

# Operation Princess in Rio de Janeiro: Policing 'Sex Trafficking', Strengthening Worker Citizenship, and the Urban Geopolitics of Security in Brazil

PAUL AMAR\*

*Law & Society Program, University of California,  
Santa Barbara, CA, USA*

This article develops new insights into the gendered insecurities of the neoliberal state in Latin America by exploring the militarization of public security in Rio de Janeiro during 2003–08 around campaigns to stop the 'trafficking' of sex workers. Findings illuminate the intersection of three neoliberal governance logics: (1) a moralistic humanitarian-rescue agenda promoted by evangelical populists and police groups; (2) a juridical 'law and rights' logic promoted by justice-sector actors and human-rights NGOs; (3) a worker-empowerment logic articulated by the governing Workers' Party (PT) in alliance with social-justice movements, police reformers, and prostitutes' rights groups. Gender and race analyses map the antagonisms between these three logics of neoliberal governance, and how their incommensurabilities generate crisis in the arena of security policy. By exploring Brazil's fraught efforts to attain the status of 'human security superpower' through these interventions, the article challenges the view that the reordering of security politics in the global south is inevitably linked to desecularization, disempowerment, and militarization.

**Keywords** security • gender • human trafficking • race • Brazil

**T**HIS STUDY ANALYZES THE POLITICS behind the rise and fall of Brazilian government campaigns to stop human trafficking in sex workers that figured prominently in efforts by the administration of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (hereafter 'Lula') to promote the nation as a 'human security superpower' on the world stage. In doing this, I explore gendered insecurities in the globally visible and symbolically saturated landscape of urban Rio de Janeiro, the country's security laboratory and 'shop window' to the world. From this exploration, I deduce the contours of conflicting political logics that explain the constant crisis of Brazil's security sector and



highlight its unique, counter-hegemonic models of sexual-rights mobilization. This study opens up new possibilities for developing police and security policies grounded in gender, sexual, and racial justice, and for a politics of rights that goes beyond the limits imposed by neoliberalism, moralization, and securitization.

Contemporary security politics in Brazil provides an incredibly compelling and frustratingly convoluted object of study as the nation makes a dramatic attempt to leap from being one of the planet's most unjust, unequal societies to claim the status of a global role-model of social justice, humanity, and safety. As described in the reports of the United Nations and by its own government,<sup>1</sup> Brazil remains one of the most violent and economically unequal countries on the planet. Yet, it also stands out as the originator of some of the world's most progressive and admired policy agendas – including its bold commitments to provide universal AIDS care, support affirmative action and racial justice, achieve energy self-sufficiency, and promote human rights, police reform, and disarmament in the public security sector.

On the one hand, in the first part of the 20th century, this majority-Afro-descendant nation explicitly promoted a 'whitening' of its society and hypocritical vice campaigns against 'white slavery'. In the period of military dictatorship, 1964–85, the government carried out brutally repressive racist, misogynist, and homophobic morality campaigns. And, today, the country is still dominated by media and public discourses that feed middle-class fears and reproduce racial stereotypes. Yet, on the other hand, 20th-century Brazil's modern nation-building project generated provocative projects of 'racial democracy', 'erotic democracy', and 'Tropicalist exceptionalism' that rejected puritanism and segregationism in order to promote a uniquely sexualized urban public sphere as a field of racial reconciliation and cross-class conviviality, and as a site for integration of the local and global. Often, these latter projects have been appropriated by hegemonic groups for the most reactionary ends, in order to deny the realities of racial and sexual violence and inequality; yet, at times these political discourses have also provided resources for publics who want to revalue political issues of sexuality, eroticism, and mixed-racialism, and to resist the contraction of the public sphere around the politics of morality and identity. But, which of these contrasting political repertoires and clashing historical legacies will come to define Brazil's future?

Does Brazil promote its ascendance on the world stage as a promoter of gendered 'human security' by championing free and universal AIDS care, rights for sex workers, and an affirmative, inclusive agenda for racial and sexual 'minorities'? Or, does Brazil define its 'human security' ambitions according to the terms of moral policing and a particularly paternalistic

<sup>1</sup> See DIEESE (2008); Alston (2008).

program of 'humanitarian rescue' by focusing on excluding sex workers from AIDS-alleviation programs, repressing all aspects of the sex trade, and enhancing the power of police and churches to define and limit the terms of sexual and gender publics? Or, does Brazil find some accommodation that reconciles aspects of these two alternatives by focusing on interventions that improve the country's moral reputation on the world stage and reduce real, gendered violence and sexual exploitation? The latter could take place without allowing the agendas of missionaries and puritans to achieve hegemony in national politics in ways that recriminalize and disenfranchise sexual minority and sex-worker groups. Brazil's history of violence, militarization, repressive securitization, and political polarization during the last 30 years informs the high stakes of these interventions and leaves open the ultimate outcome of these struggles.

## Brazil's Security Dilemmas

Since the military regime transitioned to democracy in the late 1980s, militarization of the public security sector in Brazil has tended to increase, not decrease (Huggins, 2000; Wacquant, 2008). During the military dictatorship that governed Brazil from 1964 to 1985, the junta executed about 6,000 individuals over two decades. However, in the first two decades of democratization (1985–2005), police in Brazil have killed about 1,500 people in Rio de Janeiro and about 40,000 nationwide *each year*, according to former national security secretary Luiz Eduardo Soares.<sup>2</sup> The democratic Brazilian state has killed more people in its recent 'urban security operations' than any war in Latin America since the 19th century (except perhaps Colombia's conflicts) (Mir, 2004).

This grim record has been masked by the racialization and sexualization of security politics since the 1980s, by the mapping of race/sex fears onto urban spaces, and by the moralistic and bellicose character of 'crime wars' on trafficking. Social movements had hoped that the election of leftist-nationalist President Lula (term: January 2003 to January 2011) would provide space to critique and expose the causes of security-sector violence and the politics of fear. At first, Lula seemed to adopt the agenda of the progressive social movements, targeting police corruption and violence as primary causes of insecurity and as priorities of security-sector reform.<sup>3</sup> But, countering this trend, new evangelical parties and right-wing morality campaigns found common cause with entrepreneurial elements of the *Polícia Militar* (which I will trans-

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Luiz Eduardo Soares, University of California Humanities Research Institute, 5 February 2008.

<sup>3</sup> See *Folha de São Paulo* (Rio de Janeiro) (2003).

late as the 'Militarized Police'),<sup>4</sup> who were looking for a new mission that could justify their repressive, extralegal tactics, and that would block efforts to deeply reform or even wholly supplant them as the core public security agency.

