

On “gringos” and “natives”: gender and sexuality in the context of international sex tourism in Fortaleza, Brazil.

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Abstract

Drawing on research carried out about male European heterosexual sex tourists and young, low income local women, this paper explores the intersections of gender, sexuality, nationality, class and colour in the context of a modality of international sex tourism in Fortaleza, the state capital of Ceara in Northeastern Brazil. Focusing on relationships that include prostitution and romance, it argues that for understanding the dynamics of transnational encounters attention is required on how those differences are set in motion amid foreigners' and local people's reciprocal perceptions.

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Presentation¹

Anthropologists who discuss research on tourism call attention to the necessity of embedding such work on theories allowing them to deal with representations and power, practice and discourse, notions related to simulacrum and authenticity. Entering these discussions, Edward Bruner affirms that diverse forms of contemporary tourism, amongst which sexual tourism, convert the Third World into a playground for the Western imagination. According to this author, tours organized in industrial countries say more about the representations tourists have of Others than about the visited societies (Bruner, 1989, 438-441). These reflections are helpful when contemplating sex tourism. When considering, however, the contexts in which these trips take place, one becomes aware of the necessity of developing more complex ideas about them.

Basing this approach on gender constructions set in motion within the frame of a specific modality of international sex tourism in Fortaleza, capital of the Northeastern Brazilian State of Ceara², I argue that far from involving unilateral appreciation these trips are marked by divergent considerations -- but also convergent ones -- between foreigners and locals. This interplay between concordance and discordance is central for understanding the dynamic behind these transnational contacts.

This argument is based on an analysis of the style of heterosexual sex tourism named by some locals in Ceara as “middle class sex tourism”, by which means visitors from various countries establish relationships with local women from lower and middle lower classes, native to Ceara and other States in the region. It is linked to the desire for social mobility shared by a large section of the local population as well as to the actual migration of some women. Taking gender as a point of departure, I explore the most significant distinctions within the context and I reflect on how these differentiations are set in motion in the sexualization processes in this world. But before proceeding it is necessary to extend further this approach upon what I mean by sex tourism.

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² The city, situated in one of the poorest regions in Brazil, is considered to be a centre of industry and tourism, because of its beautiful beaches and busy nightlife. Fortaleza is one of the fastest growing cities in the Northeast and is also one of the poorest metropolitan regions in the country. Tourism, whose growth intensified quickly since 1980, is responsible for the 5% increase in income per capita, and is considered to be the fastest growing sources of employment in Ceara. GOVERNO DO ESTADO DO CEARÁ. SECRETARIA DE TURISMO, 1999; CORIOLANO, 1998: 88.

In Brazil this problematic area has attracted some attention from the public opinion, researchers and policy makers at least since early 1990`s. In this period the intensification of international tourism in the Northeast, linked to the arrival of direct international flights to this region, made more visible the prostitution geared towards international visitors. While child prostitution in Fortaleza was still the focus of international anxiety, it was nonetheless more and more clear that the Brazilian Northeast had become integrated into the world sex tourism circuit (Piscitelli 1996). Notwithstanding, if among Latin American, Caribbean and African countries Brazil became the 1980's and 90's one of the new targets for sex tourists, Southeastern Asia has been in turn a privileged area for this kind of tourism since the 1950's (Mullings,1999:72).

The endeavor to grasp this problem created a stimulating body of knowledge, which presents a plurality of approaches in constant confrontation with research disseminated in various parts of the world. An important number of such studies assume as reference the pioneering work of Truong (1990)³. In this study sex tourism is linked to relations between people coming from developed countries and natives of poor nations. Accordingly prostitution is considered as resulting from unequal social relations, including relations between North and South, capital and labor, production and reproduction, men and women. This conception of sex tourism runs through the whole bibliography on the subject, in which sex tourism is frequently linked to organized trips ("packages") aimed at a male public aged between 35-50 years and always directed at those who travel from the "First World" to the "Third World" countries (see for example Leheny, 1995; Richter, 1994; Pettman, 1997; CHAME, 1998; Carpazoo,1994; Dias Filho, 1998).

Even though imbued with a political character, various studies managed to widen the field of discussion on sex tourism. The production of the second half of the nineties which is focused on countries in Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America has offered a particularly important contribution which calls attention to the extreme diversity present in the world of what is considered to be sex tourism. This diversity expresses itself in the existence of various forms of sex tourism (Mullings 1996:67; Hall, 1994:267); in significant distinctions between sex tourists – men (O'Connell Davidson, 1996:43) and women (O'Connell Davidson and Sanchez Taylor, 1999; Oppermann, 1999:251-252; Phillips, 1999; Heide 1999; Pruitt and Lafont, 1995; Meisch, 1995) – and in the wide range of established relationships between foreigners and natives, involving not only multiple contacts which are anonymous and immediately rewarded financially, but also long lasting relationships frequently influenced by romantic sentiments which although do not exclude an economic interest do not incorporate direct financial payment.

The analyses considering this wide range of differences have destabilized various generalized supposition about sex tourism. The idea that sex tourism involves men from the First World, who are generally old and traveling to developing countries in search of sexual pleasures which are not available (at least not for the same price) in their own countries, becomes more complex through a contraposition with tendencies in various African and Caribbean countries where the number of women from the First World in search of sexual pleasure supersedes the

³ There are previous works on this problematic (COHEN, 1982; 1986) but the study of Truong marked the discussions on sex tourism.

number of men (Oppermann, 1999: 251-252). The massive presence of sex tourists traveling in various parts of the world in an isolated and autonomous manner (Kempadoo, 1999) is an element at odds with the supposition that sex tourism basically involves organized tourism packages. The most important point however is that these research works contest the adequacy of the idea of prostitution, conceived in terms of financially rewarded sexual services which are both indiscriminate and emotionally neutral, in order to contemplate the combination of relationships which arise from the sexual encounters between tourists (men or women) and the locals.

In the search to establish references which permit reflection on the diversity of known forms of sex tourism, some approaches have envisaged a conceptualization of sex tourism by confronting the linear association between sex tourism and prostitution which became a matter of course in studies on the subject. Some authors propose the utilization of the concept of open-ended prostitution to characterize these relationships. This concept would allow the consideration of the processes which, although beginning as services which are 'neutral' in emotional terms, can become personalized relationships involving emotion and economic interest. Going beyond these reflections, other approaches consider sex tourism as a *continuum* integrating sexual relations with a wide range of women (and men) which may or may not involve the direct exchange of money. In other words, although sex tourism can be considered as tourism geared towards the search for sex, some forms of this type of tourism might be considered a part of prostitution, while others cannot be so encompassed (Opperman, 1999: 261). This line of thought, which I share, conceives sex tourism as any travel experience in which the furnishing of sexual services by the local population in exchange for monetary and non-monetary reward is a crucial element for the success of the trip.

I focus on the constructions of gender set in motion in "middle class sex tourism", in Fortaleza, whilst taking into account the approaches which broaden the conceptualization of sexual tourism. When considering international sex tourists as those foreigners who are traveling in search for sex, I consider the notions of gender set in motion within this context, in the light of those perspectives concerned with understanding the interconnections between this category and other difference marks.

