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OUR LADY OF HELP:
SEX, TOURISM AND TRANSNATIONAL
MOVEMENTS IN COPACABANA**Thaddeus Blanchette and Ana Paula da Silva¹**

Abstract: Analysis of sexual tourism has generally concentrated on the subjugation of women as devalued objects of exchange shuffling between the so-called “developing” and “developed” worlds. Basing our analysis on ethnographic fieldwork among tourists and prostitutes in the Copacabana neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro, we seek to demonstrate how women's ability to create and manipulate symbols enables the international movement of both Brazilian women and foreign men. This article recovers the agency of Brazilian women involved in tourism-related sex work, situating them as neither victims nor victimizers, but as active participants in the creation and management of both affective and commercial sexual relationships.

Discourses² Regarding Sexual Tourism

In discourses produced by the Brazilian government, one commonly sees *sexual tourist*³ used as if it were synonymous with *pedophile* or linked to the export of Brazilians for forced sexual labor overseas⁴. This hegemonic definition of the phenomenon is routinely used by political agents in Brazil to justify new laws and social interventions⁵. *Sexual tourism*, however, is not defined by Brazilian law. In legal terms, a *sexual tourist* is any foreigner involved in sex crimes: to wit, production of pornography, seduction and corruption of minors, trafficking of women⁶, or “violent attacks upon propriety”.⁷ It's important to point out in this context that contracting an adult, self-employed prostitute for the provision of sexual services is not a crime in Brazil and thus should not be considered sexual tourism in this sense.

When we turn to the realm of public opinion, however, we find a wider understanding of the phenomenon. In this view of sexual

tourism, the term describes the behavior of foreign tourists who seek out native sexual partners and it is applied whether or not these couplings are commercial or affective in nature. In the public, commonsensical view of sexual tourism, legality is less important than an underlying moral code which stipulates that foreigners should not engage in promiscuous sexual contact with Brazilians, especially when this involves an exchange of money for sex.

A final vision of *sexual tourism* has been offered up by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and is making itself felt in Brazilian policy-making circles. According to the WTO, *sexual tourism* is organized travel using the structures of the tourism industry for the principal purpose of facilitating sexual conduct between tourists and natives (Viera de Carvalho, 2005). Note that this definition of the phenomenon ignores the legal status of such activities, concentrating instead upon the practices and objectives of the tourists. The WTO's definition also presumes that there is a clear-cut division between *normal tourists* (who supposedly travel without thinking of sex) and *sexual tourists*. As we shall see, such a division is problematic in Rio de Janeiro.

The discontinuities between these definitions of sexual tourism are obvious, though one factor unites them all: a belief that the problem is centered upon the sexual behavior of *gringos*⁸. The term *sexual tourist* is perhaps best understood as an accusation which is deployable against any foreigner in Brazil. The logical point to begin a discussion of sexual tourism, then, is to ask who is almost always accused of it.

Sex in the City

We initially encountered the term *sexual tourist* while researching the anglophonic immigrant population of Rio de Janeiro (Blanchette, 2002). We discovered that there was place in the city which our informants (long-term gringo residents of Rio) claimed

to avoid: Help Discothèque⁹ in Copacabana, widely labeled “the most gringo nightspot in town”. Universally, gringo residents of Rio evidenced disgust of the disco, which they described as overrun by sexual tourists. As one informant put it, “I’m not like those pathetic guys who should be banned from entering Brazil. They make me sick and ashamed and because of them, I don’t go to Copacabana. After all, I don’t need to, right?” It was this last affirmation that intrigued us. What did it mean to “not have to go” to Copacabana? Our informants distanced themselves from sexual tourism, avoiding Copacabana and especially the area around Help. However, the majority of these self-labeled *gringos bons*¹⁰ see Rio de Janeiro – and sexual relationships in the city – through a lens shaped by the same predispositions enunciated by the men they label sexual tourists.