This 'morality coalition' demanded broad leeway for the police in their campaigns against traffickers and organized crime. This invigorated moral mandate for the Militarized Police came just as racketeering among police, particularly in Rio de Janeiro, had reached stunning new levels. In fact, between 2003 and 2007, several heavily populated working-class areas of the city were invaded and taken over by vigilante *milícias* (militias) calling themselves *Autodefesas Comunitárias* (Community Self-Defenders), made up of rogue active and retired police officers in league with evangelical church operations, sometimes routing trafficking cartels, sometimes joining forces with the traffickers to establish absolute, extortive control over the areas.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, in 2003, Rio de Janeiro declared that it would open another front in the crime wars. Buoyed by an international humanitarian campaign against sex trafficking and girl slavery, Rio launched new police units that mimicked the old 'Vice Police' stations that had dominated social control in Brazil through the 1940s but had been officially banned with the end of the military dictatorship.<sup>6</sup> These new militarized vice squads unleashed a series of armed sting operations, led by the Militarized Police and coordinated by international evangelical and UN authority. These missions, including 'Operation Princess', sought to apprehend and rescue young people forced into prostitution and to remake Brazil's national image into that of a soldier of salvation, rescuing children and banishing the perversion of 'new slavery' from the global south. This campaign was the flag-bearer of a broader push to remake the country into a model of human security on the world stage. However, as I will show below, the anti-slavery campaign gradually unraveled as it became apparent that this rescue mission was actually undermining the rule of law and rights, enhancing violence and exploitation in the sex sector, and undermining the security and rights of gendered and sexualized citizen groups. As we shall see, Operation Princess and similar interventions promoted the intensification of police corruption and protection rackets, and actually consolidated links to global traffickers and mercenaries.

<sup>4</sup> To translate this term as 'Military Police' would seem more linguistically accurate, but that would incorrectly imply that these forces served to preserve order within the Brazilian military, which is not the case. During the dictatorship, Brazil's military allowed the *Polícia Militar* to do a lot of its dirty work, but today's military considers the *Polícia Militar* a perverse rival and a threat to law and order.

<sup>5</sup> See Boueri & Lemle (2006); Lemle (2007).

<sup>6</sup> Vice Police Stations ('Delegacias de Jogos e Costumes') had been closed by President José Sarney in September 1989, as noted by Don Kulick (1998: 242).

## Three Rival Logics of Governance

Before exploring the details behind the rise and fall of Operation Princess and the other related rescue missions, it will be useful to introduce in some detail what I see to be the three contradictory logics of governance operating within the Brazilian state and public sphere.

'Logic' is not used here in the sense of a structural overdetermination of late capitalism. Nor is the term 'logic' here understood in the rationalist sense, as the strategic expression of an interest group. Instead, I am using the term more dynamically, informed by Foucault's ([1979] 1990) notion of discursive power that can circulate and reconfigure spaces of the state, and by Ernesto Laclau's (1997) analysis of logics that enable the coherence of hegemonic blocs but that can be subversively undermined and rearticulated by counter-hegemonic alliances. I can also term these blocs 'prerogatives' or 'imperatives', informed by Wendy Brown's (1995) thoroughly gendered conception of state governance that captures and interrogates the state's power to rescue and police.

As theorized by Glynos & Howarth (2007: 164), 'if naturalists offer the prospect of a causal explanation by *subsuming* the phenomena under *universal laws* or *general mechanisms*, and if hermeneuticists explain via the use of *particular contextualized interpretations*, our approach conceives of explanation in terms of a *critical and articulated assemblage of logics*.' These logics, they argue, 'focus our attention on the rules or grammar that enable us to characterize and even criticize a phenomenon, but they also allow us to disclose the structures and conditions that make these rules possible ... [and focus] attention on the way their "ignoble origins" are generally forgotten or covered over as the practices and their self-understanding are then lived out' (Glynos & Howarth, 2007: 159).

By analytically linking together and denaturalizing a plurality of logics, explanation aims to serve transformative semiotic and political ends, because the identity and significance of the elements studied are 'modified as a result of the articulatory practice' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 105).

### *Humanitarian Moralism*

Important critical analyses of urban 'crime wars' of the late 20th century, including those of Brazil and the USA, have explored the escalation of repressive law enforcement and punitive incarceration of urban populations in relation to the 'criminalization of poverty' and the rise of racist punitive politics in the era of deindustrialization and structural adjustment (Gilmore, 2007; Simon, 2007; Husain, 2007). These studies drew analytical attention away from the criminality of individuals and toward questions of structural

violence and political-economic power relations. Complementing this turn, critical security studies can situate today's 'crime wars' in the context of globalizing cities and realigning international orders, taking these moralized police campaigns seriously as wars – that is, as armed interventions driven by geopolitical prerogatives, often drawing upon and then backing up the new legitimizing framework of 'militarized humanitarianism'.

New articulations of humanitarianism have been appropriated in the era of crime wars, with such appropriation turning these doctrines towards repressive ends and annexing them to the revival of 19th-century paternalisms and missionary activities. Moralization and police militarization are, of course, not inherently linked phenomena, but they have become contingently bonded in Brazil as the police have found it useful to deploy media-friendly 'quality of life' mobilizations and public-morality 'blitzes', rather than to embark on internal reform or face down militias and corruption within their own ranks. Also encouraging the mutual articulation of moralism and militarization in Brazil are neoliberal political culture's emphases on deregulation, individual moral self-discipline, and entrepreneurialism, along with the legacies of the military dictatorship's explicit promotion of evangelical parties and right-wing armed vigilante groups in order to supplant the leftist community organizations and social movements that they crushed.

In the period between 1985 and the present, some police missions increasingly adopted the humanitarian language that critics refer to as the 'rescue industry' (Agustin, 2007: 115; Steiner, 2006: 99), shaped by the expanding investment of private-sector mercenary companies and the influence of evangelical missionary groups. The link between moralization and militarization of police practices in the 'drug war' is well studied. But, there has been far less analysis of the connection between humanitarian moralism and the new 'abolitionist' politics that links the policing of 'human trafficking' with a new commitment to eradicating prostitution, which it identifies with a 'new slavery'. Elizabeth Bernstein (2007: 144) is a pioneer in this area:

For modern-day [evangelical] abolitionists, the dichotomy between slavery and freedom poses a way of addressing the ravages of neoliberalism that effectively locates all social harm *outside* of the institutions of corporate capitalism and the state apparatus. In this way, the masculinist institutions of big business, the state, and the police are reconfigured as allies and saviors, rather than as enemies [of sex workers and unskilled migrant women] and the responsibility for slavery is shifted from structural factors and dominant institutions onto individual, deviant men ... as in the White Slave trade of centuries past.... What is perhaps most ironic and surprising about the sexual politics of the 'new abolitionism' is that it has emerged not only from the simultaneous rightward migration of feminists and other secular liberals toward the politics of incarceration but also from a *leftward* sweep of some evangelical Christians away from the isolationist issues of abortion and gay marriage and toward a 'new internationalist' social justice-oriented theology.

In Brazil, the intermingling of evangelical morality politics with the police protection of women's rights has become 'confusing', as described by Marina Pereira Pires de Oliveira, the renowned feminist who led the Justice Ministry's national campaign between 2003 and 2007 to draft and pass new articles of the criminal code prohibiting human trafficking and increasing awareness of the problem among police, judges, and civil society. She complained that the state has (mis)used the new codes to push an old-fashioned 'normative' campaign that reinforced the perception that adult women in prostitution represented a 'moral and ethical perversion' (de Oliveira, 2008: 131). Also, the state has utilized the new anti-trafficking laws to intensify the repressive victimization of women, increasing the extralegal detention of women, raising their sentences for vice crimes, and harassing single women traveling across borders – while virtually no 'real' traffickers have been brought to justice. De Oliveira (2008: 133) suggests that

it continues to be difficult to have a prostitute seen as any other citizen, that she can have her rights violated, but also to show that the central element of traffic is not prostitution. Although prostitutes can be victims of this crime, the [crime itself represents] the violations of rights that can be suffered by a domestic worker, a rural worker or a sex worker. But declarations of this broader type tend not to be well-received by the hegemonic morality of society and do not help to attract allies to our banner. This is one of the traps of this matter.

