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Sex Trafficking, Moral Panics, and Homonationalism  
during Global Sporting Events

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Introduction

In February 2011 police “rescued” about eighty travesti (loosely translated as “transgendered”) sex workers from sex traffickers in São Paulo, including six teenagers. The women had traveled from the poor and conservative northeast to the cosmopolitan southern city of São Paulo and stayed together in a dilapidated, overcrowded tenement building (Lupion 2011). “Rescue” in this case actually took the form of arresting the travestis, though their crime is unclear, because unlike other countries where victims of trafficking are often charged criminally with prostitution, sex work is not a crime in Brazil. ¹

Arrest in this instance began with assault. Pamela, one of the minors, complained, “I was taking a shower, the police knocked on the door. I opened it and was soon getting beaten in my head” (Trindade 2011). Apparently, police had to subdue the travestis because they did not want to be rescued, nor did the minors want to be returned to the more conservative city of Belem. “Here we can ride the bus and go to the mall without being called names,” said Daiany. Samantha, age seventeen, agreed, declaring that she and those whose families could not stop them would be taking the two-day bus trip back to continue selling sex as soon as possible. Dimitri Sales, the policy coordinator for sexual diversity for the state government, contradicted them and defended the intervention on the grounds that it was merely “difficult for the travestis to recognize their situation [as] sexual exploitation” (ibid.).
When news of the raid came out, I was sitting in a cheap bar in Copacabana frequented by backpackers, working-class locals, sex workers, hustlers, and the occasional travesti while interviewing garotos de programa, or “rent boys,” who work in a bathhouse with brothel-style male prostitution. (These men were the focus of my dissertation fieldwork and first book.) The consensus among these locals was that the police needed to mind their own business and stop barging into poor people’s homes. Far from being perplexed about sex trafficking and equally far from framing it as an LGBT rights issue, the scuttlebutt among the bar patrons was that this raid was just part of a larger crackdown that they were fed up with that had included harassment of prostitutes and homeless street kids, and brutal raids on favelas (shantytowns), looking for drugs and gang members, which had ended in the deaths of many nonwhite young men.2

I begin with the case of the travestis because it encapsulates several pressing problems facing Brazil before it hosted the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. When one begins tugging at the loose threads of this shoddily woven story, one finds that state actors acting in bad faith used the travestis like so many other women in Brazil’s sex industry, to appease the US State Department and international human rights and women’s rights organizations while broadening the power of a corrupt state apparatus. In this analysis, I build on Paul Amar’s (2013: 18) notion of the parastatal (a lexical mirroring of “paramilitary”) to describe “coalitions that can include government policymakers, NGOs, private-security agencies, morality campaigns and property developers . . . performing the public functions of a state that has outsourced its functions into a parallel realm of reduced accountability and unregulated power.”

Such tactics are not new in Brazil, but I argue that they are being intensified as a result of global sporting events and the increased public attention that comes with hosting such events. The use of moral panics around sex trafficking and sporting events to bolster development is not unique to Brazil, either. As I document below, there is a pervasive parastatal pattern of governments, neoliberal entrepreneurs, evangelical Christian groups, and liberal activists who promote the idea of a strong correlation between global sporting events and sex trafficking. The result is a moral panic that extends far beyond feminist, religious, and juridical circles, filtering into popular consciousness. For example, in Brazil, a wildly popular telenovela called Salve Jorge airing during the run-up to the World Cup seized on the fears of predation, reifying a hyperbolic vision into a common, if misguided, fantasy that foreign men were out to sexually enslave Brazilian women.

Typically, religious groups and neo-abolitionist feminist groups oppose all prostitution and believe that total abolition of the sex industry is the first step to
EVANGELICAL ECSTASY MEETS FEMINIST FURY

stopping trafficking, usually by criminalizing the purchase of all sex, voluntary or otherwise, in an approach known as End Demand (or the Swedish Model) (Agustín 2007; Bernstein 2007). Meanwhile, sex worker rights groups and feminist anti-trafficking groups that do not support total abolition are not eligible for US funding, which requires a blanket antiprostitution pledge. That gives neo-abolitionists greater influence in public policy development when it comes to questions of trafficking and prostitution, and how to police these activities during sporting events.

However, the correlation between trafficking and global sporting events—although it may seem intuitive—is actually a myth. During these events, when celebrities lend their voices to media campaigns or when feminist groups rally or when evangelical Christian missionaries arrive in a country and preach sermons about sex predation and abduction by traffickers, what one does see correlated is an intensification of police and state violence against sex workers. This violence is also almost invariably accompanied by land grabs, rapid gentrification, and displaced poor people under the auspices of promoting “economic development,” a problem exacerbated, as Andrea Cornwall, Sonia Corrêa, and Susie Jolly (2008) show, by the disinterest and outright hostility shown by “development theory” experts to issues of gender and sexuality. There is, however, a new erotic landscape in Rio de Janeiro that must be accounted for, and it is in this realm that one can bear witness to the Brazilian state’s denigration of certain sexualities and sexual ontologies. Such denigration is happening in conjunction with a governmental rebranding effort to promote other subaltern forms of sexual subjectivity, most especially the rebranding of Brazil as sexually liberal, tolerant, and gay-friendly in an effort to attract more gay tourism—an idealized form of governmentality that I link to Jasbir Puar’s (2007) notion of homonationalism. As the government cracks down on certain forms of sexuality, it is promoting others, and this shift reveals much about the potentially negative consequences for unreflexive privileging of normative and consumer-based sexual subjectivity and its relationship to other forms of subaltern sexuality. By bringing Puar’s theory to bear on the parastatal subjectification identified by Amar, I demonstrate how homonationalism functions in such parastatal formations through the denigration of what I term the “ontology of the whore” and a heightened valorization of consumer-based sexual subjectivity.

Resisting Rescue

In the days that followed the February 2011 raid, initial reports of the travestis’ status as “trafficked” became increasingly murky. The sex workers said that the
woman who ran the house where they lived physically punished them (i.e., slapped them) for breaking house rules, and she allegedly held their birth certificates, a red flag for exploitation and something smugglers and pimps do under the guise of keeping the documents “safe” (Trindade 2011). Life certainly does not seem to have been unilaterally pleasant for them. Yet not all of them had complaints. They regularly made 400 reais (US$250) for a good night and still made 80 reais (US$50) on a bad one. One woman said that the landlady did take 30 reais (US$19) of each woman’s earnings a day for room and board, but that they were, in fact, free to come and go as they wished so long as they agreed to work through the night. Somewhat surprisingly, unlike most debt bondage schemes where unmanageably high “rents” are charged, the amounts in this case are not necessarily exploitative. The travestis also reported that the landlady/pimp helped them arrange and save for the breast implant surgeries that many of them were working toward. Her role as a bank might seem suspicious to law enforcement or antitrafficking groups that do not actually talk to sex workers, but it is not surprising given the intimidating difficulties of setting up bank accounts as a working-class sex worker without proper papers and ID, especially as a minor and especially if one’s gender presentation does not match one’s documents. In short, there were abuses in their new home situation, but the rubric of trafficking is not an easy match.

Nonetheless, the government shipped the minors back to the conservative northeast against their will to families from which they had fled. Thus did the Brazilian government use brutal force to insist on the valorization of the “traditional family” unit ahead of the sexual autonomy of sex workers, the young people’s rights to safety and security, and their ability to forge their own forms of kinship among themselves and with others in their new home. This kind of police violence is nothing new, as gays, lesbians, and, in particular, travestis regularly face high rates of harassment and physical abuse from deeply prejudiced military and municipal police forces (Simionato 2010). What the government hailed as a human rights victory in a self-congratulatory manner for the media was, in reality, a case of the state forcing the women to exchange a potentially (but not altogether) bad situation of their own choosing for a definitively bad one of the state’s devising.

