *trafficking in women* are essentially one and the same thing for women of this class and color. Not imagined as protagonists of this story are white women, middle-class women, professional women, men of any class or color or—indeed—black, brown, and poor women who work outside the field of sexual/reproductive labor.

In spite of the story’s popularity, it is noteworthy in that it does not accurately describe, as far as we know, more than a handful of actually occurring cases of trafficking in persons, as documented by the Brazilian legal system or—indeed— even any of the many NGOs who are active on this issue. This is a rather large blanket statement, but we are reasonably convinced of its veracity.

Since 2004, we have constantly dialogued with the main NGOs active in Brazil’s anti-trafficking movement and have persistently asked to be shown reasonable proof of cases in which women were told that they were going to work as a maid, dancer, or model overseas only to be forced into sex work under conditions analogous to slavery. So far, no one has been able to show us the details of a single example which match the Myth of Maria.⁵ This is not to say that in a country the size of Brazil (more than half the land mass of South America and 180+ million inhabitants), a case can’t be found somewhere and, of course, it is impossible to prove a negative. It is notable, however, that in the 15 years that these stories have been circulating in the Brazilian anti-trafficking movement, very few cases which even approximate the myth in general terms have yet come forward. Everything indicates that the story of Maria is, in fact, a myth.

Obviously, when we speak of “myths,” we are not claiming that all such stories are 100 % false and that they never occur. It is a well-established fact that Brazil has exported large numbers of migrants—male, female, and trans—to work in the sex industries of North America, Europe, and Japan over the last quarter century. Many of these migrants do indeed end up encountering exploitation and human rights violations, just as their non-sex-working countrymen and women do, both at home and abroad.

The problem with myths, however, is that they distort reality, highlighting some aspects and diminishing or ignoring others. As veteran researcher Frederick (2005) points out, trafficking myths tend to be fabricated around presuppositions,

⁴ Citation comes from CHAME/NEIM (1998a, b: p. 1).

⁵ An example of the apparent invisibility of this “really true” form of trafficking occurred when Senator Marinor Britto’s Congressional Inquiry Commission came to Rio de Janeiro in 2011. In spite of a general call to all NGOs and government offices working on trafficking to pass information regarding their outstanding cases to the Commission, the one clear-cut trafficking case discovered was that of a Guatemalan man who had been recruited to work as a chef in Rio, had his passport and documents retained by his employees and had been forced to work as a construction laborer.

unexamined prejudices, and the political agendas of the groups who promote them. In spite of the emotional heat they generate, they rarely provide a solid basis for human rights-based policies they clamor for:

A myth is simplistic: it cannot express the complexities of an issue, entertain controversy, or encompass “gray areas”. Like a popular film, it presents morals, heroism, and emotionality as readily as facts. A myth is conservative: it is resistant to change and discourages innovative ideas and interventions, while being easily influenced by cultural prejudices and political agendas. And it is pseudo-knowledge: in the absence of knowledge about the actual trafficking episode, it provides donors and policy makers with the validation to create interventions or policies (Frederick 2005: 128).

Myths, in short, are the preferred language of *moral panic*, a situation, according to Stanley Cohen’s classic writing on the topic, where a condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests (Cohen 1972: 9). These panics (and the consequent social villains they bring to the public’s attention) are generally created by *moral entrepreneurs*, people who instigate large-scale popular outrage regarding certain social and political questions, suggesting and implementing rules, generally in the form of legislation, in order to deal with the problem which they have brought to the public’s attention (ibid; Becker 1963).

To understand how Brazil has decided to face demands to end human trafficking, one must first understand how the Myth of Maria does not so much express reality as shape it, directing attention away from certain elements of the Brazilian immigrant experiences while highlighting others. It recasts what trafficking scholar David A. Feingold calls “immigration gone wrong” as the result of consciously organized transnational criminal enterprise. Instead of looking at Brazilian migrant women as agency-endowed subjects who leave home voluntarily in search of better or more exciting lives and who, along the way, become enmeshed in exploitative or coercive situations, whose negative impact is multiplied by xenophobic migration laws, the Myth of Maria casts these women as agency-less victims of all-powerful (yet curiously invisible) globalized mafias, in need of state-directed intervention and rescue. An extremely complicated set of social relations and actions is thus reduced to two dimensions and four colors, complete with clear-cut “good guys” and “bad guys” (Feingold 2010: Loc. 1456–69). In effectuating this reduction, the Myth has oriented policy decisions at local, state, national, and even international levels and it shows no signs of losing steam even today. As we finish this article (Oct/2012), a new *telenovela* is being aired whose central drama revolves around a young Brazilian woman from the *favelas* who is tricked into sexual slavery in Turkey.

In spite of a greatly increased level of qualitative and quantitative data regarding trafficking in persons in Brazil which has undermined many of the Myth of Maria’s basic presumptions, the myth still contains the ability to motivate policymakers and the Brazilian public in general. It provides a unifying narrative for Brazil’s anti-trafficking struggle and, as such, consistently threatens to direct the resources and energy earmarked for anti-trafficking actions into moral crusades against sexual tourism, prostitution, and that great, shadowy monster of the early twenty-first century bourgeois imagination, the sexual exploitation of children.

Below, we follow the history of the Myth of Maria, developing an initial chronology mapped out and analyzed by Adriana Piscitelli in 2004 and extending this into the post-2006 period when Brazil established its first national policies and plans to combat trafficking in persons. We then analyze how the myth ignores many of the realities revealed by the past decade of ethnographic research into trafficking in Brazil. Finally, we conclude with a structuralist hypothesis (drawn from the field of feminist anthropology) regarding the Myth's continuing unabated popularity among almost all actors in the political field of anti-trafficking policy in Brazil.

The first iteration of the Myth: sexual tourism and the trafficking of women

Contrary to its claims to objectively report truth and reality, the Myth of Maria began existence as an exemplary tale concocted by moral entrepreneurs who were (and continue to be) engaged in the construction of a moral panic regarding trafficking of persons in Brazil. It preceded formal research of the trafficking phenomena in our country, informed other studies to such a degree that it undermined their scientific worth⁶ and soldiers on today, long after its many of main precepts have been demolished or problematized by ethnographers.⁷

The first enunciations of the myth seem to have occurred in the Brazilian northeast during the 1990s in the intersection between academia (the field of women's studies, in particular) and NGOs. As Adriana Piscitelli has pointed out, something of a perfect storm was brewing in this region during that decade, which resulted in a confluence of public preoccupation over sexual exploitation of minors, sexual tourism, and the trafficking of women:

[T]he intensification of international tourism in the Brazilian northeast, following the institution of direct flights to the region from Europe and the U.S., shed greater light on prostitution geared towards international visitors. This increase in visibility coincided with an increase in international anxiety regarding the prostitution of minors (...), and with increasing reports that Brazil had become integrated into the global circuit of sexual tourism (...). In this context, sexual 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 regarding trafficking of persons and has not only been applied to adolescents and youth, but also to the women involved in sexual tourism. (Piscitelli 2004a, b: 284).

As Piscitelli demonstrates, the initial accusations of trafficking were not produced by studies but rather by media sources and a narrow set of politically active agents in civil society. These agents, who in many cases fit the classic

⁶ See Blanchette and Silva (2012) for an analysis of one such case.

⁷ See, for example, the extensive *opus* of anthropologist Adriana Piscitelli (especially 2004a, b, 2006, 2007a, b, 2008a, b, 2009) and also Teixeira (2008), Pelucio (2010, 2012), Oliveira (2008), and Blanchette and Silva (2005, 2010, 2012).

description of *moral entrepreneurs*, understood prostitution, sexual exploitation of children, sexual tourism, and trafficking to be congruent and this understanding was originally taken as a given, not as a hypothesis.

In the 1990s, three types of trafficking were understood to be commonly occurring in Brazil, all connected by the figure of the foreign sex tourist. According to material produced by the principal NGO working on trafficking issues at the time, CHAME (the Humanitarian Center for the Support of Women), and their academic allies at the NEIM (Interdisciplinary Nucleus for Women's Studies) at the Federal University in Salvador, Bahia, these could largely be described as "servile marriage" (using marriage to effectively acquire a domestic slave), recruitment of women for overseas labor under precarious conditions and sexual tourism in and of itself, given that this was seen as being the prime instigator of the other two forms of trafficking.

An excellent example of this early formulation of the Myth of Maria can be found in a joint publication of CHAME/NEIM entitled *Europa: O Conto que não se Conta (Europe, the Story Nobody Talks About)*. Produced in 1998 in comic book form, the tract's main goal is to warn Brazilian women that falling in love or having sex with Europeans could lead to their ruin, presenting as "typical" three different variants of the Myth of Maria.

In the first story, a young mulatta woman is seduced by a blond, blue-eyed Dutch man into a marriage in Holland. A year after the glow has worn off their union, she finds herself living a stifling life as a mother and a housewife while her husband betrays her with blond, blue-eyed Dutch women and comes home at night, drunk, to beat her.