The moralization and sexualization of the campaign against human trafficking draw from both international and particularly Brazilian narratives of race, gender, and urban agency. Women become defined as an intersection of vulnerabilities and dishonors, naturalized by skin color or social position, rather than as bearers of rights and privileges. For example, in a conference at the headquarters of the Rio de Janeiro State Council for Women's Rights, a government spokesperson asserted that 'Afro-descendent women, living in the margins of Rio, economically excluded' were 'highly vulnerable' to sex traffickers, and thus for them it would be 'difficult to travel internationally with security'. At the same panel, a Federal Police officer lamented the passing of the old days during the dictatorship, when 'we could just take one look at someone' and tell that 'they should not travel' and deny them a passport. At the National Conference to Confront Human Trafficking in October 2008, held in Rio, the Justice Ministry affirmed that 'no one will be able to leave Brazil until they can leave with dignity'. But, does this expression sacrifice the rights of women to geographic and economic mobility in order to save the status, honor, and moral reputation of the state? (Blanchette & da Silva, 2008: 22).

The paradox of this neoconservative version of abolitionist anti-sex-trafficking politics is that it both expresses a commitment to forms of Brazilian nationalism, as well as to humanitarian internationalism, and at the same time links itself to the rise of a new wave of US exceptionalism, evangelical

neoconservatism, and national supremacism. As Michael C. Williams (2007: 221) notes, this neoconservatism is driven by moralistic ideologies that idealistically ignore the shifting material bases of security in the world order and remain hostile to 'rule of law' notions of security.

### *Juridical-Legal Humanitarianism*

During the same period when the Militarized Police in Brazil began intensifying their mission against sex trafficking, the court and constitutional sphere struggled to move the state in a different direction, advocating a strengthening of the rule of law and citizens' rights as the cornerstone of a new human rights-centered order. This legalist movement focused on rooting out the repressiveness and impunity that characterized the military dictatorship of the 1970s and still characterizes the Militarized Police missions of today.

In the late 1980s, Brazil ratified an expansive constitution that offers universal rights and promises access to justice for all. The constitution includes articles aimed specifically at uprooting racism and sexism (Couto & Arantes, 2008). However, this constitution also preserves a dangerous space of exception through a single article that guards the autonomy, and thus impunity, of the Militarized Police, not incorporating them into the civil law-enforcement system or national justice framework. This move was considered necessary in order to preserve national security (Dimenstein & Pinheiro, 1996). Much of the authoritarian and racist cultures and practices of the past have been able to squeeze through this tiny loophole, and often threaten to utterly marginalize the cultural and political order presented by the democratic rule of law. The agents who take most advantage of this loophole and who militate against the culture of juridical legalism include the authoritarian-populist political-party machines that often use the Militarized Police as their private militias; private security firms that depend upon a state of public fear; the media, who routinely portray progressive judges and the 'rights of criminals' as the enemies of public safety; and some (although not all) religious groups, who see adversarial courts and individual rights as forces that challenge family and community solidarities and divinely ordained gender and sexual hierarchies.

An example of how the geography of justice can be shifted out of the realm of the juridical-legal and into the sphere of militarized moral policing is that of closing the criminal courts. Following the establishment of the post-dictatorship constitution of 1988, Brazil set up new criminal courts to guarantee rights for the accused and justice for the victimized. However, in the last few years many of these courts closed for lack of use. Despite the rise in property crime, the media and public hysteria around the surge in crime and violence called the 'War of Rio' (2003–05), and the escalation of organized crime, violent crime and police brutality, several criminal courts were closed



in Rio in order that they might be converted into civil courts. As frustrated judges reported, police were simply not bringing those accused of drug-related or property crimes to court. Police were rendering judgment and punishment (including executions) in the street. While criminal courts closed, civil courts flourished, facing rising demand as middle-class Brazilians became proficient in using the law to sue each other, protect intellectual and real properties, and assess status claims.<sup>7</sup> By 2004, despite judges' pleas and the efforts of human and civil rights groups, the courts were becoming a forum for the privileged middle and upper classes, and police and vigilante militarism had hijacked the space of criminal justice.

Nevertheless, after this low point, the logic of legality began to make a comeback, in part by drawing from the particular power of sexuality and sexual rights in Brazil. For a century, Brazil has been a world pioneer in legalist approaches towards prostitution and sexual identity. Brazil legalized prostitution in the early 20th century as a crucial dimension of its push toward modernity (Caulfield, 1997; Meade, 1997). The state sought to enfranchise and enhance the productivity of women by connecting their public presence in urban space with the realms of law, labor, and the economy. Since the era of the *Estado Novo* of the 1930s, a utopian discourse of 'erotic democracy' has been the twin of Brazil's 'racial democracy' project. Sexual contact between classes, races, and nationalities – not just in mixed marriages but also through more fleeting or commercialized encounters – has been seen to promote national security, harmony, cordiality, and, somehow, equality. Critics have demonstrated how these utopian national ideologies have obscured patterns of race/class and gender violence and white supremacy, and have eroticized patterns of violent segregation and exclusion (Goldstein, 2003: 226–258; Twine, 1998: 31–64).

These uniquely Brazilian discourses of 'erotic democracy' have continued to inform and seduce mobilizations on both the right and left into the 21st century, leading to gendered and racialized frustrations and denial, as well as to complex approaches to questions of public sexuality both in the law and in the public sphere. Similarly, the fact that the AIDS epidemic emerged in the mid-1980s in Brazil at the same time as the final push to end the military regime meant that the struggles of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) social movements to force the state to provide treatment and dignity to AIDS victims became intimately attached to the struggles of the Brazilian people to reclaim their country and their rights (see Green, 2001; Daniel & Parker, 1993; Biehl, 2004). Because of this important symbolic linking of Brazilian democratic modernity to the struggle against AIDS, the Brazilian state extended more free services and rights protections during the time of privatization and entrenchment that followed political liberalization in the

<sup>7</sup> See *O Globo* (2004a).

mid-1980s than had previously existed. State interventions, legal permissions, and rights provisions around questions of sexual commerce, sexual identity, and sexual health became essential parts of Brazil's national identity.

The politics of human rights in Brazil both benefits from and is limited by its linkages to international efforts to dislodge the legacies of military authoritarianism, as well as its association with sexual justice. Human rights have become associated, in the minds of many, with an elite perspective, with the ivory tower or the judge's bench, oblivious to the 'realities of the street'. The legalist logic of human rights politics has sometimes become associated with foreign interference, as UN and Amnesty International reports continue to create headlines and stir indignation, often triggering immediate, rejectionist responses from local and federal police and security officials. And, police in-training still too often roll their eyes when human rights are mentioned, grumbling that human rights organizations are made up of the 'usual suspects' – homosexuals, feminists, and blacks sympathetic with narcotraffickers. However, *human security* discourse, as opposed to human rights talk, has managed to some degree to avoid such stigmatization. McRae (2001: 15) defines 'human security' as taking 'the individual as the nexus of its concern, the life as lived, as the true lens through which we should view the political, economic and social environment'. However, in the context of Brazil, human security has meant bringing together the juridical politics of access to justice and rights enforcement, with modernization of police, participation of national civil society (and particularly working-class community organizations), and a broadening that includes an emphasis on general social and economic rights as well as political and 'minority' rights (Avelar, 2004: 40–44).

