

Chapter 2

Sympathy for the Devil: Pimps, Agents, and Third Parties Involved in the Sale of Sex in Rio de Janeiro

Thaddeus Gregory Blanchette and Ana Paula da Silva

Introduction

The “pimp” is, without a doubt, one of the most despised figures dotting the postliberal imaginary of sex/gender relations. Pimps, we are told, enslave and exploit women who sell sex, transforming them into agencyless beings who desperately need the intervention of (generally armed, generally state-backed) rescuers in order to be returned to rights and citizenship. The present article seeks to challenge this simplistic and morally loaded view of “pimps.” Based on 9 years of ethnographic research in Rio de Janeiro, we look at third parties involved in the sale of sex, situating them in lived networks of socioeconomic relationships. It is our contention that, in Rio de Janeiro at least, “pimp” (“cafetão/cafetina”) is an accusatory term used to mobilize resources and deploy power against certain kinds of actors in sexual economies—actors who often occupy some of the most exploited and vulnerable positions within said economies while also often being some of sex workers’ closest allies. At the same time, the term camouflages actors who are universally pointed out by sex workers themselves as being much more dangerous

We will be using italics and quote marks throughout this article to indicate certain symbolic qualities of words. When we cast a word in quote marks, we wish to highlight its use as an accusatory term. When a word is cast in *italics*, we wish to indicate that it is being used etically, or as a more-or-less objective category of analysis, or emically as a stable form of identification within a given social group. If you eschew objectivity, think of these two categories in Weberian terms as “stereotype” and *ideal type*.

T.G. Blanchette (✉)
Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Macaé, Brazil
e-mail: Thaddeus.Blanchette@gmail.com

A.P. da Silva
Federal Fluminense University, Santo Antônio da Pádua, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
e-mail: ana51@uol.com.br

and oppressive: most particularly the police and other agents of what anthropologists Dewey and St. Germain (2016) call *the Alliance*.¹

We have quite a lot of ethnographic data on “pimps,” but although the present article references much of this, it is not directly set out except in the final section. There are three reasons for this.

In the first place, “pimp”/“cafetão” is an exceptionally loaded category, which is heavily monstered and overdetermined. We feel that it is necessary to lay it out in terms of what has already been said about it in Brazil and the anglosphere. The first section of the article thus unpacks “pimp” as it has been used by English-speaking (mostly U.S. based) social scientists while the second section looks at its use in Brazil.

Second, “pimp” is an accusatory category which interacts with juridical structures. The article’s third and fourth sections show how this works in Brazil. Brazil is a particularly interesting example for our reflections because, in the minds of those who wish to criminalize the sale and purchase of sex, prostitution is “legal” in this country. As we show, this is not quite the case. Brazil’s abolitionist laws (which are similar to those of many European nations) are, in fact, used to control and abuse sex workers by employing a plastic and vague definition of “sexual exploitation.”

Finally, due to the intense and often irrational hatred that “pimps” provoke, we do not feel that we can adequately protect our informants through our usual method of giving them aliases. For the purposes of this article (and following the lead of our colleague Letizia Patriarca, in her study of *cafetinas*: 2015), we have thus crafted, from amalgamated field notes, an “ideal type” of a certain kind of carioca “pimp.” We conclude the article with a brief presentation of what this ideal typical “pimp” looks like in Rio de Janeiro, as well as a brief discussion of other types of pimps that we have encountered in our fieldwork. Neither “Delma” nor “Club 171” exist, in fact, but anyone who has frequented carioca brothels will quickly recognize her and her working conditions. It is for the “pimps” such as Delma that we have a certain sympathy and, notoriously, these are precisely the sort of people who are swept up and accused with sexual exploitation in Rio’s increasingly frequent anti-vice police raids.

The Dark Monster

In spite of the centrality of the pimp to much popular, political and scientific discourse regarding prostitution,² relatively little research has been produced regarding this character. Much is said about pimps and ascribed to them, but little is

¹Dewey and St. Germain’s term refers to the set of security, justice and social work personnel and institutions which interlock and together produce “the prostitute” as a legal/social category of criminalized (or semi-criminalized) subject to whom certain human and citizenship rights do not apply and to whose body and person sanctions and restrictions *must* be applied.

²We use *prostitution* throughout this article to denote the practice of commercializing sexual services. *Sex work* encompasses prostitution, but also takes in other sexualized forms of commercial labor such as stripping, phone sex and dominatrix work.

known. As sociologist Davis (2013) points out in her excellent article “Defining ‘Pimp,’” the literature on prostitution tends to accept *a priori* views of pimps that are condemnatory, emotive, demonizing and vilifying (Schwartz, Williams and Farley, 2007; Giobbe 1993; Raphael and Shapiro 2004; Stark and Hodgson 2003). Even those few social-scientific researchers who have attempted to specifically investigate pimps and pimping (Williamson and Cluse-Tolar 2002; Kennedy et al. 2007; Raphael and Myers-Powell 2010; Dank et al. 2014) have tended to employ an imprecise and shifting definition of “pimp” that assystematically combines cultural, gender, role, and behavior assumptions in such a way that the people labeled as pimps (and their encompassing cultures) cannot easily be compared (Davis 2013: 25). Indeed, in many cases, we are not even sure if the researchers are talking about the same phenomenon at all! And, of course, moral *a priori*s regarding pimps still contaminate the scientific literature about them.

More problematic, however, are the informants which these studies often employ.

In five of the principal pimping studies we have looked at (Williamson and Cluse-Tolar 2002; Kennedy et al. 2007; Raphael and Myers-Powell 2010; Dank et al. 2014; Davis 2013) 1, 0, 25, 73 and 10 pimps (respectively) were interviewed: an extremely small population from which to draw sweeping conclusions that are often presented as quantitative in nature. In three of the studies (Williamson and Cluse-Tolar 2002; Kennedy et al. 2007; Raphael and Shapiro 2004) practically all information about pimps comes from prostitutes. In two (Kennedy et al. 2007 and Raphael and Myers-Powell 2010), much of the information appears to come from people who are not currently involved in prostitution, but who are looking back upon it after passing through a transformative change in which they have reclassified the sale of sex as extremely negative. Finally, the largest study to date (Dank et al.), draws all of its pimp informants from among the ranks of the currently imprisoned. Moreover, almost all the pimps discussed in these studies are men and fully 67% of them are black. As Laura Agustin puts it, commenting on Dank et al.:

...bias was guaranteed when researchers chose to center pimps, but the only pimps they could conveniently interview are incarcerated. Black men predominate in prisons and predominate in the kind of pimping researchers know about, so the study reproduces the usual racist idea that black men pimp white women (Agustin 2014).

These difficulties in objectively engaging with the “pimp” have given pimping a largely unchallenged symbolic existence that overpowers descriptions of it as reality. This has helped reify a caricature of the pimp drawn from some of the most racist corners of the U.S. American imagescape (Appadurai 1990). We call this portrayal the “Upgraded stereotype,” after the eponymous pimp in the 2006 comedy film *Idiocracy*, but its ur-expression in the anglosphere’s cultural psyche is almost certainly Robert Lee Maupin, AKA “Iceberg Slim.” Slim’s portrayal of pimping became set as sociological fact after anthropologists Richard and Christina Milner interviewed him for their 1972 study, *Black Players: The Secret World Of*

Black Pimps. The unstated moral—and even racist—attitudes underpinning much pimp research, then and now, can be illustrated by the fact that Milner & Milner interviewed Slim under false pretenses, violating ethnographic ethics with regards to confidentiality and consent (Davis 2013).

The reification and romanticization of the “Upgrayedd stereotype” continues apace in pimp research today (Amber Horning’s recently defended doctoral thesis (2015) offers an excellent exception to this trend). Williamson and Cluse-Tolar, for example, equate rapper Ice-T with Iceberg Slim, describing both as “famous and successful pimps” (Williamson and Cluse-Tolar 2002), even though Ice-T himself describes his presumptive³ “pimping” career in very belittling terms (Spitznagel 2013). The academic fascination with the black pimp and the acritical acceptance of what they say about the “life” and the “game” is even reflected in Dank et al.’s recent work. This is almost entirely based on a qualitative analysis of what sex work scholar Laura Agustin calls “typical cocky imprisoned men’s comments,” aimed at showing how in-control they were in their interactions with prostitute women. These comments were more-or-less accepted by the researchers as a reasonable portrayal of pimping in America and widely reproduced throughout the mediasphere following the publication of Dank et al.’s research.

The majority of the social scientific opus regarding pimps thus revolves around a single presumption that is rarely unpacked: pimps exploit vulnerable women. Not men, note; nor husbands, boyfriends or any other social role; nor women (for social scientific studies of “madames” are almost unheard of): “pimps”.

Even Davis’ attempt to clear the decks and provide us with a Durkheimian taxonomic definition or Weberian ideal type of the *pimp* is centered on this presumption. After all, Davis takes pimps to task for “exploiting their own community” and ends up proposing that a *pimp* be defined as “An individual who financially profits from, and manages the activities and income of, one or more individuals involved in prostitution” (Davis 2013: 24). This activity is understood in Marxist terms to be exploitation. But using this definition and absent the presumption that prostitution is a morally separate and uniquely exploitative form of labor, how would a pimp’s exploitation be fundamentally different from, say, that of the franchise holder of a ghetto McDonalds, or, indeed, an independent small businessman? It seems that the moral ascription of “exploitation” here ultimately depends on what is sold. If it’s hamburgers, management is simply an extension of the long and (ig)noble practice of modern capitalism; if it’s sex, management is exploitative and violent. These two positions are presumed, not proven.