Through this action the government added eighty more rescued people to Brazil’s government tally in its efforts to make adequate yearly progress in the US State Department’s TIP Report, or Trafficking in Persons Report, an annual report begun under the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-386). Failing to (appear to) take adequate steps to combat trafficking not only results in a downgrading and loss of esteem in the eyes of the international community but can also lead to a loss of funding. Each country’s progress is
determined by the US State Department and consists of whether the United States feels that a country has provided enough evidence of “vigorously investigating” severe cases, whether the country provides for and protects victims that it does not choose to deport (a common occurrence), whether the country has raised ample public awareness about the danger and scope of trafficking, and—importantly—whether the country has made serious attempts to “reduce the demand for commercial sex acts” and nationals’ “participation in international sex tourism.” Importantly, this latter point includes completely legal and consensual prostitution and sex tourism, a bit of moral imperialism by the Bush administration that nonetheless suits the secular liberal feminist views of the Obama administration and its State Department.

In this way, the United States forces sovereign states to attack legal forms of sexual work in order to combat “trafficking.” It requires a conflation of prostitution with trafficking. Moreover, foreign organizations that do not denounce legal sex work are ineligible for funding under the “Anti-Prostitution Loyalty Oath,” which led to a complicated series of legal appeals that eventually reached the US Supreme Court, which finally overturned the antiprostitution oath domestically in 2013 in a landmark decision based on free speech grounds. However, the Supreme Court decision does not, of course, extend this new protection to non-US citizens or foreign organizations receiving US funding. Adding eighty cases to Brazil’s file with the State Department counts for a lot of TIP report points. Whether the sex trafficking in question was, in fact, “trafficking” as conventionally understood is of secondary importance because it registers internationally as a human rights intervention. The administrations of presidents Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–11) and Dilma Roussef (2011–present) have been eager to promote the idea of Brazil as deeply interested in human rights issues (UPI 2009). Of special interest are women’s rights and LGBT rights, all of which help bolster Brazil’s claims to join other “First World” leaders with comparable economic clout and secure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Although Brazil went through a period of massive economic growth in the 2000s and fared favorably during the 2008 global financial crisis, it subsequently fell into recession and a deep economic and political crisis of its own replete with massive demonstrations and violence. It is, nevertheless, a major player in the global economic landscape eager to reassert itself as a major power.

Brazil’s antitrafficking laws, which were overhauled in 2003, are being so abysmally abused that Marina Pereira Pires de Oliveira (2008), the Ministry of Justice official who crafted the legislation, resigned in 2008 and began writing fierce critiques about how those laws were being misused and are actually increasing the...
abuse of women. The government is passing further antitrafficking regulations, whose details remain unclear. And at present there is a law proposed by Jean Wyllys with input from the recently deceased Gabriela Leite, a famous feminist sex worker turned activist, that seeks to clarify the difference between prostitution and exploitation, and to establish minimum standards for working conditions for sex workers. The conflicting definitions of trafficking at the local, national, and international level (not to mention between various organizations) creates a slipperiness in definition that parastatal alliances have used to further antisex agendas. Concerns about the rapid advance of urban cleansing and moral crusades led to the stalled attempt by Wyllys to pass “Gabriela’s Law,” which the evangelical right-wing pastor Marco Feliciano, Brazil’s controversial congressional head of human rights, and other conservatives killed in committee (Éboli and Krakovics 2013).6 Brazilians have an expression, para ingles ver, “for the English to see,” referring to laws that were passed against slavery but never put into practice, existing purely for show. Today it is used to describe pulling the wool over someone’s eyes to keep up appearances, including in this case public policies that do one thing while pretending to do quite another. I maintain that the crackdowns against sex workers before sporting events are designed to present an image of a safe and prosperous Brazil to the media and are very much in keeping with this tradition of being “for the English to see.”

Brazilians also have another favorite quip about their homeland: O Brasil é o país do futuro—e sempre será (Brazil is the country of the future—and always will be). Sporting events have presented the government with a valuable opportunity to erase the ironic tagline in that sentence and to come into its own in the eyes of millions of people who will tune in all over the world. The news media are awash in stories about how far Brazil has come and how far it has yet to go. Prostitutes are an unsightly feature on the landscape of the city and—in the spirit of “para ingles ver”—the government is using violent forms of policing to clean up and socially cleanse red light districts.

But how to obtain the kind of control necessary to pull off such a transformation for the world to see? Beginning in 2009, Rio’s evangelical Christian mayor began a militarized version of “broken windows theory” called O Choque de Ordem, “the shock of order.” That same year, the governor of the state hired Rudy Giuliani (New York City’s former mayor and pioneer of racial profiling and broken windows enforcement) as chief of security for the 2016 Olympic Games (Kouri 2009). The Brazilian government cracked down with excessive force against small infractions like vagrancy and public lewdness (to target prostitutes), which eventually escalated into numerous military incursions into the favelas with armored tanks in a process it calls pacificação (pacification).
This intensification is reminiscent of brutal crackdowns during Brazil’s military dictatorship (1964–85), as well as a series of “quality of life” sweeps in the run-up to the UN Earth Summit in 1992 documented by Amar (2013: 66), in which police rounded up prostitutes (especially travestis) in operations with moralizing names like Operation Shame, Operation Sodom, and Operation Come Here Dollbaby. However, the size, scale, and imbrication of the intrastatal alliance of feminist, human rights, and evangelical Christian organizations lend tacit moral credence to the government’s assault. Company is coming, and Brazil’s poor had better be on their best behavior.

The parastatal alliances identified by Amar represent a broader depiction of what Elizabeth Bernstein (2010) calls “militarized humanitarianism” meeting “carceral feminism.” Bernstein explains that what unites neo-abolitionist feminists like the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women and Equality Now with evangelical Christians like Focus on the Family is not an apolitical common interest in human rights but a shared commitment to a carceral ideology that advocates state punishment, criminalization, jail, and imprisonment. Also, a new wave of young evangelicals is willing to set aside hot-button issues such as gay marriage and abortion, and embrace the language of women’s rights and social justice to garner support for antitrafficking (ibid.: 60). Evangelicals and antitraffickers got perhaps their biggest boost from George W. Bush, who expanded Bill Clinton’s “charitable choice initiative” to make religious groups eligible for federal funding. As Denise Brennan (2014: 63–65) notes, the rush to talk about sex trafficking instead of other forms of trafficking into forced labor was spurred as much by xenophobia and a desire to avoid comprehensive immigration reform as by a concern with sexuality. In my own analysis, I take up Bernstein’s focus on the carceral but expand it beyond the evangelical and feminist camps to Amar’s broader array of actors in order to map the repeating political economic pattern related to global sporting events and to better understand the effects of this carceral feminist parastate on sexual culture in Brazil.

**Sex Trafficking . . . or Shell Game?**

In light of this historical and political context, I offer three claims, each one alleging a sleight-of-hand manipulation on the part of NGOs and Brazilian agencies, but these three claims also collectively demonstrate a complex and refracting complicity of the carceral parastate in the persecution of the very people these alliances are purporting to help. First is the claim that antitrafficking operations in Brazil are linked to development efforts despite apparent concern for women’s
rights, which has actually increased rather than decreased the exploitation of women. Next, I turn to international research perspectives that debunk the presumed correlation between global sporting events and sex trafficking. Finally, I address the more theoretical question of how the state’s interest in policing sexual ontologies reveals the relationship between governmentality and homonationalism in Brazil’s new consumer economy.