In the theater of Rio de Janeiro, this legalistic and idealizing approach to sexuality as a cornerstone of human safety and democratic agency has come into conflict with both international and local efforts to revive the lens of 19th-century missionaryism and articulate this with new 'crime war' policies that designate sex as a high-risk, militarized realm of trafficking and danger.

### *Worker-Citizen Empowerment*

The Brazilian city is home to more than exclusion and violence, and this very same urban context has been one that has repeatedly fostered the mobilization of broad sectors of the population under the banner of urban transformations.... [I]n the weeks and months before the 2000 municipal elections thousands of activists carried out the grassroots effort that brought an unprecedented number of PT [Workers' Party] mayors to power. The party is now known to many Brazilians as the party of good governance and sound municipal policies, and as a viable alternative to the ruling coalitions. But the idea of participatory governance of cities predates the PT, and began with the variety of new urban social movements in the 1970s that brought new versions of urban democracy to Brazilian politics. (Baiocchi, 2003: 7)

Propelled by the success of PT urban progressive governance models, President

Lula's government has reasserted the place of workers' identities and workers' rights, as well as public ownership and participation to correct for the excesses of neoliberalism (Bittar, 1992; Abers, 1996). The state has invested in symbolically highlighting worker agency, promoting public involvement and participatory planning, and further nationalizing and maximizing the productivity of Brazil's resources, including vast new oil discoveries, genetic biodiversity, and biofuel projects.

Participative 'workerism' is not necessarily antagonistic to human rights politics, but it draws on a distinct notion of citizenship and cultivates a unique public sphere. 'Workerism', in Brazilian socialist theory, draws upon the Italian philosophy of *Operaismo*, emphasizing that the agency of mobilized workers and popular-class communities has always been responsible for pushing the evolution of modes of capitalist production, which is misrepresented by liberalism as a 'top down' process of technological innovation and market forces.<sup>8</sup> In order to turn the power of their agency into an advantage (rather than a reason to replace them with machines or disenfranchised/flexibilized labor), workers and the popular classes must master self-organization in councils, expand networks of solidarity, engage in direct-action politics, and commit to involvement in autonomous politics and participatory planning, to allocate property, decisionmaking power, and resources in ways that reconcile efficiency with justice. As in Italy, workerism in Brazil and throughout Latin America has developed and survived in strong association with Catholic liberation theologies and other movements that value faith and community. In Brazil, the center of gravity in workerism, since the 1970s, has moved from the factory floor toward popular-class communities and a broad range of municipal, rural, and 'identity' groupings.

Since the time of Lenin, critiques of workerism have emphasized its blind adherence to popular culture and working-class 'false consciousness', leading to narrow populist gestures, rather than more radical, critical policies advocated by the vanguard elites. And, since the 1970s, liberal-socialist critiques have warned that workerism ignores the rights of minorities and reproduces oppressive faith-based myths about gender and community. Colored by these critiques, 'trabalhadorismo' (workerism in Portuguese) has largely pejorative connotations; in its place, the positive aspects of workerism have been rebranded as 'cidadania', 'solidariedade', and 'participação'.

In today's Brazil, the participatory-empowerment agenda remains critical of 'top down' state power, which it sees as including some dimensions of the human rights framework, which can tend to trap the progressive agent in the position of victim, individualized and isolated as a complainant at the intersection of vulnerabilities, supplicating an aristocratic court, or an interna-

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the journal *Classe Operaria* (1963–66), founded by Antonio Negri; the 'Johnson-Forest Tendency' research on Detroit auto workers' culture in the 1940s and 50s; and the group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in France in the 1960s.

tional humanitarian agency, to come to the rescue. The workerist thus turns the critique around and argues that it is this positioning of citizens as supplicant victims that reinforces gender, race, and class indignities. Workerists also argue that court victories can often lead to token symbolic judgments or, worse, provoke protective tutelary responses or 'civilizing missions' that do nothing to promote empowering or emancipatory transformations. Of course, as a tool for struggle against tyranny and dictatorship, human rights politics has served Brazil well, but the era of Lula has been marked by the development of a 'post-liberal' theory of democratic empowerment, involving the promotion of solidarity and direct participation of the governed in assuring access to justice, and on a rebalancing of political and individual rights with social and economic rights (Kopittke, dos Anjos & Oliveira, 2008: 2-4).

Modeled after the World Social Forum meetings (most of which have been held in Brazil) and the UN international thematic conferences (particularly the Rio Earth Summit of 1992, which was the first UN gathering to feature major NGO and social-movement participation), Brazil has hosted about 30 massive National Conferences, bringing together NGOs, community groups, academics, and federal and local officials around thematic areas such as the environment, racial justice, women's rights, and LGBT issues. At the end of this cycle of summits, a massive national congress on public security was scheduled for August 2009, with the aim of radically remaking the country's human security and public security agendas, and creating a participatory infrastructure for evaluating policing, urban safety, and criminal justice policy, replacing 'top down' and 'punitive' approaches with dialogic, preventative models. 'The public policies of security that aim to construct superior bases for social cohesion should be based on a model of public management in which implementation of actions occurs through networks, as opposed to through hierarchies or via markets. Its logic should transcend the juridical logic and economic logic, to explicitly assume a [participatory] political logic' (Kopittke, dos Anjos & Oliveira, 2008: 8).

Of course, a danger lies in that, by 'transcending' the juridical logic, the activation of worker and community networks of participation may not necessarily lead to the articulation of progressive policies in the security sphere, especially at a time when police, vigilantes, missionaries, and the politics of sexualized and racialized insecurity have become such prominent and influential fixtures in many communities, social movements, and local administrations. Insecure moral majoritarianism may trump minority rights. Also, the Workers' Party (the governing party of Lula that is organizing these national congresses) is beginning to be increasingly swayed by the participation of Pentecostal evangelicals, Catholic groups that are morally conservative but economically socialist, and clientelist political machines aligned with police militias. So, it is an open question whether this post-liberal participative workerist framework will join with the juridical-legalist rights logic

to promote emancipation and gender rights, or whether it will leverage its power behind the militarized humanitarian-moralist agenda.

One major factor working in favor of a progressive outcome to this struggle is that Brazil's public sphere, uniquely, has identified the country's sexual vitality as a social, cultural, and economic resource with essential generative power, as I will discuss below.

## Operation Princess and Its Sisters

A set of interventions against sex trafficking can reveal for us how these three logics play out, as their collision defines the security dilemmas of contemporary Brazil. These three logics amplify crisis in the public security sector as their incommensurabilities collide, and their areas of intersection are identified, opening up spaces for reframing political agency through mobilization of gendered insecurities. The Militarized Police in Brazil are a fourth set of actors that feature prominently in this study. This analysis traces how police are captured by a provisional alliance between moralist and participative projects, which then begins to break down as the violent, negative effects of the rescue campaigns are revealed. International interference in questions of sexual rights and AIDS treatment becomes associated with the police and evangelical mobilization against 'human trafficking', reminding the country of the particularly Brazilian national uniqueness and the empowering potential of juridical rights, especially in the area of racialized sexuality and gender.