³“Presumptive” because we only have Ice’s word on it and his description of his activities leads one to doubt that he actually was a “pimp” in the sense proposed by Davis. It seems more likely that he was rather a young black man enfatuated by the pimp aesthetic and the respect such men seemed to receive in his neighborhood. When pushed for details, the most Ice-T would say was that he wasn’t a professional, couldn’t pay his rent pimping and that he got his nails done and his hair permed (Spitznagel, 2013).

The unexamined moral underpinnings of this entrepreneur/pimp dichotomy are revealed by the fact that the actual practices of management and workers' feelings about managers are rarely referenced when these terms are employed. And yet, as we have shown elsewhere (Blanchette et al. 2014), sex working women in the U.S. and Brazil will often say that they prefer sex work over labor in a fast food restaurant or as a maid precisely because prostitution offers better wages and less oppressive labor conditions. The erotic dancers in Susan Dewey's *Neon Wasteland* also confirm this pattern. Of Dewey's fifty informants, 49 engaged in other forms of employment before dancing and many of them left these other jobs specifically to become dancers, characterizing "the straight world" of low wage employment as "exploitative, exclusionary, and without hope for social mobility or financial stability" (Dewey 2011: 25).

The "obviously evil" nature of pimping is thus constructed by subordinating analysis of actual labor practices to the affective charge of an accusatory and "monstrous"⁴ term and by categorically ignoring or dismissing any positive portrayals of "pimps" by the women whom they supposedly "control", typically as a manifestation of "Stockholm Syndrome." In this way, someone who kidnaps, enslaves and forcibly prostitutes a ten year old girl becomes the hegemonic moral and legal (and often analytical) reference for a 40 year old sex working woman who rents out part of her apartment to other adult prostitutes so that everyone can work in safer, more profitable and more hygienic conditions. In our experience as researchers, the second type of person is far more commonly encountered in the world of prostitution than the first (and is also more commonly arrested), yet the first (and its various, generally racialized, derivatives) dominates public and legal discussions of pimps, both in Brazil and internationally.

Another problem with Davis' proposed *pimp* definition is that it presumes a relatively clear-cut definition of "prostitution" as set in opposition to other forms of sexual-affective interaction under conditions of patriarchal capitalism. But the foundational authors of socialist and anarchist feminism—Engels (1884), Kollontai (1921), Goldman (1910) and de Beauvoir (1949)—have all made a point of conflating traditional bourgeois marriage and sex work. These authors identify the root of prostitution as male domination and males' presumed ownership of female sexual-reproductive capacities, attitudes which are endemic in society and hardly limited to prostitution. And while all of these authors seek a different future for men and women, they all point out that prostitution is indeed a logical choice, given the options presented to many women by present day patriarchal capitalism. Kollontai perhaps puts it best:

Prostitution is above all a social phenomenon; it is closely connected to the needy position of woman and her economic dependence on man in marriage and the family. The roots of prostitution are economics. Woman is on the one hand placed in an economically

⁴For a better discussion of this term, see Brazilian anthropologist Laura Lowenkron's discussion of the rebirth of the monstrous in the context of laws aimed at punishing "bad sex" (Lowenkron 2012), which draws heavily upon Michel Foucault's work.

vulnerable position, and on the other hand has been conditioned by centuries of education to expect material favours from a man in return for sexual favours – whether these are given within or outside the marriage tie. This is the root of the problem. Here is the reason for prostitution (Kollontai 1921).

From a feminist–socialist perspective, then, it becomes very difficult to see a difference between a “pimp,” managing and profiting from a woman’s sale of sex, and a traditional husband, managing and profiting from a woman’s unpaid labor, which includes sexual–affective labor. About the only distinction that really can be made is Engel’s ironic observation that “the wife... differs from the ordinary courtesan only in that she does not hire out her body, like a wage worker, on piecework, but sells it into slavery once and for all” (Engels 1884: 507).

In spite of the constant monsterring of the pimp, time and again, researchers affirm that pimps’ control of women, to the degree that it exists, does not seem to be substantially different from that exercised by men over women in other types of relationships. As Williamson and Cluse-Tolar remark, “The true talents of a pimp, however, are in his ability to keep his women happy, command money, and portray a deep, mysterious and somewhat mean demeanor about him, one that conveys the message that he is not to be crossed... On an interpersonal level, the power and control pimps maintain over women in their stable is akin to that used in abusive relationships.” (2002: 1083, 1089). And while Herve et al. have argued convincingly that convicted pimps have some of the same personality characteristics as psychopaths (2006), much can be said about male leaders of all sorts, most particularly in the government and corporate world (Babiak and Hare 2006).

So while we can provisionally agree with Davis that pimps are a thing and that a *pimp* is defined by their managerial/profitting relationship to sex workers, it needs to be recognized that this is a very open and partial description—a Weberian ideal type to guide our thoughts about the economic and social relations of sex work, as it were, and not a hard-and-fast category upon which one can hang all manner of unimpeachable quantitative and qualitative data. By not thoroughly investigating the category “pimp,” the social sciences help reify it, moving us away from a cultural studies based understanding of what is involved—socially, economically and legally—in the management of sex work.

Perhaps the worst side effect of social science’s uncritical reliance on (generally black, male, imprisoned and/or contrite, street level) pimp informants is the overvalorization of the “cocky male discourse” that Agustin criticizes regarding control of women, which is generally presented as a simple fact. These “pimp informants” are in many ways an orthodox feminist’s dream, for they often and in no uncertain terms employ misogynist discourses which illustrate women’s worst accusations regarding men. Lost in the excitement of finding informants who confirm one’s dearest theories is the simple fact that these men are hardly “dominant and powerful patriarchs” but rather, as Dank et al. admit, people who have very little power, who come from backgrounds of exclusion and abuse that are quite similar to those of the

women they purportedly exploit. Few feminist social scientists studying prostitution really challenge pimps' "cocky male discourse." Dewey, Rhett Epler and Tonia St. Germain's recent writings (Dewey and Epler 2015; Dewey and St. Germain, forthcoming) are almost alone in that they relativize and contextualize sex work management, privileging street-level, sex working women's comments about so-called pimps and distinguishing between the various types of people who facilitate prostitution:

Women's characterizations of men who facilitate their street-based sex work activities fell into the four main categories of opportunistic struggler, dopeman, small-time hustler, and intimate partner or loved one. Women characterized the opportunistic struggler as a man in a socioeconomic position that offers little to no protection or benefits to women working with him, in direct opposition to the "real pimp" who provided a protective role to women. The small-time hustler alternatively, is the product of the violent socioeconomic realities that frame men's and women's respective gendered positions in the street economy. Intimate partners or loved ones, a category that can include children, are just one of women's many relationships that engender income-generating responsibilities shaped by constraining gendered forces of circumstances including poverty and addiction. The dopeman, a figure in the street drug economy who benefits financially, sexually, and socially from women's addiction to crack cocaine while also providing occasional assistance to them in the form of protection, drugs for clients, or sex-for-crack exchanges.

None of these characterizations correspond with popular cultural or, indeed, some scholarly representations of this figure [i.e., the pimp] as a simplistic exploiter of women (Dewey and Epler 2015).

Or, in the words of one of Dewey and Epler's street-level sex working informants:

There ain't a real pimp out here. I used to work for the best of 'em in New York, but in this area, excuse me, honey, they're crackheads. They think they're a woman's man, they ain't nothin'. A real pimp is somebody who takes care of his girls (Dewey and Epler 2015).

Very recently, however, a handful of North American-based sex work researchers have begun to question the presumption that "pimps"—however defined—are unilaterally exploitive, abusive and all-power. Work by Morselli and Savoie-Gargiso (2014), Marcus et al. (2012, 2014, 2016), Horning (2015) and Hoang (2015) emphasize that the relationship between prostitutes and those who work with, around and over them is negotiated and complex. In spite of lurid stories of pimp violence, the researchers listed above have shown that the weave and weft of the relationship seems to be based on mutual interest, emotional manipulation and occasional threats. Going on what these researchers are claiming, this relationship often doesn't seem to be essentially different, in its more (or less) violent particulars, from other forms of engendered domination: it is not egalitarian, by a long shot, but one should hesitate to take pimps' self-reported word (or that of the police) that they unilaterally "control" women as actual fact, given prostitute women's frequent contestation of this characterization.

Interestingly enough, a new generation of Brazilian sex work researchers with little to no contact with the work of their North American peers is independently coming to similar conclusions regarding pimps and pimping.

Cafetões, Gigolos and Husbands

Brazil has produced even less literature regarding pimps than the Anglosphere,⁵ but what little has been written (most of it by anthropologists) tends to support the observation that the pimp/prostitute relationship is ambiguous and often based upon the same logic as more socially acceptable forms of sexual/affective relationships. In other words, it is often at least as much of a partnership (or not) as a marriage. Anthropologist Claudia Fonseca, for example, highlights the feelings of respect, solidarity, mutuality and even love which can exist between sex working women and the men in their lives that are labeled “pimps” (Fonseca 2004). Anthropologist Adriana Piscitelli has described several different types of sex work intermediaries and beneficiaries in international prostitution involving Brazilians (2004, 2008). Anthropologist Olivar (2011, forthcoming) describes how the moral economy of the traditional, male-dominated, monogamous and heterosexual family lay at the heart of the prostitute–pimp relations described to him by sex workers in Porto Alegre in the 1980s–90s. Also taking Porto Alegre as her field, anthropologist Leticia Tedesco produced a precursor/counterpart to Olivar’s work for her master’s dissertation, mapping contemporary affective and commercial relationships between prostitutes and third party agents in that city (2008). And just last year (2015), budding anthropologist Letizia Patriarca produced a brilliant master’s thesis exploring relationships between *travesti*⁶ prostitutes and third parties in the state of São Paulo. Meanwhile, Historians such as Kushnir (1996) and Schettini (2006), investigating prostitution in Rio de Janeiro during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, have often touched upon pimps and other third parties.