Gringos in general consider Rio to be representative of one extreme of a bipolar division of the world into dominant and subordinate socio-political realities. In other words, they believe that there are “developed”, “first world” or “western” nations which can be used as a unit of reference and nations which do not meet these standards. Rio, in this sense, is believed by gringos to be “underdeveloped”, “third world” and “non-western”. In the field of sexual relations between gringos and natives, these symbolic understandings of the city find expression in idealizations which are understood to be applicable to *Brazilians* in general, including the belief that Brazilian women are hyper-sexual. Our sexual tourist informants frequently made comments to this effect, such as “Brazilian women aren’t afraid of sex” and “Sex for Brazilianas [sic] is like eating”. Alternatively, such men would tell stories that provided “evidence” for this belief. As one respondent noted, “Brazil has a very liberal sexual culture. Have you ever been on a crowded bus in Rio? Often, Brazilians will rub up against one of the girls on the bus and the two will end up in one of those motels.”

These opinions are not different from those presented by the long-term gringo residents of the city who claim to be opposed to sexual tourism. The *gringos bons* also describe Brazilian sexuality as liberal and abundant, situating it in direct contrast to the sexual mores which they feel to be common in *the West*, where, as one respondent noted, “Women are ashamed of sex. Not Brazilian women. I think that the Brazilian mentality is like this: ‘We have these bodies and we should take advantage of them.’” This is compounded by the widespread belief among gringos that gender relations in Rio are typical of the past of their nations of origin. As one gringo resident puts it, “I like Rio because the people here are like they were back home in my grandparents’ days. Here, people think of family and friends first. Money’s far down their list. This is one of the reasons I ended up marrying a Brazilian: they know the value of family.”

For men like this one, Brazilian women are faced with an inherent dilemma due to the economic difficulties faced by many residents of their city. As one self-described sexual tourist noted:

Brazilian women want American men because we can give them more status and a much better life. There are so many hookers in Brazil because, quite frankly, the country is a disaster. Corrupt politicians steal everything, there aren’t any jobs and everyone’s poor.... people are dying of hunger... So most hookers do what they do because it’s do that or die. They are normal women who turn tricks because Brazil is a shitty country.

Both *good* and *bad* gringos share another opinion, one which explains the “need to go” to Copacabana. Though both groups consider Brazilian women to be highly sexual, both also declare that it’s difficult for an itinerant foreigner to engage in sex with a *normal woman*¹¹ unless he speaks Portuguese or has Brazilian friends. In the words of one of our informants, “If you don’t speak

Portuguese or live in the city... the most you're gonna get is some *garota de programa*.¹²”

The possibility of sexual relationships with Brazilian women, understood to be a “different sort” of woman from those in gringos’ countries of origins, is one of the explanations proffered by foreign men to explain their presence in Brazil. However, access to *normal* (non-prostitute) women is understood to be dependent upon insertion in native social networks. This, in turn, is situated as being dependent upon the ability to speak Portuguese and the amount of time spent in the city. Speaking Portuguese and being inserted in native social networks, a gringo will have access to a “normative”, or non-commercially based sexual life. Not speaking Portuguese and not being inserted in said networks means that he’ll have to go to Copacabana and, most likely, to Help.

Help¹³

Help Discotheque is situated in the beach-side neighborhood of Copacabana, a *moral region* typified by the presence of tourists and prostitutes (Gaspar, 1984)¹⁴. It is part of a series of venues which include a sidewalk bar and, at the time our research began (2002), two restaurants. Help is frequented by two main groups of people: itinerant foreigners, generally from Western Europe and North America¹⁵, and Brazilian prostitutes¹⁶. Among the men, the disco is famous as a place where a foreigner can meet a prostitute without being exposed to violence or police corruption. Among the women, Help is valued as a safe, clean place to find well-paying tricks without having to give money to a pimp. For these reasons, the club has maintained its position for close to two decades. No overt sexual activities occur in Help, nor does the house take a cut of the women’s earnings. It is simply a place where prostitutes – or *girls*¹⁷ - meet clients.

The majority of the men at Help are between 20 and 40 years old, though average age increases during the off-season (April-

November). They generally seem to be middle-class in dress, behavior and values. Approximately 10% of the men would be classified as black following U.S. norms and this percentage has increased in recent years. It is difficult to assess which countries most gringos come from, but the main foreign language spoken is English, with Italian and Spanish in second and third place. Advisory notices on the house's doors are in those languages and in German.