I will now examine how the campaign against sex trafficking, including Operation Princess, served as a laboratory for attempts by the state to reconcile and mobilize these three contradictory logics. Early in the campaign, the legalist and moralist forms of humanitarianism clashed. It became difficult to assert the extension of legal rights and participatory agency in the sexual public sphere while also declaring a virtual state of emergency, suspending rights, and launching moralistic humanitarian police operations in the sex-work sector. To manage this contradiction, the police and state agencies focused on the trafficking of *children* into prostitution and international sex commerce. The state decided to focus on minors, who are by definition not endowed with adult agency or the capacity to consent or to assume the status of citizen-participant. The resurgent syndicalist left, evangelical-pentecostal populists, and humanitarian movements of globalizing civil society in Rio de Janeiro were able to forge a fragile, momentary consensus around the rescue of those children who were forced into sex slavery or trafficked as prostitutes. This mission to rescue young 'slaves' would combine with the newly dominant Workers' Party (PT) agenda for empowering adults as

workers and active, participatory agents, in an attempt to move the economy beyond austerity and stagnation, as well as to project Brazil as an 'honorable' geopolitical power (Hirst, 2008).

In May 2003, the Militarized Police of Rio de Janeiro and its Civil Police *delegacias* launched their contribution to the UN campaign against sex trafficking. Operation Princess and its sister campaigns were launched by the police in seeming disregard for the fact that prostitution is legal in Brazil. The Pentecostal evangelical leaders of Rio (which included the security secretary and former governor Anthony Garotinho) gave biblical legitimacy to the campaign, brushing aside questions of legality or sex workers' resistance to being 'rescued'.

During this phase, the state government of Rio de Janeiro also rededicated two special Civil Police Stations and a Military Police Battalion to the task of rescuing Brazilian women and children from international sex traffickers. On the occasion, the charismatic, evangelical Christian security secretary and former governor Anthony Garotinho proclaimed proudly that he would purge corruption and promote moral rectitude in the police and the general public by bringing back the spirit of the Vice Police stations (*Delegacias de Costumes*), which had been closed for the most part in the 1940s when prostitution was legalized. Simultaneously, President Lula declared a nationwide war against sex trafficking, designating the campaign a 'top priority' for his new administration.

The designation of one of the key operations in this campaign as 'Operation Princess' resonated perfectly with the 19th-century iconography of missionarism, child rescue, and abolition in Brazil. It displaced the more macho images of worker citizenship with feminized and infantilized tropes of sacrifice and innocence. Avenida Princesa Isabel is the grand boulevard that brings travelers from central Rio and the airports into Copacabana Beach, a mixed-class and mixed-race coastal community that also serves as a center of sex tourism and international diplomatic conferences. Copacabana was a focal point of the new vice-policing operations. At the end of the avenue named after her stands the statue of Princess Isabel, with her arms outstretched, blessing those she liberated from slavery and radiating a spirit of tolerance and welcome at the gateway to the topless dance clubs and all-night saunas of the Lido. The child monarch's act of self sacrifice – the signing of the proclamation of 1889 that ended slavery in Brazil (see Skidmore & Smith, 2001) – immolated the imperial regime as well as slaveholding. Her proclamation of abolition triggered a republican revolt among the resentful coffee-planter oligarchy, who overthrew Isabel and her family. Anti-racist historians and the intellectual leaders of the Black Movement in Brazil have rigorously critiqued the 'Princess Isabel Syndrome', or the commemoration of this child monarch as the agent of abolition (Nascimento, 2007: 231; Hanchard, 1999). Critics claim it takes credit away from the centuries of sacrifice and mobilization

among Brazil's Afro-descendants and their efforts to form national and international civil, legal, and social movements to push for abolition. Thus, the princess metaphor in Rio de Janeiro, in this context in particular, resonates vibrantly with the politics of social 'whitening' (*embrancamento*), infantilization of black slave agency, and religious moralization. 'Operation Princess' thus drew upon rich gender and national metaphors of rescued slaves and liberator child-monarchs, focusing on self-sacrifice and non-agency rather than on forms of democratic protagonism, or on questions of the gendering of labor and consumption in the sex and tourism industries (Bernstein, 2007: 130).

In a speech made on 27 May 2003 to an assembly of public-sector union leaders in Rio de Janeiro, Lula imagined Brazil's early neoliberal era (1985–2000) as a stationary bicycle pedaling away in a shuttered apartment. This metaphor evoked the white middle classes in Brazil's gated condominium developments that proliferated in the 1990s (see Caldeira, 2001), exercising in their private gyms and fearing racialized crime outside. Lula declared that he wanted to liberate that bicycle and invite Brazil to pedal toward a new horizon of progress, where the national landscape would be cleared of the stigma and injustice of its *favelas*<sup>9</sup> and exploited children. President Lula's discourse in the tentative early months of his administration identified Brazil with its middle classes; yet, interestingly, when Lula addressed the 'middle classes', he spoke to the upper echelons of syndicate and union labor, not as much to private-sector entrepreneurs and professionals.

The role of the state and its privileged worker protégés was to fulfill roles remarkably similar to that of the late 19th-century bourgeois social reformer. Victorian-era 'green city' discourse returned in Lula's projection of the nation as a landscaped park to be traversed by bicycle once it is cleared of slums and of the miasmas emitted by open sewers. The provisional adoption of a 19th-century-style missionary reformist discourse by this new left-leaning government is not surprising in itself. The left-populist authoritarian regime of Getulio Vargas in the 1930s combined campaigns to enfranchise workers and redistribute income with moral crusades against 'white slavery' (forced prostitution) and vigorous slum-clearance campaigns in the inner city (Caulfield, 1997). Lula was certainly aware of and influenced by this legacy. But, equally significant was the late 20th-century rise of evangelical protestant (primarily Pentecostal) churches in Brazil, linked to transnational missionary and humanitarian campaigns, which have gained influence within syndicates and party organizations, and who speak a political language that revives late 19th-century discourses of salvation and abolition (Corten, 1999; Fonseca, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> These well-established informal shantytown communities house about one-quarter of Brazil's urban population and suffer as the target and stage for the great majority of trafficker and police violence.

These experiments in transferring Victorian-era ideas into the contemporary context caused considerable friction. This form of rescue politics, developed in the 19th-century context of imperialism and mass urbanization, infantilized and condescended to its objects by focusing on children first, voiceless female victims second. Broken, racialized men were a distant third priority. Set explicitly, then as now, against the 'machine politics' of mass mobilization, redistribution, and aggressive, masculinized labor politics, this missionary rescue politics focuses on civilizing, evangelizing, and controlling populations.

Lula's deployment of evangelical rescue discourse early in his term reflected the political need to build a supportive coalition between Pentecostals, a growing power on both the right and left, and the PT's new articulation of secular, participatory social-democratic principles centered around 'worker citizenship'. Another very strong incentive for the adoption of this rescue politics was the state's overarching commitment to improving the image of the country in order to promote Brazil as a leader of the ascendant global south with sufficient moral authority and political legitimacy to make a claim to a permanent seat on the UN Security Council (Bourantis, 2005; Hirst, 2008).

Democratic Brazil's efforts to assert itself on the global stage have been consistently handicapped by world concern for its miserable or 'monstrous' children. During the 1992 UN 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro, the international media focused on police massacres of 'street children'; in the early 1990s, international tourists reported being terrorized by masses of children from poor urban neighborhoods; in 2002, the world was captivated by Meirelles & Lund's controversial film *City of God*, in which highly eroticized black children and teenagers were portrayed either as worthless fodder for traffickers or as ruthlessly murderous and cruel; and, in the early 2000s, Brazil was once again featured for its child problems, this time as international NGOs reported on the abduction of Brazilian boys into hard labor and girls into prostitution. In 2001, the US Department of State and the United Nations Office against Drugs and Organized Crime (UNDOC) released reports claiming that Brazil was the 'champion' of sex trafficking in the Western hemisphere.<sup>10</sup> By the time Lula assumed power in 2003, a massive child-rescue initiative was deemed essential to Brazil's plans to legitimize and empower itself on the world stage, as well as to address social-justice concerns at home. For Brazil to assume leadership of the democratic global south and make a claim to the proposed new seat on the Security Council, it wanted to change the image of Brazilian law enforcement from death squad to rescue mission, authoritarian to humanitarian. The national landscape had to be cleared of lawless, victimized children.

