



GRINGO PANIC:

SEXUAL TOURISM AND MORAL POLICING DURING THE BRAZILIAN WORLD CUP AND OLYMPIC GAMES

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In the run-up to the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics, media, NGOs, and the state contributed to a growing panic about prostitution. Police raids on legal commercial sex venues increased and police invited the media to broadcast them. In truth, prostitution did not increase in Rio de Janeiro and there were no proven instances of sex trafficking linked to these mega-sporting events. Rather, the “clean-up” of red light districts was a land grab aimed at social cleansing and “urban renewal.” This paper examines how state and non-state actors constructed images of predatory *gringos* (foreigners) to create a moral panic. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted among sex workers and clients before, during and after the Cup and Olympics, this research examines the fantasies projected onto gringos by various constituents – sex workers, media, evangelical Christians, feminists, and others. It argues that gringo clients are best understood as atypical sex tourists with diminished agency who experienced key differences in social capital and cultural competency. The reliance on misinformed ideas of gringo masculinity has unintended social consequences, including the further marginalization of vulnerable women working in Rio’s sexual economy.

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