Most of the women in Help are Brazilian with varying degrees of brown skin, though there are always large minorities classified as *white* and *black*. Age varies between 18 and 45, with a probable average of around 25. The house normally asks for the IDs of young-looking women and will occasionally card everyone. Floor security also asks for the IDs of women who look as if they might be minors even when these women have already entered the disco. This makes Help exceptional among the city's nightspots, which hardly ever card and we have never seen obvious minors inside the disco. Most of the foreigners who end up at Help come not because they consider themselves sexual tourists, but because sex is almost universally understood among tourists as a necessary component of a successful trip to Rio (Ribeiro, 2001). In the words of one of our informants: "I never went with a whore at home, but here... Hell, I'm in Rio! How can I let an opportunity like this pass me by?" Another informant was even more explicit:

A friend of mine was down here last year and he came back talking about how he'd screwed his way around Rio... He told us all that all you had to do was snap your fingers and the women came running. Said it was like living a porno flick. So I came back down with him and here I am. Except the bastard left one thing out: he didn't tell me all those women were whores...! I ended up going out to Paraty and Cabo Frio for three weeks. Couldn't pull anything there.... Tomorrow I'm back to England so here I am [at Help]! After all, how can I go

back to the office and say I went to Brazil but didn't fuck anyone?

Many such men frequent Help, accidental sexual tourists who attribute their presence in the disco to circumstance and do not consider involvement with prostitution to be a main goal of their voyage. A second type of man one finds at Help is a member of a smaller group. These are the *mongers*,¹⁸ self-identified sexual tourists who seek out adventures (sexual and otherwise) across the globe. Physically, these men are no different from the others found in the disco. Morally, they are even more opposed to violations of Brazilian laws regulating sex, not because they worry more about the social consequences of their acts, but because they are conscious of the fact that violations leave them exposed to harassment and violence¹⁹.

The *mongers'* attitude is well-expressed by another nickname which they apply to themselves: *hobbyist*. In fact, their behavior is similar in many aspects to that of male fans of football, automobiles, or "pen-and-paper" role-playing games like *Dungeons & Dragons* – to pick three hobbies dominated by males. *Mongers* are cautious about whom they discuss their activities with, however, and prestige acquired in *mongering* is generally only recognized by the small and closed society of the *hobby* and not by men in general. Such men normalize their behavior with statements such as, "You always pay for sex if you are a man. When I pay a prostitute, I'm at least dealing with an honest woman." To better understand this situation, however, and to present a third kind of man found at Help, we must take a detour through the women's bathroom.

Backstage at Help

The women's bathroom is important for understanding the dramas at Help.²⁰ Cinema and literature have explored the bathroom as a space for negotiations between women. The manner in which

women typically go to the bathroom – together – and the fact that they spend significant amounts of time there raises male curiosity as to what really happens in this women-only space. The bathroom is imagined as a space in which women can freely speak and plan, away from male eyes and ears. Within this context, one can conceive of the women’s bathroom at Help as a strategic spot from which to observe prostitutes while they are “off-stage”. The bathroom can thus be seen as a dressing room, “a closed space in a theater where actors prepare themselves” (Brandão, 1991, 98). It is a place for rehearsals and the revelation of secrets kept from the audience (foreign male clients).

One important characteristic of the women’s bathroom is that a corps of assistants circulates within it. These are women who are employed by the house to maintain the space, but who earn extra money working as beauticians. To the rear of the room, one employee rents make-up and helps to apply it, choosing tones which combine with a given women’s color and clothes. A second employee utilizes brushes, gels and blow dryers to concoct or repair hairstyles. A third sells clothes and accessories. All three women also sell condoms, hard candy, chewing gum and cigarettes. There is a market for these items within the club because no one can enter Help with a handbag, purse, or backpack, which is one of the houses’ many precautions against drug-dealing or armed violence. Bags are held at the door and women are deprived of most make-up and accessories. The bathroom thus becomes a market for beauty products and services and, as is the case in any beauty salon, the women talk amongst themselves while they are being done up.