The second story concerns a young black dancer recruited by a blond, blue-eyed tourist to work in a strip club overseas. When she reacts against the conditions of her labor, her boss slaps her. She is "rescued" by a club patron who later tries to rape her. Escaping from his clutches into the streets, she's arrested by the police as a mad woman and thrown into an asylum for 2 weeks.

The final story involves a blond, blue-eyed German family man who "escapes" to the Brazilian state of Bahia for a vacation, alone. There, he cynically seduces a young mulatta girl (who another blond, blue-eyed gringo, working as a tourism agent, has arranged for him to meet) and forces her to have (it is implied) painful anal sex. He then leaves for home, but not without first inviting his new paramour to come to Berlin to work for him as a maid.

What is interesting about these stories is how banal they are. Minus the blond, foreign husbands/lovers, they are all variations of traditional cautionary or exemplary tales told in Brazil about gender relations from a female perspective. In other words, it is difficult to see what, specifically, these stories contain that could be typified as "trafficking" (as opposed to, say, domestic violence, attempted rape, battery, and what the Victorians would call the "crime of seduction") other than the fact that a Brazilian woman goes (or might go) overseas.

It is when we turn to another booklet, *What's Up in Bahia?*, also produced by CHAME in 1998, that we begin to see the principal factors which were understood to feed trafficking in these early iterations of the Myth of Maria. According to this publication, sexual tourism and trafficking of women are characterized by "social

inequalities reproduced throughout the long history of colonialism, sexism and racism that have paved the development of the world market. Indeed, they thrive on existing unequal power relations among different countries as well as on the prevalent hierarchy among the sexes, social classes and ethnic groups within them” (CHAME 1998b: s/p).

Here, the first iteration of the myth is contextualized within its original intellectual environment: a generalized anti-imperialism, informed by certain sort of Marxism, dependency and world systems theory, and the anti-globalization movements of the 1990s. In this view of the world, what transforms the traditional exemplary stories of violence against women, recounted above, into the cases of trafficking isn't just the international movements of the women involved, but their movements within fields of possibility that are severely constrained by the structural inequalities of a colonialism that employs sexism and racism in order to segment and subjugate the working classes. Maria is trafficked *precisely because* she is black, poor, and moves from the global periphery toward its core. “Individual agency” in this world view is simply a liberal myth: our sociological and historical positions within large-scale social groupings such as classes, genders, or races determine our fate. The violence Maria meets is thus necessarily an outgrowth of these larger, structural factors. Conversely, Brazilians who do not display Maria's particular set of social markers—men, white, middle- or upper class, professionals—are relatively “privileged.” They, too, might be lied to, raped, or beaten in the course of trajectories of migration, but these experiences don't carry the same historical weight as those of the Marias of the world. The claims of absolute knowledge regarding Maria's “destiny” that repeatedly appear in the Myth should be looked at in this light: in such a view of the world, almost any kind of hypogamic or hypochromatic affective relationship is inevitably exploitative and if such a relationship involves the international movement of the less socially powerful partner, it is understood to be trafficking.

At the removal of two decades, it is difficult to remember now how prevalent this view of the world was in leftist and academic circles in Brazil in the 1990s. The country was still largely on the “non-wired” side of the digital divide and immediate contact with non-lusophone universes was rare. The national economy was finally pulling out of a crippling recession and Brazilians who could travel overseas were envied and admired. Contact with North America and Western Europe was limited. Consequently, the tendency among many Brazilians, of all political persuasions, was to conceive of foreign lands as more-or-less homogenous and caricatured blocks which could be arranged hierarchically above or below Brazil. The irony of these early iterations of the Myth of Maria is that while they chastise Maria's idealization of the Euro-American “heaven” she expects to find, they are equally upon stereotypes of national and racial identities. The cover drawing of *What's Up in Bahia?*, for example, although based upon a real photograph,⁸ is almost grotesque in its representation of two decadent gringo sex tourists (Fig. 2). Indeed, it is almost an arayanized photonegative of the caricatures

⁸ Information given by CHAME founder Jaqueline Leite. Unfortunately, the original photograph is not currently available for reference.

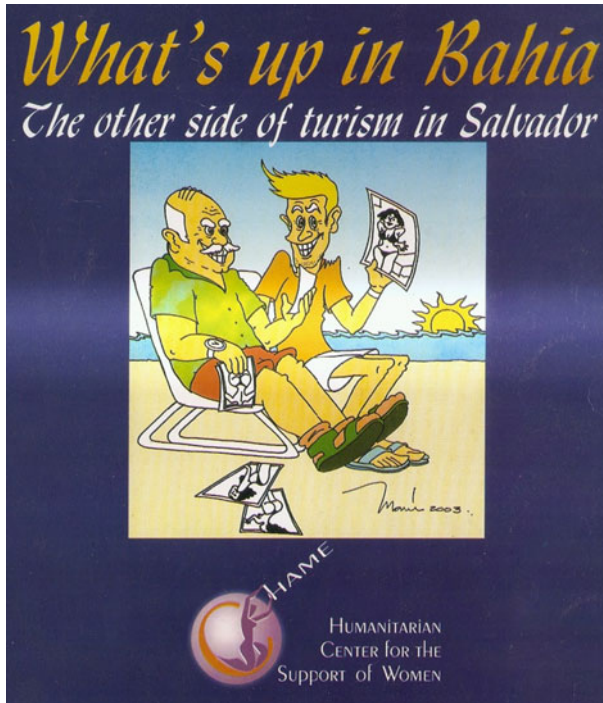


Fig. 2 CHAME (1998a, b) publication on sexual tourism in Bahia

of “Jewish sex offenders” produced by the Nazis in the 1930s: an *ur*-expression of the racialized outsider as sexual predator.

It is important to note that CHAME’s founder, Jaqueline Leite, gained her initial views regarding trafficking of women while living in Europe in the 1980s and meeting Brazilian women involved in trajectories of “immigration gone wrong.” She was deeply motivated by the cases of injustice and violence against immigrant women that she witnessed. Determined to do something, she returned to Brazil and founded CHAME in 1994 as a means of attacking the problem at its root, “by drawing attention [sic] and disseminating information on these on-going problems, as a means of mobilizing government officials as well as the general public into combating Sex Tourism and the Traffic of Women” (CHAME 1998a, b: s/p). After 14 years, Leite’s views on the topic of trafficking (and those of her academic feminist allies at NEIM) have become much denser and sophisticated through dialogues with other social and political actors (Brazil’s prostitute movements, in particular) and through the assimilation of the large amount of data regarding sexual tourism and trafficking which has since been produced.

Today, CHAME and NEIM make clear distinctions between forced and non-forced sexual labor and between tourists who contract and pay for legal sexual services⁹ while in Brazil and those who engage in sex crimes while overseas.

⁹ Prostitution is legal in Brazil as long as it involves consenting adults and does not involve economic exploitation by third parties (i.e., pimps).

In the intellectual milieu of the late 1990s, however, going on the organizations' published materials, the appreciation of subtle nuances in international sexual-affective commerce was definitely of secondary concern. CHAME's principal orientation at the time was quite clearly moral entrepreneurialism: they perceived what they understood to be a problem in society and were determined to bring it to the public and policymakers' attention through an "advocacy approach" that stated rumors as fact, situated anecdotal experiences as norms and which created a simplistic and clearly delineated set of racialized heroes and villains.

It is difficult to criticize the CHAME/NEIM alliance during this period because the truth of the matter is that hardly anyone in Brazil at the time was interested in the topic of trafficking and almost no data had been produced about it. A certain degree of militancy and even exaggeration was thus probably necessary or, at least, unavoidable. The effects of this early framing of trafficking as something linked to sexual tourism and colonialism, however, were to cast a long shadow on anti-trafficking discourse over the coming decades.

As Adriana Piscitelli has pointed out, feminism in Brazil largely avoided participation in the "sex wars" which rocked Europe and North America during the 1970s, 1980s, and on into the 1990s. Up until the turn of the century, Brazilian feminists had concerned themselves primarily with violence against women and reproductive issues and generally eschewed discussing prostitution at all.

Towards the end of the 1990s, however, in an environment of greater connections with transnational feminism, Brazilian feminists began to become increasingly concerned with sexual tourism and the trafficking of women. This concern was particularly palpable in the discourses of certain non-governmental organizations which dealt with women's issues, in particular those groups which worked in the cities of the Brazilian northeast which were supposedly the privileged destinations for sexual tourists (Coletivo mulher vida, 1996; CHAME 1998a, b). However, as the turn of the century approached, the main groups connected to the trafficking of persons issue were movements which fought for children's' rights. (Piscitelli 2008a).

People involved with CHAME in the late 1990s have remarked to us that the organization initially had difficulties in dialoguing with women's rights groups and thus needed to work with children's rights organizations, confirming Piscitelli's observation. In 2000, this situation led CHAME into participating in the first nation-wide trafficking research project in the country: the *Study on Trafficking in Women, Children and Adolescents for Commercial Sexual Exploitation* (PE-STRAF), organized by the Brasilia-based Reference Center for Studies and Action Regarding Children and Adolescents (CECRIA). In the public mind, this alliance would firmly associate the sexual tourism trafficking of women nexus postulated by the Myth of Maria with a second burgeoning moral panic that regarding the sexual exploitation of children. In so doing, it would ensure that the language passivity, vulnerability, xenophobia, and victimization would become codified as hallmarks of Brazilian public discourse regarding trafficking of persons over the next decade of increasing anti-trafficking legislation and intervention on behalf of the Brazilian state.