Rio de Janeiro had served as the epicenter and showcase of these episodes of violence, as well as the launching pad for the public image campaigns. In

<sup>10</sup> See *Folha de São Paulo* (São Paulo) (2003a).



2003–04, Rio had also become the focus not just of international attention, but of national debates around security policy. This period witnessed the ‘War of Rio’, when a violent mix of organized crime, police racketeering, and armed trafficker attacks escalated, leading to the closure of businesses and suspension of the rule of law even in the most exclusive neighborhoods and tourist areas. Attempts to reform police and disentangle them from militarized, criminal elements met stiff resistance during this period. Rather than enforce the law and bring trafficker organizations like the ‘Red Command’ or ‘Third Command’ to justice, police had formed a rival trafficking and extortion ring, a militia nicknamed *o Comando Azul* (the ‘Blue Command’).<sup>11</sup> ‘The image of police [had] never been so negative.’<sup>12</sup> Police and prison guards went on strike, and the Brazilian military was sent in to try to bring order to Rio’s *favelas*. The mayor of Rio, Cesar Maia, considered declaring an ‘estado de defesa’, a hybrid of a state of emergency and siege, where slums would be walled off and civil rights suspended.<sup>13</sup> Unable or unwilling to demand police reform and accountability during this time, Governor Garotinho instead launched a ‘moralization’ campaign, where police would be encouraged to assume a more ethical role, promoting moral rectitude in the population, as well as within their own stations and battalions.<sup>14</sup> This superficial initiative sought to encourage police to identify as paternal/maternal figures. Nearly 300 women were integrated into the tourism battalion of the Militarized Police, and the forces cultivated a moral mission to save trafficked children.<sup>15</sup>

Would the moralization of the object of policing affect the structural violence of police corruption and criminality? For many years, observers had critiqued the extent to which international and local humanitarians ‘infantilized’ Brazil’s social problems, displacing questions of race and racism and masking the violence of state institutions and neoliberal policies. Does this evangelical fascination with rescuing miserable or immoral children (almost always represented as of African descent) actually reinforce the infantilization and disenfranchisement of blacks, reproduce stereotypes of atavism, violence and sexualization, and promote dependence on outside humanitarian and development ‘experts’ (Smillie, 2001; Rahneema & Bawtree, 1997)? Critics in Brazil have suggested it would be better to provide jobs, social services, and political voice to these kids’ black parents, rather than giving more jobs and prestige to white, middle-class missionaries who want to capture and re-educate the children (Rosemberg & Feitosa Andrade, 1999).

Despite these criticisms, the Brazilian state’s need to reform its international image, compose a coalition between evangelicals and left-progressives,

<sup>11</sup> See *O Globo* (2005a).

<sup>12</sup> See *O Globo* (2005b).

<sup>13</sup> See *Extra* (2004a).

<sup>14</sup> See *Folha de São Paulo* (São Paulo) (2003b).

<sup>15</sup> See *Extra* (2004b).

and act aggressively in the public security sphere led the national government and the provincial administration in Rio de Janeiro to launch a major campaign against sex trafficking and child slavery in 2003. Both the legalist logic of empowerment through rights and access to justice and the 'workerist' logic of security through participatory socio-economic citizenship took a back seat as the missionary logic of humanitarian moralism defined the terms of action. But, the launching of the anti-sex-trafficking campaigns by the new Lula government in 2003 and the evangelical provincial administration of Anthony Garotinho and then Rosinha Matteus in Rio revealed the difficulty of proceeding with ambitious national mobilizations when the state is split between courts and police, humanitarian legalism and humanitarian moralism, worker agency and liberal individualism.

Although I focus on evocatively named police missions, such as Operation Princess, the broader federal and state effort that was launched (and repeatedly relaunched) between 2003 and 2005 was officially termed 'The Plan To Combat Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents'<sup>16</sup> and included many other operations and subplans. Launched originally in 2003, the implementation of the overall plan began to gain momentum in early 2004, expanding with a series of media-friendly stings. In February 2004, just before Carnival season, the chief of Rio's Civil Police announced his 'Division of Oversight for Public Amusement' would be reborn as a virtual vice station, combating new 'white slavery', sex tourism, and sex exploitation in Rio during the high tourist season. Since the Civil Police in Brazil cannot deploy armed operations on the street or make arrests, their station paired its activities with the revitalized Militarized Police Battalion for Tourist Areas, 'BPTur', which integrated up to 100 new women officers trained in both military and social tactics for interventions against child and adolescent prostitution.<sup>17</sup> The Public Ministry (similar to an Attorney General's office) issued a 'Manual of Sex Crimes and Child Prostitution' to all Militarized Police Battalions, with 71 pages showing the mapping of crimes throughout Rio state and instructing police how to deal with minors who have been victims of sexual exploitation.<sup>18</sup> The UN Special Rapporteur for Child Trafficking, Prostitution and Child Pornography lauded Brazil for asserting itself at the vanguard of Latin America in these issues, and President Lula agreed to submit to international inspectors in the country's sex-work sector.<sup>19</sup>

'Operation Carnival' became the first test of this revived vice-police campaign.<sup>20</sup> As if to mock the new police operations, a 'Group A' Samba School (one of the massive dance and drum troupes that march and present their

<sup>16</sup> See *O Globo* (2005c).

<sup>17</sup> See *O Globo* (2004b).

<sup>18</sup> See *O Globo* (2004c).

<sup>19</sup> See *Folha de São Paulo* (São Paulo) (2003c).

<sup>20</sup> See *O Globo* (2004d).

elaborate thematic floats at Carnival) celebrated 'Prostitution in Copacabana' as their theme that year; their 4,000 sequined dancers, the 'Lions of Nova Iguaçu', marched through the downtown Sambadrome, singing a samba about the joys of the sex trade.<sup>21</sup> In its debut, the police's anti-sex-trafficking campaign netted a total of one arrest, that of a Brazilian man who was charged with pimping. From the start, members of the Workers' Party complained that the campaign would have no real effect, since the pimps and sex traffickers worked under police protection or in rackets run by the Militarized Police themselves. The 'cleaner' Federal Police would need to get involved.