In these approaches, gender, thought of as a way of creating and expressing differences, is necessarily relational – inasmuch as categories are placed in relation to each other (Strathern, 1988:ix-x). These perspectives affirm that in order to understand how the categorizations of gender are set in motion in specific interactions and to reflect on its metaphorical intensity, a contextualized analysis is needed (Strathern, 1980:169; Corrêa and Piscitelli:1998). These approaches also insist on the necessity of relating not just notions of masculinity and femininity, but also gender with other categories of differentiation (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1993: 2-4; Moore, 1994:49-50; Haraway, 1991:199-201). This last requirement presents a particular difficulty. These perspectives combine to highlight the limitation of, put simply, adding together various forms of oppression in order to understand the diminution of groups "marked" by their corporeal characteristics. They also combine to underline the importance of perceiving the intersections between the multiplicities of differentiations which mark these groups (Stolcke, 1993:22-23). However, in these analyses, these interconnections are not always clear.

Focusing on the constructions of gender set in motion in the specific sector of the aforementioned sex tourism in Fortaleza, I reflect on the processes of sexualization present in this world, paying attention to the way those distinctions intertwine. And if the idea of context as a set of frames within which ideas acquire meaning (Strathern, 1992) is crucial to any symbolic analysis, in order to consider these intersections by taking into account the foreign and native conceptions about these trips we must take into account an aspect not always contemplated in the international production on sex tourism: the plurality of dimensions (“global” and “local”) which are present whenever these transnational encounters are produced.

Taking into account these dimensions, I reflect on the intersections between differentiations present in this modality of sex tourism basing myself on the results of qualitative research developed through an anthropological approach. The data, collected during field work carried out between October 1999 and March 2000, were obtained through observation, in-depth interviews and from a variety of sources. An important part of the field work consisted of following the movement of international tourists and local women on social circuits linked to this kind of sex tourism. This includes bars, night clubs, “forrós” (places where people dance to a traditional Northeastern rhythm), hotels and restaurants on Iracema beach, parts of the sidewalk at this beach and at the seafront, hotels and restaurants in this section of the seashore and beach bars on Beira-Mar and on Futuro Beach⁴. These are eminently touristy places in which predominantly foreign and Brazilian tourists socialize together, alongside the local middle class and young women of the lower classes, some of whom go on *programas* (the local term for any act related to prostitution). On these circuits, I focused my observation on methods of approach, courtship and interaction between them.

The information generated from the observation was supplemented by interviews with women who maintain love-sexual relationships with foreigners, with tourists of various nationalities in search of sex⁵ and with foreigners who, fascinated by their experience as tourists, arrange seasonal or permanent residence in the city. I also carried out interviews with various agents involved with international tourism and/or local prostitution.⁶ In addition, I obtained secondary data, statistics and case studies on tourism and local prostitution from government agencies, educational institutions and NGOs. These secondary sources made it possible for me to place the research into a pattern of information which relativizes the intensity of the flow of

⁴ The observation also incorporated exchanges in apartments occupied by girls who date foreigners, on Futuro beach and in neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Fortaleza.

⁵ Although taking into account the information furnished by statistics on international tourism in Fortaleza, the criteria followed in the choice of nationalities of those interviewed – Italians, Portuguese, Germans, Dutch, Argentineans, French, English – was to consider those that were significant in the experience of the girls who establish sex – love relationships with foreigners.

⁶ This text was written on the bases of the information given by 33 interviewees: 12 foreigners, 14 women who “date” foreigners, and six agents linked to international tourism and – or prostitution, in the city. I did not incorporate foreigner women in search of native males because they are scarce in Fortaleza, concentrating themselves on secluded beaches, such as Canoa e Jericoaquara.

international tourists into the city⁷ and the responsibility awarded to them in the past as the main forces behind the incidence of child prostitution in Fortaleza.⁸

⁷ In 1999, Fortaleza received 91,000 foreigner visitors and little more than 1,296,000 Brazilian visitors. ("Tourist Aggregates" State Government of Ceara, 2000).

⁸ Data published from research requested by the Pact Against Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, in 1998 and 1999, are in line with this relativization. Conceived in parallel with the National Campaign for the End of Exploitation, Violence and Sex Tourism against Children and Adolescence – launched nationwide, in 1995 – this research shows that, in the areas under examination, including those frequented by tourists, child-juvenile prostitution basically involves adolescents – and not children – and point clearly to the fact that, although tourists represent an important percentage of the clientele, Brazilian tourists (16.7%) arrive close behind foreign visitors (18.8%) – and, in the total calculation, both of these figures add up to less than 50% of the total number of clients – who are predominantly local., (PACTO DE COMBATE AO ABUSO E EXPLORAÇÃO SEXUAL DE CRIANÇAS E ADOLESCENTES, 1998; CÂMARA MUNICIPAL DE FORTALEZA, 1999; JUBITSCHK, 1997).

“Elegant prostitution on Iracema Beach”

When speaking of “middle class sex tourism” or, alternatively, about “Elegant prostitution on Iracema Beach”, the natives of Ceara allude to distinctions between forms of prostitution geared towards foreigners. These terms differentiate this kind of prostitution with other “poorer” versions, with prices set around RS\$10 (less than US\$5)⁹ on some sections of Beira-Mar. On Iracema beach, the value of *programas*¹⁰ is rarely inferior to RS\$50, and rises up to levels three times more expensive than that figure.¹¹ These values summarize differences which appear evident when observing the girls linked by the locals to one or another form of prostitution. Those who engage in “poor” prostitution are girls and adults with a low level of education, immersed in extreme poverty, which expresses itself in their bodies. They wear flip-flops or, sometimes, trainers, and they have their hair and skin dried out by the sun. Wearing shorts, short skirts and tops revealing their stomachs, which are generally flaccid as a result of successive pregnancies, they explicitly offer their services to both tourists and locals. It is not rare to hear, at the height of the afternoon, offers of a “little blow job”¹² being shouted to any car, which happens to be passing by on Abolition Avenue.

This feminine world is differentiated from that made up of women from a “higher level”, who interact in a practically exclusive manner with international visitors. The interviewees¹³ linked by the natives of Ceara to “middle class sex tourism” share between them certain characteristics. They live in middle class, lower middle class and, also, poor, but not necessarily miserable areas of the city and have a comparatively higher level of schooling – some have completed sixth form college and even high school.

Carefully looking after their “appearance”, these women, most of whom are in their twenties¹⁴, possess slim bodies. The current idea is that, differently from Northeasterners, foreigners do not feel attracted to fat women – “my French boyfriend”, commented a waitress of 25 years who exclusively dates foreigners, mother of a 8 years old child, “told me not to eat bread to avoid getting fat”. They

⁹ At the time when the fieldwork was carried out, the dollar was worth around two reais.

¹⁰ The term “garotas de programa” used, according to Gaspar, *in Rio de Janeiro*, to designate women of stigmatized sexual conduct and prostitutes is also used in *Fortaleza* to refer to women and adolescents; of different social levels; working as prostitutes. But it also expresses the constructions of hierarchies within local prostitution. GASPAN 1985: 11.

¹¹ Various people interviewed, including girls involved in prostitution, use the value of the *programas* to measure their level. These levels, linked to poverty and the level of education, have territorial expressions. “Elegant prostitution on Iracema beach”, with *programas* of between 50 and 150 reais, is at the intermediate-upper levels. For a summary of the history of prostitution in Fortaleza see SOUSA, 1998.

¹² Term used to refer to oral sex.

¹³ The young girls interviewed considered to be “*garotas de programa*” by the natives of Ceara, some of whom come from cities outside of the state capital of Ceara (Sao Luis do Curu, Itapipoca), from other cities of the Northeast (Natal) and from the North of Brazil (Belem and Manaus) – live in various neighbourhoods: Serviluz, Leste-Oeste, Henrique Jorge, shared apartments on Future beach and rooms on Iracema beach. Some of those who live in far-away areas (Messejana), or who work as domestics, reside in the house of their employer, spending the weekends in colleagues apartments, on Future beach, or, inclusively, on Beira-Mar.