The second iteration of the myth: induced consent and mafias

The *Study on Trafficking in Women, Children and Adolescents for Commercial Sexual Exploitation* (PESTRAF) was Brazil's first (and to date only) large-scale attempt to research trafficking in our country. It is, unfortunately, almost entirely unconcerned with the vulgar exigencies of scientific veracity. We have discussed at length its methodological problems elsewhere (Blanchette and Silva 2012). In short, the study uses two antagonistic definitions of "trafficking" to create its counts of routes and victims. Worse, the raw data for its counts are almost entirely drawn from newspaper stories, which the study makes no effort to verify. More importantly, it doesn't describe its methodologies or cite its sources properly, so there is no way to reproduce or even check its findings. Finally, the data it does present do not sustain the conclusions it comes to.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that, far from being an honest attempt at producing scientific knowledge regarding trafficking, PESTRAF's primary goal seems to have been the creation of a sense of urgency regarding trafficking by naming villains and victims and fabricating apparently solid statistics upon which to hang its accusations. What is interesting about PESTRAF from the point of view of the Myth of Maria, however, is the transformations it made in the myth and its ability to broadcast these to a global audience.

PESTRAF's organizers had no prior experience in dealing with issues such as adult prostitution or migration. Crucially, CECRIA did not invite any of Brazil's prostitutes' organizations to participate in their study (perhaps because it was being funded by the Bush Administration's USAID which prohibited the involvement of such organizations.) It also does not seem to have employed any organizations which dealt with migration issues. It thus seems that most of the study's "expert knowledge" regarding these phenomena came from a handful of small NGOs (like CHAME) working at the state and regional level. These organizations, by and large, had not produced any methodologically solid research into trafficking, but had been dealing with issues on a case-by-case and largely anecdotal basis. Also, their definitions of what constituted "trafficking" differed substantially from the crime as defined internationally by the Palermo Protocol—which was supposedly the definition orienting PESTRAF.

The Palermo Protocol defines trafficking as recruitment for migration into situations analogous to slavery. As the 1990s came to a close, the principal Brazilian NGOs discussing trafficking understood the phenomenon to be a broader set of movements wherein structural limitations created by globalization, racism, capitalism and colonialism were expressed in engendered forms. "Trafficking," to them, thus took in a series of movements not qualified as such by the Palermo Protocol (such as "servile marriage" and "sexual tourism"), while largely ignoring most of the other forms of trafficking the Protocol was created to address.¹⁰ In this view of the phenomenon, migratory movements did not have to necessarily end up in

¹⁰ Basically, any form of recruitment for slave labor which didn't involve sexual exploitation—being that earlier international definitions of "trafficking" had exclusively focused on this sort of exploitation (see Kempadoo 2005).

conditions analogous to slavery in order to be labeled as instances of trafficking: they simply had to contain injustice and operate following the large-scale, post-colonial cleavages created among the global working classes by markers of gender, nationality, and race. Certainly, forcing a woman into sex work overseas was “trafficking,” according to this logic. But, then again, the simple marriage of a Brazilian woman to a foreign man was also considered by CHAME/NEIM to be trafficking, if said marriage later ended up generating common forms of domestic abuse.¹¹

CECRIA’s lack of experience with the issues surrounding migration, prostitution, and trafficking of persons seems to have led PESTRAF to adopt CHAME’s broader understanding of “trafficking” as its practical and theoretical guide to the phenomenon. As a result, Piscitelli observes, PESTRAF greatly enlarged its definition of trafficking to something that extends far beyond the limits of the Palermo Protocol. More importantly, it removed any consideration of choice or individual agency from its understanding of women as trafficking victims (Piscitelli 2004a, b). In a rather breath-taking proclamation, the study accrued to itself the ability to discern whether or not women have been “trafficked,” simply based on researchers’ perceptions of their status, completely independent of said women’s views or opinions on the issue. “Macro-social indicators” became the key to identifying whether or not an individual was involved in a situation analogous to slavery:

The term “induce” means to lead to so something, to persuade, instigate. Within the law, it is translated as a crime which consists of the abuse of someone’s inexperience, simplicity or inferiority, knowing or supposedly knowing that the proposed activity is bad, what means it may be harmful [sic]. In this sense, we also call “induced consent” the concept of cooptation, that here has a meaning of abuse by a group that dominates a certain situation – in this case, the people who belong to the commercial sexual exploitation network – related to a person or a group of people, to lead to an apparent choice or consent.

...

The “rules of the game” are already set, and in this sense, the decision is, most of the time, predetermined. Or rather, the choice is taken as an approval and an encouragement of the group that proposes the action and that uses their position to decisively influence the “choice”. This form of cooptation is difficult to identify, because these “game rules” are formally respected and the

¹¹ It should be obvious that we are not making light of domestic abuse here. The problem is that CHAME’s early understandings regarding trafficking for “servile marriage” defines the crime *ex post facto*. If Hans marries Maria and Maria has no complaints about him, this is not trafficking. If Hans marries Maria and then turns out to be a stereotypically bad husband (a violent, drunken philanderer), then his earlier act of seducing and marrying Maria automatically becomes an instance of recruitment for trafficking. It is important to note, in this respect, that the CHAME/NEIM comic strip recounting this mythical tale does not situate the foreign villain of the story as having any prior ulterior motives when it comes to marrying his Brazilian girlfriend, involving the desire to enslave her. He simply marries her and then turns out to be a horrible husband. Such a situation is manifestly *not* trafficking in persons, according to the Palermo Protocol.

agreements, which are hidden, are very difficult to be documented. Besides, the people who “choose” turn their own rhetoric into that of the group that has co-opted them. (CECRIA 2003: 47–48)

It is noteworthy that this declaration comes immediately after a brief discussion of the controversy (in Europe and the United States.) regarding whether or not a person can consent to prostitution. PESTRAF's authors strongly imply that they see prostitution in general, no matter what the circumstances, as the moral equivalent of the sexual exploitation of children (Ibid, 46–47). In light of this understanding, other “macro-social indicators” (such as class, race, and gender) take the place of age in rendering the subject engaged in sexual commerce as incompetent. If children are exploited through sexual labor because they are too young to decide for themselves whether or not they should engage in it, adult women are likewise exploited due to their “inexperience, simplicity, or inferiority” (ibid, p. 48), which leads to their “alienation” and their “induced consent” (ibid, idem).

By creating the notion of “induced consent,” by situating this as the moral equivalent of slavery and, finally, by identifying “macro-social indicators” such as race, class, and gender as the key to determining who is supposedly “inexperienced, simple, or inferior,” PESTRAF strips certain classes of women of agency, symbolically transforming them into children or—worse—objects. The logical extension of PESTRAF's arguments is that if a given woman can be classified as suffering under the effects of “macro-social indicators” (race, gender, class), she can be deemed as “vulnerable” by anti-trafficking activists and the law. As such, she is subject to “cooptation” and thus unable to speak for herself or make decisions regarding whether or not she will engage in sex work or migration. Other, “less vulnerable” people (read whiter, more middle class, more formally educated), who are presumed to know better than she what is and what is not “harmful,” must then speak for her and, through the law—ultimately the State—decide where she can go and what she can do.

The earlier iteration of the Myth of Maria proposed by groups like CHAME/NEIM here takes a very dangerous turn. While still hewing to a certain degree of Marxist rhetoric in its construction of the prostitute as “alienated” and subject to “induced consent” (which resembles nothing so much as the Marxist notion of “false consciousness”), it completely misses the greater point of Marxism. The understanding of trafficking supported by PESTRAF does not seek to support or create greater class consciousness among the oppressed, or aid them in constructing their own structures of power which might one day challenge those of the system which oppresses them. Rather, it seeks to ensconce “vulnerable women” in the wrappings of State tutelage, treating them as subjects and not citizens; as children, not adults.

The stories recounted in CHAME/NEIM's publications presumed a Maria who did not know, but who could be informed as to, the “reality” of life overseas. Armed with “the truth,” Maria could make an informed decision as to whether and how she should migrate. PESTRAF strips Maria of this ability entirely, labeling her as “stigmatized by [her] status, race/ethnic and gender conditions” (p. 56) and “a naïve and humble person, who has serious financial problems and, because of that, is

easily deceived” (p. 60).¹² Maria comes out of the other side of these descriptions as, essentially, a ward of the State, a subject reduced to the rights and responsibilities of a child. This imagery is reinforced by the fact that PESTRAF continuously refers to “women and children,” throughout its pages, as if the two groups were absolutely interchangeable in terms of rights and social situation, going even so far at one point as to classify 18-year-old women as “adolescents” (CECRIA 2003: 61).¹³

PESTRAF was to operate one further important transformation in the Myth of Maria, however. The first version of the myth had generally situated “traffickers” as individual sexual tourists, operating in behalf of their own interests. Occasionally, these tourists would be aided in their search for Brazilian sexual partners by tourism agency owners in Brazil. The prevailing word used to describe these exchanges was “circuit,” with people moving between Europe and Brazil either independently or through third-party contacts made in the context of the tourism industry.

