14

Moral Panic

Sex Tourism, Trafficking, and the Limits of Transnational Mobility in Bahia

ERICA LORRAINE WILLIAMS

The opportunities for transnational mobility available to socially and economically disadvantaged Brazilian women often arise through their intimate encounters with foreigners, but sensational media stories frequently depict such instances where foreign tourists facilitate trips to the tourists' home countries as criminal cases of "trafficking." The experiences of the Brazilian women Ivete and Fabiana illustrate how this problem typically may occur, for the underlying assumption is that the women will be forced into prostitution.

When I visited the home of Pérola, a black woman who was an active member of the Association of Prostitutes of Bahia (APROSBA), she showed me a picture of her friend Ivete, a brown-skinned woman in her late thirties who had just returned from Germany. Ivete had gone to visit a "gringo" she met doing *programas* (commercial sexual exchange) in Salvador de Bahia. After a month in Germany, she returned to Salvador and shared with her friends news, pictures, and memories of her positive experience overseas. In contrast to Ivete's rewarding trip, Fabiana, the president of APROSBA, expressed anxiety over the risks of transnational mobility and migration for sex workers. She once had a foreign client-turned-boyfriend who wanted to marry her and take her to Europe. Instead of eagerly taking advantage of the opportunity to travel abroad, Fabiana was cautious about putting herself in a potentially precarious situation and she declined his offer: "I'm afraid to leave Brazil. I'm afraid of the cold . . . of not having money to return."

My point in juxtaposing Fabiana's fear of overseas travel with Ivete's positive experience of foreign travel is not necessarily to question the extent to which sensationalized horror stories of trafficking are true or not. Rather, my critique is that campaigns against sex tourism and trafficking often unwittingly fall into the trap of constructing any and all situations in which "vul-

nerable" women travel abroad with the help of foreigners as potential cases of trafficking.

This chapter analyzes public debates surrounding sex tourism, as well as the effects and limitations of anti–sex tourism campaigns in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, mounted by the state and civil society. Although sex tourism and trafficking are separate issues, they are often conflated in the official policies of national and international agencies. What are the divergent ways in which governmental and nongovernmental agents understand sex tourism and trafficking, and how do these understandings shape their efforts? How do campaigns against sex tourism and trafficking risk reaffirming patriarchal values and placing further restrictions upon (specific) women's mobility, especially women of African descent. In this way we can see how anti-trafficking discourse in Brazil is informed by fears and beliefs about race. In analyzing the work of CHAME (Humanitarian Center for the Support of Women), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that raises awareness about sex tourism and trafficking, I offer a critique of how their well-intentioned campaigns often reproduce stereotypical images and sensationalized stories that contribute to a "moral panic" (Carby 1992; Cohen 1972; Herdt 2009) over interracial sex and transnational border crossings. At the same time I suggest that a more effective approach to improve sex workers' lives can be found in the work of Associação das Prostitutas da Bahia (APROSBA).

CHAME

CHAME is the only NGO engaged in campaigns to raise public awareness about sex tourism and trafficking in Brazil. Founded in 1994 by Jacqueline Leite, CHAME became an independent NGO in 2001. The mission of CHAME is to:

> alert society to the risks of exploitation of young and adult women in the different forms of migration and recruitment for forced labor (sexual, domestic, and other modalities of slavery, usually linked to physical or psychological violence), respecting her freedom of choice. (CHAME pamphlet, n.d.)

Though terms such as "slavery," "forced labor, and "exploitation" parallel the vocabulary of abolitionist organizations, the use of the phrase "freedom

of choice" indicates that Leite positions herself within a sex worker rights' framework that respects women's choice to do sex work.

The inspiration to create CHAME emerged from Leite's experience working for the Center for Information for Women from Asia, Africa, and Latin America (FIZ), an organization in Switzerland that focused on combating the exploitation of foreign migrant women. At FIZ Leite noticed that many Latin American, especially Brazilian, women found themselves in untenable situations abroad. They arrived with little information about how to live in another country and with no notion of their rights and limitations as foreign migrants. The FIZ team recognized the need for a project dealing with prevention and education so that women could travel abroad knowing whatever they needed to know to protect their interests rather than naively seeing Europe as a paradise (Ana Paula, interview 2005; CHAME, n.d.).