Discussion ranges from soap operas to which prices should be charged for sexual services. The women who frequent Help are mostly free agents and the bathroom is an important planning space, where a given evening’s crowd of sex workers will decide what the going rate for various forms of sex should be, given the way the night seems to be shaping up. One topic repeatedly stands

out in bathroom conversations and this is descriptions of relationships with gringo *namorados* [boyfriends]. This almost always leads to a discussion of marriage. In one of her first incursions into the women's room, the female researcher stumbled upon a conversation in which a *garota* [girl] described how she had managed to *conseguiu um gringo* [catch a gringo]²¹ and had gone to Europe to marry him. On a second occasion, the researcher observed a conversation between a *garota* and one of the bathroom employees. The *garota* asked the employee if her stomach was already showing. "No!" replied the attendant, "You don't even look pregnant."

At this point, the researcher approached the *garota*: "Wow! You're pregnant?" "Yes," said the *girl*. "It took me six months to get that American, but I finally caught him. Now I'm waiting for him to come back from the U.S. so that we can go there together." "Does he know it's his child?" asked the researcher. "Will he take responsibility for it?" "Of course!" responded the *girl*. "He's not foolish enough to try to wriggle his way out of this one. I'm taking very good care of my little American here [strokes belly] and I'm headed to the U.S. to marry his father."²² The bathroom employee then broke in with a warning: "You'd better take care of him, because you've had an unbelievable stroke of luck." The *garota* then left the bathroom, smiling radiantly.

These stories demonstrate that marriage for migration is a common strategy among women who frequent Help and it is not understood by them as "playing upon women's vulnerabilities", as hegemonic notions of trafficking of women suppose. The *garotas* of Help are in general aware of the steps and risks that they are taking. Marriage to a client is seen as a viable strategy because of the personal, financial and work opportunities which it may open up. Our questions as to what these women planned to do if the relationship didn't work out met with the following response: "Either I'll come back here, or I'll work in Europe, where girls make more".

In a world where access to international travel is ever more restricted – especially for poor female Brazilians – foreign men thus appear as means of opening up routes to Europe and the U.S. where, in the experience of many of these women or their friends, better economic opportunities exist. In this scenario, whether or not a marriage or relationship “works out” is of secondary importance to the relationship’s ability to open doors for migration. Furthermore, all of our female informants affirm that they work for themselves and not for pimps. According to several women, “you only need a pimp if you want to go overseas.... unless [you] can arrange an invitation from some gringo.” Marriage, or even a simple offer of marriage, eliminates commercial middlemen. Such strategic relationships are cultivated by many of the women on Copacabana precisely because they eliminate the need to pay third parties or engage in illegal immigration.

As the discussions above make clear, the position of the *garotas* cannot be reduced to that of defenseless victims or passive objects, “trafficked” between subordinate and dominant socio-political universes. Comparing the women’s bathroom to a dressing room allows us to call attention to how actions are produced and interpreted in the club. Successful negotiation of the possibilities opened up by the disco can mean international and upwards social mobility for the woman in question. However, it’s also notable that for every story we’ve collected of women who have *consequiram um gringo* through sex work, we’ve collected a similar story of failed migratory projects. We are thus forced to conclude that while many carioca sex workers do indeed transform the relationships forged on Help’s dance floor into foreign travel, relatively few of these journeys result in long-term migration. Furthermore, it is significant that the pregnant woman in Help’s bathroom was waiting for the father of her child to come back from the United States. If he were to never come back, her ability to force him to fulfill his promises and his responsibilities to his child would be extremely limited. To a certain degree, this situation

resembles that described by Denise Brennan among bar sex workers in the Dominican Republic, where even a “successful” negotiation of the possibilities for international migration opened up by sex work do not necessarily result in long-term residency overseas (Brennan, 2004).

It is important to point out in this context, however, that most of our informants are not engaging in sex work in order to migrate, but see migration as an effective supplement for sex work. Few of them see permanent or long-term residency overseas as the only way to reach their goals in life. As one informant, recently returned from failed attempt to marry a client in London put it:

I didn't even get into England because they stopped me at the airport, but I had a great time. They kept me in this really nice place. We had a gym and movies, nice beds... it was practically a hotel. The only problems were that there was no booze and we couldn't leave. I managed to stretch the stay out to five weeks because I asked for asylum. I told them that I lived in a *favela* [informal housing settlement] and that the local drug gang wanted to kill me [laughs]. It was an excellent vacation!