PESTRAF, however, described these circuits as “networks” and criminalized them through the use of the term “mafia.” The study gave little to no support for its allegation that international organized crime is involved in the trafficking in Brazil: one report from the southeastern region of the country was quoted as raising the hypothesis of Russian and Chinese mafia involvement, but offered no proof of this hypothesis. The term “mafia” stuck, however, and it would become synonymous for any international connection involved in the migration of Brazilian women for sex work.

In this way, PESTRAF utilized the global structuralist arguments of CHAME to turn that organization’s Marxist-feminist focus on its head: far from empowering women as individuals or as a class, anti-trafficking policy was cast as something which the State needed to employ to protect women from their own ignorance and innocence. Furthermore, by naming traffickers as “mafiosos,” associated with nationalities that have historically been seen as alien and enemy in Brazil, PESTRAF reinforced the notion that combating the phenomena it labeled as “trafficking” was properly the responsibility of law enforcement (and not, say, social or educational agencies). These phenomena not only included the sexual exploitation of children, but also the simple prostitution of adult women (not a crime in Brazil), which PESTRAF seems to qualify¹⁴ as “sexual exploitation” independent of the conditions under which it occurred.

The version of the Myth of Maria which was to come out of PESTRAF confirmed Maria’s status as black, poor, and uneducated and also situated her as a child-like incompetent, unable to safely speak or act on her own behalf. Maria was no longer

¹² PESTRAF admits that she could also be “a woman who is in ‘control of the situation’, who evaluates the risks very clearly and decides to take them to earn some money”. The study makes it clear, however, that the quote marks around “control of the situation” indicate that this sort of woman is suffering from “cooptation.”

¹³ It should be noted that Brazilian law allows consensual sexual activity from age 14 on and for pay from age 18 on. Voting is allowed at age 16 and all other forms of legal majority are achieved by age 18.

¹⁴ One of the many problems of PESTRAF is that while its authors use the term “sexual exploitation,” the never settle on a solid or clear definition of the same, allowing them to apply it in diverse situations ranging from out-and-out sexual slavery to consensual, voluntary, independent, well-paid prostitution.

an actor, negotiating complex trajectories of migration, often in restricted circumstances due to xenophobic immigration laws and abiding structures of domination based on race, class, gender, and nationality: she was now an “exotic and erotic commodity” (CECRIA 2003: 56), a passive object traded on an international market by shadowy Eastern mafiosos. Furthermore, if Maria was a prostitute, she was not a worker (as stipulated by the Brazilian labor code), covered by labor laws and deserving respect as a citizen: she was a “victim of sexual exploitation” who needed to be rescued by the State.

PESTRAF reified, in a Brazilian context, all the accusations which had been circulating internationally in anti-prostitution and abolitionist circles since the sex wars of the 1970s and 1980s, but which had so far been largely absent in Brazilian feminist debates. The fact that the study received funding from USAID and other transnational organizations with anti-prostitution and abolitionist agendas meant that its conclusions and recommendations were quickly translated into English and internationalized. These were then immediately reflected back upon the Brazilian government as an unambiguous international mandate for a national plan against human trafficking, precisely at the moment when Brazil was in the process of ratifying the Palermo Protocol and committing itself to creating a national anti-trafficking policy.¹⁵

Between 2002 and 2006, the trafficking issue took off in terms of its media exposure and PESTRAF became one of the most authoritative sources for journalists seeking to understand this new social danger. As one highly placed member of the Brazilian Ministry of Justice told us in October 2007, PESTRAF had become the government’s guideline for understanding trafficking in Brazil. The Myth of Maria, in other words, was about to become operationalized as policy.

The Myth as policy

The first large-scale anti-trafficking campaign was launched in Brazil in 2004 by UNODC and the Brazilian Justice Ministry. It included two widely distributed posters, three radio spots, a handout flyer and a condom carrying case. The central image of the campaign was a nude woman with her back turned toward the viewer, her body inscribed with one of two campaign catch-phrases. Underneath, came the slogan “Denounce Trafficking of Women,” accompanied by the number of a national hotline which people could call if they “suspect that someone could be committing this crime and recruiting women” (text from flyer: UNODC) (Fig. 3).

The campaign material reiterates several key elements of the Myth of Maria, as postulated by PESTRAF. In the first place, the campaign exclusively focused on women. Secondly, it situated trafficking as exclusively occurring within the strictures of sexual/reproductive labor. Thirdly, it affirmed that trafficking was a multi-billion dollar industry controlled by international criminal organizations (mafias). Although the campaign material shows a white woman as its central image

¹⁵ Brazil signed the Protocol in 2000, ratified it in 2004 and created its first national anti-trafficking policy in 2006 (Lins 2010).



Fig. 3 Posters from 2004 UNDOC/Ministry of Justice Campaign

and claims that any woman can potentially be at risk, its pamphlets emphasized that the majority of trafficking victims are “of humble origins.” It advises that “love proposals” and offers of material benefits overseas should be seen as suspect. Finally, as can be seen in the image above, it situates “trafficking victims” as essentially passive: objects to be handled and shifted and not decision-making actors.

Of particular interest in this regard is the campaign catchphrase on the poster on the left: “First they take your passport, then they take your freedom.” The idea that a stolen passport reduces a woman to the status of a passive object (as if she were a parcel which had lost her proper address) would become one of the most important and oft-repeated memes of the anti-trafficking movement in Brazil and one of the most puzzling. There is, of course, no reason why having one’s passport taken should reduce one to the condition of a slave, absent some threat of violence or form of imprisonment. The campaign’s inability to perceive that reality and to suggest a more empowering slogan (our suggestion at the time was “If someone takes your passport, immediately contact the nearest Brazilian Consulate,” with a list of phone numbers) betrays what seems to have been the UNODC and the Justice Ministry’s underlying goal: to scare Brazilian women into staying home.

In the series of the meetings, seminars, and mobilizations which took place during the early 1900s around the formulation of Brazil’s new anti-trafficking policy, this anti-immigration message was reiterated by many policymakers and

government officials. The most common refrain that we would hear at these meetings was succinctly expressed by a member of the Justice Ministry in a national seminar in 2007: “No one should leave Brazil until they are able to do so with dignity.” “Dignity,”¹⁶ as other anti-trafficking policymakers were to describe it on later occasions, meant legally, with a ticket paid with one’s own money, an appropriate visa and a full bank account: conditions for immigration that only a very small minority of Brazilians could ever hope to achieve.

Furthermore, these political agents made it very clear exactly what kind of “undignified” Brazilian women was being enjoined to stay at home.

The language that developed in the political field of anti-trafficking planning in Brazil, post-PESTRAF, made heavy use of the word “vulnerable” to describe the women who would be singled out as “potential victims” by the country’s new policies. *Vulnerability* could be summed up as a series of attributions (PESTRAF’s “macro-social indicators”), almost always presented in essentialist and reductionist forms. These included: color and race (black or brown people being understood as more vulnerable than whites); class (poor people being more vulnerable than the rich); gender (women being more vulnerable than men); education (university students being less vulnerable than people that cannot read and write); age (children being more vulnerable than adults); and even the socio-cultural position relative to the Brazilian metropolitan regions (people from the country’s interior, shanty towns, and the suburbs being more vulnerable than those that lived in urban areas and/or city centers).

These *vulnerabilities* were almost never explored, explained, or even defined by anti-trafficking agents: in most of the cases we observed, they were simply cited, as if their epistemological and etymological contents were obvious. In this way, the explanatory power of *vulnerabilities* in the overall picture of human trafficking became extremely subject to subjacent prejudice.

An excellent example of this was seen by us during a seminar at the headquarters of the State Council for Women’s Rights (CEDIM), in Rio de Janeiro in June 2005. On this occasion, an employee of the State Secretariat for Human Rights (SEASDH) described the victims of human trafficking in Rio de Janeiro as “highly vulnerable” to trafficking because they were typically “women of African descent living in the city’s suburbs, economically excluded and with little education,” conditions that “make it difficult for them to travel abroad in safety.”¹⁷ This young woman’s presentation was immediately followed by one given by a leader of the local anti-trafficking division of the Federal Police, who stated that human trafficking had intensified since the end of Brazilian military government because “having a passport is now legally defined as a citizen’s right.” He then remarked that “things during the military dictatorship were much simpler,” as passports were not issued to individuals understood as “the type of people that should not travel.” According to

¹⁶ It is noteworthy in this context that the laws surrounding sex crimes in Brazil—particularly the country’s only anti-trafficking law (which prohibits prostitutes from migrating, independent of any considerations regarding human rights violations) are known as “crimes against dignity” in Brazilian jurisprudence.