CHAME focuses on three areas of activity: preventing trafficking through documentation and raising awareness; political work on local, regional, national, and international levels; and international research. It organizes events, workshops, seminars, and courses in schools, neighborhood associations, unions, and other groups. CHAME has developed a packet of course materials (*módulo*) for training a cadre of people (*multiplicadores*) who can go back to their home communities to educate their peers. Leite sees working with grass-roots communities as one of CHAME's major strengths, and she hopes that this work will prevent trafficking so that women "may know that when they travel there could be dangers" (interview, 2008). Ultimately Leite contends that,

> What motivates this project is the fight for a better condition of women. Our objective is to give more power to women by disseminating information so that they can decide their own futures. This requires awakening the consciousness, of understanding their social condition and the role that they play in this society. From this base, women will certainly have greater opportunities to opt for migration or not. (CHAME, n.d.)

The overarching goal of the work of CHAME is to empower women with knowledge so that they can make informed decisions about traveling abroad. The next section explores the problematic ways in which "sex tourism" and "trafficking" have been conflated in campaigns launched by the state and civil society.

Coming to Terms with Sex Tourism and Trafficking

> "All of them [foreign tourists] really come to have sex. Everyone ends up doing sex tourism
>
> —Fabiana, president of APROSBA

Sex tourism is a complex subject of analysis, because it calls for an interrogation of notions of desire, intimacy, affect, and reciprocity, as well as race, class, gender, and sexuality. The sexual economies of tourism in Salvador involve far more than sex, money, and illicit activity; travel, romance, leisure, consumption, and sometimes marriage are also part of the package. Scholars have highlighted the ways in which sex tourism relationships are characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity (Cabezas 2009; Fosado 2004) and that a central feature of sex tourism is that it "highlights the convergence between prostitution and tourism, links the global and the local, and draws attention to both the production and consumption of sexual services" (Wonders and Michalowski 2001, 545). Whereas sex tourism is complex and ambiguous, trafficking is often seen as a clear-cut, black-and-white issue. Not only is trafficking seen as unequivocally negative, it is also presented in a simplistic way that erases its characteristic complexities of race, class, place, and citizenship.

The term "trafficking" was first used in the early twentieth century to refer to the "white slave trade" of European women as concubines and prostitutes to brothels in the United States (Altink 1995). Trafficking reemerged in the mid-1990s and was cast as a "modern form of slavery" (Agustín 2007). Definitions and interpretations of trafficking are widely debated. Global trafficking in persons has become one of the most lucrative illicit businesses in the world today, making it the third-largest source of profits for organized crime after drugs and guns (Commonwealth Secretariat 2003). The U.S. government estimates that between six hundred thousand and nine hundred thousand people are trafficked each year to and from nations around the world (Commonwealth Secretariat 2003; U.S. State Department 2004), though these numbers are difficult to substantiate.

The literature on trafficking, much of which emerges from human rights organizations and feminist scholars, indicates that women are forced, deceived, or coerced into traveling abroad and once they arrive at their destination they suffer debt bondage, forced servitude, and slavery-like conditions (Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women 2000). Although most anti-trafficking literature tends to focus on "sex slavery" or trafficking for prostitution, it is important to point out that people are also trafficked for

other purposes such as sweatshop labor, adoption, and domestic work. That there seems to be a greater deal of mobilization and outcry about trafficking for sex work belies two assumptions: that sexual labor is more pernicious and devastating than other forms of labor and that the state has a vested interest in maintaining other forms of exploitative labor (Chang 2004).