¹⁴ During the course of the research I did not notice, in the areas observed, children working as prostitutes. However, very late into the night I did meet on various occasions girls who appeared to be between thirteen and sixteen years of age.

like imported perfume and wear fashionable clothes, occasionally designer labels which are relatively discreet. In the words of a waitress, “I dress well; I don’t like to go out wearing skimpy clothing. It’s either trousers, or else a long dress.” These women apply special care to their hair, relaxing, hydrating and sometimes dying it in light shades. These carefulness acquires specific meanings. They are expressions of a bodily production directed towards the selection criteria attributed to international visitors. Among those criteria, aspects connected to race and colour acquire particular importance. One of the interviewees -- 33 years old, mother of three girls, for whom one weekly *programa* on Iracema beach provided half of the monthly family income -- said, referring to the international “clients”:

They don’t want that... horrible hair. Horrible hair, they think of as black. It can be dark, but not very, straight hair is great for him... You have to be *morena* [light brown in colour] and slender.”

But, this carefulness also establishes distances in relation to the traditional images of local prostitution, which tends to be linked to that of a lower level. One native of Ceara – a married university graduate who frequented Iracema Beach -- said:

One of the unmistakable indicators is the hair. If it is not looked after, well brushed, with a shine, these are all the trademarks of a prostitute.

The effect of this bodily production is a cause of relative confusion between these girls and others of more elevated social classes, unconnected to prostitution, who frequent the same area. Hardly anything differentiates these girls from other girls. Neither their hair, reaching the shoulders or longer, wavy or straight, nor their makeup highlighting mouth and eyes, nor the colour of their skin, in various tones locally regarded as being between “moreno” (brown skin) and “moreno claro” (very light brown skin), nor their clothing, high heels, trousers of synthetic material, blouses which leave the back bare, dresses or skirts of figure-hugging material of knee or ankle-length and very often of neutral colours. The relative indistinctness these young girls express in their bodies integrates itself into a series of signs marking with a particular character the approaches between these girls and international visitors. Differently from the explicit sexualization of various forms of prostitution in Fortaleza, these meetings between foreign tourists and natives are, though loaded with sensuality, shaded with uncertainties.

In the majority of these “mixed” areas of Iracema Beach – mixed in the sense that people involved in prostitution socialize alongside those who are not connected to it: the approach acquires the quality of flirting. The girls give out signals through their body language. In this sense, the impressions of a Portuguese tourist -- married, 55 years old, resident of Porto, worker in a car factory, part of a group of 40 men making the most of a “bonus” holiday from the company -- summarize those of visitors of various nationalities:

“You know by the look, the look is an international language. Sometimes it is mistaken, but mostly it isn’t.”

The approach is up to the foreigners – they are expected to do so and invite the girls. This approach style, imitating patterns of traditional courtship, is significant – and observation allowed us to note the rejection of “lower level” prostitutes who offered themselves freely to visitors. To this approach dynamic is added the fact that some girls only reveal their expectation of payment after having passed a night with

a foreigner (and not before). In addition, relationships which greatly surpass the time limit expected of a *programa* are common.

These procedures distance these girls from the local stereotypes of prostitution and, at the same time, from images of prostitution in Europe and in other parts of the world circuit of sex tourism. They take part in the creation of a climate of confusion which involves both tourists and locals. Young female workers from service sectors with salaries of around R\$200 per month complain with frequency of being confused with “call girls” by foreign tourists. Equally frequent are the complaints of international tourists who, in the morning, confront a demand for payment from their companions and so discover that they had not made a romantic conquest the previous night. These complaints become more acute in the cases where the discovery is made in a more violent manner. I am referring to the situations where the foreigners awake after having been drugged and discover that they have been robbed.

But if these girls deliberately try to distance themselves from stereotypes of prostitution, the practices of courtship and love developed by some international visitors in search of sex differentiate them from the local “clients” and also from local boyfriends. While fidelity lasts the length of the stay but tears and the intensity of contacts after departure acquire value as indicators of the amount of love involved, a waitress describes the approaches of a foreign boyfriend:

Every night he was waiting for me, sitting at my table. He sent me roses in the middle of the night. So good! And then, you know, you start getting more attached, you see?

These affairs, sometimes intense and long lasting, are nourished by telephone calls, gifts (bracelets and earrings, furry animals, bed clothes, clothes), cards and letters, in a kind of correspondence which works its way around the problems of communication common to the diversity of languages involved. In this way, the uncertainties, far from just being part of the girls’ behavior, are also connected to those the international tourists feel themselves.

The circuits on which these meetings are produced allow us to observe that sex tourism in Fortaleza goes beyond the idea of pre-set packages involving children and/or adolescents. In the search for women foreign visitors go on long tours which intersect with the weekly ‘cycle’ of events in the nightlife of the city. And, at least part of this search takes on a certain degree of happenstance, which means that, although it might be directed at girls who are considered to be “*garotas de programa*” by the natives of Ceara, this search is made across a wide range of natives. This idea becomes clearer when considering concrete cases.

At the going-away meal of a group of eight Napolitans who had spent a week in Fortaleza in February 2000, only one of them had not arranged a “girlfriend”. Some of these tourists, linked by friendship and/or family ties – in the group there were a father aged around 55 years with his son in his twenties --, of different ages and professions – small businessmen, salesmen, industrial workers --, were accompanied by “medium level *garotas de programa*”, whom they had met along various stretches of the sidewalk. One of them was accompanied by a more sophisticated “*garota de programa*” he had met in a club considered to be at the heart of the prostitution ring on Iracema beach. Another was accompanied by a judge’s daughter he had met when the group visited a nightclub frequented by the local middle classes. This relationship encountered opposition from the group when

the “boyfriend” spent several days waiting to have sexual intercourse with the girl. Only the latter two girls said goodbye to the foreigners at the airport. The group barred the attempt made by the other girls to go to the airport, leaving them crying at the entrance of the four-star hotel in which they had been staying.

This example is significant. It shows how the practices of these visitors, approaching various social classes, offer some girls the possibility of crossing, in a temporary or more permanent way, the (severe) local social divide. It also shows the diversity present between women who, on these circuits, establish relationships with international visitors who are looking for sex. One important distinction amongst these women is that some of them do not demand money for sexual services.

On these circuits, I met girls who went on “*programas*” for foreigners in the same way in which they did business with the locals, that is to say, with prices, periods of time, and also including previously agreed type of sexual act. I also found girls who exclusively “date” foreigners, maintaining relationships with them which were full of uncertainty areas, very often long lasting and involving payments whose value was not fixed. A young girl -- originally from Natal, divorced and mother of two girls whose survival depends entirely on foreigners -- alludes to the flexibility of these “dates”, and explains the fundamental importance of the exchange of money to these relationships:

I don't like Brazilian men, for God's sake! They don't have any future. I only like gringos. I like only good stuff... Have money! They are very friendly, romantic, I don't know, it is different... When I see a man who is mean, I take him off my list straight away. A man has to throw money away. He has to pay for everything, take me to the shopping centre and so. I really fuck him. When the sun rises I say, 'Darling, give me 100 for the taxi'. (...) he has to give me money. This kind of men come and go... If you don't take advantage of it, bye bye then... Once I went out with a Portuguese man. He was nice. His name was Neno. He gave me 450 dollars to spend four days with him in Jericoacoara¹⁵. He also took me on a shopping spree. That man was wonderful... He bought some stuff for my boys, he bought them beach clothes, flip flops... he spent about 800 bucks in Iguatemi¹⁶. And I spent all these days there wonderfully, enjoying the beach, eating the best food, and going on buggy rides. And Jericoacoara is very beautiful, isn't it? It is all five star treatment. The man was very handsome, I have a photo of him. I'll show you how handsome and strong he is.