Following her “vacation” in the British immigration lock-up, this informant then moved on to Portugal where she spent most of the Christmas season with another client before returning to Rio for the high-point of the sex work calendar, Carnival. Such stories are at least as common along the Copacabana strip as said tales of failed relationships with foreign boyfriends and lead us to conclude that international mobility is perhaps as much or more desired by Copacabana sex workers than simple emigration.

Love Tourists

We can now present the third type of foreign male who frequents Help, the *love tourist*. Consensus among *mongers* is that the

women frequenting Help, with the exception of the house's employees, are prostitutes. However, a minority opinion insists that many *normal women* go to the disco in search of boyfriends. We first encountered this view in an internet discussion where an Englishman (who classified himself as a *love tourist*) claimed to have met his fiancé at Help, describing her as a virgin. This statement caused reactions ranging from skepticism to hilarity among the majority of the participants in the discussion, one of whom quipped that the Englishman must have met the avatar of Our Lady of Copacabana, this being the only possible way a virgin could have been found at Help.

We originally qualified this case as a joke, but further research showed that the disco was indeed a matrimonial market and interactions with the man in question convinced us of his sincerity. Several other informants, in fact, related stories that were similar to that of "Our Lady of Help" and two of our female informants even offered herbal recipes to simulate virginity. Finally, we interviewed a *girl* whose reactions to us as a "typical Copacabana couple" shed light on the question. Kika is a 35 year-old Brazilian prostitute of mixed Japanese and Native American ancestry who claims to have gone to Germany "in order to marry the love of my life". Unfortunately, the relationship did not work out and she returned to Brazil. When we asked if many *girls* ended up married to gringos, Kika responded "No, these little whores lie... It's possible, but very difficult. It has to be, like... well... like you guys [pointing to the researchers]". "Like us...?" we asked. "It has to be love at first sight, just like you guys."

Kika then turned towards the female researcher: "I mean, when you saw him, it was love at first sight, right? Didn't you look at him and know that he was the man for whom you'd waited?" The researcher responded with an ambiguous, "Well..." "Of course it was", Kika affirmed, cutting the researcher off. "It has to be like you guys. The girl can't make eyes at other men. She can't flirt with other guys, even as a joke. That's what these little whores

don't get: if you're going to find the love of your life, then you can't mess around." Analyzing Kika's testimony, we perceived that she had given us the formula through which *girls* transform clients into boyfriends. It is impossible for us to say if the category "love of my life" is employed in a sincere way or not. All of our female informants who touched upon the topic claim that their loves were sincere but that those of "the other girls" were false. Several, however, also admitted to manipulating the appearance of love for personal gain.

It is important to remember that working as a prostitute does not mean one cannot love. Furthermore, even though romantic love is popularly understood to be a reciprocal and spiritual process which the lover cannot control, it is in fact something created by the active intervention of both partners. As Berger and Hansfield affirm, love is a powerful identity-forming relationship which structures our basic understandings of the world. In a loving relationship, two individuals join together in a creative act in which they are socially and psychologically redefined. A third party can accuse the lovers of insincerity, but given that love is lived as a private reality shared by two people, it is impossible, absent public and dramatic acts, for any third party to gage its sincerity (Berger & Hansfield, 1989, pp. 165-166).