CHAME's Perspectives on Sex Tourism and Trafficking

CHAME understands trafficking not only as a problem of morality, migration, and organized crime but also as a violation of fundamental human rights and "one of the most perverse forms of violence against women" (CHAME pamphlet 1, n.d.). CHAME identifies eight contributing factors to trafficking: (1) social and economic inequality, (2) unemployment, (3) social exclusion, (4) sex tourism, (5) gender discrimination, (6) laws and politics about migration and migrant work, (7) corruption of authorities, and (8) organized crime. CHAME conflates sex tourism and trafficking by referring to sex tourism as the "gateway" or "tip of the iceberg" to trafficking (Ana Paula, interview, 2005; CHAME materials). I was told by Reginaldo Serra, an officer of the specialized police force that deals with tourist issues (Delegation for the Protection of Tourists—Deltur):

> It's a very serious problem . . . They [foreign men] take women over there [abroad] . . . [with] the proposal to live in Europe . . . [but] it's nothing like they thought it would be. They're held hostage by elements of the mafia and can't return home again. Sex tourism is really ambiguous, but it's criminal. The tourist comes seeking people to take back with him. (Interview, 2006)

For Officer Serra, sex tourism and trafficking are virtually indistinguishable. Officer Serra conflates sex tourists with *mafiosos* and traffickers, and assumes that the goal of sex tourists is to find women to "bring back" to their home countries.

Discourses of sex tourism and trafficking construct "victims" in particular ways. Categories such as gender, race, age, and sexuality inform which group is seen as in need (read: *worthy*) of intervention, protection, and rescue from the state and civil society (Alexander 1991; Agustín 2007). As sociologist Laura Agustín (2007, 39) argues, in treating "perpetrator" and "victim" as identities rather than temporary conditions, the violence against women framework situates "victims" as "passive receptacles and mute sufferers

who must be saved." Brazilian Gabriela Leite, a sex workers' rights activist, claimed that when the concept of trafficking is confused with sex tourism, it is automatically assumed that a woman traveling with her own money is a "victim of trafficking." As Leite explained in a presentation I attended (Central Unica dos Trabalhadores 2005), "If a prostitute is caught in Europe, of course [she is] going to say [she was] trafficked!" Similarly, as Adriana Piscitelli (2008) points out in her research on Brazilian women who migrate to Italy and Spain to marry or work in the sex industry, the danger of illegality often encourages migrant sex workers to say they were trafficked in order to escape persecution.

Although CHAME respects women's freedom of choice to travel, much of the educational materials it produces use scare tactics that risk limiting the possibilities of mobility for women who are deemed "vulnerable." In the critical work they do to raise awareness of the dangers of sex tourism and trafficking, CHAME advocates for women's rights to have transnational aspirations but simultaneously highlights the risks involved in the *means* through which many women have access to transnational mobility, for example, through people they meet in the touristscape of Salvador de Bahia. It is important to realize, however, that the kinds of access that Bahians have to transnational connections and mobility are profoundly affected by disparities of race and class. For instance, a working-class black woman in Bahia, regardless of her educational level, is less likely to have opportunities to travel abroad unless it is through her romantic, friendly, or familial connections with foreigners. Jafari Sinclaire Allen (2007) and Denise Brennan (2004) and others have also discussed this in the context of Cuba and the Dominican Republic, respectively. I had numerous conversations with Bahians about this unequal access to travel. Young black Brazilian students, activists, hip-hop artists, and dancers were stuck in place, unable to travel abroad, while at home in Bahia they constantly encountered young students, researchers, and volunteers visiting from North America and Europe.

CHAME's Campaign Materials: An "Archive of Racialized Sexuality"

CHAME's campaign materials constitute an "archive of racialized sexuality" (Reddy 2005) that reflects global perspectives about black Brazilian women, foreign (European) men, and the possibilities of sex, intimacy, migration, love, marriage, and exploitation. Chandan Reddy defines such an archive as an "active technique by which sexual, racial, gendered, and national differences . . . are suppressed, frozen, and redirected" (115).