First, to the question of political economy: the Brazilian government misconstrued data about sex trafficking in an effort to crack down on red-light districts, clean up those spaces, and make room for the stadiums, hotels, and facilities required for the World Cup and Olympics. I focus on a hot spot for pricy development, the Copacabana district of Rio, where the most visible overlap between tourism and prostitution famously takes place. This area includes Balcony Bar, a venue popular with sex workers and clients that had the misfortune of being located across from the FIFA Fan Fest viewing tents on Copacabana beach and so became the site of a major raid on the opening day of the World Cup. Balcony Bar was closed and has been replaced by an upscale restaurant. The prostitution in and adjacent to Balcony now appears to have moved farther down the beachfront. When the World Cup and Olympic Games are done, the once-thriving sexual culture of Copacabana—a culture that includes legal and consensual prostitution—will likely not come back. Now that gentrification has taken hold and new owners are in possession of former commercial sex venues, it is not realistic to think the prostitutes will somehow reclaim these properties. In the case of Balcony Bar, the carceral parastate has engaged in a state-abetted neoliberal land grab, undertaken in the name of feminism and human rights—all with the blessing of feminist groups such as Femen, which has been staging antiprostitution and antisex tourism protests throughout Copacabana and Rio’s main airport.

Ironically, governmental juking of the stats also makes the country look good to international observers while strengthening connections between organized crime groups and corrupt police and government officials. As Amar (2009: 40) demonstrates in his compelling study of sex trafficking operations in Rio, most of the actual exploitation comes not from clients or pimps but from corrupt police. Virtually no actual sex trafficking can take place without police collusion. Moreover, as Amar’s work shows, such physical, sexual, and financial exploitation is happening less in the sex tourist venue than in other locations. The operations Amar describes almost never discovered trafficking victims. They found sex workers. In May 2003, following President Lula’s call to make stopping human trafficking a priority, Pentecostal leaders along with a special military police battalion
began a series of antitrafficking operations. They found a lot of sex workers, but no trafficking victims, and it resulted in only one prosecution—for pimping.

With much fanfare, the antitrafficking raids—given names like Operation Princess and Operation Shangri-la—resulted in a flurry of arrests of clients and women, only for police to release all of them immediately after the news conferences for lack of evidence of coercion, which made for good optics, but poor policy. The Worker’s Party (PT) said that this failure must have been because the military police were corrupt. The PT wanted the federal police to handle antitrafficking. So in May 2004, a UN team working in conjunction with federal, military, and civil police finally managed to bust an illegal brothel in faraway Itatiaia, where they still failed to uncover a major trafficking site, but proudly boasted finding two underage teenage girls (fifteen and sixteen years old). It turned out that the brothel was owned by a military police officer. That same year, officers from the Shock Battalion were found extorting women in brothels for protection money just like a trafficker. In 2005 an officer in the military police was caught attempting to traffic a Brazilian sex worker to Russia.

Given that the exploitation is not happening in the well-regulated venues of Copacabana’s sex tourist districts but is wrought by the police in a variety of less visible venues, it is no surprise that the police should want attention focused on comparatively autonomous sex workers in Copacabana instead of trafficking victims. The Brazilian antitrafficking movement, including the Dilma administration, is asking the foxes to guard the henhouse. The result is a situation in which police and government officials have ignored actual exploitation, misclassified sex work as trafficking, and victimized sex workers, all while “reclaiming” Copacabana for “development” during the run-up to major sporting events.

A Global Pattern

This government sleight of hand in which prostitutes are merely grist for the mills of the Brazilian patria is largely predicated on the assumption that sex trafficking not only exists but is increasing and will continue to increase because of the World Cup and the Olympics. There is an oft-cited correlation between sex trafficking and global sporting events that one finds trumpeted on progressive blogs, leftist groups on social media sites like Facebook urging petition signatures, Change.org, and mainstream media outlets like CNN, which runs a permanent initiative, “The Freedom Project: Ending Modern Day Slavery,” on its home page.7

A growing chorus of scholars in the social sciences and humanities has
coalesced to voice harsh criticism for antitrafficking organizations that lump voluntary sex work and involuntary trafficking together, adding to its ranks a coalition of organizations like the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) that also makes this critical distinction. Scholars such as Carole Vance (2011) have also criticized the legal frameworks for sex trafficking that use the language of human rights law while actually acting within criminal law, and have critiqued frameworks that obscure labor trafficking and carve out sex trafficking as a non-labor issue. Likewise, the Brazilian scholar Adriana Piscitelli (2012: 275) has critiqued international antitrafficking discourses on the grounds that “the notions of prostitution and international human trafficking held by Brazilian sex workers clash with those found in the current public debate of these issues.”

Despite their disconnection from the lived experiences of sex workers themselves, antiprostitution neo-abolitionist organizations remain the only groups eligible for US funding. Thus the Obama administration disqualifies any program engaged in peer outreach such as sending sex workers to do HIV prevention and education or even to raise awareness about trafficking and debt bondage schemes if they also choose to defend their perfectly legal profession. It also disqualifies groups that attempt to include feedback from sex workers in public policy directed at sex workers themselves. Nonetheless, antiprostitution feminist groups and evangelical rescue organizations persist in supporting blanket antiprostitution policies, using global sporting events as a time to induce moral panics and push through harsh anti–sex worker measures, which pertains to my second claim. To investigate this, I traveled in January 2013 to London (host of the 2012 Olympic Games) and to South Africa (host of the 2010 World Cup) to interview service providers, representatives from the National Health Service, academics, hospital administrators overseeing programs for sex workers, the neo-abolitionist feminists from the Lord Mayor’s Office, and representatives of the Metropolitan Police (i.e., Scotland Yard) who spearheaded the antitrafficking policies, and—in the case of South Africa—to meet with sex worker–led advocacy organizations who had collected their own data and undertaken collaborative research projects with universities on prostitution and exploitation rates before, during, and after the World Cup.

I also engaged in ethnographic research during the 2014 World Cup in Brazil before, during, and after the event in indoor and outdoor venues and lower-, middle-, and upper-tier venues. I was invited to be part of a collective of independent researchers with common interests who agreed to share our information and to cooperate under the auspices of the Observatório da Prostituição (Prostitution Observatory) at the Metropolitan Ethnographic Lab (Le Metro/IFCS/UFRJ). In Rio the twelve active members of the research team collectively logged over three
thousand field hours and formally or informally interviewed about two hundred
sex workers.

What I conclude, based on these interviews with stakeholders in London,
Cape Town, and Rio, a closer look at the Observatório’s own data, the British and
South African internal documents, and compiled research reports, is that the cor-
relation between global sporting events and sex trafficking is, at best, severely
overblown and, at worst, a near total fabrication. It is the product of a discursive
alliance between antipornography feminist organizations and sympathetic celebri-
ties like Ashton Kutcher and America Ferrera (as a proxy of New York Times col-
umnist Nicholas Kristof) on the left, evangelical Christian donors and lobbyists
such as the Salvation Army and the International House of Prayer (IHOP) on the
right, and a bloated state security sector of police, international security special-
ists, and legislators scrambling to funnel resources to themselves during an era of
austerity and neoliberal reform.

The anti—sex trafficking movement is also part of a larger right-wing
evangelical Christian movement funded from the United States, which is not only
responsible for dumping money into antitrafficking campaigns in South Africa but
also includes organizations such as IHOP, a megachurch in Kansas City famous
for its ecstatic prayer traditions, which allegedly funds other sex-related lobbying
efforts elsewhere in Africa, most notably the “Kill the Gays Bill” in Uganda.11
IHOP’s antitrafficking ministry, Exodus Cry, writes about going on a tour through-
out Brazil before the World Cup to show its antitrafficking film, Nefarious: Mer-
chant of Souls (2011) to evangelical churches and asking churchgoers to partici-
pate in “The Call,” an IHOP program organized by founder Lou Engel, who went
to Uganda to preach that homosexuality is the result of demonic possession and
who maintains that a “satanic tornado of homosexuals” is planning to take over the
world and must be converted into ex-gays before they can do so (Tashman 2012).