It is impossible for us to say whether or not the gringos who are involved in these "two-party realities" believe in them. Many men have told us that they knew that their girlfriends *were* prostitutes before meeting them, but now that these women had *found a nice guy*, they had *given up the life* (quit selling sex). Other men blame Brazil for the fact that their wives *used to* sell sex, with a lack of economic opportunities for women in Brazil cited as the factor which forced otherwise *normal women* to prostitute themselves. However, as Gaspar points out, the modification of life history is a "ready resource" used by Copacabana *garotas* in order to reduce the stigma of prostitution:

[The woman presents herself as] a weak female who, through the force of circumstances, finds herself in this situation and in need of protection or economic aid. The role emphasizes women's inferior [socio-economic] position and a situation of extreme weakness which has obliged the woman in question to turn to prostitution, an activity which she otherwise repudiates... One [of Gaspar's informants], Luísa, is quite explicit about how this procedure works. According to this woman, the preferred mode of interaction with the client, especially when it comes time to ask for payment, involves "telling him a really sad story..." (Gaspar, 1984, pp. 93-94)

We are not suggesting here that prostitutes necessarily lie when they tell clients about their lives. What we are trying to show is how women's life stories become dramatic resources used as fundamental elements in interactions with clients. This explains the behavior which we have observed in the field. Brazil's economic situation becomes a dramatic resource which the *girls* use in order to formulate the "really sad stories" they tell to foreign clients. It is not surprising then that many of our male informants who are aware of their girlfriends' participation in the sex industry understand this in the light of the common gringo belief in Brazil as a *loser nation*, in which things are so bad that even *family girls* must prostitute themselves in order to survive. In this view of the world, the *love tourist* sees himself as a "white knight" swooping down to save a maiden in distress, perceiving a princess where everyone else can only see a prostitute.²³

On the other hand, we cannot also assume that gringo declarations of love are sincere. As Julia O'Connell Davidson points out – and our research confirms – an increasingly popular mode of sexual tourism involves paying for the construction of the illusion of love (O'Connell Davidson, 1998). This is known as a *girlfriend experience*²⁴ by the *mongers* and it often results in contracting for sexual services for a more extended period of time. Such services

may even involve travel overseas. The goal of the *girlfriend experience* is the construction of a normative sexual/affective experience in which a couple-like relationship is formed, only to be broken after a stipulated amount of time has passed.²⁵ Such relationships are often impossible to distinguish from so-called “normal” relationships and this is especially the case in a context in which one partner of a bi-national couple has significantly more economic and social capital than the other. All our informants, however, are in agreement on this point: “a girlfriend can make more money than a whore”. This affirmation dismantles the notion which resides at the base of all of the definitions of *sexual tourism* which we presented above: that in the nexus formed by sex and tourism in Rio de Janeiro, there is somehow a definite line between behaviors which can be described as *commercial sex* and those which make up *normal* and *reciprocal* relationships.

Conclusion

Our research calls into question the hegemonic discourse regarding sexual tourism and its linkages to female migration. State agents and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Brazil seem to presume that female prostitutes, especially those who migrate overseas following contacts with gringo tourists, are being “fooled”, “exploited”, or “trafficked”. Put simply, this discourse presumes that naïve girls are being “taken advantage of” by savvy foreigners who use superior wealth and mobility to transform Brazilian women into sex slaves. This discourse simplifies human stories, presenting these only at the moment in which a crime supposedly occurs (i.e. when a prostitute is aided in traveling overseas, something which is against the law in Brazil) and situating agents in distinct and complementary roles as *victims* and *victimizers* following a moralistic, nativist and ultimately sexist logic. It understands the category *sexual tourist* as homogeneous and self-explanatory and, in so doing, enshrines an accusation as a category of sociological analysis and public policy formation. However, as we’ve demonstrated above, there are many kinds of

sexually active foreigners in Rio de Janeiro. The term *sexual tourist* does not adequately describe these men, even in those cases where they seek out commercial sexual relations with native women, because the complex of values which orientate these men's actions is functionally indistinguishable from that which orientates supposedly *normal tourists* and *good gringos*.

As we have seen above, the *girls* who frequent Help are active agents in the maintenance of a globalized view of Brazil as a fertile field for the realization of sexual fantasy. Far from being simple *victims*, these women maintain a notable degree of control over their actions and representations, constructing trajectories of socioeconomic ascension through their interactions with foreigners. These women's acts are not simply attributable to "colonialist brainwashing" or "low self-esteem"²⁶ as they frequently result in socio-economic changes which the women themselves understand as positive. They are thus better viewed as rational, if risky, strategies and not as ideological manifestations of false consciousness.