The CHAME materials use stock images depicting Brazilian women of African descent as naïve, ignorant, and willing to do anything for the opportunity to migrate to Europe. In one of CHAME's pamphlets, for example, there is a cartoon image on the front of a blond, muscular European man standing in an open door superimposed on a land mass labeled "Europa." The European man is smiling and reaching out his hand to someone. Upon opening the pamphlet, another image depicts a large white hand holding a postcard of a curvaceous black woman wearing a miniscule bikini. The woman makes a "thumbs-up" sign with one of her hands, while seductively yet playfully pointing the other hand down toward her pubic area. Upon closing the pamphlet, the front image is now complete; we see that the European man is reaching out to this black Bahian woman. She is superimposed on a land mass marked "Brasil." In high heels, short shorts, and a tank top revealing a bare midriff, she stands with her knees slightly bent and her arms outstretched, as if ready to leap into the man's arms. Lips puckered and eyes wide and bright, the three hearts circling her head suggest she is smitten. This final image evokes hopefulness, eagerness, and desire. But its location in a brochure warning about the dangers of trafficking leaves the reader with the unsettling feeling that things may not turn out the way the Bahian woman hopes.

Conversely, in these campaign materials, European men are generally cast as evil and sinister perpetrators who always have ulterior motives. In the brochure titled "Travel Is a Dream? Sometimes a Nightmare!" drawn by Mario Brito, the front cover features a black woman and a blond-haired, blue-eyed, European man embracing. The woman's eyes are closed, and a circle of hearts flutters above her head. She imagines this man as a smiling prince with a crown, an angelic halo, and a big heart. She cannot see his face, however, which is contorted into a sinister snarl, as he imagines her as a domestic worker holding a broom while dressed in sexy lingerie with a ball and chain tied to her ankle.

The comic strip tells the tragic (love) story of this couple who met during Carnaval. As the woman puts the finishing touches on her makeup, she says to herself with a conniving grin, "Who knows, maybe I'll hook up [*arrumo*] with a gringo in the streets." Next we see two blond male tourists enjoying Carnaval and conversing about how "easy" [*oferecidas*] Bahian women are, so different from the "civilized white women" of Europe. One of the men says, "We're going to get the most out of these [women] . . . they fall easily for our game and even think we're rich." At that moment, they spot the black woman dancing seductively by herself. After this encounter in the street, the

story quickly shifts to one of the men sitting with the woman at a table full of empty beer bottles and cans, and then her accompanying him back to his hotel; finally, we see them in bed, the sheets rumpled. The man promptly asks her if she would like to go to his country with him, and she responds, "That's all I've ever wanted. It's like a dream!" The seamlessness of this narrative is not only striking but is obviously oversimplified to ensure the brevity and clarity of the brochure's message.

Things quickly deteriorate when she travels to his (unidentified European) country. The Brazilian woman is pictured alone in an empty, rundown room with four locks on the door. Pregnant and crying, she laments about how she feels used and vulnerable in a foreign country far from her family. She continues, "He keeps me in prison and doesn't let me leave . . . I thought I was smart . . . that I would marry him. I want to go back, but the jerk hid my travel documents. I don't have any money." Thus the Bahian woman was tricked by the man she thought was her "prince charming."

Finally, the last frame zooms in on the woman's face and pregnant belly as she screams: "The dream turned into a nightmare!!! I want to go home!!!" She is repentant for her naïveté, for her eagerness to trust this foreigner and put her fate into his hands in the hope of a better future. The notion that the "prince charming" turns into a "frog" once the Brazilian woman is in Europe reflects consistent themes in how CHAME represents the "dangers of sex tourism and trafficking," particularly regarding the naïveté and unrealistic expectations of Brazilian women of African descent. Is this woman's situation intended to be seen as an example of trafficking or simply as a transnational romance and migration gone awry? If the purpose of trafficking is to exploit some kind of labor, what kind of labor is she expected or forced to perform?

The representational strategy of cartoons unwittingly reproduces stereotypes both of Brazilian women of African descent and European men. The graphic images imitate the ways in which postcards from Brazil eroticize black women's sexuality as a tourist attraction. The women are often pictured alone, as if inviting the foreign tourist to an isolated beach where he will find single, available women. The comic strips and testimonies in CHAME's educational materials differ from touristic postcards in that they rely almost exclusively on the use of "terrifying" life narratives of trafficked persons.