All of these researchers echo what the new generation of North American “pimping scholars” report above: the relationships forged between sex workers and third parties labeled as pimps involve a complex negotiation of exchanges.⁷ Many of the Brazilian authors relate how men described by prostitute women as exploitative pimps can be described in other circumstances by the same women as beloved husbands, boyfriends and partners. As Schettini puts it:

That which turn of the century journalists saw as an underworld of prostitution and crime can be understood as moments of community connection, or at least as networks of conviviality and solidarity among the men and women involved in prostitution. Recognizing

⁵By which we mean, in this context, the principal English-speaking nations whose social scientific establishments form a community.

⁶*Travesti* is an emic term in Brazil used to label a gender performance whereby people who are born male take on (often stereo) typical female dress and mannerisms on a semi-permanent or permanent basis, while also often engaging in various forms of body modification. *Travestis* in Brazil often reject the category *trans* because, although they wish to be understood as women, many of them do not see their situation as the result of mental illness (as stipulated by DSM IV), nor they wish to undergo gender reassignment surgery. For a better discussion of the phenomena, in English, see Kulick (1998).

⁷And, interestingly, very few of the Brazilian authors have read the recent North American literature on this topic, arriving at their conclusions independently through their own research.

this dimension does not mean ignoring that these relationships were full of diverse sorts of conflicts and tensions and structured according gender and status inequalities... (Schetinni 2006: 131).

Much like marriages, in other words.

As one reads through much of the new literature being produced about “pimping,” both in Brazil and elsewhere, it becomes increasingly clear that, in spite of often involving forms of abuse, this relationship cannot be simply qualified as essentially “abusive” or “exploitative” any more (or less) than other forms of less stigmatized relationships built around exchanges of sex, services and resources. In this respect, an essential question that researchers into pimping have barely begun to ask is not why intimate relationships shot through with other interests (typically economic) can turn abusive: it is why this is so often understood as “typical”, “definitive” and “essential” of relationships involving prostitution, but “exceptional,” “non-normative,” or “reformable” in other forms of intimate relationships. This is particularly the case when one ponders the fact that there have been no reliable studies done comparing the occurrence of violence in prostitute/“pimp” relationships as opposed to “normative” relationships (however defined). Just to put things in perspective, however, while Raphael and Shapiro’s oft-cited non-random sampling of 222 Chicago prostitutes reports that about half of them have suffered violence at the hands of pimps, a multinational comparative study undertaken by the World Health Organization, drawing on the experiences of over 24,000 women in ten different countries, reported that, on the average, close to fifty percent of these women have suffered physical or sexual violence at the hands of their intimate partners (WHO 2005).⁸

In short, while there is no doubt that intimate relationships generate and perpetuate engendered violence, there is ample reason to doubt that relationships between sex working women and “agencying” men are any more abusive in this respect. And yet, very few of the prostitution abolitionists who claim that sex work is irredeemably about violence toward women (and thus absolutely unreformable) would make the same claim about marriage. After all, even Andreia Dworkin got married, proving that she thought the institution, which she notoriously denounced as deeply misogynistic and violent, could have some positive social value under the right circumstances.

The new wave of pimp researchers in the Anglosphere and Brazil are beginning to question if the logics of marriage and pimping are really that far apart, however. Morselli and Savoie-Gargiso (2014) claim that a “resource-sharing model” underpins much of what is understood to be pimping, with participants in the relationship “combining the necessary resources and skills to accomplish and maintain a shared objective” (2014: 250). The authors then go on to describe a relationship observed

⁸Prevalence ranged from a low of 15% in urban Japan, to a high of 71% in rural Ethiopia, with most sites falling in the range of 29–62%. 29% of urban and 37% of rural Brazilian women reported being victims of intimate partner violence. See Schraiber et al. (2007), for an analysis of the Brazilian situation.

by Marcus et al. (2012) in which a man provided some small degree of protection and customer-finding services to two women, while primarily working for the both as, essentially, a housekeeper. In return, he received payments from the women for sustaining the household while the elder also provided him with sex. What is interesting about this relationship is, absent the “spectacular” fact of sexual commerce, it resembles what many feminists would consider a “healthy” and even “egalitarian” family arrangement.

Morselli and Savoie-Gargiso avoid pointing out the obvious—that families can also be described as “resource-sharing models,” which notoriously generate violence toward and exploitation of women. José Miguel Nieto Olivar, however, centers the reproduction of a certain traditional family relationship as constitutive of classic forms of pimping/prostitution prevalent in Porto Alegre in the 1980s and ’90s (Olivar, forthcoming).

Olivar also emphasizes the point put forth by Dewey and St. Germain’s informants: the “classical” pimp no longer exists. Olivar attributes his disappearance to an increasing popularization of feminist and sexual rights tenets among sex workers, as well as a decrease in police abuse brought about by the consolidation of democracy in Brazil and prostitutes’ greater willingness to confront rights abuses. Demand for the “protective” and negotiating services once provided by pimps thus declined as arrests and police abuse of sex workers began to diminish.⁹

Brazilian prostitute leaders have also corroborated this trend. Prostitute rights leader Gabriela Leite, for example, once told us that “classic pimps” couldn’t exist anymore in Rio de Janeiro because they were “easy meat” for the police:

Any man who thinks he ‘owns’ a woman is in trouble here because all she has to do is call the cops. Even if he isn’t abusive, men involved with prostitutes are ripe for exploitation by the police: pay a bribe or go to jail for pimping.

Leite, however, also emphasized the role ongoing police corruption has played in the disappearance of the pimp. While police brutality against prostitutes decreased in Rio following the return of democracy, Leite believed that “The police are the true pimps in this city and they don’t like competition.”

Both Olivar and Leite, however, seem to be talking more about the type of “pimp” Brazilians have historically classified as a “gigolo.”

The essential ambiguity of the pimp figure is well expressed by the fact that there are two common terms for pimp in Portuguese: *cafetão* and *gigolo*. It is worth examining these words in some depth, for although they are commonly presented as synonyms, their use by sex workers indicates important differences.

⁹As “Sara”, a prostitute leader from Porto Alegre, told us, “During the dictatorship, pimps were part of the approved system for state control of prostitution. The police would illegally arrest you and they would immediately inform your pimp. He would then come down to the station house and pay your ‘caution’. In this way, the police extracted money from us via the pimps. When the dictatorship finally fell and the police were forced to at least minimally acknowledge that prostitutes were human beings, there wasn’t really any need for pimps anymore”.

Cafetão comes from the Turkish *kaftan* and it generally means a person who sells or brokers the sexual services of others. Crucially, it has a feminine conjugate: *cafetina*. Universally in Brazil today, the term is used to describe a person who owns or manages a brothel and who directly controls sex workers. Furthermore, *cafetão* has an almost universally negative connotation that *gigolo* does not have.

Most brothels we have visited in Rio de Janeiro (and, indeed, throughout Brazil) operate according to the following logic: the house charges an entrance fee and makes money off of selling drinks and renting rooms while the men and women make money off of selling sex. In theory, the house does not touch the money sex workers receive from clients. In practice, everything is charged to the same bill which the house manages, applying fines and other charges (such as those for house-managed STD testing or for house uniforms) and taking these out of the workers' pay. In theory, the house cannot tell a worker to have sex or not have sex with any given person. In practice, there is always a reason for this or that particular client (a police officer, say, or a city councilman) to receive "special treatment" or attention from a given sex worker.

It is in the shifts between and manipulations of theory and practice that many sex worker accusations of *cafetinaagem* arise. A manager or owner who oversteps the bounds of what is considered to be normal or prudent management (excessively docking sex worker receipts, say, or imposing upon their ability to choose between clients), or one who runs an unsafe, unhygienic brothel, becomes open to charges of *cafetinaagem*.

Cafetão/cafetina are universally considered to be negative and are used by sex workers, police, the media and members of civil society alike as an accusation. In this sense, they are probably the closest thing Portuguese has to the Abolitionist understanding of the *pimp*. In the mouths of sex workers, they are used to label people who are considered to be exploitative.

A *gigolo*, by contrast, is an exclusively male personage. Furthermore, he can be ambiguous and even sympathetic, at least in prostitute usage (police and journalists tend to see him as undistinguished from a *cafetão*). During a recent seminar hosted by the Prostitution Observatory, we asked 72 year old prostitute activist Lourdes Barreto what the difference was between a *gigolo* and a *cafetão*. "A *cafetão* has many women," she responded, after pondering the question for some time. "A *gigolo* has only one."