As our informants report, and as the work of researchers such as Renata Melo Rosa (1999), confirm, love generates international movements of Brazilian women. Prostitutes also love and travel internationally in function of their relationships, but Article 231 of the Brazilian Penal Code defines the crime of *trafficking in women* as aiding the movement of any prostitute who crosses an international border (Leal & Leal, 2002, 176). This definition decisively ignores the *habitus*²⁷ of prostitution in places such as Copacabana, where *love* and commercialized sex are often two faces of the same coin. *Love* may last eternally or only for one night. It may be genuine or insincere. Whatever the case may be, there is no objective way to distinguish one sort of love from another and, given this, it seems unlikely that current Brazilian legislation against *trafficking of women* will be able to actually produce justice as long as it continues to define the international

movement of prostitutes as a necessary and sufficient component of the crime.

In his classic work, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Lévi-Strauss observes that while many men consider women to be status symbols, this does not negate women's existence as symbol creators and manipulators in their own right. The play of passions which we have observed at Help Discotheque is founded upon structural inequalities – between the sexes, between Brazil and the central nations of the West, between a Brazilian femininity conceived in terms of sexy *mulattas*²⁸ and a foreign masculinity conceived of as rich and white. However, none of these inequalities, alone or together, can completely explain the behaviors which we have observed without taking into consideration the subjectivities involved and the totality of options which the actors and actresses on the Help dance floor attempt to manipulate. In this play, prostitutes transform themselves into girlfriends or wives; sexual tourists become husbands; commercial sexual relationships turn into reciprocal love. The shifting, complex and bilateral nature of the diverse relationships which we have observed at Help shows the need to abandon the category of *sexual tourist* as a sociological construct which can be comprehended through the use of bi-polar categorizations which split tourists into “good gringos” and “bad”.

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¹ Ana Paula da Silva and Thaddeus Blanchette are professors of anthropology in Brazil (he at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and she at the University of São Paulo). They have been active supporters of and researchers for sex workers rights organizations in Rio de Janeiro since 2003.

² "Discourses" is used here in the Foucauldian sense. According to Foucault analyst Sara Mills, A discourse is a regulated set of statements which combine with others in predictable ways and which structure the way we perceive reality. Through the use of power, discourse actually becomes constitutive of reality (Mills, 2003: chapter 3; Foucault, 1972). In terms of sexual tourism, the discourses produced by the Brazilian state have situated *sexual tourism* as synonymous with *abuse of children* and *trafficking of women*, though there is little empirical proof to back this association up and, as we shall see, much which questions it.

³ Throughout this text, emic terminology used by our informants is indicated in *italics*. In the English-speaking world, people who go to foreign lands to engage in commercial are known as "sex tourists" whereas in the Portuguese-speaking world they are "sexual tourists". In the present article, we have retained the Portuguese term because we feel it better expresses the ambiguous nature of much sex during tourism. Very few people who are labeled as "sex/sexual tourists" by the media travel solely and specifically for sex. Rather, sex is an ongoing option for them, something which they actively seek out and often in

both commercial and non-commercial variants. These men and women are thus better conceptualized as “tourists who are sexual” rather than tourists whose principal or overriding goal is to have sexual encounters with the native population.

⁴ During a series of public events in Rio de Janeiro and Brasília (2004-2007), Federal Police repeatedly described sexual tourism, the sexual abuse of minors and trafficking of women as effectively interchangeable phenomena.

⁵ Leal and Leal (2002) is an example of an official study which presumes, without demonstrating, that sexual tourism is a privileged vector for human trafficking.

⁶ It is not the purpose of this article to analyze why and how trafficking of women and sexual tourism became important themes for Brazilian politicians and the media over the past few years. Suffice it to say that this is partially due to the global growth of the rescue industry (as documented by Augustin, 2007), but it is also possibly due to recent attempts by the Brazilian federal government to “clean up” the nation’s image and increase its international status. We have discussed this question at length in a recently published article (Blanchette, 2010) and plan to more thoroughly investigate in upcoming work.

⁷ *Atentado violento contra o pudor* any sexual act practiced under the threat of violence. See <http://www.cedeca.org.br/releases.php?cod=21>, for a typical example of how Brazilian NGOs presume that sexual tourism is necessarily linked to criminal activities of this sort. CEDECA, the NGO in question, is widely recognized as a reference in the field of protection of children’s rights.