Upon asking Jacqueline how the idea to use cartoon images emerged as a significant tool in their educational and awareness-raising campaign efforts, she explained that the organization did not want to use photos that "could link anyone directly to crime or criminal connotation" (personal commu-

nication, 2009). She also stated that they thought cartoons would appeal to young people and that the images would not directly connect women or youth to any specific community of Salvador. Despite their best intentions, however, CHAME's campaigns unwittingly fall into the use of sensational methods to get the message across. The sensational images of the CHAME educational materials contradict Leite's critique of government campaigns against sex tourism as being xenophobic and creating "hysteria" in Brazil around sex tourism, in which "any foreigner in Salvador is seen as if he were a sex tourist."

Moral Panic

Even while espousing their rights to travel abroad if they so choose, CHAME's campaign materials nonetheless construct an image of Brazilian women of color as naïve, vulnerable, innocent victims of unscrupulous foreign men. The images, as well as the unparalleled attention garnered by sex tourism and trafficking, indicate that a "moral panic" has emerged around questions of interracial sex and sexuality, national image, and transnational tourism and mobility (Herdt 2009; Cohen 1972). Although the travels and travails of European men are the *source* of this panic, their effects are shifted to the bodies of women of African descent. This raises a crucial question: Who is *allowed* to enjoy the privileges of transnational mobility?

As vulnerable subjects and targets of a moral panic, black women and sex workers (neither synonymous nor mutually exclusive categories) are constructed in a way that places their right to be transnationally mobile into question. In other words, the specter of sex tourism has created a situation in which Brazilian women of African descent who want to move beyond national borders are not only discouraged because of the "risks and dangers" of trafficking but are also automatically seen as "suspect." In referring to the "specter of sex tourism," I am suggesting that not only sex workers or sex tourists feel the effects of discourses surrounding sex tourism. These discourses also profoundly impact the interactions between foreign tourists and locals and what they think about each other's motivations and intentions, particularly regarding sex and intimacy.

Moral panic occurs when "a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests" (Cohen 1972, 9). Moral panic creates a flurry of mass-media activity, where the object of the panic is presented in "stylized and stereotypical fashion,"

and experts propose solutions and develop coping strategies for the problem (ibid.). Moral panic provokes new techniques for governing the self and others, and "produce[s] state and non-state stigma, ostracism, and social exclusion" (Herdt 2009, 3). In articulating the concept of "moral panic," I draw from Hazel Carby's (1992) essay, in which she argues that the migration of black women to northern cities in the United States in the early twentieth century generated a moral panic associated with the construction of black female migrants as both "sexually degenerate and socially dangerous" (739), and in need of protection as they are "at risk" or "vulnerable" to falling into prostitution (741).

This idea resonates with the Brazilian campaigns against sex tourism and trafficking that depict Brazilian women of African descent as not only naïve but also eager to use their transnational ties to foreigners as a "get-rich-quick" scheme. The underlying implication might be that, lacking the necessary skills and qualifications to succeed and acquire a higher standard of living in Brazil, these women seek out opportunities to try their luck abroad. They see transnational romance and marriage or job opportunities as the best and most efficient strategy to achieve upward mobility. Their dreams of transnational mobility, however, violate a moral and social order in which they are always already poor, marginalized, and unable to move. Like M. Jacqui Alexander's (2005) concept of the "queer fetishized native," they are discursively stuck in place, never allowed to move or travel. Ironically, although black women have long been situated at the bottom of a racial/gender hierarchy, they are overwhelmingly sought out by foreign tourists who travel to Brazil in search of erotic adventures with "exotic Others." Thus a major disruption of the racial social order occurs when a Brazilian woman of African descent successfully travels abroad.

The fears provoked by the migration of black women to northern U.S. cities in the early 1900s and those aroused by black women's mobility in contemporary Bahia raise questions about the gendered aspects of travel. Paulla Ebron (1997) points out that women travelers are often portrayed as morally distasteful and sexually promiscuous, whereas men's travels are seen as "stories of masculine agency" (225). Moreover, as Laura Agustín (2007) asks: Why should the travels of people from less wealthy countries be understood as fundamentally different from those of Europeans? Although many seem to think that the term "cosmopolitan" should be reserved for "elite, urbane globetrotters," Agustin contends that there is no reason poorer travelers should be disqualified from cosmopolitanism (44).