As the eyes of the sporting world begin to turn their gaze toward Brazil
for the World Cup 2014 and the Rio de Janeiro Olympics in 2016, a team
from Exodus Cry prepares to carry a torch of light, life and freedom to this
nation steeped in human trafficking and sexual exploitation. At Exodus
Cry, we believe that prayer is the foundation of every move of God on behalf
of those most vulnerable . . .

Boasting beautiful beaches and a burgeoning sex industry, this
nation sits by as an estimated 250,000 children, usually under the age of
14, are prey to the appetites of pedophile sex tourists pouring in from both
the U.S. and Europe. In fact, the Brazilian Federal Police believe that up to
400,000 children a year are sold in prostitution, especially at resorts and in other tourist areas. Notably, Brazil has seen the exploitation of young boys in commercial sex more than many other places. Therefore, we understand this to be a key launching area from which we can help to reach this nation with the love of Jesus. (Exodus Cry 2012)

*Nefarious* features prominent feminists from the antitrafficking movement such as Dr. Melissa Farley, apparently either ignorant of her collaborators’ affiliated work or willing to collaborate with them despite it. Even though Exodus Cry is not supposed to focus on LGBT issues, its press release about the homosexual pedophiles who target Brazil makes clear that its members draw an unsubtle correlation between Brazil’s role as a gay tourist destination and child prostitution, with global sporting events being used as a point of entry. The group organizes tours with various evangelical churches to warn people about the impending scourge of sex trafficking and stir up panics about the presence of foreign homosexuals who have come for Brazil’s children.

Despite evangelical concerns over underage prostitution, child prostitutes are spectral figures at best. In fact, I never observed any significant amount of child prostitution in the targeted areas in Copa until the megadisco known as Help!—the largest site for safe and legal sex tourists and workers to meet and strike deals—was closed to make room for a new Museum of Image and Sound on Copacabana’s beachfront. Nonetheless, Help! was shuttered amid sensationalized reports about the horrors of sex tourism and child prostitution (Jornal Nacional 2012). The scene outside Help!, though, is in fact so thoroughly unshocking that *Frommer’s* guidebook (de Vries and Blore 2012: 119) recommends it, saying:

> By the Help disco, the Terraço Atlantico is where johns and hookers hook up in the afternoon and early evening. For those who like people-watching, it can make a fascinating scene. . . . The good news is that [it] isn’t dangerous or even overly sleazy. Indeed, it can be interesting observing the hustle and bustle and to and fro, though the atmosphere is not exactly family-friendly (unless you come from a very odd family).

And this is from *Frommer’s*—not an edgier title like *Lonely Planet* or *Rough Guides*—but the guidebook for the staid and thoroughly conventional traveler. With Help! gone, the industry began spilling into the alleys and streets, with hundreds of sex workers and clients mingling. The handful of other bars in the area could not hold the overflow. No longer is there security carding young-looking girls
or the ability to police what is happening. And so now one can find girls appearing to be in their early to mid-teens working outside, as the industry has had to shift outdoors and there are no longer safeguards such as doormen, owners, and sex workers of legal age keeping an eye out for illegal activities and booting transgressors from the premises. By shutting down the safer legal indoor spaces for solicitation, the antitrafficking crackdown has inadvertently fostered the development of an underaged prostitution market in the area, paradoxically creating the very exploitation it purports to abhor.

Nor were we the first or only experts to note that the state uses its antitrafficking laws to increase extralegal detention of sexually vulnerable populations, raise sentences for vice crimes, and harass single women and *travestis* traveling across borders—all without satisfactorily bringing traffickers or abusers to justice (Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women 2011). The media ran similar stories about sex trafficking when Dallas hosted the 2011 Super Bowl, causing the Dallas police to go on TV and announce that one hundred and fifty thousand to two hundred thousand prostitutes, including trafficking victims, could show up for the big game (enough for every fan in the stadium to have her or his own prostitute).  

Human rights and antiprostition activists likewise sounded the alarms in 2010 that South Africa’s five hundred thousand World Cup attendees would cause sex trafficking to skyrocket to forty thousand victims (Kwinika 2010). Similar claims were made in Vancouver, Athens, Berlin, London, and other World Cup and Olympic host cities by GAATW. Now Brazil is following the same pattern. But what exactly is the correlation? After all, it makes intuitive sense that rowdy, drunken sports fans would be more likely to want to get laid while partying. Might they be predisposed to purchasing sex to accomplish this goal? And if there is a demand for sex, wouldn’t traffickers move women to the area, and might migrant women be more likely to enter into commercial sex without knowing the risks and thereby be exposed to exploitative practices?

**Busting Myths before Brothels**

Despite much alarm, these expectations have consistently proved completely false and utterly sensationalistic. In the case of the Super Bowl, widespread panic about Mexican girls being trafficked caused an embarrassed FBI to publicly admit that there had been no trafficking as expected (Huseman 2011; Lee 2011). However, the coverage after the fact of the “surprising” absence of sex trafficking at these sporting events was not given nearly the amount of attention as the stories leading
up to the event, leaving readers under the impression that sex trafficking actually had coincided with the Super Bowl.

Well-funded evangelical groups such as the Salvation Army—which most people know only as charitable bell ringers but which also operates a powerful and well-funded evangelical antigay political lobby—took out numerous advertisements warning of the dangers of sex trafficking during global sporting events, including the South African World Cup. Likewise, the Protestant Church of Germany and the German Women’s Council had taken a similar approach when Germany hosted the World Cup. The South Africa Drug Authority warned that “a billion condoms may not be enough,” and Great Britain promptly sent 42 million condoms to its former colony for the Cup (Cherner 2010). Local celebrities took to cable to warn people not to “fall prey” to traffickers. The most common figure bandied about was that forty thousand people would be trafficked into South Africa for the World Cup, but this number actually came from a Swedish antiprostitution group and, after being cited in a UN meeting, quickly congealed into a “known fact” for CNN and various other news outlets even though numerous academics have noted that no one knows anything about the methodology whatsoever and we have no actual research study that ever produced that number. In truth, the figure was simply being recycled from the German World Cup in 2006, when, according to the South African social scientist Marlise Richter (2010: 222), “over-heated media reports suggested that 40,000 women and children would be trafficked into Germany to meet the demand for paid sex of three million soccer tourists. Only five people were subsequently found to have been trafficked during that time period.”

Despite South Africa being a completely different country with relatively little in common with Germany and the fact that the statistic had not even been accurate the first time around, antiprostitution groups stuck with the forty-thousand figure. Calling it “the Cup crisis that never was,” the South African journalist Kashiefa Ajam (2010) reported: “40,000: That’s how many cases of human trafficking were predicted during the World Cup. Zero: that’s the actual number of reported cases.” The International Organization for Migration, which is responsible for running many antitrafficking programs, derided the whole thing as a “myth,” with director Mariam Khokhar calling it “hype.” South Africa, she said, “has had a problem with human trafficking for a long time now. Suddenly, before the World Cup started, it was highlighted as a big problem. . . . The initial figure was 40,000. Then it was 100,000. We don’t know where these figures came from. But the problem got attention, and people were made aware of something they may not necessarily have known about. So maybe the hype wasn’t such a bad thing” (quoted in ibid.). Except, of course, that the policies one embraces to combat traf-
ficking are vastly different depending on the size and scope, and hype has very real consequences for sex workers, stigma, public health, public perception. At a minimum, laws restricting women’s autonomy over their bodies ought to be based on evidence, not just rumors spawned by evangelical Christians and antiprostitution feminists getting caught up in the intoxicating haze of their own moral panic.