I also met girls who delimit the differences between themselves and those “*de programa*”, mainly because they have stable jobs with low salaries. Although they reject any connection with *programas*, they accept and occasionally ask for presents and financial contribution to their medium and long term needs – clothes, watches, perfumes, mobile phones, rent payment or medical treatment for the children.

An old man, Armando, turned up. He was 58. The first time he saw me he said to me: you are very beautiful. I didn't pay any attention to him. He said that he was leaving and that he was going to send me a present from Italy... When my birthday arrived, an envelope with 50 dollars inside arrives. And I didn't even do anything with him, we just had a chat. At that time, the dollar was worth R\$2. With this money I paid the rent, I paid some things off and also bought others. One day, he told me that he was arriving. He brought me a watch, three bottles of perfume and he wanted to go out with me. I work at night, and I didn't want to go out with him, so I tried not to be off duty. I went out with him in the end. We went to the best motel in Fortaleza, which had a swimming pool, lights, and a cascade. It cost 280 reais for two hours. My friend insisted so much that I ended up going out with him. He said: I

¹⁵ This beach is much sought after by the tourists, it is reached only after an eight-hour trip by land from Fortaleza.

¹⁶ One of the shopping centres most appreciated by people in the city.

want you to wear some good clothes. He bought me a nice outfit. It cost 240 reais. It was a grey dress with a shoulder strap, it had feathers all over it. He gave me 100 reais more to have my hair done. When we finished having dinner, it was about 3:30 - 4:00 o'clock, and I said I was going home, he got furious. I then phoned my friend and she advised me, "Don't do it". So, I invited him to go to the motel. When we were finishing, and he was going to come, I thought he was going to die. It was horrible. It seemed as if he hadn't had one for ages.

Further still, I met young ladies who go out exclusively with foreigners but have no expectations of money or presents. They want to enter the world accessible to the tourists, they share tours, restaurants, hotels. A twenty-two year old unemployed girl, who is the daughter of the owner of a small garage talked about the boyfriends she had in January, it was about one per day, she explains:

I don't need money. My father or my aunt give it to me, or when I need it I just take it. I bought these clothes when I was working. I kept Lars's shirt as a memory, nobody can erase a memory, can they? What do you want, do you want me to ask them for money? No, that is not the way I think, I am not interested in presents, they are nothing to me. Friendship is much more important to me...., it is only when I know somebody... And I experience everything the tourists experience. I went to Cumbuco with Lars, it was cool.

I also met middle class women with a high level of education, who were also freelance professionals, in the age range of 30, 40 and 50 who resent the characteristics of a matrimonial market perceived by them as extremely unequal because of its saturation of women and because of the fact that men have ample access to women between twenty and thirty years younger than them. I interviewed some of the regular visitors to Iracema Beach with these characteristics. They are women unconnected to prostitution who exclusively look for relationships with international tourists. A 35 years old psychologist, divorced, mother of a 13 years old boy, who had gone out with as wide range of Brazilians and foreigners and who was at the time divided between a Dutch and a Portuguese said,

[Foreigners] are different from men from Ceara. Men from Ceara want to take you to bed as soon as they meet you. That's the primary objective. If something better comes along... it's really difficult, because it's so easy, one today, another tomorrow, and they are afraid of getting involved... The foreigners are different, as far as caring is concerned. In the experiences I've had, sex wasn't just sex... There was caring, that exchange, conversation...

Romanticism is far from restricted to the accounts of these middle class women. But in the stories of those interviewed from lower classes, the idealization of foreigners is combined with the hope of living outside Brazil. Amongst the latter, a narrative goes around that minimizes the mistreatment and slavery to which Brazilian women are subjected abroad and emphasizes successful weddings and affairs, with particular emphasis on the acquisition of apartments, bars or restaurants which express a clearly ascendant social mobility. These girls, practiced in questions connected to international trips, frequent visitors of internet cafes where they receive messages from distant boyfriends and who bring up to date, via translators, the old custom of illiterates in need of scribes, yearn after diverse countries. They dream of a better future, mainly in Europe – occasionally however, the USA is incorporated into the range of countries sought after.

If an important part of the areas associated with the "elegant prostitution" of Iracema Beach shelters a diversity of women, there exists an analogous heterogeneity amongst the foreigners. Italians, Portuguese, Germans, Norwegians,

French, English, Dutch, Argentineans, Bolivians, circulate among bars, nightclubs and restaurants on this beach. In contrast to the bodily production specific to the girls who date foreigners in the “middle class sex tourism” circuit, the international visitors exhibit a wide diversity in their style of clothes, their hairstyles and even in their tattoos. In these areas there are men who have their heads completely shaved with earrings, fifty years old men with blondy hair cut in the Prince Charming’s style, young men with long dark hair tied into pony tails. There are men with very pale skin, reddened by the sun, others displaying intense tans. The clothes worn are equally varied. Some wear long Bermuda shorts, sandals and colored shirts. Many walk around in jeans and tight t-shirts, without sleeves, exhibiting their entirely tattooed arms, while others wear casual trousers and shirts.

The length of their stay in the city varies. Some stay in four star hotels, others prefer small bed and breakfasts on the Iracema Beach, on the Beira-Mar or in certain flats.¹⁷ Amongst these men are bachelors, divorced and also married men. In terms of professions there are security guards, electricians, cooks, waiters, butchers, salesmen, sailors, train drivers, but there are also language teachers, journalists, professional sportsmen and small businessmen – owner of restaurant, hair salons, small textile companies. For the tourists I interviewed, the salaries and/or monthly withdrawals from the business varied between U\$1.000 (an Argentinean) and US\$4.000 (an Italian).

On these circuits there are foreigners who travel entirely alone, but it is also common to meet pairs of friends or small groups of three or four and occasionally large groupings of 30 or 40 men. The international visitors who arrive in Fortaleza tend to meet up on the basis of regional, national and/or linguistic criteria. There are meeting places favored by different communities on the basis of city sympathies and regional and national tensions which exist in Europe. These groupings are very often spontaneous, but there are foreign residents, some of whom married locals of Ceara, who contribute in various ways to the encouragement of these meetings. In addition, the international tourists who repeatedly return to the city “introduce” those recently arrived to their resident fellow countrymen.

The poor girls who exclusively date foreigners make distinctions between those who circulate on the circuits linked to the “sex tourism of the middle class”. The habitués and the residents passing by and occasionally going out with the “*garotas de programa*” are those interviewees who display a clearer perception of the character of these relationships. This perception is recorded by one of the young girls, who prefers the new tourists, the ones visiting the country for the first time. In the words of one of these girls:

It is always better for you to approach a foreigner who is here for the first time, you see? Because when a foreigner falls in love, he falls in love for real.

To this aspect is added another, crucial in the establishment of the differentiations made by the girls between the foreign visitors. According to the waitress:

¹⁷ The freedom to take women home, which exists in some small bed and breakfasts, flats and apartments, is a relevant criteria for selection. After the activities of the Pact to Combat Prostitution, some of the big hotels, which had been denounced in the past as being related to sex tourism severely restricted the entrance of women who were not residing there and also banned the practice of the use of “books” offering women.