Of course, Lourdes Barreto's typification does not always hold true. We have occasionally heard prostitutes use *gigolo* as a synonym of *cafetão*. But there does seem to be a hierarchy of complicity and solidarity implied in prostitutes' use of these terms. A *cafetão* is a someone who relates to the prostitute as a purely money-making venture. A *gigolo* has a personal and often a sexual-affective relationship with a prostitute, but also earns money from her as a "kept man." Think, for example, of Mackheath in Brecht's *Two Penny Opera*.¹⁰ The term might

¹⁰And, indeed, Max Overseas, the *malandro* main character in Chico Buarque de Holanda's homage to Brecht's work, *A Ópera do Malandro*, is often described as a *gigolo*.

best be translated to English as *hustler*. In Brazilian literature, the *gigolo* is perhaps best represented by the character Teixeira, in Marques Rabelo's *Marafa*, a pioneering modernist work which paints a picture of Bohemian Rio de Janeiro in the 1930s (Rabelo 1935). Teixeira is supported by Rizoleta, a prostitute, to whom he relates as a boyfriend or a lover. He also extorts money from other prostitutes by threatening to break-up their brothels and is thus referred to by them as a "bully" (*rufião*). His girlfriend's co-workers, meanwhile, refer to him as a *cafetão* and warns Rizoleta that he'll end up spending all her money. Rizoleta, however, simply sees Teixeira as her "man," a term which in working class Brazilian argot is synonymous with "husband."

A *husband*, as the term is used by many Brazilian sex workers, is a man dedicated to a single woman in a monogamic sexual affective relationship, who does not make excessive economic demands of her. As Olivar (forthcoming) points out, however, husbands still expect resources and services from prostitute wives, as they do in relationships which do not involve sex work. This, of course, is what lies at the heart of these terms' ambiguities, a point nicely illustrated by Teixeira and Rizoleta's relationship in *Marafa*. For, after all, how does an outsider "objectively" judge the act of a woman who gives money to a man? Is it cruel exploitation? A poor affective choice? The act of a woman so brainwashed or cowed that she cannot recognize her own exploitation? Or is it the mark of a dedicated wife who is helping her deserving male partner through hard times? This ambiguity is at the heart of the "monstrosity" of the *pimp* (and, to a certain degree, the prostitute), in the juridical–natural and juridical–moral sense (Foucault 2001), given that the West naturalizes women as economically dependent upon men, but only traditionally, "respectably" so within the context of kinship ties—whether these are by birth or marriage. Men who receive money from women violate this "natural" and moral order and are suspect, as are women who receive money from men outside of the bounds of kinship, particularly if this is in exchange for sexual–affective labor.¹¹ A "pimp" is thus doubly monstrous within this moral algebra, receiving money from women and encouraging or negotiating their receiving money in exchange for sex with other men outside the bounds of marriage. As such, the pimp can only be scheduled for social death.

Another interesting aspect of *gigolo* in light of this "monstrosity" is term's connotation as a man who sells sex to women. As Cristiana Schetinni has pointed out to us,¹² the sexual–affective–marital aspects of the *gigolo*–prostitute relationship played a key role in sex work in early twentieth century Rio de Janeiro, as the

¹¹ As Ana Paula da Silva has pointed out (da Silva, forthcoming) with the advance of modernity, women have become increasingly valued for their productive (and not their reproductive) work. More and more forms of labor that women were expected to "naturally" perform "out of love" (or a sense of duty)—such as nursing, cooking, cleaning and child rearing—have become rendered respectable as (often under) paid labor. Supplying sexual and affective services to men, however, is a form of labor that still remains highly stigmatized and naturalized as "non-work".

¹² In the course of combined research into the history of sex work in Rio de Janeiro for the "Selling Sex in the City" project of the International Institute for Social History.

gigolo (presumably the prostitute's "husband" or, in any case, her legal male "protector") could insert himself as an effective "circuit breaker" into certain forms of exploitation or repression.

Women who travelled in South America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example (such as theatrical or musical artists who could also engage in sex work), needed a "husband" in order to rent hotel rooms and be relatively free from police oversight. Furthermore, women who worked as prostitutes in nightclubs could have "husbands" intervene if club owners were to attempt to maximize the exploitation of these women as artists or sex workers by underpaying or overworking them. For this reason, Schetinni states that many anti-prostitution initiatives in turn-of-the-century Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires often focused on imprisoning or otherwise eliminating prostitutes' male companions, but avoided closing down major nightlife venues or "artist's boarding houses" where prostitution took place, as these were often frequented by members of high society and under police protection (Schetinni 2012, 2014). In this sense, then, *gigolos* can be seen as selling sexual-affective services which promoted relative female respectability in a patriarchal social and policing regime where unaccompanied, unattached women were seen as, ipso facto, prostitutes.

Our own research into prostitution in early twentieth century Rio de Janeiro turned up a case which illustrates this (Blanchette and da Silva 2009). In 1918, a sex working member of an American dance troop on tour in the city at a renowned night club was arrested by police for drunken and disorderly conduct in a bawdy house on the outskirts of town. Being an American citizen, the police were loath to throw her in prison. Instead, with the American Consul's agreement, they interned her in a mental health institution. Shortly thereafter, however, a locally renowned "gigolo" signed papers as her "responsible protector" (and, presumably, her husband or boyfriend) and removed her from the asylum. This man's intervention allowed the American dancer to unilaterally break her contract with the dance troop and night club (where it was also expected that she'd engage in prostitution) and follow what seems to have been a more lucrative career as a freelance "artist prostitute." It is no wonder, then, that the man in question had been for some time the target of local police harassment, being finally imprisoned for his role in a financial scam.

There is one more crucial distinction which needs to be made between *cafetões* and *gigolos*, however. While *cafetão* continues to be a term in daily use by Brazilian prostitutes, the *gigolo* is a character that is increasingly set in the past. In this sense, the *gigolo* seems to belong more properly (if not exclusively) to an earlier set of social, legal and affective relationships in line with the "husband-pimps" of the 1970s and '80s described by Olivar's informants and the "real pimps" described Dewey and St. Germaine's.

While it is too soon to say anything definitive, we believe that the disappearance of the *gigolo* and other like types from the prostitution scene may have to do with the proliferation of female public subjectivities which took place in the second half of the twentieth century (something Olivar alludes to—forthcoming). Notably, the *gigolo* type's heyday appears to have been during a transitional period in modern

capitalism, in which single women were increasingly becoming present in urban spaces, particularly in the night life, but where female respectability (and thus at least partial protection from police harassment) was still legally linked to the presence of a stable male sexual/affective partner. As women became increasingly, legally codified as equal to men in rights and responsibilities, the functional need for a male partner in prostitution diminished, and *gigolos*, *boyfriend pimps* and *real pimps* began to disappear.

It should be noted that all three of the main categories discussed above—*cafetão*, *gigolo* and *husband* (*homem* or *marido*)—can indicate a man “who financially profits from and manages the activities and income of one or more sex working women.” In fact, one sex worker’s *husband* might be another’s *cafetão*, while a *husband* likewise might be reclassified as a *gigolo* if his sex working wife feels he is making too many demands upon her or discovers that he is having sexual relations with other women (Fonseca, in fact, gives an example of this. 2004: 274).

Finally, there is a whole galaxy of people who profit from and/or manage sex work who are not labeled by prostitutes with any of these terms. These include the managers and employees of the hotels, bars and brothels where sex work takes place, as well as prostitutes’ landlords, housemates, relatives and friends. Often, these people are involved in the exact same sort of activities as people labeled as “*cafetões*.”

Cafetão thus seems to be the current maximal accusatory term among sex workers and it is generally used to indicate people in managerial/ownership positions who, to put it bluntly, have seriously pissed off prostitutes. Thaddeus witnessed an excellent example of this in 2013, when he was invited to give a lecture at a conference organized by one of Brazil’s most active prostitutes’ associations. One of the city’s many brothel hotel owners had agreed with the association to pay for some of the conference’s expenses, but had backed out at the last possible moment, leaving the organizers high and dry. Luckily, another brothel hotel owner stepped into cover the resulting hole in the conference’s finances. Many of the sex working women at the conference loudly and vociferously excoriated the first hotel owner as a *cafetão*. Meanwhile, the second owner—who had exactly the same structural position in terms of managing or profiting from the sex work of others—was repeatedly described by conference-goers as a “dear old friend” who “helps us out a lot.”¹³

It has recently become common among some sex work scholars to use the term *market facilitators* instead of *pimps* in an attempt to strip *a priori* moralisms from the critical analysis of prostitution. We have done this ourselves on numerous

¹³In light of persistent abolitionist claims that sex worker associations are “funded by sex industry pimps”, it should be noted that the sum in question (2000 USD) was laughably small in comparison to, say, the 1.2 billion dollar budget of the United States largest anti-trafficking organizations, which are all abolitionist in focus (Moore 2015). The hotel owners in this case were being pressured by both the prostitutes’ association and the state Justice Ministry (which was the event’s primary sponsor) to contribute to something which was obviously in everyone’s interest: a conference focusing on how to eliminate human rights abuses in the red light district.

occasions. We have begun to question this decision, however, because our primary interlocutors, sex workers themselves, insist on using the categories discussed above. To replace these terms with “facilitator,” merely because the first term is being misused by prostitution prohibitionists and police, runs the risk of losing key emic categories employed by sex workers. These men and women make fine distinctions among the individuals lumped together by police as “pimps” and by scholars as *facilitators*.

This leads us to our next question, however: if prostitutes are particular about who they call a pimp, what does the law say, particularly in a country like Brazil where prostitution is understood (not the least by abolitionists and prohibitionists) as legal but where pimping is supposedly criminalized?

The Law and Pimping in Brazil

If “pimps” are largely imagined as dark monsters in the U.S., controlling most sex work from their all-powerful perches behind the scenes, when English-language media sources and abolitionist campaigners look to the so-called “developing world,” fantasies regarding pimps and sexual exploitation tend to become even more lurid.