SWEAT, a sex worker advocacy group in Cape Town, teamed up with researchers at Wits University, the University of Ghent in Belgium, and public health officials at Stellenbosch University to conduct several studies for the United Nations Population Fund, most notably a large phone survey of sex workers before, during, and after the games, and another study that trained sex workers as fieldworkers to implement a survey of 2,200 sex workers working across the country’s major red-light districts, including repetitions for before, during, and after the Cup as well as additional methodological components including participants keeping field notes of their business interactions for the fieldworkers. Although their findings are painstakingly elaborated, the basic summary is as follows: there was a small increase of women advertising in the run-up to and during the Cup. Fewer non-South Africans advertised (or were advertised for) in newspapers and sex trader sites than expected. Domestic client rates went down slightly during the Cup, and foreign clients went up slightly, for an overall steady level of demand. There was no substantial demographic shift, including age or nationality. However, reports of police brutality, harassment, and corruption increased (United Nations Population Fund 2011).

Some sex workers viewed the World Cup positively. As one woman said, “One of [my clients] bought me a ticket to go to the stadium to watch soccer. It was my first time. . . . I don’t even wish for that day to pass, I would like to go back again to watch” (ibid.: 18). Mostly, though, they complained. “There is no business like before the World Cup. The clients are busy watching the ball. The time for sex it’s too short.” Or: “There were no changes at all. I am sick and tired of the World Cup. I’m sorry to say that, but for me it was bad” (ibid.: 18). Many complained of police violence: “The police officers took my money, they put me in [the car] and drove around with me, on the way they threw me out of the moving car, my leg got injured and I went to the hospital.” Such tactics of dumping prostitutes in faraway or rural places surface regularly. Or another: “I bumped into police and they asked me if I know that prostitution is illegal. . . . [one cop] who was a female hit me with a fist on my face and I bled lots of blood. . . . I spent about three days not being able to talk.” Several others complained of pepper spray, including one woman who said, “Police arrest sex workers and take our money. They sleep with us and they don’t pay. They take clients’ money and pepper spray our vaginas and
clients’ penises” (ibid.: 25). Although in South Africa there was no increase in sex trafficking but a sharp increase in police violence, Brazil did not heed this lesson from the previous World Cup host.

In London, a post-Olympic research report from a city councilman, Andrew Boff (2012), alleged that despite the city throwing 600,000 pounds at the anti-trafficking initiative, “I found no strong evidence that trafficking for sexual exploitation does in fact increase during sporting events nor that such trafficking or prostitution had increased in London. In fact my research found a decrease. . . . The data I have however reveals that raids increased significantly in the Olympic host boroughs. This has not led to large numbers of sex traffickers being caught nor victims found.” In my interviews with National Health Service manager Georgina Perry, who runs services for 1,500 sex workers a year in three boroughs of London, she explained that the Lord Mayor’s Office maintains that all prostitution is exploitation and that all prostitution is therefore forced. “I’ve seen trafficking,” she told me in her East End office. “We’ve had sex trafficking here before with Thai trafficking victims in the early 2000s. I would tell you if it was happening during these events, but it’s not. . . . And most of the sex workers held in debt bondage tell me they don’t want rescue. They want to marry or they want to work for themselves. Many do want transition [out of the sex industry], but not rescue.” She had been part of the Mayor’s Office’s coalition on trafficking and the Olympics, but had frequently been a voice of opposition. “Everyone saw dollar signs . . . people wanted to make their careers off of it. They were hiring PR companies, media people . . . the police got 600,000 pounds extra. . . . I just kept releasing the data, keeping my head down. . . . I work based on evidence and I think in terms of vulnerabilities, not victims.”

Perry said she hoped to write a report summarizing the experience. “I’ll title it, ‘Watch Out, Rio!’ . . . But the Policing and Crime Act made it possible to bust brothels; police threatened to tell landlords what the women were doing [selling sex], or they can threaten the landlord and say that they will go after them for ‘living off immoral earnings.’ Use the trafficking discourse to scare them. . . . We lost contact with many women. And when they got robbed or beaten or raped, they don’t report it. Or the police answer a domestic violence call from a sex worker and say, ‘Next time, don’t call us again. This is a brothel . . .’ But the abolitionist groups accuse me of ‘keeping women in prostitution.’” When I ask her why the neo-abolitionists in the antitrafficking coalition did not look at evidence before and are only now beginning to focus on research to discover why they found no victims as they expected, she notes that a lot of the people they rely on are religious groups. “The Salvation Army, they don’t publish any numbers. They say research
takes them away from their core mission. They admit they have no interest in evidence, only faith.”

My interviews with the Lord Mayor’s Office representatives who personally headed up the Olympic antitrafficking efforts revealed somewhat contrite policymakers. They did not have evidence of any trafficking cases during the Olympics, they said, but noted that this “lack of conclusive data” does not mean it did not happen. They speculated that perceived increase in demand might have led to oversupply or that perhaps they had prevented it because traffickers saw the government’s forces were ready for them. They were, however, genuinely sorry about the police exploitation, which they were surprised by and which they admitted happened, but said that was an unintended consequence and the result of improper police training. These leaders assured me that police were supposed to go after organized crime behind the brothels, not the individual women, but local police—as opposed to citywide police overseen by the Lord Mayor’s Office—were not as prepared or skilled as the metropolitan police, and each borough has its own semiautonomous police force. As for what they wished they had done differently, both representatives I interviewed agreed that the first thing they would do is not allow anyone a seat at the policy table who was not on board with “the position of this office that all prostitution is exploitation,” by which they meant Perry and other social service providers, such as Jane Ayres at the Praed Street Project, who work with sex workers and follow harm reduction models rather than neo-abolitionism.

Rather than accept claims that the reason there is no evidence of trafficking is because news of antitrafficking measures scared away the traffickers, the Wall Street Journal (Bialik 2010) points out that the numbers used for the World Cup do not add up: forty thousand sex workers for a few hundred thousand soccer fans, not all of whom are men, and not all of whom would buy sex, would just be a preposterously skewed ratio defying basic economics. Moreover, as the Global Alliance Against the Traffic in Women (2011) points out, short-term events simply are not profitable because of costs associated with smuggling, transportation, bribery, and document forgery, instead concluding that while trafficking in various forms is a real problem, the connection between global sporting events and sex trafficking is a fabrication.

NPR’s foreign correspondents likewise reported after the 2010 World Cup that the spike in prostitution never happened, sharing an interview from a sex worker named Rose, who said: “World Cup, we didn’t make money. . . . even if we go to the pubs, they will all just tell us: No, we are here for soccer not for sex” (Kelto 2010). Another added, “No I didn’t make money, nothing. I only see my regular
clients, my local clients” (ibid.). A city councilman in Cape Town noted that “we’ve not seen international trafficking, certainly not the ludicrous 40,000-figures and stuff that were bandied about. So it is exactly ten at last count” (ibid.). Other managers and pimps said business was “terrible,” and sex workers complained that these sports tourists were “boring” and that they were “disappointed,” although some Mexicans offered one of them five hundred dollars, but the Mexicans could not get her past hotel security, so the deal fell through (Thakali and Bailey 2010).

Yet despite the evidence being painfully clear from South Africa in 2010, when London’s turn came in 2012, the Metropolitan Police moved in on five London Olympic boroughs. As Laura Agustín (2012) documented at length during the pre-Olympic raids, the moral panic was not actually rooted in social fact, but the areas targeted conveniently happened to be on the cusp of gentrification, with a campaign in the run-up to the Olympics reporting that the crackdown was necessary to prevent organized criminal elements and also, interestingly, the athletes themselves from sexually exploiting women. Moreover, this fear over the foreign male athletes was echoed by the Lord Mayor’s Office, which fought to include anti-trafficking information in the welcome packets given to the Olympians and pointed to this as a major accomplishment during my interviews because the International Olympic Committee had not been cooperative with them about other proposed publicity that could highlight trafficking and the games, thereby damaging the Olympic brand. The Bishops of Newcastle and Winchester at the Church of England also applied public pressure.