As the anti-sex-slavery campaign intensified and multiple policing agencies became involved, the absurdity of having the Militarized Police of the province of Rio lead this campaign, using military 'rescue' and 'protection' models, became apparent. Once the less-corrupt Federal Police investigators became involved, the campaigns increasingly found themselves tangled in the shadowy world of protection rackets and transnational mercenaries. In May 2004, a UN team in conjunction with Brazil's federal police infiltrated a sex-trafficking ring made up of 45 individuals, all of whom were agents of the state, including Militarized Police, Civil Police, federal agents, customs agents, and tax collectors.<sup>22</sup> In July, Civil Police closed down an illegal brothel in the district of Itatiaia in which a 15-year-old and a 16-year-old girl were working; it turned out that the brothel was owned by a Militarized Police officer from the adjacent battalion.<sup>23</sup> In September, secret video cameras set up to apprehend sex-traffickers preying upon girls instead witnessed the regular visits of *eleven* military police officers from the Shock Battalion (a heavily armed 'special ops' unit) delivering pizza to young adult women prostitutes and extorting protection rent from them.<sup>24</sup> In April 2005, a recently retired officer of the Militarized Police of Copacabana (19th Battalion), then working as a pimp, shot a Russian mercenary, Oleg Starykh, during negotiations over the transfer of an adult sex worker. The Russian was in town for the 'International Conference and Exhibition on Helicopter Technology and Operation'. Direct links between Militarized Police protection rackets and Eastern European private-sector military companies had begun to be exposed in the mainstream press.<sup>25</sup> Sex trafficking and slavery, rather than being a local matter of the morality and deviance of urban marginals, was exposed as cultivated by police militarism, impunity, and global private-sector networking with other shadowy militarized groupings.

In this context, in April 2005 the specific sting called Operation Princess was launched by the infamous 19th Battalion of Copacabana along with the

<sup>21</sup> See *O Globo* (2004e).

<sup>22</sup> See *O Globo* (2004f).

<sup>23</sup> See *O Globo* (2004g).

<sup>24</sup> See *O Globo* (2004h).

<sup>25</sup> See *O Globo* (2005d).

Civil Police Station for Protection of Children and Adolescents (DECA).<sup>26</sup> The police scoured Copacabana for brothels and underage sex workers. On the basis of the testimony of the mother of a 16-year-old girl, a brothel in Central Copacabana was busted and a 23-year-old was arrested for putting ads in the paper to recruit young escorts. Was this a 'rescue' of child slaves from captivity and forced labor? Was this operation a serious intervention into international sex trafficking? Or, was Operation Princess a bust of an independent, safe brothel run by young people in order to force them onto the street and make them submit to police protection rackets incorporated into transnationally linked networks of armed exploitation?

By May 2005, a public backlash against the hypocrisies of the vice campaign had gathered steam and began to penetrate the press and public sphere. During 'Operation Shangrilá', the Federal Police raided a showboat in Rio's Guanabara Bay. Forty Brazilian prostitutes and twenty-nine American tourists were arrested for having committed the crime of 'sex tourism'. This incident was immediately trumpeted as a major bust of a 'human trafficking' operation. According to the sex-worker-rights NGO Grupo DaVida (2005), evangelical and humanitarian anti-trafficking sites registered this operation as the capture of 29 'traffickers' and the rescue of 40 child sex slaves. But, legal and rights activists, and a growing cohort of supporters in the press, soon revealed a very different reality: no Brazilian law had been violated. None of the prostitutes were underage, nor had they violated any pimping or brothel laws. The only way this situation could be imagined as 'trafficking' was because the tourists had crossed international frontiers, although without breaking any laws or visa restrictions. Furthermore, 'sex tourism' is not against any Brazilian law, unless one assumes that sex tourism is the same thing as forced sex trafficking. Soon after Operation Shangrilá, all parties were cleared and no one was deported or charged. The police, however, maintained this was a 'model operation', and evangelical websites continued to headline the arrests as 'proof' of the threat of 'trafficking'. But, by now, public response had begun to associate these campaigns with an alien North American moral hypocrisy, a moralistic and clumsy image campaign that was mocked and termed 'genital nationalism'. The public started to become frustrated with the Workers' Party's collaboration in these 'un-Brazilian' vice raids:

In Brazil, contrary to the United States, prostitution is not illegal. So why is a group of Americans arrested in a boat full of women in Guanabara Bay even though everyone is professional and adults? To protect our sexual market? Genital xenophobia? To combat sex tourism? Why combat sex tourism if the visitors' objects of desire are adult men and women that do this by choice?<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See *O Globo* (2005e).

<sup>27</sup> See Motta (2005), cited in Grupo DaVida (2005: 158).

The 'humanitarian militarist' logic that had driven the evangelical character of these rescue campaigns had turned inside out. Rather than draw world attention to Brazil's armed law enforcement as protecting racialized, morally corrupted children, Operation Princess and its sister campaigns revealed the corruption of police and the role of militarism and moralism. Instead of child slaves, these operations had apprehended young people with some degree of agency and had either criminalized them or forced them onto the street where police rackets dominated. And, they certainly had not helped the tourism sector, which is Rio de Janeiro's largest job creator and represents a vast sector of service, industrial, and construction activities much larger than mere 'sex commerce'.

The focus on child sex slaves, selected because of their lack of agency and rights, proved a very precarious way to fuse the prerogatives of the police and the juridical-legal principles of modern Brazil. Since the police were not worried about agency or issues of consent, they did not bother to launch proper investigations or gather evidence. Nevertheless, there were certain successes in these operations – checking highways and borders, tightening adoption/immigration procedures, stopping trafficking in minors – mostly involving the state regulating corrupt officials. But, these operations ended up highlighting the conflicts and incompatibilities between the governance projects of police militarism, juridical legalism, and worker nationalism, rather than providing a seamless project through which to reconcile them.

Other legal and policy divergences at the level of the president's cabinet were highlighted as the campaign including Operation Princess proceeded. During the anti-vice period of 2003–05, Brazil's Ministry of Labor designated prostitutes as 'tourist accompaniment workers', while the Tourism Ministry deemed them 'trafficked sex slaves'.<sup>28</sup> The more internationally linked Tourism Ministry was strongly influenced by both UN and evangelical campaigns against sex tourism. Political appointees developing tourism-promotion campaigns were absorbed by the logic of the humanitarian militarist language and pushed a very visible campaign to vigorously police prostitution and demonize sex tourism while promoting Brazil as a destination for fans of baroque architectural heritage and eco-tourism. Meanwhile, the Labor Ministry supported sex workers and promoted further regularization of prostitutes as service workers and as bearers of broader legal status. At first, they did provisionally agree on child prostitutes as an object of 'rescue', so police focused on hunting down child sex workers rather than deploying a larger 'blitz' against sexual commerce and sex tourism.

<sup>28</sup> See *O Globo* (2005f).

## The 'Child Slave Rescue' Consensus Breaks Down: The Princess and the Empire

Brazil's rescue mission was driven, in part, by President Lula's need to promote the country on the international stage as a model of human security and as a liberator of the world's most insecure and violated. As described above, the militarized humanitarian campaign against sex slavery unintentionally exposed the forms of violence, corruption, and contradiction within the state, but did not do a very good job of promoting Brazil as a unique model of security and justice for the global south.

The 19th-century missionary character of the rhetoric that surrounded these operations and the language of abolition, slavery, and warfare against crime and trafficking created no room for workers' issues, legal questions, or pragmatic solutions. Creating mythic power for rescuers and protectors had ended up empowering the very racketeers that serve as the hubs of the global sex-trafficking industry. It was when this missionary logic became identified with the military and ideological ambitions of the highly unpopular US President George W. Bush that Rio de Janeiro's sex workers reclaimed their status as subjects of security and agency, not just as spectacles of enslavement or objects of rescue.