You know, there are men who come here just after an adventure, you see? Just to have a different woman every night. But the ones I have set myself up with, are looking rather for tenderness, attention...

In this context, the arguments by which these girls and the foreigners who have relationships with them explain their mutual choices acquire particular importance. These formulations allow us to understand the procedures by which these agents set in motion the differentiation categories permeating the choice of partners.

Gender, nationality

Foreigners of various nationalities looking for sex point out the importance of local women in their choice of going to, returning to or staying in the city. They agree on a positive appreciation of the friendly character, a temperament trait particularly attributed to Brazilian women. This character makes up part of the attributes which, embodied in the native women, are alternatively associated to Brazil and the totality of its inhabitants. The foreign interviewees agree on assessing the temperament as passionate and the spirit open, and friendliness, happiness and being easy going as specific traits which distinguish the national character, differentiating it from other countries.

In the relations established by these foreigners, the appreciation of the attributes that mark Brazil is apparently positive. However, each positive element also becomes part of a negative analysis: the Brazilian happiness acquires connotations of non-cautiousness and irresponsibility, the malleability and patience attributed to the native population are associated with passivity and indolence. On the other hand, the European countries and their inhabitants are considered to be cold and individualist. But these countries are also characterized by positively evaluated attributes addressing above all the idea of rationality, legal organization and planning for the future, which do not exist in Brazil. What I am trying to highlight is that these relations between nationalities are permeated by ambivalences.¹⁸

These ambivalences shade the sexualization of which Brazil is the object. In a procedure apparently current in the reading that Anglo-European cultures make of Latin American and Caribbean cultures, the temperament associated with the national character is derived from the (tropical) climate and is associated with an extremely high degree of sensuality (Aparicio & Chaves Silverman, 1997). In this sense, one of the Portuguese tourists says:

In Portugal we live at a distance from each other... trust has limits... We are withdrawn. Maybe it's because of the climate that they (Brazilians) are different. In Portugal the temperature is totally different from here. I would say that the women reach maturity earlier here. Here a thirteen, fourteen years old girl is a woman who is weary of having sex... the very climate makes them behave differently.

¹⁸ It is important to consider the relevance acquired by these ambivalences in the perpetuation of stereotypes. I am referring to the analysis developed by Bhabba. According to this author on colonial discourse stereotypes are the principal discursive strategy in the bestowal of a fixed character onto the "other". They acquire strength, precisely through interplays of ambivalences which articulate multiple, mixed and divided beliefs in a current of signification. (Bhabba, 1994:66-67, 82).

In these impressions of Brazil, the country is associated with a hot climate and an exuberant sexuality and also connected to a high level of prostitution: “what is known about Brazil”, says a seasonal Italian resident, “is that there are 50 women for each man, and a lot of prostitution.”

Gender cuts across these relations between countries and nationalities. In the conceptualizations voiced by the foreigners the European nations appear to have been rendered masculine, connected to a rationality, objectivity and “coldness” and opposed to the warmth and openness of Brazil, which is inhabited by a poor people, who are receptive and “affectionate”. However, from an internal perspective, countries display differences between them in terms of gender. From this perspective, Brazil, placed in the South, presents acute and traditional differentiations between femininities and masculinities. Rich countries, on the contrary, appear to present dislocations in the differentiations of gender. These distinctions are enunciated by means of relations between masculinities and between femininities, both native and foreign.

From the point of view of the interviewees, the attributes allocated to Brazil, embodied in the blood, characterize the native masculinity with an explosive and dangerous temper, in opposition to the “cold” blood of the Europeans. “Brazilian men have a lot of hot blood, they lose their heads, they are violent, capable of killing”, comments a seasonal Italian resident. In these visions, the native masculinity is associated with a certain indolence, which is in proportion to an excessive consumption of alcohol and to a “stupidity” expressed by a bellicose temperament and above all, to the attribution of an exacerbated sexuality, which is basic and not sophisticated at all.

The European masculinities on the other hand, are presented as displaying signs of romanticism and delicateness. The foreigners interviewed also insist on highlighting the dedication to work and the appreciation of responsibility in relation to the family, particularly to fatherhood -- various foreigners establish causal relationships between their being in Fortaleza and the lack of family obligations --, as central elements in the constitution of positively appraised masculinities. On these points, these notions of masculinity reiterate those present in other (Western) contexts (Vale de Almeida, 1995). But, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that these formulations integrate themselves into relations between European and Brazilian masculinities, the latter of which are invariably treated as inferior.

In terms of references to sexuality, there are not necessarily convergences between those interviewed. Italian residents and tourists looking for sex openly allude to the importance of a certain style of sexuality as a component of the positively evaluated masculinities -- “I won’t do anything when I don’t want to, because I’m a real pig when I want to be... a real womanizer”, proudly explained a seasonal resident to me. Some of the interviewees, “who speak English” -- named like this by the local girls because it’s in English that the Dutch, Germans and Norwegians communicate with them -- highlight the importance assumed by “fantasies” in their sexual relationships with the natives and the excitement provoked by the fact of being able to have sexual relationships with various women of different skin tones, in one day. In the words of an English tourist, who was single, 33 years of age and owner of a hair salon:

I have been to bed with some of them. Dark, medium dark, light. In the first two days I went crazy.

But, at the same time, they allude to the propensity for establishing egalitarian relationships with (all of) the women, underlining their capacity for intersexual friendship and also priding themselves on the way they see their household chores, including in the relationships with their holiday girlfriends. In a game in which no trace of personality and/or temperament escapes the relations between nationalities, some characteristics are directly opposed to “machismo”, considered as a distinctive trait of the local masculinity.

The perceptions of the foreigners interviewed show an apparently positive appreciation of the local women. The traits linked to the native femininity are delineated by their contrast with those traits associated with the women from the interviewees’ respective countries. The temperament’s accessibility and “warmth” of Brazilians are, in this way, contrasted to the arrogance of Germans, the “closed” nature of Portuguese women and the exaggeratedly positive self-appreciation of English girls, the coldness, the calculating nature and the haughtiness of Italian women.

Oh, the Italians, you can’t say anything to them, everything offends them.. the Italian woman has a conflict of identity, they’re full of feminist ideas.

In these perceptions, the attributes designated to the European femininities are generally translated into high levels of demands on the men. These foreigners perceive the femininities of women in the North, embodied in independent women who, prioritizing professional success, career, money, also enjoy paid sexual and/or exotic favours as if they had been masculinized. In the words of an Italian expatriate:

Italians, lots of women go to Africa to have sex with negroes, you see? They act as if they were men.

However, some commentaries indicate traits leading us to certain styles of traditional femininity. This is in the reports of men from relatively “poorer” countries. The Portuguese interviewees juxtapose the temperament of Brazilian girls to the closed and conservative character of women in their country; Argentineans talk of the lack of sexual movements among their female compatriots.

On the other hand, amid impressions of the interviewees from richer countries, the tender temperament, warmth, simplicity and submission of the natives incorporates itself into the idea of a femininity coated in traits of authenticity, it fulfills a submissiveness, now long gone in Europe: “A woman here is still a woman, more tender”, says an Italian tourist. But the apparently positive readings of these femininities sexualize these girls, and render them inferior. The local attributes of womanliness are perceived as being characterized by a singular sensuality. In the words of a German resident:

One thing that I love is these birds... fifteen, sixteen years old, sometimes up to thirty, and the way they dress, the way they walk... and go for a stroll down the street. It calls the attention of all men. Those revealing clothes...The jeans which only go up to here, the top which starts here, right below the breasts. I sit here watching, just watching, I think it’s the sexiest thing in the world.