¹⁷ It should be noted that her descriptions were based upon the single case of trafficking that her office had dealt with to date, which itself did not express the criteria she had established as “typical.”

this police officer, “Often, you only have to take one look at the person to know that they will get into trouble if they leave Brazil, but we still have to issue a passport. This was not previously the case.”

At this seminar, the politically correct terms describing *vulnerabilities* (African descent, economically disadvantaged, lacking formal education) occupied the same semiotic and political space as their unspoken socially excluding synonyms (black, poor, and stupid), united by the same political desire: a determination that individuals with certain characteristics should be prohibited—or at least strongly discouraged—from traveling abroad.

From 2006 on, trafficking discourse became slightly more sophisticated in Brazil and two new forms of trafficking began to occasionally appear in seminars and meetings conducted by the agents active in the political field of anti-trafficking policy: movements involving other forms of slave labor and trafficking for the sale of organs. In the field of media representations, however, trafficking continued to almost exclusively revolve around the overseas travel of Brazilian women for prostitution. This focus was aided by the vagaries of the Brazilian legal code which, to date, classifies any assisted movement of prostitutes (whether or not said movements involve exploitation or human rights violations) as “trafficking” while classifying “slave labor” as another crime, entirely unconnected with trafficking in Brazilian jurisprudence.

By late 2006, we began to hear disturbing stories in our ethnographic work with sex workers returning from overseas migrations. Many reported being detained by police in countries like Spain and Italy and being forced to declare themselves as “trafficking victims” in order to avoid being deported as criminals or—even worse—charged as traffickers themselves. Often, police would arrest a prostitute’s housemates, lovers, or colleagues as supposed “pimps.” These people would then, in turn, be forced to accuse yet other individuals. The key operator which allowed the cycle of accusation and arrest to continue, in many cases, was the fact that almost all of the arrested were illegal or irregular immigrants, subject to criminal deportation. By turning state’s evidence, an accused foreign sex worker could avoid criminal deportation and, instead, be “repatriated.” This was of great concern to many Brazilians caught in “anti-trafficking” dragnets overseas, as they believed they would lose their passports and their right to travel if they were deported, but would not suffer these sanctions if “repatriated” as “victims of trafficking.” Several of our informants reported claiming victim status for this reason. Others claimed that they had to identify themselves as trafficking victims in order to avoid being charged as traffickers.

Universally, the women (and some few men) we talked to who had been caught up in these hunts reported that they had received no assistance from Brazilian embassies or consulates. Many of these sex working immigrants reported seeking aid from the Brazilian Consulate and being told by consulate employees that Itamaraty¹⁸ was not disposed to help them. “Your place is out there in the streets,” said one consulate employee in France to a transvestite who sought help. “Don’t come in here. We’re not here for your kind.”

¹⁸ The Brazilian State Department.

Simultaneously, rumors began appearing in the international media of police abuse of foreigners awaiting deportation (Carrau 2011). While none of our informants related being sexually or physically abused by State employees, many claimed that European police “rescuers” emotionally abused them and frequently used racist terms to describe and address them. One woman reported being imprisoned for 2 months in Switzerland as a “sexual exploiter,” in situations where her jailors routinely called her a “dirty black whore.” She was released from custody and “repatriated” to Brazil when she agreed to turn state’s evidence on her Swiss husband as a “trafficker.”

All of these stories are, of course, anecdotal and based on individual experiences. There’s no telling how widespread these sorts of experiences are among Brazilians “rescued” from or charged with trafficking while overseas. Adriana Piscitelli’s research (2007a, b) among returning Brazilian deportees and non-admitted tourists from Europe and the United States, however, counted far many more cases of complaints of treatment at the hands of State agents than complaints regarding exploitation by people who could be considered “traffickers.”

The stories and rumors of abuse of Brazilian citizens at the hands of the police and other State agents make the most recent operational use of the Myth of Maria extremely worrisome, however.

In mid-2011, we sat in on a local meeting of the Parliamentary Investigative Committee, chaired by Senator Marinor Brito. On this occasion, a representative of the local Federal Police squad, charged with repressing trafficking in Rio’s airports, described how his team works.

He began with the by-now-standard recitation of the Myth of Maria as describing the typical trafficking victim: “a person who is recruited to leave Brazil, our national territory, who is deluded that they’re going to work in a country with a strong currency, who often doesn’t know that they are going to work outside of Brazil as a prostitute and who goes seduced by the idea that they are going to improve their lives,” but who so innocent or frightened by the experience that they are not willing to talk to police.

Because of this persistent lack of cooperation after the supposed crime of trafficking has occurred, the agent went on to explain that the Federal Police’s only recourse was to act preventatively:

It is a rare case when a victim wants to denounce that she has been a victim of trafficking. So the police have to send the case on to the migration authorities in preventative fashion. On one recent occasion, we acted preventatively regarding the embarkation of some dancers [who were denounced] via the denunciation hotline [listed on the UNODC/MJ posters, above]. Our most recent case involved 13 women who going to Turkey. Everything indicated that they were going to be sexually exploited... so the Federal Police acted in a preventative manner, trying to impede their embarkation.

“Acting preventatively,” in this case, meant sequestering the women in a room alone with federal agents and informing them that “the Federal Police have received a denunciation that you are embarking on a trip in order to engage in a crime. We suggest that you do not go.”

When the agent was later asked what the women decided to do, he claimed that they all decided not to go but, by that time, “their plane had already left the ground, anyhow,” making it unclear as to whether the women had really been given any choice in the matter. He justified the Federal Police’s action in the following way:

So we end up acting reactively. Why? Because after they arrive and are exploited, after they get to another State, another country, who passes along this information to the Federal Police after an investigation, it is really difficult. Because they’ve already disappeared... and for you to find or locate them, listen to them and get proof regarding how they were recruited... that’s... that’s... it is really difficult. So unfortunately, we have to act in this reactive sense.

Following the Myth of Maria—that trafficking victims are women drawn from the most miserable sectors of Brazilian society, operating under a false consciousness, highly suggestive and controllable due to their almost child-like innocence and passivity—the Federal Police of Rio de Janeiro have come to the conclusion that the basic coordinates of western jurisprudence needs must be overturned. *Habeas corpus* apparently does not apply in trafficking cases and, indeed, the police feel themselves of necessity to be authorized to intervene in order to prevent future crimes, similar to the cops in the science fiction film *Minority Report*. In the testimony above, the representative of Rio de Janeiro’s Federal anti-trafficking squad claims to know, beforehand, that a crime will occur. His proof? Anonymous denunciations from the National Anti-Trafficking Hotline and, of course, his personal evaluation of the likelihood that a given accused potential victim actually will become a victim, based upon “macro-social indicators” such as the perceived race, class, gender, and education of the accused victims.

In his concluding arguments, the federal agent also underlined the need to not only *work* with foreign police forces but to be *trained* by them:

Obviously, improving our capacities in this respect is important, and not only in the national environment. I learned a lot from working with other [nations’] police because over there is where you do operations. Agents over there have cases, do an operation, identify a recruiter here in Brazil; three, four, five years of investigation and they break everything open and then they come over here... That’s why it is essential that we do these exchange programs with other police forces, see? A permanent exchange for agents to work together. So that when they detect a place where a Brazilian is being sexually exploited, we learn about it and learn about where they were recruited, so that we can operate together.

Aside from being rather touching in its innocent admiration of the relative capacities and competencies of European police forces who deal with trafficking issues, this seems to be an indication that the Brazilian Federal Police have begun to transform themselves from an agency which should uphold the law for all Brazilians citizens to an auxiliary branch of the migration authorities of the countries of the Global North. A person choosing to leave Brazil now not only has to convince the migration authorities at her destination to let her in: she also needs

to avoid coming to the attention of Brazilian authorities as well. This is a situation that is darkly humorous when one takes into account the official puzzlement as to “why trafficking victims don’t want to talk to police” which repeatedly pops up in the anti-trafficking seminars and workshops.

Furthermore, the unquestioned presumptions in the Federal officer’s statement, above, are legion. To illustrate just one of the problems inherent in this sort of proposed cooperation, there is no international consensus as to what constitutes “sexual exploitation.” In the United States, all prostitution is inevitably understood to fall into this category. In countries like Germany, Holland, and Australia where prostitution is legal, only certain types of commercial sexual activities would be classified as such. In Brazil, prostitution is not illegal but the law prohibits prostitutes from migrating without, however, constituting said migrations as “sexual exploitation.” Where our Federal Police would come down, then, on presumed cases of international “sexual exploitation” is completely open to question. The testimony reproduced above, however, suggests that they are not taking their cues on this issue from the Constitution or even the Penal Code, but from their more repression-oriented colleagues overseas.

There has been one final mutation in the Myth of Maria in recent years, however, one which seems to have sprung from the story’s repeated emphasis upon Maria’s essential innocence and (to not put too fine a point on it) stupidity. This has to do with one of the main tasks Brazil’s anti-traffickers have assigned themselves: Maria needs to learn that she is a victim. According to this new riff on an old theme, Maria’s false consciousness as a sex worker has rendered her completely unable to recognize that she is being victimized. It is thus up to the State—in the person of police, social workers, and their NGO allies—to determine for women whether they are being trafficked and to teach them to internalize their victimhood.