⁸ “Gringo” here is understood as a term analogous to Simmel’s *fremde* (1950). It signifies “that which is not of us but is nonetheless among us” and should not be understood as pejorative. For further discussion of the term, as well as an in-depth discussion of the Anglophone presence in Rio de Janeiro, see Blanchette 2002. (Copies of the dissertation can be had from us, for free, via macunaima30@yahoo.com.br).

⁹ Anthropological studies try to maintain anonymity. However, Help is so *sui generis* that it would be impossible for us to describe it anonymously. Other informants and establishments mentioned throughout this text are given pseudonyms.

¹⁰ “Good gringos”, the term most often used by our foreign resident anglophone informants to distinguish themselves from “bad gringo” stereotypes such as *sexual tourist* and *imperialist*.

¹¹ An emic term used by informants to indicate a woman who does not engage in commercialized sex.

¹² A Portuguese term for “prostitute”.

¹³ In order to better contextualize our fieldwork, readers should know that the authors are something of an ideal couple for engaging in participant/observation in the universe of sexual tourism in Copacabana. Ana Paula is black, native

carioca and younger looking while Thaddeus is a middle-aged gringo with a physiognomy typically understood to be “German” or “American” by *Cariocas* [the Portuguese adjective used to denote that which is from Rio de Janeiro]. The researchers are also a couple in the normative sense of the word, being married to each other. Though we never presented ourselves as *garota de programa* and *turista*, that was the constant perception of everyone around us in the field. We thus gained access to a wide variety of situations where we could observe behaviors without disturbing the emic order. When asked, however, we always introduced ourselves as anthropologists.

¹⁴ Park and Burgess (1925, pp. 44-45) define “moral region” as a region of the city frequented by people dominated by a particular taste, passion or interest and in which a divergent moral code prevails.

¹⁵ Recent years have seen a significant increase in Africans and Eastern Europeans. See Woods and Hunter, 2008, for more on African-American sexual tourists in Brazil.

¹⁶ These come from all over Brazil, though the majority seems to be from the city’s working-class suburbs.

¹⁷ *Menina* or *garota*, here translated as *girl*, are terms used by the female sex workers in Help to refer to themselves, regardless of age.

¹⁸ The word’s root can be found in *whoremonger*.

¹⁹ Veteran mongers are, in general, quite aware of the fact that many Brazilians understand them to be pedophiles or other sorts of sexual criminals and are thus usually very concerned to be perceived as following the country’s laws regarding sex.

²⁰ The fact that one of the researchers is a woman gave us access to this restricted space. It should be emphasized that said researcher never presented herself as a prostitute to the other women in the bathroom: she simply showed up to use it during the course of fieldwork. Given the fact that the club’s female clientele is almost exclusively made up of Brazilian prostitutes and given the fact that the researcher in question was similar in biotype (if not in language, clothing, or make-up) to most of the women in Help, there was no doubt in her mind that she was perceived in the bathroom as one more prostitute.

²¹ An expression utilized by *garotas* to indicate that they’ve constructed a more-than-casual relationship with a foreigner.

²² Situations like this are also related by mongers who are quite wary of girls offering unprotected sex.

²³ The *monger* nickname for this kind of gringo – “Captain Save-a-Ho” speaks volumes about how such behavior is generally perceived by the self-ascribed sexual tourists on Copa.

²⁴ For an excellent discussion of this term and its associated cultural practices, see Bernstein, 2007: 125-130.

²⁵ It should be noted that this amount of time might simply be the two hours stipulated for a single sex act.

²⁶ Both terms frequently used by anti-prostitution activists to “explain” why some Brazilian women prostitute themselves and migrate overseas. An example of the “low self-esteem” and “colonization” thesis can be found in Giacomi, 1995.

²⁷ We use this term in the sense defined by Pierre Bourdieu as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1998: 72)

²⁸ For an excellent overview of ideologies of miscegenation and how they impact upon sexuality in Brazil, see Moutinho, 2004.