But the outcome was again the same. In the end, police had no tangible evidence of trafficking to show, but they did have a lot of arrests of sex workers and had made it much harder for education, outreach, and advocacy groups who do frontline work with sex workers to provide services. It also means that in a time of austerity and budget cuts to schools, hospitals, pension plans, health care, and policing, valuable resources are being needlessly squandered to appease a handful of evangelical Christian groups and misinformed leftist activists and celebrities. It also de-emphasizes other forms of trafficking and exploitation relevant to sporting events, including construction labor. And lastly, the panic turns consensual sex workers into victims of physical and sexual violence, both juridically and materially, thereby creating the necessary conditions for the exploitation that these groups ostensibly wish to prevent. Moreover, the pattern is a global one that pervades regardless of the form of government or cultural particulars of the host countries. The parastatal alliances are not adjuncts of neoliberalism, per se, and instead flourish precisely because of their adaptability. How, then, did this pattern fare in Brazil?
Brazil’s World Cup: The Rape and Raids the Carceral Feminist Parastate Wrought

On May 23, 2014, police entered the house where three hundred women were legally selling sex in Niterói, Rio de Janeiro. Acting without a court order, the police stole the women’s money, extorted them, and singled several of the women out for rape. Isabel was one of the women whom police beat and gang-raped in this operation that occurred just weeks before the World Cup. When police were done, they closed the building and labeled the rooms as crime scenes. Unlike the other women who were intimidated by police, Isabel pressed her claim and testified against them. On June 21, men abducted her and tortured her by cutting her with razor blades all over her body. They showed her pictures of her children and told her to stop talking to the press. Isabel went from making US$4,000 a month selling sex legally to being totally destitute and homeless. I met Isabel while working with the Observatório da Prostituição, as my colleagues and I scrambled to find her safe housing, clothes, a secure phone, and access to psychological counseling, and to raise enough money for food while she was in hiding. While the other women went to work during the Cup in other neighborhoods and venues, Isabel remained hidden. “They’re scared,” she told one researcher. “Because, like it or not, they know what’s happening. And after all that’s happened to me, they’re even more scared.” As I write this, Isabel remains in hiding. Amnesty Brazil is working on her case, but she remains destitute and depressed. Because she is not a trafficking victim, neo-abolitionist feminist and evangelical groups are not interested in her case. Eventually, I managed to organize a face-to-face meeting for her with the chief political and economic officer at the US Consulate in Rio de Janeiro (i.e., the State Department officer responsible for the TIP report as well as the Human Rights Report on Brazil). It remains unclear what, if any, actions will be taken about her case or the continued possibility of systematic violence against other sex workers.

On the morning of June 12, the opening day of the World Cup, police arrived with reporters from o Globo TV at Balcony Bar, a restaurant popular with sex workers and clients. Police shuttered the venue and hung disparaging signs claiming that “the conduct [of Balcony Bar] reinforces a derogatory image of Brazil, which is viewed internationally as a country that permits sexual tourism.” They also closed a nearby hotel known to rent rooms to sex workers and clients. That evening, over a hundred women turned up to work and promptly moved about ten feet over to stand in the plaza. One woman called out to me cheerfully as she held up her phone, “Balcony [Bar] is closed, but the wifi is still on!” Soon hun-
Hundreds of clients appeared, and the mobile vendors swooped in with cheap drinks and snacks. A rollicking party ensued most every night for the month of the Cup. Across the street, viewers left the FIFA Fan Fest viewing area on Copacabana beach. About three hundred police stood around for crowd control. With no media presence, they no longer cared about the prostitution. As I stood in the square, two European tourists asked some police officers in front of me where they could go to find sex and promptly received directions from the police to another nearby sex tourist venue.

In the ensuing weeks, it became clear as I and my colleagues visited dozens of venues to speak with sex workers that the women were disappointed. “The Cup should end! It sucks,” one opined. Priscilla, a woman in her forties, explained, “I thought I would make money, but no one wants programas! They only want to talk, maybe buy a drink, and then take selfies with me for their Facebook.” Downtown brothel venues resorted to giving out free beer on game days if people would come, but still could not coax clients to enter. Eventually, business was so poor they simply closed down on game days. Although gringos abounded and women raised prices, the Observatório found only 16 of 279 venues to have an increase in business. Local clients preferred to stay home with their families or friends and to avoid the crowds of gringos. Thus, women moved from downtown venues popular with locals to Copacabana, chasing the gringos but creating a massive oversupply of sexual labor and increasing competition in the process.

While I examine these and other events during the Cup in more detail below, the important thing about the Brazilian case is that the global pattern continued. Despite Femen protesting sex tourism outside the Copacabana Palace Hotel and Exodus Cry touring Brazil amid a media frenzy about sex trafficking in Brazil, sexual commerce went down overall and police violence went up. Simultaneously, museum construction and other development continue in Copacabana even as the state tries to shutter venues and drive out sex workers. The carceral parastate was in full swing, yet the individual actors consistently revealed that in the Brazilian context it is the appearance and not the actual rescue/removal/rehabilitation of prostitutes that is most important.

From Prostitutes to Gays: Homonalionalism and Shifting Sexual Ontologies

In this final section, I interrogate what the social consequences of this shifting sexual landscape in Rio de Janeiro are vis-à-vis contemporary discourses about human sexuality and the rights of sexual minorities, offering a framework for how
queer theorists might understand this situation not only as a set of colliding ideologies and economic interests but also as an assemblage of actors, events, and territorializations that reveal new aspects of governmentality in Brazil.

The government is holding up particular visions of normative sexuality at the expense of those on the sexual margins of society. Prostitutes are out; gays are in. Rio de Janeiro has rededicated its efforts to encouraging tourism, launching extensive advertising campaigns along with homonormative PSAs directed at Brazilians to stamp out homophobia. Brazil holds the largest gay pride parade in the world and is quick to point this out to gay media and travel sites. In its efforts to promote itself as a socially liberal, tolerant, feminist, and gay-friendly destination, it is throwing other sexually marginalized people such as prostitutes, clients, sex tourists, and travestis under the ônibus. Using Jasbir Puar’s notion of homonationalism and the rubric of pinkwashing, I argue that we can best understand this move as a matter not of gay liberation but of the oppression of queers (in the broad sense of all those living nonnormative sexual lives). A new form of governmentality is unmaking certain ways of being in and apprehending the world—what I describe as the whore’s ontology—and replacing it with a valorized homonationalism. The use of sex trafficking rhetoric to oppress women (both cisgender and transgendered) ought to be of much concern to queer studies scholars, who have historically neglected to include or acknowledge sex workers in their vision of queer social justice.

For Foucault, governmentality refers to how the state produces citizens, especially the techniques used to create subjects most suited to its own ends. This is not hierarchical but includes a complex and interlocuting collection of institutions, which in our present era include neoliberal actors from the market as embedded in the institutional apparatus (Foucault 1991). Puar’s (2007) groundbreaking work on homonationalism builds on Foucault and has had a profound effect on queer theory and the academy. However, some people have misunderstood Puar’s concept as simply being shorthand for gay conservativism, gay racism, or valuing a particular vision of gay rights in such a way that one accepts or even promotes oppression. Specifically, Puar was talking about Israel’s and Zionists’ lobbying efforts to curry favor as champions of human rights by emphasizing Israel’s regional role as the only outspoken protector of gay rights and freedoms, much as it had promoted women’s rights, thus obscuring the groups in Palestine fighting for LGBT rights and queer causes, diverting attention from Israel’s own homophobia, and sideling the question of its occupation and abuses.

However, Puar’s notion of homonationalism was actually intended to reference far more than just this pinkwashing, as she later clarified that the analytic of
homonationalism is less “an accusation, a problematic subject positioning, or something to oppose” than “an assemblage of affect, bodily forces and discourses . . . a facet of modernity that is embedded in spatial logics of discipline and control that articulate an emergent form of neoliberal governmentality” (Puar, Pitcher, and Gunkel 2008).