This development has decisively destroyed what was left of the Myth’s original Marxist roots, shifting anti-trafficking praxis in Brazil into a quasi-Stalinist frame of mind. Maria is now cast as someone who is completely unaware of her own interests, interests which must be vouchsafed by the State and to which Maria must inevitably bow. What Maria gets from this tutelage in victimhood, however, is rarely discussed. Given that the vast majority of anti-trafficking activities in Brazil to date have been geared toward preventing certain types of women from travelling overseas, it seems unlikely that this focus on teaching victimhood would gain an immigrant deemed to be “trafficked” anything more than a quick, one-way ticket back to their point of origin, if that. In the larger context of our nation’s infatuation with the Myth of Maria, teaching victimhood seems to be simply a means of assuring that “repatriated” immigrants “get with the program,” internalize anti-trafficking discourse and thus help create the requisite victims which will be used to justify further national expenditures toward aggressive anti-immigration campaigns.

Questions unanswered, problems unexplored

Ethnographic research into sexual tourism and trafficking of women in Brazil began shortly around the time that CHAME was producing its original educational

materials on the theme. These studies quickly threw into question many of the presumptions of *The Myth of Maria*. We'd now like to briefly touch upon some of the main considerations regarding trafficking of persons in Brazil which the *Myth* has left untouched or unanswered.

1. The vast majority of trafficking victims in Brazil does not appear to be sexually exploited women and children but rural laborers who are probably mainly male. According to the federal government's report of its first anti-trafficking plan, 32,052 non-sex-working slave laborers were freed in the country between 2002 and 2008. Over the same period, there were 211 condemnations for the crime of trafficking for sexual purposes, typically involving a handful of victims each.¹⁹ There was also one case involving trafficking of persons for organ removal (Lins 2010: 25, 52, 173–174).
2. A significant proportion (no one knows how much) of the flow of migrants out of Brazil for sex work overseas is made up of men and transvestites. *Maria*, in other words, is often José or Beyoncé (Mitchell 2010; Pelucio 2010; Teixeira 2008).
3. Brazilians of all ages, colors, social classes, and from all regions of Brazil immigrate in significant numbers overseas. So far, there is no solid, quantitative proof to support the view that *Maria* generally has a given class and color or comes from a given region. Being that most Brazilians are nonwhite and poor (at least by Western European standards), it is a fairly safe bet that, all else being equal, people who can be described in this fashion make up the majority of Brazilian migrants in general, that is no proof of causal connection between race, poverty, education, or any other “macro-social indicator” and trafficking, however. Additionally, Piscitelli's work in Spain and our work in Rio de Janeiro indicate that a large proportion of migrant Brazilian sex workers are white, lower middle class or working class, and relatively well educated.
4. So far, almost every Brazilian migrant sex worker who has been interviewed by Brazilian ethnographers has entered into sex work voluntarily. Most informants knew they were going to work as prostitutes before they left the country. Others decided to engage in sex work upon arriving at their destination. Brazilian migrants forced into prostitution seem to be extremely rare.
5. Far from being typically a “crazy” or “deluded” decision, based on childish fantasies of Europe, migration for sex work is more often relatively well planned and informed by the experiences of friends and colleagues who have already migrated. Often, it represents the final step in sex worker's career and not their initiation (Teixeira 2008; Blanchette and Silva 2005; Piscitelli 2008b).
6. People are often not “recruited” for sex work overseas, but actively seek it out. Our informants in Rio de Janeiro have consistently related, in fact, that there is a “waiting list” for those people who want to work in Europe. These same informants report that club and brothel owners in Europe are not interested in recruiting forced labor (see Piscitelli 2008a). As one of our interviewees, a

¹⁹ See Oliveira (2008) for a more detailed description of these cases.

35-year-old carioca woman who has repeatedly gone overseas for sex work in Spain and Italy, succinctly put it:

Look, club owners over there don't want to get mixed up with the police. They want to make money. And how do they make money? By having a busy place with happy workers and clients. They can't do that if they're working clandestinely with a bunch of slaves. So they only want whores – real whores. Women who know about whoring and know how to do it well. That's the sort of woman who brings in clients and money. What is the advantage of recruiting innocent virgins who'll get frightened of the work and run screaming to the cops at the first opportunity? This just doesn't happen because it goes against the logic of the business.

7. There is no solid quantitative or qualitative proof that sexual tourism is a privileged axis for the recruitment of trafficking victims, especially if we are to take the Palermo Protocol as our definition of trafficking. As we (2005) and Piscitelli (2004a, b) have pointed out at some length, many Brazilian women of all sorts create affective and sexual connections with foreign tourists. Often, these connections are used in order to migrate overseas without having to become indebted to a third party. The sexual/affective relationships constructed between Brazilians and foreigners in the context of tourism is at least as likely to be an effective way for migrants to avoid trafficking as it is a means of conducting it.
8. Even according to PESTRAF (whose methodology has a distinct bias toward reporting accusations of overseas trafficking by foreigners), the majority of “recruiters” (68 %) for migrant sex work are Brazilians. Like all migrants, those involved in sex work tend to migrate by mobilizing connections in a social network and this very often means their friends, parents, and relatives. The act of migration is thus almost by its very definition an act which involves an international network of individuals. When migration ends up violating labor, sex, or immigration laws, it *ipso facto* becomes a criminal activity. Labeling these sorts of movements as “international criminal networks,” however, does not magically transform the people who aid sex worker migrations into *mafias*. The incessant focus on finding and punishing “recruiters” risks illegalizing sex workers' intimate support networks, paradoxically leaving them more isolated, with fewer options and thus more vulnerable to exploitation. Teixeira (2008) has documented how transvestites' social support networks in Brazil have been criminalized by anti-trafficking operations informed by discourses regarding “mafias” and “international criminal organizations.”
9. Indebtedness to friends, relatives, and future employers is a structural part of the migratory process for low-income immigrants, especially when these move along international trajectories. In order to migrate, one needs capital. Poor migrants, without capital, tend to borrow the money necessary for their move, a fact confirmed by almost every study of Brazilian overseas migration. The existence of a debt to a third party with regard to the migratory process is thus in no way sufficient proof of trafficking. Debts must be understood within the

whole complexity of the social and affective networks in which they are accrued. As Piscitelli has exhaustively documented in the case of Brazilian sex workers in Spain (2008a), debts are only considered to be a mark of coercion by these women when they are excessive, effectively unpayable, and/or enforced by threats of violence.²⁰

10. In many cases, situations of exploitation do not immediately exist but slowly become constituted over time. By emphasizing Maria's "innocence" and the great dramatic moment in which it is "revealed" that she's in fact a slave, the myth ignores the fact that exploitation occurs not because the immigrant didn't know she was going to work as a prostitute, but because the conditions of that labor are much worse or were radically changed from what were originally agreed upon.
11. Likewise, by concentrating on the chimera of "trafficking," abiding conditions of extreme labor exploitation or human rights violations become pushed into the background, as long as the exploited stay at home. We notice Maria when she's selling sex in Europe. We do not notice her at all she's an un-unionized, temporary laborer working in a Brazilian factory or as a maid in a posh Ipanema hotel, making a starvation wage. The fact that Maria may be engaging in the first sort of work in order to avoid the second, which she believes to be even more of a violation of her rights and dignity, is not considered.
12. It is rarely necessary to threaten an irregular or illegal worker with violence in order to get them to shut up when one can simply denounce them to the police. In this way, the organs of State violence often indirectly serve as the exploiters' "henchmen." Illegal and irregular immigrants are principally concerned with deportation and see that as a much more immanent and dangerous threat than an often vaguely described "exploitation."
13. As long as certain classes of workers are effectively treated as criminals by migration and vice laws, the police will never be seen by these workers as their allies. Maria thus often doesn't talk to the police, not because she's afraid of what the "traffickers" might do to her, but because she knows full well what the police will do to her. This dilemma has been quite well expressed by one of our informants, a 45-year-old man who worked as a prostitute in France:

Wait a sec: the Brazilian Police try to stop me from travelling. The French police try to arrest me because I'm an illegal immigrant. But if I find myself in trouble, the solution is to go to these guys and ask them for help? The same guys who call me a bum and a faggot and say I deserve to die? Go on, pull the other one...

14. Police are hardly neutral agents in the socioeconomic and political structures of commercial sex. In Brazil, our informants routinely report that police

²⁰ The class bias of considering debts to be *ipso facto* evidence of trafficking can be illustrated by the fact that many of our migrant sex-worker informants have been charged less interest on their interpersonal loans to go overseas than we as researchers are charged by Mastercard when we attend international conferences to talk about them.

officers extort sex and money from sex workers and are also involved in the management of brothels. This sort of problem is not constrained to Brazil: internationally, police officers have been proven to be among the most commonly cited abusers of prostitutes (see, for example, WHO, *s/d* 2005; Venkatesh and Levitt 2007). Making law enforcement primarily responsible for intervention in suspected cases of trafficking involving sexual exploitation may thus create as many human rights violations as it resolves.

15. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, by focusing on trafficking as a law enforcement issue involving mafias, individual victims, and the policing of borders, the Myth naturalizes the State's role in managing migration according to xenophobic and pornophobic laws. The fact that illegal and irregular Brazilian immigrants are seen by the various national police forces of the global north as criminals, particularly if they engage in erotic labor, is shoved into the background. The State's role in creating the very problem it now proposes to solve through police intervention is ignored. The arrest and deportation of female immigrants thus becomes "rescue" and "repatriation" and human rights violations which occur during the course of police anti-trafficking interventions are either ignored or shrugged off as collateral damage, unfortunately necessary in the course of preventing a greater evil. The State, in other words, is allowed to forcibly migrate people who the State itself deems forcibly migrated because forcible migration is wrong.

Side effects of the Myth: the case of Simone Borges

As John Fredrick observes, trafficking myths serve a potentially valid function in that they are consensual descriptions of "typical" trafficking episodes which might be utilized in order to encapsulate information and communicate it to the largest number of people possible (Frederick 2005: 144). The persistence of the Myth of Maria as Brazil's "consensual description" of trafficking, however, has already begun to generate side effects which, in some cases, are worse than the problem the Myth attempts to address.

An excellent example of this can be found in the case of Simone Borges Felipe, a young woman from the state of Goiás who died under suspicious circumstances in Spain in 1996 while working as a prostitute.²¹ Simone's case is so symbolic within Brazil that the Ministry of Justice's annual award for anti-trafficking activities carries her name.²² Simone is almost universally recognized as a woman who died as a result of trafficking. An attentive reading of the publically available details of her case, however, suggests that perhaps another interpretation is in order.

²¹ A good overview of the case can be found PESTRAF (CECRIA 2003:120–127). Other information can be encountered in "Morte na Espanha," in *Revista Claudia* 2001.

²²

http://www.cet.unb.br/turismoeinfancia/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=109:prorrogadas-as-inscricoes-aos-premios-libertas-e-simone-borges-felipe&catid=13:noticias&Itemid=24.

In January 1996, Simone travelled to Spain to work in a club known as “Cesar Palace.” The details surrounding her decision to migrate for work and to what degree she knew, beforehand, that said work involved prostitution are not clear. In the investigations following her death, friends and colleagues offered up contradictory stories, some claiming that she had been originally promised work as a maid but forced to work as a prostitute. Other Brazilian women, who had worked at Cesar Palace, categorically denied these claims and said that Simone knew she was migrating for sex work. The official report by a Brazilian consul in Spain following Simone’s death did not find any irregularities in the Spanish club in question, or any indication that the workers there were enslaved or otherwise coerced. One thing is clear, however: whether or not Simone volunteered for sex work or not, she did not like her job. She called her family in early February and asked them to contact the Brazilian Consulate to help her come home.²³ Simone bought a ticket to return to Brazil and was scheduled to leave Spain on the 24th of April. On the 4th, however, she was checked into the Basurto, diagnosed with tuberculosis and shortly thereafter died.

The proximate cause of Simone’s death had nothing to do with her work at Cesar Palace, but Simone’s condition as a sex worker, Brazilian immigrant does seem to have played more than a minor role in her demise. According to Jane, one of the Brazilian colleagues who accompanied her to Basurto:

They gave her enormous quantities of medicine. The nurses came into the room holding fistfuls of pills! After she’d taken the medicine, Simone complained that she couldn’t breathe properly and was feeling intense pain.

Jane claimed that when she tried to alert hospital employees as to Simone’s reaction, a nurse told her to shut up, being that “I was a specialist in prostitution and she [the nurse] knew how to take care of the sick” (Leal and Leal 2002: 122).

Basurto quickly alleged that Simone’s death was due to acute tuberculosis. An independent autopsy by the Federal University of Goiás, however, showed that the young woman died of an overdose due to the drugs that had been applied to her at the hospital. Eventually, after the evidence began to pile up, Basurto admitted to misdiagnosing Simone and to medicating her improperly. Why the hospital staff ignored the warnings of Simone’s friends regarding her reactions has to this day been unexplained.

Regardless of why she went to Spain or what her working conditions were like there, Simone Borges did not die as a result of trafficking in persons: she died due to medical malpractice which appears to have been compounded by the prejudices of the employees of the Basurto Hospital toward sex workers and immigrant women. To this day, as far as we can determine,²⁴ no member of the staff at Basurto has been

²³ Whether or not the family did this and what the Consulate’s reaction was, if any, is not presented in any publically available sources.

²⁴ PESTRAF’s version of the Borges case has been reproduced dozens of times across the Internet. In spite of this, we have been unable to find information regarding further investigations into the role malpractice and prejudice played in the young Brazilian’s death. This in and of itself is significant in the context of the mythological reading of trafficking which we are critiquing here. It indicates that Simone’s supposed death as trafficking victim is of much greater importance to the media, Brazilian politicians, and other political actors in the field of anti-trafficking policy than the actual circumstances surrounding her death.

charged with malpractice. Further investigation into the case seems unlikely now that Simone has become something of a “poster child” for Brazil’s anti-trafficking movement, which claims that her death was the direct responsibility of Cesar Park’s owner. In this way, the Myth of Maria has aided in hiding the abuse that irregular and illegal Brazilian immigrants and sex workers suffer. When the choice of responsibility for a young woman’s death comes down to the employees of a public hospital or the presumed “mafioso” who recruited her for sex work, the Myth makes it quite clear what the focus of public outrage should be. Instead of asking why Brazilian sex worker immigrants confront stigmas, the Myth essentializes and naturalizes these. We are thus to understand that Simone died because she was a Brazilian prostitute in Spain (a situation mythologically understood to be synonymous with “trafficking victim”) and not because Spanish health professionals, faced with a woman they presumed to be a Brazilian prostitute, decided not to treat her case with the seriousness it deserved.

Conclusion: on national status and female purity

The Myth of Maria is ultimately a conservative—if not reactionary—understanding of the problems thrown up by the interaction of global mobility and sex work. It postulates a Brazil inhabited by two kinds of citizens: those who can be trusted to travel and those who should stay at home for their own good. In this understanding of the world, women, transvestites, the poor, African, and native Brazilians and other groups who have traditionally been seen as second-class citizens are cast as “vulnerable” subjects, in need of direct State intervention in order to condition their constitutionally guaranteed right of free movement. Ironically, however, instead of vouchsafing this right, State anti-trafficking initiatives submit these subjects to an enhanced regime of surveillance and to “educational” programs which seek to *reduce* their mobility. By transforming certain classes of migrants (especially those engaged in sex work) into caricatures, infantilizing and objectifying them, and stripping them of agency, the Myth of Maria enables police activities which subvert the constitutional rights of these Brazilians. By promulgating an inaccurate and emotionally laden understanding of trafficking, the myth mobilizes public emotions and creates a sense of moral panic, occluding an increasing array of practices and policies that penalize prostitutes and irregular migrants, transforming them from citizens into subjects.

A question which remains, however, is why has this myth become the guiding narrative of Brazil’s anti-trafficking struggle in such a short period of time?

It must be remembered in this context that, up until very recently, the Brazilian State has been relatively supportive of sex workers. After all, in 2005, Brazil chose to lose 40 million dollars in USAID funds rather than cut its Health Ministry programs which employed prostitutes as safe sex educators. Furthermore, the Brazilian Labor Ministry has recently declared prostitution to be a profession for tax and retirement purposes. It is certainly true, as anthropologist Paul Amar points out (Amar 2009) that the concept of the prostitute as citizen is fairly well advanced within Brazilian popular culture and political discourse—certainly more advanced

than it is in most countries of the global north. Amar, in fact, ends his analysis of the 2005 “Operation Princess” anti-prostitution blitzes in Rio de Janeiro on an optimistic note:

The failure of these moralizing, militarized logics of intervention around Operation Princess provides evidence that Brazil’s state and civil society are still in flux, and that there are strong indications that the country has the political and discursive resources to promote new kinds of agency and national identity, asserting sexual rights while reining in police militarism under the framework of a mix of humanitarian legalism and worker empowerment that can expand the notion of “human security” beyond the violent urban geopolitics of late 20th-century neoliberalism (Amar 2009: 537).

With all due respect to Paul Amar, however, and without wishing to appear excessively pessimistic, we believe that it is precisely Brazilian desires to promulgate a new formulation of national identity on the global stage that militate against these sorts of optimistic wishes.

On an empirical note, while Operation Princess collapsed in the manner which Amar relates, it has been followed in Rio de Janeiro by a series of police anti-prostitution operations, each of which has legally collapsed in turn, but each of which has also resulted in arrests, court cases, and the closing (legal or otherwise) of commercial sexual venues. While it is true that Operation Princesses’ attempt to link prostitution to child sexual exploitation failed, this has not prevented police from engaging in ever-increasing numbers of raids against commercial sexual venues, always alleging (but hardly ever proving) child sexual exploitation. Furthermore, these sorts of operations have now become endemic on a country-wide scale, with prostitution rights activists reporting similar police pressures in São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Fortaleza, Porto Alegre, Natal, and many other cities.