This sensuality is coated in simplicity. “They are simple, very simple, without malice”, says an Italian tourist looking for sex. But it is also associated with a lack of

intelligence: “They just think of making love and dancing *forró*”, says a sixty years old retired Italian resident, giving me the example of a girlfriend who is “very young and very jealous” and lives in his house. Demonstrating with his hands the accentuated feminine curves which sway from one side to the other, he adds, establishing a causal relationship:

She doesn't have much upstairs, she can't learn. I paid her school fees for two years but she doesn't even know her timetable.

And the “heat” of native girls, attributed to the women who go on “*programas*” and also to those who don't, is linked to the propensity for (more or less) open forms of prostitution. Foreign visitors of various nationalities share this perception. In the words of a Portuguese tourist:

Brazil, the Brazilian woman, is a different phenomenon. I see girls of sixteen, seventeen who are already doing it...

In these foreigners' conceptualizations, the notions of masculinity and femininity acquire meaning in their intertwining with nationality. And this intersection is central in the sexualization through which native masculinities and femininities are rendered inferior. I call attention to this intertwining by observing that the peculiar (erotic) attraction mediating these transnational encounters is also shaded by other differentiations. Age is one of them. The interviewees confer importance on sexual access to very young women. This access is a long way from being limited to foreigners. However, intersections between gender and nationality, apportioning these transnational encounters with a character of intense inequality, greatly facilitate this possibility for international visitors.

These foreigners also show a certain perception of the difference in the local classes, perceived in terms of the affective/sexual distance established by women from more elevated social levels in relation to them. I specifically refer to the upper middle classes of Fortaleza. Only women from these social groups appear to occasionally escape the game of rendering “others” inferior, which, while intimately linked to the structural positioning of the respective countries in transnational relations, affects the native girls from the lower classes and from less favoured sections of the middle classes. I observe that, in this context, the positioning becomes fundamental to understanding how the differentiations congregating around the process of rendering these Brazilian girls inferior operates -- some of these foreigners are situated in their respective countries in social levels analogous to those of the young girls with whom they have relations in Fortaleza.

In the universe of the native girls who engage themselves in love/sex relationships with foreign visitors, the procedure of delineating masculinities and femininities is reiterated, contrasting notions associated to the attributes of manliness and womanliness in different countries. Establishing relationships between these constructions of gender and nationalities, female interviewees from different social levels, connected or not to prostitution, regard the local masculinities as inferior and associate the most appreciated attributes of manliness to the foreigners. The perception of native masculinities is, however, immersed in a permanent opposition, that of being “in/out”, which is constantly redefined. In this world, this opposition points to relationships where the conceptions about the “location” define themselves either in relation to the “outsider” of other nationalities or in relation to national

“outsiders” -- and, in these cases, Brazil’s Southeast, reiterating on a national scale an appreciation linked to localization where the (privileged) position is “outside”.

In these relations, the styles of local masculinity, invariably perceived as “macho”, are considered as being characterized by traits of intense possessiveness, aggression, affective remoteness, lack of respect and infidelity. The attribution of these distinctive traits to male natives is used by female interviewees to explain their choice for men from “outside”. And, on the contrary, outsiders, particularly the foreigners, appear to be embodying styles of masculinity linked to a certain “openness” and a higher level of equality. These qualities, linked to various European nationalities are presented as being integrated into a manliness characterized by romanticism, tenderness and care. In the words of a waitress, describing her relationship with a German boyfriend:

We arrived at home, he made breakfast for me: cheese, ham, bread... I sat down and he went off to get everything ready. He never even let me wash a plate, but as often as I could I washed his clothes. I washed and he starched. Or he washed and I starched. It was like that. Or, when I had clothes to wash, he himself washed and starched them... He swept the house, I washed the dishes, he made food, I cleaned the bathroom and made the bed. He didn’t have this attitude of letting one person do all the work while the other one watched.

These relations between masculinities involve attributes and aspects present in comparisons established by the foreigners. But, in conceptualizations voiced by some of the interviewed women, work is a long way from appearing as a substantial reference in the constitution of masculinities. The positively evaluated attributes of manliness are necessarily associated with a certain social level. In this sense, the kind of job integrates itself into a wider group of indicators which, combining with the country of residence, possessions and the ability to spend money, including trips abroad, are all associated with more highly praised styles of masculinity. And the allusion to the country of residence is far from being redundant since there are Latin Americans frequenting middle class sex tourism circuits, themselves looking for girls who “date” foreigners. But, the attributes of manliness associated with these nationalities are not on the list of the most highly valued masculinities.

In these relations, other differentiations are far from operating in a stable manner. Age, a matter of indifference for some of the girls interviewed, is on the contrary a relevant aspect in the preferences of others, particularly in the case of those girls most appreciated by foreigners. On this point, a girl who considers herself “queen” of the nightclub perceived as the hub of the prostitution geared towards foreigners on Iracema Beach, in love with an Italian of 24 years of age, is very restricted: “Old guys? I don’t even shoot the breeze with them”.

In line with these distinctions, the styles of sensuality associated with diverse attributes of manliness acquire particular meanings. The conceptualizations of masculinity presented by those interviewed show relations in which sensuality and sexuality are intimately connected and the latter is perceived as expressing the essential characteristics of the person. These characteristics, particularly temperament and character, appear as inscribed in the sexual practices which, revealing the presence or absence of basic attributes in the appreciation of masculinities, above all “generosity”, “attention” and “companionship”, are linked with the nationalities in question. In relations analogous to those established by the foreigners, the native girls attribute to the local men an intense level of sensuality which shows itself in their bodily practices, particularly in sexual practices. The style of sexuality

associated to these practices, however, perceived as exacerbated and inconsiderate, is a long way from being incorporated into positively considered masculinities.

The appreciation of styles associated with foreigners is not linear. Latin men, particularly Argentineans and Italians, are also linked to a high level of sensuality. The Latin American styles are far from being positively appreciated by female interviewees from lower social levels who exclusively date foreigners. On the contrary, these interviewees converge on the positive evaluation of sensuality allocated to the Italians: the “hotness” associated with this nationality is shaded by an intense romanticism which “softens” the style of sexuality attributed to these foreigners and propagates emotional involvements and lasting relationships, with a potential passport out of the country, precisely to one of the most sought after countries. In the words of the “queen” of the nightclub:

Italians are romantic. If they fall in love, clap your hands, woman, they'll even give you their underwear. That's the way it is, girl, if they fall in love, it's 'my darling' to the left, to the right and in the middle.

In an appreciation which shows relative autonomy in relation to sexual “performance”, the views of the girls interviewed point towards relations in which styles of sensuality and sexuality connected to positively evaluated masculinities are those which most clearly demonstrate care, companionship and generosity. These attributes may be allocated to one or another of the nationalities. But in relations which reveal the crucial importance of the intersection of gender and nationality, in the conceptualizations of the poor girls who date foreigners they are allocated to those visitors from countries from the North.

The relations between femininities established by those interviewed also reiterate attributes present in the appreciation of foreigners. In these readings, the European femininities appear to be marked by autonomy and in an analogous manner to the “climate” associated with the respective countries, to “coldness”. Opposing themselves to these styles of femininity, Brazilian womanliness appears to be characterized by the qualities which the international visitors attribute to those girls. A caring temperament and submissiveness are part of these attributes, associated by some of the interviewees with the idea of dependence, based on economic necessity. “Brazilian women are more caring”, says one female native of Ceara who is married to an Italian. The reflections of a waitress in a nightclub, on the basis of her experiences, clear up this point:

It's that kind of thing, you have to please him. The women from their countries are not dependent on them, they have their own money, car, freedom, they don't need a man to go to a bar. For Brazilian women it's different, we need one. They like that, and they, the Brazilian women, like to be looked after by them. The women look at something and say, that's lovely, and the men buy it for them. The men like this dependence and the women like the men's attitude.