In the case of Brazil, this situation is aptly illustrated by the global media’s coverage of prostitution leading up to the 2014 FIFA Soccer World Cup. As we’ve discussed elsewhere (Blanchette and da Silva, forthcoming), expectations were that a half million child prostitutes would be recruited by unscrupulous pimps prior to the Cup to cater to foreign tourists’ sexual demands and that this number would increase by a further 35% during the games. Media stories highlighted prostitute women’s abjectness, claiming that Brazil’s supposedly “lax” laws regarding prostitution¹⁴ had somehow led to a situation in which women and children were routinely sold into sexual slavery for the price of a pack of cigarettes (Goldberg 2014). One of the worst examples of this sort reporting can be found in the pages of *Time* magazine, which reported the unconfirmed musings of an unidentified and self-proclaimed ex-pimp who (in typical “cocky male” fashion) reported having a long and profitable career in trafficking children (Gupta and Crellin 2014). Foreign journalists and academics accritically repeated these stories (Townsend 2014), further reifying them as fact.

Few people, however, seemed ready to talk to Brazilian prostitutes about their work or the conditions they faced. Journalists—both national and foreign—quoted government officials, social workers, police and NGO members almost exclusively.

During the World Cup, we conducted more than 2000 hours of in-the-streets ethnographic fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro’s principal prostitution venues. This followed ten years of similar ethnographic work in the city. During the Cup, we saw

¹⁴The sale and purchase of sex in Brazil is, as of yet, not criminalized.

very few media or NGO workers in the carioca *zonas* unless we ourselves took them there. Without exception, all of the journalists, social workers and NGO personnel whom we presented Rio's sex work scenes to were surprised at the almost absolute lack of evidence of coercion or exploitation (in the moral, if not the Marxist sense) among the prostitutes they talked to.

"But what about the pimps?" they'd ask. "Where are they?"

"Well, what do you mean by pimp?" we'd counter. "Do you mean a big black guy in a silver fox fur coat with a Panama Hat and cane which he uses to beat his hos?" Confronted with the Upgrayedd stereotype, our interlocutors would backpedal. No, that's not what they meant. They meant.... They meant.... Well, they meant sexual exploitation. What about the exploiters?

"Which exploiters? Define 'exploiter', please," we'd ask.

"People who make money off of prostitution," they'd reply, reproducing the first half of Davis' ideal typical definition.

We'd then explain that this would take in a huge number of people in Rio de Janeiro, including us (given our research grant). After all, sex work is not hermetically sealed off from the rest of the economy. Prostitutes make money and spend it. A series of people make money by selling goods and services to them, including the motel owner who rents them a room, the pharmacists who sell them condoms and the baker who sells them their morning baguette. Obviously, then, it cannot just be "making money off of prostitution" that qualifies someone as a pimp.

Usually, by this point in the conversation our interlocutors would become irritated. "You know very well what we're talking about!" they'd say. "Someone who directly profits off of someone else's sex work. The person who takes a cut of the prostitute's money and controls them. Those exploitators! Those pimps!"

We would then explain that this is usually not how most prostitution works in Rio de Janeiro. The *programa*, or trick, is almost sacrosanct in most sex work venues in town. The money that others make off of prostitution typically does not come directly from a sex worker's labor, but from economic manipulations and the sale of goods and services surrounding her labor (most particularly the renting of the private, anonymous spaces where sex acts take place). There are exceptions to this rule, but it generally holds.

Often, our interlocutors would then move to the field of law, "So what's illegal in Brazil?" they'd ask. "Prostitution is legal, but pimping and sexual exploitation aren't, right?"

And that is when we would sigh and roll our eyes, because there are no laws against pimping, per se, in Brazil, nor is it entirely correct to say that prostitution is legal here. All of our laws are abolitionist in nature and they are formally directed toward the elimination of prostitution through the identification of certain types of people and activities which are understood as needing to be repressed. People are generally charged according to whatever law can be employed against them and, in the course of the media circuses that surround large prostitution-related busts, the accused are almost universally presented by police, journalists and policy makers to

society at large as “pimps” or “sexual exploiters,” regardless of what they’ve actually been charged with.

Articles 227–231 of the Brazilian Penal Code are the laws specifically directed toward prostitution and it’s worth taking a look at what they actually say if we want to understand accusations of pimping. The fact that it was only in 2009 that these laws stopped being classified as dealing with “crimes against honor” (they are now understood to be directed against “crimes against dignity”) is an indication of their origins. Established in 1940, they focus on protecting the Brazilian family through the safeguarding of its “honor” in terms of the sexual behavior of “its” women. Thus, these laws not only repress recruiting into prostitution, but also the “recruitment” of women for any sort of “immoral” sexual act outside the confines of marriage. Furthermore, the statutes criminalize the movement of prostitutes, as well as any sort of economic activity engaged in by prostitutes. Needless to say, all of these laws originally applied exclusively to women, a fact that changed only in 2005. Their clear, original focus, then, was to set apart and control women’s sexuality and this is still largely the case. A woman whose sexual behavior takes her outside of the clearly delineated “charmed circle” of what Gayle Rubin calls “good sex” (1984)¹⁵ is subject to social surveillance and juridical punishment. In short, these laws do not protect women so much as they circumscribe what “bad women” aren’t allowed to do, subjecting such women to a special regime of social control.

Article 227, for example, makes it a crime to “induce someone to serve another person’s lasciviousness”. Often understood to be an “anti-pimping” law, this statute is actually left over from the days when it was illegal to “deflower a maid” outside the bonds of matrimony.¹⁶ It doesn’t mention prostitution at all.

Then there is Article 228, which criminalizes recruiting someone to prostitution, facilitating prostitution, or making it difficult for someone to leave it. While this can certainly be applied to pimps, it can just as easily target a woman who encourages a friend to turn tricks as a way of making ends meet (something that is quite frequently mentioned by our sex working informants as a common way of entering into sex work), or even people like the late Gabriela Leite, a prostitutes’ rights activist who frequently portrayed prostitution as an excellent job.

Article 229 is even more ample in its provisions. It criminalizes operating a space in which “sexual exploitation” occurs. This criminal condition is implied whether or not the owner or manager profits directly from said exploitation or mediates it. Under this law, it’s enough to be the manager of a hotel or the owner of an apartment where a questionable sex act takes place to be potentially charged as a criminal, even if one had no idea that said sex act had occurred. Article 229 has also been used to arrest and charge prostitutes who co-rent an apartment, working together for safety’s sake.

¹⁵Monogamic, heterosexual, reproductive sex within the confines of officially sanctioned marriage.

¹⁶See Sueanne Caulfield’s excellent *Em Defesa da Honra* (2000) for deeper discussion about Brazil’s historical complex of honor and feminine purity.

Article 230 is what most people think about in Brazil when they refer to an “anti-pimping” law. It criminalizes “ruffianism,” defining this as “taking advantage of prostitution, directly participating in its profits or living wholly or in part off those who engage in prostitution.” Sounding a bit like Canada’s “living off the avails” law, Article 230 is in fact significantly wider, given than it can be—and has been—applied to punish people who provide prostitutes with paid services that have no direct connection to prostitution itself. A typical “ruffian,” as incriminated by this law, would be the owner of a beach beer stand who is paid by prostitutes to give out cards advertising their services or show potential clients photos. However, anyone who receives money for anything from the hand of a prostitute can be legally qualified as a “ruffian.”

Finally, we have Article 231, which prohibits trafficking of persons. This is defined, however, as facilitating or promoting the movement of persons for the purposes of “prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation”. This is the only place within the penal code where “prostitution” is mentioned as synonymous with “sexual exploitation” and this equation dates only to 2009, when it was included in the current law under the pressure of the feminist abolitionists. Coercion, profiteering or exploitation are not necessary for the purposes of this law and, in fact, taxi drivers who have driven sex workers to meet international flights at the airport have been charged with violation of Art 231.

Nowhere in any of Brazil’s prostitution-related laws are pimps—*cafetões* or *gigolos*—mentioned (the closest is Article 229’s mention of *rufiões*). Nowhere is “prostitution,” or even “sexual exploitation,” defined. The content of these terms is decided on a case-by-case basis.¹⁷ And while it’s true that past case law serves as a guide in these instances, it is also true that the Brazilian legal system is nowhere as beholden to precedent as its U.S. counterpart. The Brazilian judiciary has a great degree of power to interpret the law as it sees fit.

There are also a variety of old laws on the books which have historically been used to criminalize prostitutes. These are in places other than the Penal Code and are essentially unchanged from the era of the quasi-fascist Getúlio Vargas dictatorship of the 1940s. As historian Silvana Jeha has recently pointed out to us, one of the most important of these is Article 59 of the Criminal Contraventions Act, which makes “vagrancy” (*vadiagem*) a crime, defining this as not having a legal job while being of sound mind and body. It is important to understand that, in spite of never being officially criminalized in Brazil, prostitution has also never been, unambiguously, a legal job.¹⁸ Jeha’s recent work in the police files of the State of Rio de

¹⁷The authors would like to thank Judge Rubens Casara for this insight.