It is the increased occurrence of police operations along the lines of those reported by Amar, which persist and multiply often *in spite* of their being declared illegal or irregular by the courts, that convinces us that we are dealing with a fundamentally changed environment in Brazil with regard to public perceptions of sex workers and sex worker rights—one which is rapidly moving away from the notion of prostitute as citizen and toward a view of the prostitute as an agency-less, disempowered victim, or quasi-criminal.

It is tempting to attribute this transformation to increased international pressures against prostitution in general. In this view of things, Brazil’s newly found fascination with trafficking in persons and the Myth of Maria is simply a logical reaction to an international trend toward increased sexual conservatism and abolitionist retrenchment—a local adaptation to the generalized western sexual panic so well described by Roger Lancaster in his recent book, *Sex Panic and the Punitive State* (2011).

Brazilian reactions to the global trafficking panic, however, are not predestined by foreign views. While it might be necessary for Brazil to articulate a national anti-trafficking policy, given pressure from the weakened-yet-still-hegemonic global north and the United Nation, there is no necessary reason why anti-trafficking policy in Brazil should have taken the anti-immigrant, anti-prostitution turn that it has.

This is especially true when we take into consideration that, as the world's sixth largest economy and a nation of close to 190 million inhabitants, Brazil has a lot more power and space to internationally negotiate policy than many nations and has not been shy of using this power in the past (President Luiz Ignácio "Lula" da Silva's rejection of the USAID ban on working with prostitute organizations is a good case in point).

The observation of the interplay of actors at the micro-political level is, of course, key to understanding how a given policy evolves and develops. At the risk of being labeled as "structuralists," however, we feel that there are also large-scale manifestations of symbolic logic that give emotional impetus to this or that policy within a given political field. This is precisely where we see the Myth of Maria as operating, in providing an emotional reasoning for Brazilian anti-trafficking policy. But why has this myth retained its ability to mobilize emotion over the past 15 years? Why has it become the go-to story for every Brazilian journalist attempting to explain trafficking to the public and for almost every Senator or Congressman attempting to create legislation to "meet the threat of trafficking?"

It is our considered opinion that, at the bottom of the Myth, we find an enduring Brazilian preoccupation with the country's status and, indeed, national identity on the global stage—a concern that has become particularly acute in recent years as Brazil has been "promoted" to the ranks of the "BRIC nations" (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) which supposedly represent a decrease in the hegemony of the global north.

After much interaction with the anti-trafficking movement in Brazil and many of the people involved in formulating and enacting State anti-trafficking policy, we have been struck by the persistence and repetition in these actors' discourses of nationalistic sentiments that reference "cleaning up Brazil's reputation" and "saving Brazil's honor." Interestingly, when these discourses occur, they generally don't talk about increasing respect for human rights, combating corruption, or improving governance: instead, they focus on reducing the sexualization of Brazilians—and Brazilian women, in particular—in the global imagescape, linking this to the notion of "increasing respect for Brazil and Brazilians." There thus seems to be a direct correlation, in the minds of many of these political agents, with the de-sexualization of the Brazilian woman in the eyes of the world, the struggle against trafficking and improving the status of Brazil in general.

We'd thus like to close with a theoretical provocation—a structuralist-feminist hypothesis which may be used to orient further investigation into Brazilian attitudes regarding trafficking of persons, sex work, and migration.

In her article "The Virgin and the State," anthropologist Sherry Ortner claims that preoccupations with women's sexual purity (and, in particular, the fetishization of this purity as part of a group's representation of masculine status) are linked to the rise and consolidation of complex societies organized around the State. According to Ortner, the importance of feminine sexual purity is based upon hypergamic structures wherein lower status groups create alliances with higher-status groups through marriage and the giving of wives. With the birth of the State, marriages acquire the possibility of being something more than a lateral transaction between groups of essentially equal status. As abiding socioeconomic hierarchies

(often organized according to ethnicity) are consolidated, it becomes possible for marriages to create or reinforce socially vertical linkages. In this new system, sexual purity symbolizes women's value for hypergamic exchange, with virginity becoming a marker for a woman's exclusivity and unattainability, separating her from the masses, making her the moral equivalent of the elite and thus appropriate for marriage to a higher-status male (Ortner 1996 [1978]: 54–56).

Certainly, relatively few people in today's Brazil expect that a woman should maintain her virginity until she marries, or that she should passively accept masculine infidelities in the name of preserving the sacred institution of marriage. However, many Brazilians still classify women as *honest* or *dishonest* based upon said woman's sexual behavior. What an *honest* woman is, exactly, in 2009 is widely debated, but one thing remains clear: she is certainly not a prostitute. In fact, in a country where modernity has created multiple and conflicting definitions regarding the expected behavior of an *honest* woman, the prostitute still functions as an example of ultimate female *dishonesty*. The continued classification sex workers as *dishonest*, *street*, or *public* women in popular Brazilian culture provides a certain level of harmonization between the ambiguities of contemporary female sexual life and previous generations' cultural expectations. Even though she might be no longer a virgin until marriage, nor exceptionally chaste afterward, by not being a prostitute, a modern Brazilian woman can still retain a claim to the traditional identification of *honest woman*.

The *dishonest* woman—of which the prostitute is the symbolic nadir—has thus become the remaining marker of femininity against which women in general are measured in Brazilian society. And if we accept Ortner's insights regarding feminine sexual purity and its connections to the consolidation of hierarchical societies and the possibilities for hypergamic marriage represented by the rise of the State, we can formulate some interesting observations regarding female sexual *impurity* (or *dishonesty*). If a “virgin is an elite female among females: reclusive, untouched, exclusive” (Ibid: 56), then the *whore* must naturally be her opposite: a highly accessible and symbolically polluted woman. A “woman of the people” in the worst sense imaginable: literally a “public woman,” available to everyone and thus no one's and, consequently, a woman of no value on the hypergamic matrimonial market. The association of a given people's women with prostitution can thus become a marker of said people's abject status in forums of intersocietal exchange.

It thus seems that while postmodern Brazil no longer has an interest in vouchsafing its female citizen's virginity,²⁵ Brazilians may indeed feel a need to sanitize “their” women's reputation in the global imagescape, for female sexual accessibility is still symbolically connected to notions of group status. Given the devalued symbolic “coinage” of virginity in these postmodern imagery flows, the

²⁵ And the Brazilian society's earlier interest in doing precisely this should not be minimized. As Sueann Caulfield relates, Brazilian Dr. Afrânio Peixoto personally investigated more than 2700 women's hymens during his work for the Rio de Janeiro Legal Medicine institute from 1907 to 1915, precisely in order to determine their virginity or lack thereof in conjunction with ongoing legal cases regarding seduction and deflowerment (Caulfield 2000: 51–52). According to this author, Brazilian “hymen mania” was internationally notorious in the early twentieth century.

struggle over prostitution thus becomes centralized as the key battlefield for dramatizing a given female group's "honor." The cultivation of "respect for Brazil" becomes intertwined with the struggle against the popular global perception that Brazilian women are prostitutes or, at the very least, highly sexually active.

A further observation of Ortner's is also of interest here. A social group's preoccupation with feminine purity does not generally represent its current status, but rather its goals in terms of social ascension:

I would argue that women are *not*, contrary to native ideology, representing and maintaining a group's *actual* status, but are oriented upwards and represent the ideal higher status of the group. One of the problems with the purity literature, I think, has been a failure to get beneath native ideology; the natives justify female purity in terms of maintaining the group's actual status, as a holding action for that status in the system, when in fact it is oriented toward an ideal and generally unattainable status. This unattainability may in turn account for some of the sadism and anger toward women expressed in these purity patterns, for the women are representing the over-classes themselves (Ibid: 57).

We can thus formulate a hypothesis regarding policymakers' and anti-trafficking agents' repeated mobilization of the Myth of Maria in the context of their claims that the fight against trafficking is synonymous with "increasing respect for Brazil and Brazilians" in the international arena. In the struggle for status among nations in a rapidly changing global landscape, one of the State's attributes continues to be a concern for its female citizens' sexual purity when these women travel beyond the nation's borders. This is particularly true in the case of nations like Brazil which seek to improve their international presence and status. To put it simply, a "serious" nation simply cannot be seen as exporting whores all over the globe.

It should thus come as no surprise, then, that in spite of the human rights rhetoric surrounding Brazilian anti-trafficking policy, most of the country's activities to date have revolved around plans to "protect our women" which can be boiled down to attempting to scare certain classes and categories of women from migrating overseas. It should also come as no surprise that, far from empowering the women tagged as "vulnerable," these activities seek to reify victimhood and often slide over into treating the designated victims themselves as criminals. The sadism and anger often shown toward "victims" during recent anti-trafficking interventions becomes more understandable when we realize that the focus of these operations is not the protection of individual human rights, but the vouchsafing of national honor in a global environment where Brazil sees itself as poised to finally realize its dream as "the country of the future."

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