Conclusion: APROSBA as an Alternative Model

APROSBA's depiction of sex workers as dignified subjects with the power to control their destinies rather than as vulnerable victims is perhaps a more fruitful response to untangling the sex work–trafficking conflation. Founded in 1997, APROSBA is the only organization in Bahia run by and for prostitutes. That adult prostitution is legal in Brazil has not ameliorated its stigmatization. Prostitutes in Salvador must therefore negotiate their agency in a society that stigmatizes their trade, a police system that often abuses and criminalizes them rather than protecting them, and a health system that perceives them as "vectors of disease." APROSBA mobilizes for prostitutes' rights, recognition, and the full benefits of citizenship. In the words of the organization's co-founder, Fabiana: "We want to show that prostitutes are also dignified people who exercise a profession like any other" (cited in Francisco 2006). The activities of APROSBA include weekly meetings for members, safe sex workshops, group activities, and the distribution of condoms and educational materials. APROSBA also refers members to lawyers and health centers, offers support in cases of sexual and physical abuse, and contacts local media outlets when organizing protests.

APROSBA is integrated into regional, national, and international networks of sex workers' associations. Not only is it a member of the Rede Brasileira de Prostitutas (Brazilian Network of Prostitutes), established in 1987 by Gabriela Leite, but it was selected by the Rede to organize the Projeto Sem Vergonha (Without Shame Project) in May 2007, which consisted of a weeklong training program that brought together fifteen sex worker activists from various organizations in the northeastern region. In March 2006 APROSBA became the first prostitutes' association in the world to launch its own radio station. Funded by the Ministry of Culture, Radio Zona was envisioned as a way to reach out to prostitutes and transform society's dominant views of prostitution by discussing issues such as human rights, sexual abuse, social issues, HIV/AIDS prevention, and racism (Francisco 2006).

In examining the circulation of discourses around "sex tourism" and "trafficking" in Brazil, this chapter has illustrated how even the most well-intended efforts can reproduce stereotypical images that confine people to their respective places. The "specter of vulnerability" creates a moral panic in which already marginalized people are stigmatized even further. The ways in which moral panic affects even women who are not engaged in sex work is exemplified in the following case from my fieldwork.

Sean is an African American gay man who has lived for a long time in Salvador, where he is a member of the Afro-Brazilian religion of candomblé. Iya Taís, his *mãe de santo* (godmother in the candomblé house where he lives), is an attractive Afro-Brazilian woman who looks significantly younger than her years would suggest. When Iya Taís wanted to travel to the United States to visit Sean for Thanksgiving, she made the trip to the nearest U.S. consulate in Recife, Pernambuco, armed with all the necessary supporting documents from Sean. To both her and Sean's dismay, neither the carefully prepared documents nor her responsibilities as a mother, grandmother, wife, and *mãe de santo* that tied her to Salvador were sufficient to convince the consular agent that she was not a migration risk. The agent promptly denied Iya Taís a U.S. visa simply because she did not believe her story.

In this case, the consular agent apparently could not imagine a young-looking, attractive, black woman traveling to the United States for any legitimate reason that did not involve transnational intimacies or the risk of illegal migration. This story underlines the message of this chapter, that the specter of sex tourism has created a situation in Bahia in which black Brazilian women who wish to move beyond their borders are seen as suspicious and discouraged because of the "risks and dangers" of trafficking. As such, limiting and limited transnational mobility is yet another extension of the multiple forces of institutional racism, discrimination, policing, and violence that black Brazilians suffer daily. The denial of Iya Taís's visa is a sad but vivid illustration of how state policy and nongovernmental projects surrounding sexual labor, informed by cultural beliefs about sex, race, and class, and citizenship more generally, further marginalize black Brazilian women, whether they are sex workers or not.