¹⁸The complicated legalities of work in Brazil is a topic for another article. Suffice it to say that is only since 2005 that sex work has only been encoded in the *Código Brasileiro de Ocupações* (as CBO 5198), the compendium of everything that the federal government recognizes as labor. Even so, just being included in the Code is not enough to make a job legal: it must also be regulated by separate laws. Lacking the necessary regulation, a sex worker could declare themselves to be an autonomous laborer, operating according to CBO 5198. Very few do so, however, and are thus official jobless, potentially falling under the vagrancy law—which, in any case, covered prostitutes *tout court* before 2005. It is also

Janeiro archives has uncovered multiple instances of women being arrested as “vagrants and prostitutes” for such crimes as “laughing too loudly at night in a public park.”¹⁹ Needless to say, prostitutes’ companions—whether or not they “managed and profited” from sex work—were also widely understood as “vagrants.” This was particularly true with regards to *gigolos*.

Social and sexual mores have changed enormously in Brazil in the 75 years since these statutes were originally written into penal law, but the laws themselves continue active, with few to no modifications. This means that sex work in Brazil can still be subject to the moral algebra of the Vargas Era if a judge is so inclined. Furthermore, other areas of the law can have an impact on how prostitution laws are interpreted. Foremost among these is the Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA), which also contains some serious implications with regards to “pimping.”

This statute is not a part of the Penal Code, but is rather a compendium of laws regarding the rights and responsibilities of Brazilian minors. ECA prohibits prostitution if conducted by anyone under the age of 18, equating it, like Article 231 of the Penal Code, with “sexual exploitation.” Recently, however, there has been a move toward disciplining promiscuous sexual conduct by girls under the age of 18 through the expedient of classifying their behavior as “prostitution” and criminalizing their partners as “sexual exploiters.”

We have been attending meetings of the state Mega Events and Sexual Exploitation Committee, organized by the State Secretary for Social Assistance and Human Rights (SEASDH) and the Infancy and Adolescence Foundation (FIA) to help plan police, civil society and social work policy regarding “sexual exploitation” during the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games.²⁰ In these meetings, we have often seen police, social workers and NGO personnel (Brazil’s version of Dewey’s *alliance*) employ extremely broad definitions of “sexual exploitation.” While avoiding an open declaration that all adolescent sexual activity is criminal, many of these professionals have made it very clear that they feel that sex conducted for any reason other than purely out of love and mutual pleasure, ideally within the context of a monogamic heterosexual relationship, should be considered “sexual exploitation.” The defining characteristic of this “exploitation” is understood by them to be “the provision of any gift or item which could induce pressure on the girl to have sexual relations, or any social or moral pressure for her to do so.” In other words, these “alliance” professionals seem to be equating normative Brazilian courting behavior with “sexual exploitation,” so long as the target of said behavior is female and under 18. Crucially, adolescent males (but not females) who engage in this sort of behavior are also seen as “sexual exploiters.”

(Footnote 18 continued)

open to debate as to whether a sex worker declaring herself to be autonomous under CBO 5198, paying the necessary taxes and filling out the accompanying paperwork, might not also be culpable under Article 228 of the Penal Code or, indeed, even under Article 230.

¹⁹Personal communication, Silvana Jeha.

²⁰A publicly funded think tank charged with helping the state of Rio de Janeiro promote policies that protect minors).

A final complication with regards to Brazilian views of “pimps” stems from the moral crusade against “sexual tourism” in our country. This is often equated by the media, politicians and “alliance” professionals as “sexual exploitation,” even though “sexual tourism” is not defined by Brazilian law and is, in fact, understood by the UN’s World Tourism Organization simply as “trips organized from within the tourism sector, or from outside this sector but using its structures and networks, with the primary purpose of effecting a commercial sexual relationship by the tourist with residents at the destination” (Diotalevi 1995). Under Brazilian law, such behavior is not criminal, as long as it involves consenting adults and no third parties. Increasingly, however, police actions are being undertaken to repress “sexual tourism” and to close down venues associated with it, even though evidence is rarely presented that said activities or venues engage in “sexual exploitation” (however defined).

Despite this legal morass, Brazil’s prostitution laws are quite clear on one point: they are abolitionist in focus, giving the lie to the oft-repeated nugget of common sense wisdom that prostitution is legal in Brazil. Rather, it would be better to say that the sale of sex is not illegal but, as Articles 227–231 clearly show, any activity touching upon the sale of sex is criminalizable to some degree. Even buying sex could potentially be seen as illegal under Article 228’s “facilitation” rider or Article 227’s definition of “inducing to serve lasciviousness.” The fact that these laws are generally not currently being used that way is more due to Brazil’s cultural traditions surrounding prostitution rather than any specific impediment in the letter of the law itself.

All of these laws seem to be vague by design and can be tightened or loosed as and when necessary to include or preclude various sex work related practices as legal or illegal. None of the laws specify what, exactly, is “sexual exploitation,” leaving this to be decided on a case-by-case basis. Finally, none of these laws even mention “pimps” (*cafetões*): instead, they make a series of associations with prostitutes criminalizable, even if money never exchanges hands.

So we come back to our original question then, usually with our interlocutors quite exhausted: “Who is a pimp in Brazil?”

Legally, it is potentially anyone who socially or economically engages with a prostitute in any way, up to and including her adult children, spouse, lovers, or flatmates. They, of course, can be bullies who charge her “protection money” for working on the streets. However, they can also be her landlord, the owner or manager of the bar where she meets clients, the owner or manager of the hotel where she has sex with clients, the person who introduced her to prostitution, any of the other employees of any place she works, or—thanks to Article 231, our anti-trafficking law—the taxi driver that takes her to or from work. They could be clients. One could even say that prostitutes’ rights advocates are “pimps” because, after all, it could be argued that nothing “promotes” prostitution more than fighting for it to be decriminalized.

Policing Pimps in Rio de Janeiro

The question of where the pimps are thus pales in significance to what definition of “pimp” we’re talking about. Are we talking about the way prostitutes define pimps? Look for the people universally described as *cafetões*: these will be indicated by sex workers quite readily and will usually be those people who reliably act in ways sex workers find to be abusive. A hotel manager who rents a sex worker a room so that she can turn a trick is not generally a *cafetão*: a manager who charges sex workers twice the normal rate because he knows they have nowhere else to go certainly is. The manager of a sauna brothel who keeps track of sex workers’ “programas” in a notebook, paying them the going rate at the end of the day (or the week) is not necessarily a *cafetina*, but she sure is if the books do not come out balanced or payment is delayed. A police officer who takes money from a sex worker to teach an abusive client “a lesson” is not a *cafetão*. He becomes one, however, if he shakes down working women on his beat for protection money, especially if he does nothing to protect them. While anyone who works with or manages prostitutes might occasionally or casually be described by them as a *cafetão* or *cafetina*, it is those people who sex workers see as being exploitative will inevitably and reliably be labeled in this fashion.

When we turn to the legal definitions of pimp, literally anyone who interacts with prostitutes can be classified as such. Who actually is, then, boils down to police discretion. As we have described elsewhere (Blanchette et al., forthcoming), police in Brazil have an exceptionally wide degree of latitude when it comes to deciding when they will enforce laws and under what circumstances. In the case of prostitution, the laws typically tend to be enforced on four occasions:

- (1) When sex workers occupy choice real estate.
- (2) When public morality campaigns are being enforced, usually following mandates passed down from city, state, or federal officials following a moral panic.
- (3) When sex worker activities offend the sensibilities of the local bourgeoisie. For example, loud bars frequented by prostitutes in middle- or upper class residential neighborhoods will typically be harassed until they close. (As one informant of ours, the owner of a major sauna brothel, puts it: “The golden rule in Rio is that you can’t establish a whorehouse next door to the residence of a judge, city councilman, or any other *authority*.²¹”
- (4) When police are looking for bribes. This is the go-to explanation by sex workers and intermediaries for any police raid on a sex work venue.

There are, of course, other examples which don’t neatly fit into this typology or are variants of it. In 2006, for example, Rio de Janeiro police went “on strike” for

²¹ *Authority* in this case refers to a member of the State bureaucracy or political establishment—elected or not—who is perceived to have the power to enforce their personal opinions and tastes as if these were law, regardless of the actual letter of the law.

48 hours to protest low wages. Instead of stopping work, however, they “worked to code”, enforcing the letter of the law and closing down several gambling rings and a sauna brothel (Soler 2006). One of our informants, a military police sergeant involved in the anti-trafficking movement and the strike, claimed that this particular sauna had been chosen for the operation because one of its “secret partners” was a high-ranking officer in the Military Police of the State of Rio de Janeiro. Some 70 prostitutes and clients were arrested in the operation, many of the men foreigners (who had their visas canceled as a result). Notably, however, no one was charged for any sex-related crimes as a result of the operation.

The police are manifestly uninterested in protecting sex workers during these operations. In 2013 in the Niterói (across the bay from Rio de Janeiro), a police raid whose stated purpose was to “attack sexual exploitation” in one of the city’s largest brothel complexes resulted in the illegal arrest of hundreds of sex workers, accusations of rape and battery against the police on the part of prostitutes, and the confiscation of sex workers’ personal property as well the illegal expulsion of sex workers from the premises (Murray 2014). One of the prostitute leaders who publicly denounced the raid was later kidnapped and threatened by men she identified as police agents. When she tried to follow-up on her complaint regarding the kidnapping, she was tricked by an unscrupulous precinct captain into signing documents which identified certain men associated with the building’s security as “sexual exploiters” and members of a criminal militia. She claims that after she realized that she had signed the wrong documents (which had been presented to her by police as paperwork referring to her kidnapping) and complained, the captain then said “If you show up dead tomorrow, no one will be able to say for sure who killed you. Your friends can claim it was us but this [shows paper] will show that it was the bandits.”²²

Typically, the police raid a place and then begin to try to “typify crimes,” usually with an eye to creating criminal cases which can be sustained in court rather than protecting the human rights of the women who work in the establishment. Accusations of violations of Brazil’s prostitution laws are usually mobilized in support of the goal of gaining a conviction—any conviction—that can justify the costs of the raid.