I want to bring this concept to bear on the Brazilian state for the moment, and to put forth two ideas. First, there is pinkwashing happening in terms of the promotion of a particular version of gay identity that is highly normative and also linked to consumerism. Second, the current repression of sex workers can be understood as part of a broader shift in terms of what sexual subjectivities the state promotes or denigrates. That is, I want to foreground pinkwashing as an activity worth resisting, and second, I want to return to Puar’s vision not only of pinkwashing but of homonationalism specifically to make a theoretical, not political, assertion that the policy shift in Brazil signals a form of neoliberal governmentality that disciplines and controls a particular assemblage of affects and discourses.

It is important to remember that Brazil is a major gay travel destination and that this source of tourist dollars existed long before the country’s successful bids for the World Cup and Olympics. From the late 1990s onward, Brazil’s reputation as a gay travel destination has grown. The sexual diversity coordinator of Rio de Janeiro’s government reports that the city received 880,000 gay tourists in 2010 (Froio 2011). Although that number is somewhat suspect given that there is no way to assess sexual identity or distinguish foreign tourists from domestic ones, it still gives a general idea of the massive size of gay tourism and the government’s perception of its importance to the industry. At the World Tourism Congress in 2009, the gay television network Logo gave Rio its award for Best Global Destination. The city regularly appears in top ten lists from gay travel magazines and articles in gay publications like Out and Instinct.

Paulo Senise, executive director of the Rio Convention and Visitors Bureau, declared: “The importance and growth of gay tourism in the world is indisputable. Rio has all the characteristics to be recognized as a gay-friendly city,” noting that “diversity makes a lot of money for the city, it creates jobs, it increases tax revenue and contributes to sharing out wealth” (Froio 2011). Riotur, the city’s promotion firm, boasts that the city’s “top notch” restaurants, hotels, bars, and clubs are all gay-friendly and inclusive (Renee 2010: 37–38). The mayor’s office is working on an international ad campaign aimed at foreign gay tourists. Even mainstream corporations have noticed the trend. Delta and other airlines feature Rio as a “top destination” on the dedicated gay travel sections of their websites (the mere existence of which bespeaks the growing power of the gay travel industry).
This does not mean that there isn’t a lot of homophobia in Brazil. Quite the contrary. Evangelical Brazilians have enjoyed a particularly vicious resurgence largely because of their hatred of gays, and they have seized control of powerful human rights committees and positions in congress. However, the state also recently held a major conference for tourism ministry officials, PR officials, academics, and business leaders to discuss strategies for even further dominating the gay travel industry. Brazil is quick to laud itself for holding the world’s largest pride parade, and a recent supreme court ruling that has paved the way for some recognition of gay relationships has also increased its perception as gay-friendly and tolerant, as have a barrage of images of Rio as a sexual playground where gays can be public in their affections and where even heterosexual carnival revelers have been known to blur the edges of sexual transgression. There is also a very public display of the state’s affirmation of gay rights in the Rio without Homophobia campaign (2011–2016), which displays hyper-normative middle-class couples in some of Rio’s famous tourist spaces such as the Arcos de Lapa and Sugarloaf Mountain, noting that the ad campaign is “an initiative of the government of Rio de Janeiro, but it can be yours too” (figs. 1 and 2).14
In this way, certain images of homosexuality are adjudicated and found to be acceptable to a vision of a progressive, tolerant, and diverse society. These images and the kind of gays they represent are deemed sexual citizens worth defending against the homophobic right wing in Brazil. But the acceptable forms of homosexuality are what Lisa Duggan and Michael Warner term *homonormative*, or modeled on heterosexual utopian visions of sexuality that promote domesticity, family, assimilation, and universalism. So at the same time that the state is investing massive resources into the repression of sex workers and sexually vulnerable and marginalized populations in Copacabana, it simultaneously displays ads (including in that very neighborhood) promoting itself as sexually progressive and tolerant, an advocate for sexual rights, foregrounding its support for (normative) lesbians and gays.

But this is not merely pinkwashing; it is indicative of a shift in Brazil to homonationalism. Puar is not interested in homonormative political formations, which she says are easy if necessary targets, but how “claims to oppositionality insidiously conceal . . . subterranean conservative proclivities” (Puar, Pitcher, and Gunkel 2008). So in the case of Brazil, it is not most important that the Rio without Homophobia or the gay tourism advertising campaigns and initiatives are homonormative, although they certainly are that. Rather, what is key is that when the government, gay activists, and gay consumers uncritically laud the positivity of those campaigns and the subject positions contained therein, they actually sideline questions of nation, class, and region. Puar’s titular move in *Terrorist Assemblages* is to demand that we cast off intersectionality to move toward assemblage. She notes that intersectionality simply nods to and multiplies difference while failing to “articulate [difference] as a conceptual frame arising out of particular historical and activist contexts” (ibid.). So we do not ever actually understand the “differing epistemological category formations” because intersectionality becomes a quick hit to gloss a sort of ineffable difference (ibid.). The move to assemblage is “a reading practice . . . meaning that the implications for gay and lesbian activism is not that it needs to create assemblages but rather that contemporary and historical organizing practices need to be read as always already assemblages” that are going to open up new ways of “thinking, speaking, organizing, doing politics—lines of flight, affective eruptions, affect, energies, forces, temporalities, contagions, contingencies, and the inexplicable” (ibid.). She says that we can never know “how” to organize, and she will not provide a roadmap for resistance precisely because she dislikes a binary of “complicity-versus-resistance” and says that we need to understand complicities much the same as scholars think of resistance—as slippery, multifarious, and unstable.

Assemblages theoretically position categories like race, gender, and sexu-
ality as “events, actions, encounters between bodies” (ibid.) rather than intersectional attributes of subjects. The body, then, is always being propelled into deterritorialization and reterritorialization, being enunciated. In the case of Brazil’s parastatal crackdown on certain sexual subjectivities and actions and valorization of others, I maintain that these are unplanned “ontological shifts” best read in light of Puar’s work.

In the context of Brazil, the state is reifying the intersectional notion of gay Brazilian consumer-subjects, but in so doing one actually can see these consumer-subjects not only as identities but as a site wherein the Brazilian state creates particular bodies—racialized, sexualized, classed, fetishized bodies—yet the neoliberal state creates bodies out of affects, desires, and other feelings, be it gay pride, national pride, gay shame, abjection, domination, and so forth. And even as the state seeks to territorialize, form, constitute, and shape a gay consumer assemblage in Copacabana, it seeks to deterritorialize, deform, deconstitute, and obliterate the whore assemblage, to rip out an ontology of whores, to literally pave over the affective landscape and social geography of Copacabana so central to the territorialization of the whore.

When one examines the state’s libidinal investments and its exaltation of the gay consumer and the denigration of the whore in the pre-Olympic/pre-Cup moment, one can see the force of the state laid bare and, with that view, can perhaps glimpse beyond just a Foucauldian disciplining and regulation of the body, instead seeing workings of power in terms of not only discipline but also the state’s ability to intervene at the level of affect, while understanding the state as also already imbricated as an extension of a broader geopolitical governmentality that demands an ontological sacrifice of the whore to sustain the emergence of a new consumer ethic and set of sexual relations and values.

The issue that this form of homonational governmentality raises is less queer versus not queer, oppositional versus complicit—with the gay consumer subject now positioned as bad/capitalist/white/male/gay and the whore as the new good/oppositional/marginalized/queer/figure—than that these two ways of being and apprehending the world (these two ontologies) are contingent and embedded in both complicities and resistances in ways that we may not have seen or known before.