And the ideas on native temperament are incorporated into the intense level of sensuality attributed by those interviewed women to the local femininities. “We are hotter”, says the “queen” of the nightclub. *As if* updating the thinking of the geographical determinists, the relations between climate and temperament also influence the perceptions which some of these women have of themselves. In the words of a native of Ceara from the middle classes, unconnected to prostitution, who dates foreigners:

I think it is the thing of being open, it's about conversation, of being happier, of having that certain something, I think that the climate influences this, if you look at the people who live in cold countries, they are more closed... They say that we are "hotter". But, they have, Brazilian women have something more than this... My libido is very strong.

These perceptions attribute distinctive traits, not exempt from negative connotations, to Brazilian women's femininities. Revealing the presence in native thinking of elements present in the procedures through which the foreigners sexualize the local women, those interviewed reiterate, one or more times, the idea that sensuality, characterizing the temperament of the natives, expresses itself in an excessive "disposition" for "lovemaking" which, when not kept within limits, overflows into sexual harassment whose object is the men, particularly, the foreigners, of the city. These impressions are expressed with particular clarity by the waitress:

Because men from abroad, if you see them, they are very handsome... And when they are here the women take advantage. If there were three couples here, I at least would flirt. I flirt. I don't care. I take what I want, for myself, Adriana... I flirt, why can't she flirt?

At the same time, this sensuality, perceived by these girls as an aspect which sets them apart, becomes a central element by which they can guarantee the success and permanence of their affairs, also negotiating their positioning in these relationships. Explaining the development of her romance with her Dutch boyfriend with whom she is ready to live in Europe, and to take her daughter with her, the waitress explains:

I was really in love with him, I did everything for him you know. Sometimes, when he arrived, I lit the candles, I bought wine... I waited for him just in my panties. I had such a great desire to give him my ass. But I was afraid he wouldn't like it. He was embarrassed. And I wanted to, didn't I? So we tried it. But I couldn't because I was so tense. But in our street there is a shop with things in, for sex. Let's go to the shop to buy some lotion? I think you want to as well, because you're all happy... So we went, I had a bath. And we started playing, playing, playing. So I said, yeah!... I like those games that get him all sticky, you know? Look, all this was new for him, you know? He said, my wife never spread apple puree, jam or yoghurt over me. No-one had ever done that to him... Every letter he writes to me, he says, you're an animal, you're an animal and I've never had that in my life... After I dressed up in clothes to dance, just for him, at home, just us two. That was all really new for him. Wow, yeah. Girl. I did it. He said. My God! I am 31 years old and I have never seen this in my life. Look, I always wanted to with her. But she never wanted to. And not because she is a Dutch woman, because it's a liberal country. She thought it was a gay thing, this kind of things. I said, no, this is really common in Brazil, Brazilian men like this... I always asked her to, but she wouldn't do it for me. But you, I didn't even have to ask you. You gave it to me.

In the inter-relations between the categories of differentiation permeating the practices involved in the "sex tourism of the middle class", gender and nationality thus become indivisible. And this intertwining expresses itself through the "colour" embodied by foreigners and natives: the relations established through "colour" complete the procedures for the appreciation of the styles of masculinity attributed to certain nationalities and to the sexualization of the natives.

"Colour", aesthetization, racialization

It might seem paradoxical to talk of colour, which is in fact a racial category, with reference to the visitors (and residents) of countries from the North. And, further still, in a piece of research based in Fortaleza, to allude to the notion of racialization. This is because, when colour is talked about, whiteness, implicit in

considerations on racism, is not always taken into account. On the other hand, of the capitals of the Northeast connected to international sex tourism, in Brazil, this city is situated in the state which contains the lowest number of blacks in the population.¹⁹ An explanation demands thinking as much about notions of whiteness and racialization as in the way that colour operates in the field of transnational relations in Fortaleza.

When speaking of whiteness, I refer to something over and above the color of the skin. It is about -- and I follow here the thinking of bell hooks (1990:166), who openly contests the exclusive connection of race to the non-white Other -- to consider whiteness as a concept which is beneath racism, colonization and cultural imperialism.

As far as racialization is concerned, this notion, used at the beginning of the 1960s by Fanon (1979:175-178), has been recreated in the field of contemporary discussions on transnational and multicultural contacts associated with globalization. Among these perspectives are numbered the feminist approaches which, interested in understanding the intertwining between gender and other categories of differentiation, highlight race. In this approaches the content of race is not always clearly delineated (Anthias and Yuval Davis: 1993, 2-4) nor there is an agreement on the conceptual status of this category (Moore,1994:49-50; Haraway,1991:148, 199-201). Amongst these lines of thought there are however, convergences when referring to racialization in order to allude to the procedures through which bodily marked groups are excluded. I use this term in this sense, taking into consideration, however, that colour is also present in the superiority awarded to certain groups in these processes of exclusion.

When I say that colour, indivisibly linked to nationality, is connected to more highly valued masculinities, I refer to the invariable label of whiteness in the embodiment of those styles of manliness. In procedures in which temperament marks the body, which is appreciated through aesthetic criteria, the most valued distinctive traits of masculinity are always associated to a beauty which contrasts with the ugliness attributed to the locals -- and I think of the aesthetic criteria such as judgments of beauty and taste (Overing, 1996), as being indivisible from a process of education of the senses. In the words of those interviewed:

The men here, the majority, are shorter, the head is like this, the shape of the head is rounder, they have paunches, are laid back...

The (poor) men in Ceara are so ugly it hurts. Ugly, with large flat heads, they appear grey because the sun is so intense, their ignorance is great.

The aesthetization involving men "from the outside" does not obey fixed physical patterns with any precision. The beauty allocated to foreigners combines attributes embodied by young or not-so-young men, with or without hair. The barmaid from the nightclub describes her foreign boyfriends in the following terms:

[He] is beautiful. He is 1,80m tall, he's very tall, or 1,90m, about that. He is bald and is 38 years old. He has blue eyes, the color of the sea. He is handsome, very caring.

¹⁹ In 1991, the rate stood at 2.95%, while Pernambuco stood at 3.3% and Salvador at 20.2%. It is important to highlight that, according to the Census of the IBGE (1991), the "brown" ("pardos") population, in the three states is represented in roughly equal numbers: Ceara numbered 67.4%, Pernambuco 63.4% and Bahia 69%.

This beauty, expressing criteria used in the construction of hierarchies within masculinities, is associated to whiteness, which is expressed in phenotypical traits: in the color of the skin, of the hair, of the eyes. One of the girls from the lower class who only “goes out with” foreigners describes her Norwegian boyfriend in the following terms:

He is handsome, with blue eyes, which went green. His eye, was green... He was tall! The physique, you know? His physique was completely different.

But this idea of whiteness, linked to Europeans and addressing localization, involves aspects which go beyond the phenotypical traits. In this light, one of the central criteria for the “queen” of the nightclub in the selection of her “boyfriends”, preferably highly-tanned Italians, acquires meaning: I like them tall, blond and white. They have to be white! These relationships are perceived by foreigners who frequent the sex tourism circuit of the middle class. In the words of a German resident:

Here, everything is marvelous, of course it is, because I am blond, a foreigner and everybody thinks I am rich. Wherever I go it's the same. And it's not just prostitutes, no. It's women of all ages, of all classes.