As an example, as part of the struggle against the prostitution venue in Niterói, mentioned above, police earlier arrested two prostitutes and attempted to place them in a maximum security prison under the allegation that each was trying to “exploit” the other, being that the two rented an apartment together. The goal here, as in the following raid, seems to have been to punish sex workers in order to push them out of a building earmarked for urban renewal in an area of intense real estate speculation. Ironically enough, when the police eventually did arrest supposed “pimps” involved with the case, months later, a third of them were themselves police officers or ex-police officers (Salarolie and Souza 2014; Schmitt 2014).

²²See “Isabel, the Witness”, interview on Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHwQisSiDxQ>) for the victim’s testimony. Further details come from interviews with “Isabel”.

Another example: in 2005 of an American was arrested for organizing boat trips in Guanabara Bay that brought together foreign tourists and Brazilian prostitutes (Folha de São Paulo 2005). This person allegedly collected money from the men for the trip, paying the women the equivalent of one *programa* up front and getting them to promise to do at least one *programa*. Additional *programas* would be negotiated directly between the women and the male tourists. Following the arrest, we interviewed several of the women involved in the scheme. All praised the American organizer, claiming the boat trips were an excellent source of income. One of our female informants even claimed that the trips were denounced to the police by another prostitute who was angry at being excluded from them. Through these women, we were able to contact one of the accused exploiter's close friends. This person claimed that, following the raid, the police kept the boat's DJ under arrest for over a month, threatening him with charges under Articles 229 and 230 in an attempt to get him to turn state's evidence against the organizer (none of the women were willing to talk to the police, although several were perfectly happy to talk to us). Here, "anti-pimping" laws were being turned against a third party (a DJ) in order to attempt to incriminate a man who, by all accounts and circumstantial evidence, was understood as a partner (and not an exploiter) by the women whom the police were supposedly rescuing.

But perhaps one of the best examples of how carioca police use Brazil's vague anti-prostitution laws not to protect sex workers but to coerce them into turning state's evidence came in 2005, during Operation Princess 2, a series of police raids in the Barra da Tijuca neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro. The raids seemed to be motivated by concerns #2 and 3, above. At the time, Brazil was going through a wave of moral panic regarding sexual tourism, which was almost universally conflated by the media and political leaders with "sexual exploitation of minors" (the boat raid described above was also apparently motivated by this concern). Secondly, Barra da Tijuca, one of Rio's most expensive neighborhoods, had been attracting a growing prostitution scene for some time, much to the disgust of many of the neighborhood's residents.

Operation Princess 2 was billed as combating the "sexual exploitation of children." It ended up arresting dozens of people in in the neighborhood, including many adult sex workers who were later shown in the newspapers, hiding their faces in handcuffs while grim-faced, assault-rifle toting female police officers stood guard over them. No children or adolescents were found in the raid or in its follow-up investigations, however, and most of the people detained by police were set free.

In one apartment brothel, however, a taxi driver, a prostitute, two telephone operators and a maid were arrested, along with the apartment owner and the brothel manager. The latter two accused were quickly released due to lack of evidence (and, presumably, in function of their ability to pay for lawyers). The first five, however, were imprisoned for over a month under charges of maintaining a house of prostitution before they were finally freed by a judge on a habeas corpus appeal (Consultor Jurídico 2005).

Discussing the case with a lawyer who was attached to it, we were informed that the real reason the five workers had been detained was that the police wanted to isolate and “sweat” them by threatening anti-prostitution charges unless they turned state’s evidence. The same lawyer also claimed that the “child prostitution” angle of the raid, amply divulged by the media, had nothing to do with the sexual exploitation of children per se.

“If you look at the actual accusations, they all talk about ‘the involvement of children in prostitution,’” he said. “This is because, for the purposes of prostitution law, anyone under 18 is a child. In this case, what was happening is that certain adult relatives of 15 and 16 year old boys were taking the kids to this particular brothel to lose their virginity.”

As far as we have been able to determine, as of 2015, none of the accused in the Princess 2 raids have been convicted.

“A Child’s Garden of Pimps”: Typifying Third Parties Involved in the Management of Sexual Commerce in Rio de Janeiro

Our ethnographic field work in Rio de Janeiro over the last decade has put us into contact with many people who could be classified as pimps. These range from the owners and managers of upper class nightclubs and sauna brothels, where sex work is effectively regulated, to beach beer salesmen, who are paid by prostitutes to offer prospective clients “escort contact books” along with their ice cold Antarticas. It is beyond the scope of the present article to present a complete ideal typology of these social actors, but we feel we would be remiss if we did not give at list a brief list of the sorts of pimps we have encountered before concluding with a more detailed description of what we consider to be one of the most typical kinds of carioca (and Brazilian) “pimps.”

Club and Sauna Owners

These men are probably the closest thing Rio has to “sex industrialists” in the classic sense. They own and operate the high- and middle end saunas and clubs around the city. Typically, they have access to capital, good lawyers and political allies. Their establishments are effectively (although extralegally) regulated, with workers having established hours, dress codes and mandatory health checks. Sex work in their “houses” is heavily controlled, but it is also generally very profitable.

The Silent Partners

These are the men and women who own the buildings, apartments, clubs, saunas and other assorted properties where sex work takes place. They themselves typically do not enter into contact much—if ever—with sex workers, but they receive significant benefits in terms of rents paid. In 2014, we interviewed a psychologist who, together with her lawyer husband, was renting out an apartment in downtown to what they knew was a massage parlor. When asked if she considered herself to be a pimp, the woman in question said “Of course not! I am simply a landlord and they are tenants like anyone else. Superior tenants, however. We have never had a problem with them with regards to rent.”

Boyfriend/Girlfriends

These work with a sexual/affective partner who is a prostitute, typically providing them with a measure of on-the-job security by keeping track of them at work. We don’t want to say that the stereotypical “boyfriend pimp” so beloved of many North American sex work scholars, who emotionally manipulates his vulnerable “girlfriend” into sex work does not exist in Rio, however we have yet to see a case of this. Olivar’s work on Porto Alegre in the 1980s shows that this sort of relationship was common several decades ago in that city. What we have seen quite a lot of, however, are very butch lesbian women or trans men who accompany their sex working girlfriends.

Old Whores

Often one will see sex working women above forty years of age working with younger newcomers in bar, beach and street prostitution. These women will train the girls in the techniques and practices of sex work and arrange clients for them, for a cut of the cost of the programa. Very often, these women also transition out of selling sex to managing venues where sex is sold. Often, this involves a serious drop in their income.

“Owners of the Street”

These are self-appointed “protectors” who charge independent and/or street-based sex workers a “tax” for working in a given area. Often they extract money through the threat of violence, but can be admired as much as feared, as Letizia Patriarca

relates in the case of the trans-*cafetão* “Cris Negão” in São Paulo (Patriarca 2015). We have encountered very few of these sorts of pimp in Rio, perhaps because, as prostitutes’ rights leader Gabriela Leite points out above, they don’t last long in a regime where prostitutes can “hire” police to rid themselves of such individuals. Leite’s own biography (2009) shows her doing precisely this in São Paulo at the beginning of her sex work career in the 1970s, removing a self-appointed “protector” via payment to a police detective. We have documented a similar case in downtown Rio, where a violent street-level *cafetão* was killed by a military police officer, apparently after many complaints by the women he was attempting to exploit.

The Police and the “Militia”

One thing everyone involved in the commerce of sex agrees upon is that the true “regulators” of prostitution in Rio are the police and their allies in the extralegal militias, often composed of ex-police officers. According to everyone we’ve talked to, it is impossible to run a commercial sexual venue in Rio without paying the police. Furthermore, individual police officers organize personal “arrangements” with prostitutes or groups of prostitutes to provide them with protection against dangerous clients or “owners of the street.” Of course, certain of these police-associated groups—most particularly the extra-legal militia—can end up managing sex workers more or less directly.

Conclusion: Sympathy for the Devil

So let’s now take a look at what we consider to be the most commonly encountered “pimp” in Rio, as codified by Brazilian law and police practice: Delma, the day manager of Club 171, a small brothel in downtown Rio. In order to maintain the anonymity of our informants, Delma and 171 are composites constructed from different fieldwork experiences and are thus a rational, unilateral and utopian fiction: a Weberian ideal type. Her statements are taken verbatim from those made by many male and female brothel managers of the same sort.

Club 171 is almost literally a hole in the wall. It’s an anonymous, dirty, open doorway with a faded red awning, stamped with a yellow “171” (which also serves as the building’s address). Concrete stairs lead up into darkness, picked out at floor level by a chain of piss-yellow LEDs. From the stygian depths of the rundown 19th century townhouse, Brazilian funk music booms out. Ascending the stairs, one moves into a cloud of cigarette smoke, cut with whiffs of industrial strength eucalyptus scented disinfectant. A small, swinging aluminum door separates the Club’s main room from the stairs. Pushing through it, one sees a half dozen bored women in underwear and bikinis lounging about the room. Some are topless and

most are idly flicking away at their smartphones. One, naked, is desultorily turning around a dance pole, set into the ceiling and a small concrete platform. There are only three men in the room right now and two of them are drinking together. The third is talking to one of the women. After a while, the couple approaches the “bar,” which is a line of two coolers. Behind this sits Delma, a large 43 year old, medium brown woman: 171’s day manager.