In 2003, just after Brazil launched its sex-rescue project, the Bush administration, via the US Agency for International Development, launched a campaign to cut off US and UN support for Brazil's AIDS program because it empowered prostitutes to serve as health advocates and as legitimate agents of the government's public health campaign.<sup>29</sup> Already upset by Brazil's insistence on bending international patent protections to produce affordable HIV/AIDS medications, the US government was appalled that Brazil would reject abstinence-based approaches and promote commercial sex workers as safe-sex counselors and public health providers. Starting in 2003, Pedro Chequer, coordinator of Brazil's program to fight AIDS, rejected \$48 million in US funds since they were tied to public condemnation of prostitution. Mr. Chequer stated,

One of the reasons for the success of the Brazilian program is exactly its realistic acceptance of the existence of prostitution, as well as homosexuality and drug addiction. To close one's eyes to this reality, as the American government wants, would be to condemn to infection not just many prostitutes, but also their clients and the spouses of their clients.<sup>30</sup>

President Bush's and USAID's attack on Brazil's prostitutes and its AIDS-fighting methodology produced a backlash. Public conversations in Rio began

<sup>29</sup> See *O Globo* (2005g).

<sup>30</sup> See *O Globo* (2005h).

to link the internationally supported police campaign against vice and sex-trafficking in Rio to the 'imperialist' and 'fundamentalist' attack on Brazil's sex workers and their participation in AIDS-fighting projects. With the USA attempting a coup d'état against Hugo Chavez in Venezuela in 2002 and the incredibly unpopular invasion of Iraq in 2003 generating a huge wave of anti-US venom, Brazilians started wondering: Was the police-based humanitarian intervention against sex trafficking a war of aggression against Brazil's resurgent nationalism? Was the USA or the 'Washington Consensus' threatened by Brazil's project to empower worker agency, in this case, sex-worker agency? Was President Lula, the 'man of the people', being targeted?

The consensus around 'humanitarian moralism' and a neo-abolitionist approach to sex trafficking was split by its tensions with other logics of state intervention from the start. But, when people began linking this 19th-century agenda to US fundamentalist crusades and illegal wars, then the missionary consensus around the armed rescue of child slaves crumbled. Instead, legalist and worker-empowerment logics formed a new consensus that switched sex workers from targets to agents, and re-identified militarized protectors as targets of reform rather than agents of mercy.

A form of 'humanitarian legalism' merged with worker-empowerment projects in the form of mobilizations by prostitutes and the Workers' Party to include sex-worker rights within the framework of state protections for workers' rights, but also, uniquely, in providing services to the nation, leading the struggle against AIDS, and welcoming tourists whose revenues were key to development and employment in many large cities. In this sense, Brazil boldly left the neoliberal fold, with its typical focus on extending property rights and minimizing worker rights, and its traditional delineation of sexuality as a set of limited rights associated with private expression or identity, rather than with public space and commerce. In August of 2003, Justice Minister Thomaz Bastos supported a law proposed by Rio de Janeiro national assembly delegate Fernando Gabeira to regularize prostitution, guaranteeing the rights of prostitutes as a class of workers.<sup>31</sup>

By the end of 2005, the Brazilian government and the Rio de Janeiro state police had largely abandoned the most corrupt and militarized aspects of Brazil's anti-child-trafficking campaign, and had begun to elaborate, instead, a 'human security' approach to the linked problems of trafficking, child victimization, and AIDS that focused on social empowerment and gender justice, linked to broader PT efforts to promote adult employment, end hunger, improve youth education, and reduce economic and sociopolitical marginalization. On 29 May 2008, the Brazilian Federal Police issued an arrest warrant for Anthony Garotinho, the country's chief evangelical politician and former governor of Rio de Janeiro. He had been the key figure in the

<sup>31</sup> See Dantas (2003).

launching of Operation Princess and the mobilization of the moral crusade in 2003, when he chose to take the moralistic route rather than purge corruption and militarism from the police. Garotinho was arrested for forming an armed gang, working with corrupt police to traffic arms and drugs, and erecting protection rackets and money-laundering operations. Evidence against the former governor revealed the great extent to which the militarized morality campaigns around Operation Princess had extended masculinized violence, impunity, and corruption rather than alleviating the exploitation of children and women.<sup>32</sup> President Lula and his social-movement allies in Rio, meanwhile, moved to extend Brazil's model anti-AIDS program, including the leadership role of sex workers within it.

By June 2008, Marina Pereira Pires de Oliveira, the feminist leader who led the drive in the Ministry of Justice in 2003 to pass new laws against sex trafficking, had resigned from government and published scathing articles on how those laws had been misused to promote moralizing agendas and to increase abusive treatment of women by the state and police (de Oliveira, 2008). In October 2008, Fernando Gabeira, who had advocated decriminalization of laws around prostitution (such as 'facilitating' prostitution and brothel-owning) and a wholesale revision of the new laws around human trafficking, missed being elected mayor of Rio de Janeiro by one percentage point, in the context of allegations of massive fraud by the supporters of his opponent. Gabeira's near victory demonstrated that his politics was not fringe. In December 2008, the president of the National Lawyers Guild of Rio de Janeiro served as the keynote speaker at the fourth annual meeting of the Brazilian Prostitutes Network, saying that 'owners of establishments take advantage of illegality to exploit this work. With the regulation of the profession, this work will be reformed and women will receive workers' benefits, including social security pensions.' At the same moment, Margarida Pressburger, the feminist leader of the Rio Bar Association's Human Rights Commission, inverted the moralist discourse, insisting her group would push strongly for the decriminalization legislation in order to promote dignity in Rio and stop violence against women.<sup>33</sup>

However, in January 2009, Eduardo Paes, the mayor who had narrowly defeated Gabeira, promised to launch a new round of Operation Princess and Operation Copabana raids.

<sup>32</sup> See *O Globo* (2008).

<sup>33</sup> On the developments outlined in this paragraph, see *JusBrasil Noticias* (2008).



## Conclusion

In this study, I explored state and provincial experiments in pushing moralistic rescue missions, and how conflicts over the role of worker agency, sexual citizenship, and international control led to the hasty abandonment, at least for a time, of Operation Princess and related rescue campaigns. Clashes between incommensurable logics of governance, and the actors that advocate them, led to crisis in the security sector and the unraveling of this platform of consensus among Brazilian evangelicals, worker-empowerment activists, and international humanitarians. I have mapped out different notions of citizen agency, rendered differently in distinct spheres of the state (conflicting ministries, courts, public-sector unions, and police) to help navigate the politics of challenging neoliberalism, fortifying sexual citizenship, and remaking the role of policing in democratic society.

The findings on insecurity politics in Brazil presented here support the constructivist tendencies in contemporary feminist political studies, illustrating the roles played by contending logics of securitization in constituting – and subverting – the gendered and racialized subjects of ‘crime war’ politics and neoliberal governance. This case study also provides resources for sexuality studies, demonstrating how conflicting logics of governance generate shifting notions of the deviant, perverse, queer, and moral not just around questions of sexual orientation but through security crises that generate panic around the sexual citizenship of children, the rights of racialized victims, and the status of working women in sexual commerce.

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.

\* Paul Amar serves as Assistant Professor in the Law & Society Program of the University of California, Santa Barbara. Publications include the *The Security Archipelago: ‘Human Security’ States, Sexuality Politics and the End of Neoliberalism* (Duke University Press, 2010); *Cairo Cosmopolitan* (American University in Cairo Press, 2006; co-edited with Diane Singerman); and *New Racial Missions of Policing* (Routledge, 2010). Paul Amar is a political scientist, legal sociologist, and urban ethnographer specializing in security politics, police–military relations, social movements, and authoritarian states. He researches the transnational and urban dynamics of police militarization, as well as state violence against racial and sexual minorities in the cities of Latin America and the Middle East.

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