Conclusion: Whore Assemblage

For many, Brazil’s hosting of the World Cup and Olympic Games is most interesting in terms of representation and narratives. How should the country be represented?
Are the narratives triumphalist and laudatory or condescending and skeptical? I think that they present another opportunity for scholars, which is to watch how an emergent form of governmentality shapes sexuality. At this critical juncture, I argue that we must understand the present crackdown on prostitution and sex trafficking as a fundamentally misguided effort.

The shifting governmentality that is privileging certain sexual ontologies is not necessarily willful or deliberate. There is no smoky cabal saying: “Let’s prosecute the prostitutes and sell Copacabana to the gays.” And it is not the case that global sporting events themselves are trying to attract gays. Yet the overall shift in the sexual landscape is important, and one can look at that sexual shift as one group of vulnerable and marginalized people—prostitutes—who were once considered quite a normal part of Copacabana and even quintessential to Brazilianness, being persecuted. Meanwhile, another marginal group—gays, especially normatively behaving and properly spending ones—are brought into the fold and valorized.

There are also meaningful attempts to push back against the parastatal oppression of sex workers and other marginalized people in Rio. For example, events such as the marchas das vadias (slut walks) took on special cultural and geographic salience when nude, scantily clad, and disruptive bodies temporarily reclaimed contested territory from police and developers. And Gabriela Leite’s sex worker rights group, Davida, had a series of successful fashion shows in the 2000s featuring sex workers and allies on a makeshift catwalk that included “pop up” events in bookstores, concert venues, and in Praça Tiradentes, a historic red-light area in the business district, during rush hour to disrupt and reclaim space. During the Cup, a radical queer collective called the Pink Bloc protested, wearing delightfully anarchic pink costumes and genderfuck gear, taunting police and bringing a carnivalesque but aggressive sexual frivolity to the streets.

These disruptions fit in a model of “unruly politics,” which the Brazilian scholar Sonia Corrêa (2013: 44) theorizes as “provocative in exploring the limits, caveats and pitfalls of crystallized notions of citizenship, civil society and justice.” Specifically, Corrêa values unruly and embodied provocations that go “beyond conventional state and law centered grammars underlining contradictions, fragmentations and erosion of public spheres and addressing ‘the question of the state’ in terms of entrenchment and effects of state power and violence, but also in relation to the transnational and biopolitical features” (ibid.). Importantly, all these groups operate on the idea of territorialization, disrupting normative and policed spaces with overt and nonnormative sexuality. They also are on the move, constantly marching, wandering, and circulating in a rhizomatic and often chaotic
way, evoking Deleuzian views of sexuality as in process, flux, and adrift. Per Corrêa’s analysis, they may not be organized or pragmatic in function, but they also do not crystallize in their form and so are able to sustain their unruliness.

Despite these resistances, the ontological shift occurring in Brazil that denigrates the now-abject ontology of the whore reveals a new governmentality predicated on human security as theorized by Amar and shows that the Brazilian government, its politics, and its economy are critical to subjugating and denigrating certain forms of sexuality and certain sexual subjects while investing in shaping the vision of the country as sexually liberal, tolerant, and progressive. In this way, these actors are helping consolidate privileges that align with particular categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Ironically, much of this is being done in the name of human rights, and these actors are therefore reliant on promulgating faulty information about sex trafficking and global sporting events.

Any attempt to provide redress must problematize discourses of sex trafficking and the concomitant manufacture of a moral panic around it, as these also mask class-based and racial prejudices as well as anti-immigrant and xenophobic modes of governance. One ought to understand this situation as an example not only of the revalorization and rebalancing of an ethics of sexuality but of a new kind of governmentality that is creating and destroying particular sexual ontologies, reshaping what it means to be a whore—that is, always and already becoming a victim—while promoting and producing homonormativity as essential to the reinvention and rebranding of Brazil.

Global sporting events are especially important and fleeting moments to study because it is during such events that otherwise skeptical audiences delight in nationalist narratives and propagandizing performances. The World Cup and Olympic Games represent moments when nation-states are free to remake their citizen-subjects in relationship to the state. In this study, it is clear that the para-state’s carceral feminist framing of prostitution reontologizes the whore as a victim whose body must always be available to the militarized state. In Brazil, South Africa, and Britain, this invariably meant the deterritorialization of the whore and the valorization of imperialist and carceral antitrafficking regimes. Following Corrêa’s unruly politics and Puar’s theorization of nationalism, however, we can see that there are also important chaotic and nomadic assemblages of people, affects, and sexual aesthetics that have disruptive effects, and so it is here within such nomadic whore assemblages that queer studies might reposition itself and take up a politics that rejects the carceral and parastral forms that have successfully seduced neo-abolitionist feminists and homonationalists.
Notes

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1. For more on the prosecution of Brazilian trafficking victims, see Piscitelli 2006.

2. Unlike the rest of the global sex worker rights movement, many activists in Brazil prefer the term prostitute to sex worker, reclaiming the former and rejecting the latter as a foreign import. Therefore, I use them somewhat interchangeably in the article depending on context.

3. Following Bernstein and others, throughout the article I use neo-abolitionist feminist to refer to groups opposing all sexual labor, to distinguish them from abolitionist feminist, a term used in feminist history to describe feminists who opposed chattel slavery in the United States. This is also separate from the use of the term in the context of movements in support of prison abolition.

4. The TIP report country narrative did not disaggregate cases so it is unclear if these are counted among the 2,800 “potential victims” cited. It does, however, state quite plainly that “in 2011, there were no reports of prosecutions or convictions for internal sex trafficking under Article 231-A, nor were there any reported convictions for this crime in 2010 or 2009.” The TIP report can be found at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2012/192366.htm.
5. Apart from antitrafficking efforts, though, the Dilma administration’s most visible women’s project has been the Rede Cegonha (Stork Network), which is itself a regressive program that has reduced women’s sexual health to the reproductive realm and further consolidated a conservative vision of womanhood under the guise of progressive feminist values. Special thanks to Columbia University’s Laura Murray, who wisely pointed out to me not only the importance of the Rede Cegonha but the grim irony of the stork as a thoroughly desexualized symbol.

6. The proposed law is 4211/2012 and can be accessed at bit.ly/Mo2lf8A.

7. Change.org has an antitrafficking editor, Amanda Kloer. The site has dozens of anti-sex trafficking petitions, most with hyperbolic statistics or unverified claims, including ones linking trafficking and sports such as “Tell U.S. Government to Urge South Africa to Pass Human Trafficking Bill before World Cup.”

8. See Weitzer 2010; Weitzer and Ditmore 2010; Dewey 2008; Agustín 2007; Parreñas 2011; Doezema 1998; Bernstein 2007; and Vance 2010.

9. See also Peters 2013.

10. For a history and overview of the “loyalty oath,” see Leigh 2012.

11. For more on the International House of Prayer and Christian dominionists’ involvement in Uganda’s antigay policies, see Williams 2013. IHOP also came to national attention when some members with ties to the “ex-gay movement” were arrested for ritually allegedly raping a woman and then murdering her, causing the church to quickly distance itself from these former ministry members (Robertson and Bradley 2012; Hellman 2012).

12. For assertions of a link between sporting events and sex trafficking, and links to Change.org, Polaris Project, Love146, Traffic 911, and other antitrafficking groups, see “Super Bowl Sex for Sale” 2011. For a more realistic assessment of how the hype emerged, see Kotz 2011.

13. For more on abuses of sex workers during the London Olympics, see International Union of Sex Workers 2012.


15. The gay beaches with rainbow flags actually removed them during the World Cup because the overwhelmingly straight crowds of tourists were avoiding those beaches. My point here is that governmentality shapes sexual ontologies and affective landscapes, though it is interesting that the beach vendors discovered sports to be a weak point in the soft underbelly of the gay consumer subject being valorized by the government.
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