Delma pulls out a “Hello Kitty” notebook and flips it open to today’s page. Each line on the page has a number, a woman’s name and two times: “in” and “out.” Sex is sold at 171 by the minute in 10, 15, 30, 45 and 60 min increments. Delma writes down the worker’s name and the time of entry. She then hands the woman a condom, set out on a cheap paper napkin like a courtesy mint on a hotel pillow. She points to the price list on the wall.

“The rubber is two reais extra,” the prostitute informs her client.

“Geez, can I go without?” he asks.

“No.” Delma butts in, flatly. “House rules. It’s for your protection too, honey.”

The man grumbles but the couple walks off to the stairs and up to the second floor of 171, where they will have sex in a small 3 by 2 m *cabine* whose walls are made of office cubicle dividers. When they come back down, Delma will check him out and present him with his bill: roughly the price of one McDonald’s Big Mac, plus a few quarters extra for the condom. 33% of this goes to the house as rent on the *cabine*. The rest goes to the sex worker.

Delma is herself an ex-prostitute and she still occasionally turns tricks, although as she herself admits, she’s not able to compete with the younger women. For that reason, she’s been working as a brothel manager for two years now—going on three months at 171. The previous day manager was a man who was fired for robbing from the till. The club’s “owner” (actually, the man who rents the space from the building owner) does the night shift, and when it came time to hire a new day manager, he specifically wanted a woman with prior experience in the sex trade.

“The police are coming by more frequently now because of the [World] Cup,” says Delma, alluding to the fact that police raids and “inspections” have been steadily increasing downtown as Mayor Eduardo Paes attempts to “clean up” the city in preparation for its upcoming mega sporting events. “When that happens, all a woman like me has to do is strip down to my panties and run into the common room. Pimba! One more whore on the dancefloor. None of the girls are about to give the police anything, so if they are looking for the manager, they now have a problem.”

Delma has already been down to the precinct house once, along with all the rest of the “girls.”

“The police screamed at me, called me a drug dealer and got a bit rough. At the end of the day, however, they had to let us go because no one was willing to talk to them. As punishment, they dumped us back downtown, on the streets, in our work clothes [i.e., bra and panties]. When I got back to the bar, all the liquor was gone, along with all the cash.”

Delma is the first person to show up at 171 in the mornings, usually at 8AM (the club opens at 9). There are already clients looking to get in a “quickie” before work. She cleans the bar, takes out the trash, restocks everything, and opens up a new page in the Hello Kitty notebook. As business picks up during the day, she has to help the cleaning woman take care of the *cabines*, sell drinks, snacks and tokens for the jukebox, wash dishes, distribute condoms and religiously maintain the all-important notebook. If a client gets rough, she is expected to pitch in with the security guard (downstairs at the entrance) in order to resolve the problem in the quickest and quietest way possible. Delma leaves as the end-of-work rush is picking up. The club’s “owner” comes in at 4PM to relieve her, but between one thing and another, she usually does not get out until a couple hours later. She works five days a week.

For these services, Delma makes no salary at all. Rather, she is understood to be an independent contractor. Her money come out of her sales of refreshment. The profit margin on this is small, however, and Delma claims that much of what she actually takes home comes from selling jukebox tokens. The cost of any merchandise that goes missing or that is given away (to traveling health and fire safety inspectors, say) comes right out of her pocket. On the average, Delma makes less than one fourth of what the prostitutes working in the house make. Often much less.

Delma lives in a favela in the western suburbs of Rio de Janeiro in a house that she built with her prostitution earnings. On the average, it takes her 2 h to go between work and home and her daily transport costs are the equivalent of half of one of the Club’s cheapest “programas.” Her 26 year old daughter is a city garbage worker, something Delma is inordinately proud of. Together, mother and daughter care for a 6-year-old granddaughter.

Delma’s relationship with the Club’s sex workers is by turns matronly and autocratic—a mixture of Piaget and Pinochet, one might say. On the one hand, she is the worker’s first line of defense against bad clients, supporting them (as we’ve seen above) against men who want to negotiate condom use or other forms of abuse. On the other hand, she has to “put order in this chickencoop” (“botar ordem nesse galinheiro”) as she puts it. This means resolving conflicts between the workers, keeping drugs out of the house, applying fines to workers who violate house rules and trying to make the workers show up when they say they will be there. 171 is informal in terms of who it “employs,” with women organizing their schedules pretty much as they like (one of the advantages of working in a low end downtown brothel, or *fast foda*), but the women are encouraged to stick to a reasonably consistent schedule. Those who repeatedly claim they’ll be in but who don’t show up will find themselves banned from the house. One of Delma’s responsibilities is to enforce this. She’s also responsible for getting the women moving and actively seducing clients. This occasionally causes conflicts between her and the sex workers.

We caught an example of this first hand one day when interviewing the women at 171.

It was a slow day and Delma was allowing us to record formal interviews with the women as no clients had yet shown up. Halfway through our second interview, however, a couple of men walked into the common room.

“Girls! Work!” cried Delma, from behind the bar.

“I am busy talking,” said our current interviewee.

“So stop taking and get to work,” replied, Delma.

“No. I want to talk to my friends.”

Delma sighed and sold a man a beer.

“Look,” she said. “If you don’t work, you don’t get paid. It’s that simple. And it’s your choice. But then I don’t want to hear you complaining, come closing time, that you’ve made no money. I am certainly not going to front you any from the till.”

After a few more minutes of sitting silently, making her point, the sex worker finally got up and moved to the men’s table.

None of the women we have talked to at 171 had any complaints about Delma, although they all claimed that she was very strict. Delma herself was quite open to us about the fact that her basic role at the club was to provide a “fall girl” (*laranja*) for the “owner” during office hours, the most likely time for a raid. “But I am strictly a barkeeper,” Delma told us. “I do not take a cut of the women’s money. I am doing nothing illegal.” When asked about the Hello Kitty notebook and whether or not that could be evidence of “keeping a brothel”, Delma dismissed this possibility. “I rent rooms,” she said. “We keep the notebook to protect the women. They don’t want to be handling the men’s money and carrying it around on themselves where it can be stolen. That is why I record everything and pay the woman out when she leaves.”

Delma is wrong, however. What she does is indeed qualifiable as illegal under several provisions of the Penal Code and her belief that she is a “fall girl” for the “owner” indicates that Delma knows this. However, as long as money keeps flowing to the police (and the women at 171 were unanimous that the “owner” pays a monthly sum to keep the house open), there’s no reason to presume that any raid on the club would result in more than a temporary stay in jail for Delma, if that.

The way the 171 Club is run is just one of a myriad of ways in which sex work is managed in Rio. It is, however, quite typical of the lower end clubs in downtown, the south zone and Vila Mimosa, which make up about two thirds of the city’s commercial sex venues. Ironically, in spite of its poor hygienic conditions, lack of air conditioning and smoke-filled ambience, Club 171 is less controlling and “exploitative” of its workers than many of the top end sauna brothels. The women at 171, for example, are not forced to work while menstruating, or to buy uniforms or clothes. They are not fined for no-shows. Even the percentage of money that goes to the house at 171 is less: 33% for *cabine* rental as opposed to 40–50% at most top end places. Thus it is difficult to say, in a Marxist sense, that 171 is more exploitative than wealthy venues catering to the middle and upper classes. This contradicts abolitionist views that low end prostitution is inevitably worse than high end prostitution. In fact, our research (Blanchette and da Silva 2009), indicates that high end escort services are among the most exploitative forms of commercial sex in Rio – although often the most profitable.

More importantly, however, it would take a very limited view of prostitution to cast someone like Delma as a “monstrous pimp”, maintaining 171’s workers in a state of semi-slavery. In fact, as she herself admits, she makes less money in the brothel than anyone else, aside from the security guard and the chamber maid and her power over the club’s women extends no further than being able to apply fines and, ultimately, ban them from the premises.

It is for people like Delma—who represent the vast majority of those classifiable as “pimps” in Rio de Janeiro—that we have sympathy. Transformed into “monsters” by an ever-more carceralist justice system which piously intones its intent to “save” sex working women from exploitation, even as it routinely jails, harasses and occasionally beats or rapes them, someone like Delma is actually far more sympathetic to sex workers than most cops or judges ever will be.

Far from being those who control and exploit sex workers, then, many “pimps” arrested in Rio de Janeiro or breathlessly described by the media actually seem to be prostitutes’ co-workers, partners, employees or even occasionally their sex working colleagues. On the rare occasion that a brothel owner or high-level manager is arrested, they have plenty of legal support and capital to free themselves from jail. Meanwhile, police and ex-police—often pointed out to us by prostitutes as “the true pimps in Rio” are also rarely arrested.

When a pimping case comes to trial, police are rarely able to count on witnesses. In part, as “Isabel’s” case shows and prosecutors often allege, this is because of fear of reprisals—a fear which should not be discounted when the police themselves are involved in brothel management and security. But also, as the Guanabara Bay “bang boat” case shows, there is often professional respect and partnership between sex workers and those managers and brothel owners who are understood to treat them fairly. This is a motivation much more commonly recounted by our sex working informants than fear and this is a fact that neither state prosecutors or ardent abolitionists—particularly those from the wealthy nations of the northern hemisphere—want to engage with at all.

Acknowledgments The authors would like to thank José Miguel Nieto Olivar for an initial reading and his suggestions.

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Anti-trafficking

Horning, A.; Marcus, A. (Eds.)

2017, XX, 196 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-50303-5