In an analogous manner, the reading of native femininities made by these foreigners is characterized by colour. One colour however, *morena* counterposed to the whiteness connected to European inhabitants, synthesizes the intertwining of the differentiations embodied in the local women. Yet, if whiteness characterizes the positively evaluated styles of masculinity, being *moreno/a*, used in the sexualization of the natives to render them inferior, racializes them. And on this point it is important to note that the relations between masculinities established by the interviewees is not just about affirming the superiority of a civilized and softened kind of masculinity. It is also about affirming the superior value of the white European attributes of manliness.

When speaking of *morenas*, foreigners use colour on many occasions in descriptive terms: they have a skin which is not white, or black. In these terms, in which to be *morena* requires a determined tonality, to be sun tanned is not enough. One of the Italians interviewed, in an attempt to describe this colour, alluded with gestures to the shape of the mouth and the nose. Differently from what appears to happen in other contexts of sex tourism in Brazil, in Salvador and in Recife, where foreign tourists look for black girls (Carpazoo, 1994:177, 178; Dias Filho, 1998), in Fortaleza, the “black blacks” are rejected by foreigners of various nationalities who sometimes assume that they themselves are racists. In the words of one Portuguese sex tourist:

I like Brazilian women, but just the light brown ones, even up to the dark brown ones, but black never, I'm a little racist.

An Italian resident expressed himself in similar terms:

The *morena* is the better woman, hardly a black woman, black, no. My ideal type is light brown. [Here] The majority of them are light brown.

Leclerc called attention to the relationship between the process of turning the Other exotic and the impossibility of perceiving the true interiority of the cultures, characteristic of the imperial vision. The author says that this vision would not be the pure and simple negation of “others”: cultural diversity would be converted into something to be savoured...” just to exploit the other is not enough. It is necessary

to relish it as such”.²⁰ The influence of the imperial perspectives in the present day cultural attitudes, particularly with reference to the updating of old divisions which are resurging in North-South relations is, today, a subject of hot debate (Said,1995), into which enters the discussion on international tourism in the countries of the South. In the words of Alexander (1994), for whom international (sex) tourism based itself on sexualization of the land and of the people, in which Alterity is thought of as an instrument of pleasure:

The European fantasies of colonial conquest, the exotic, the erotic, the dark, the primitive, the danger, fear and desire converge on virgin beaches and are traced through the contours of the imperial geography.

Following this line of thought, Kempadoo (2000) calls attention to the ways in which exoticism is present in the contemporary processes which, linked to globalized economic and cultural movements, shade procedures of domination and exploitation. According to this author, this differentiated form of racism, fed by the illusion of admiration for and attraction to the Other, render Alterity inferior. Referring to the Caribbean, Kempadoo points out that in the past these processes have been particularly focused on the sexuality of the *mulatas*. At the turn of the century, the updating of these processes widened the range of the racialized, dominated and exploited sexualities, including those embodied in people with light skin and silky hair.

A reading of the perceptions of foreigners who are looking for sex, in Fortaleza, suggests relations with the perspectives which think of international sex tourism as an expression of imperial conceptions. These perceptions converge in the subordination, through its consummation, of the national sexuality. The exotic, constructed through the association colour/sexuality participates in these interplays around subordination. But these foreigners establish through colour, used in descriptive terms, limits on the areas of exoticism in which they are disposed to enter. Reading in his travel book on Brazil that the lighter the skin of the natives, the greater the possibilities were of them being part of the “educated” classes, an English tourist dedicated himself to more or less dark-skinned girls, who he imagined would offer greater facility in term of sexual access:

Skin, there are black, brown, light brown to white. Brazilians are of different colors, and I've read in a book, my Brazilian book, that the lighter the skin, the more educated, so to speak, the darker they are, the less.

He did however exclude, black girls: “I don't really like black, black girls”. This rejection surprises when taking into account current ideas on the preferences of sex tourists in Brazil. However, it is not so strange when international sex tourism is considered on a global scale. O'Connell Davidson and Sanchez Taylor affirm that some sex tourists in the Caribbean, imagining the black women as the embodiment of everything that is low and debauched, consider these women to be appropriate partners for degrading sex, for brief and anonymous encounters. The women they sought after for long term relationships and/or almost romantic commercial sexual relationships would have relatively light skin and straight hair.²¹

²⁰ Quotation from Berque in LECLERC, 1973: 33-34

²¹ “These racists did not consider these women as “niggers”, but LBFMs “Little Brown Fucking Machines”, a wide category which encompasses any women who was not “white” or “African” O'CONNELL DAVIDSON and SANCHEZ TAYLOR, 1999: 44-45.

The foreigners interviewed in Fortaleza widely agree on what is referred to as the exclusion of blacks. This does not mean to say that the women chosen by them have not been racialized. Among those interviewed, colour is also used in categorical terms, that is, in terms which, more than describing, possess an autonomy in relation to corporeal signs since they are linked to a classification (Kofes, 1976:72, 97). In the vision of the foreign visitors, including some Latin Americans, the *morena* colour is intimately linked to Brazil and is associated with the “better woman”, and with being “hotter”. In the word of an Argentinean looking for sex:

The “morenitas” are hotter. They want to do it more often, they have another way of behaving in bed, they like other positions, start speaking dirty and hey, presto, you get her ass. Argentinean women don’t look at it in this way.

In these respects, the natives, beyond specific tonalities and in a classification which crosses different social classes and sexualizes women whether they are connected or not prostitution, are considered as *morenas*, embodying the high level of sensuality associated with this colour. And the ambivalences which shade the appreciation of this colour maintain relationships with the procedures for aesthetization, which associated with femininities, places in a relatively inferior position the “beauty” associated with Brazilians. The Italian interviewees, enchanted with the sensuality of the natives of Ceara, openly express the superiority of their female compatriotes. One tourist of this nationality explains to me:

Italian women are more beautiful, but not for me. I like them. It’s them who don’t like me. It’s true.

The Argentinean interviewees, apart from the fact that they are situated, in the same way as Brazil, in the South, articulate analogous perceptions²².

The Brazilian women are really gorgeous. I believe that if an Argentinean woman fucked like a Brazilian she would be the best woman in the world. Because Argentinean women are more attractive...

The aesthetization, by synthesizing the values which permeate this world, mirrors the unequal relations present in it. The beauty associated with whiteness and intimately connected to localization characterizes the more valued styles of masculinity which are embodied in the most valued nationalities. And, contrarily, the aesthetization expresses the subordinate place attributed to the racialized Brazilian women. Some of them are considered as embodying a purer sensuality; others are (almost) entirely rejected. The girls from lower social levels who “date” foreigners are fully aware of the attributes allocated to them by the international visitors:

What is it that they like in me? My colour. Always, all of those who know me always say, they really love my color, you know? Because I am *morena*, I have curly hair, and I am friendly, tender, I am very natural, from the earth, that’s what they always say...

In this context, the sexualization/racialization of the natives is not implemented just by the foreigners. It is also used by the locals. However, whereas international

²² Research focused on representation set in motion by migration of Brazilians to Argentina affirm (Frigerio, 1997): differently to other migrants from Latin American countries, who are “stigmatized”, the Brazilians, particularly the women, are “integrated” through the process of making them exotic. In the specific case of the women, this process involves the idea of the extreme facility of sexual access. From my point of view, these processes, although they open up opportunities for social mobility, cannot leave mechanisms for rendering these people inferior unconsidered.

visitors' procedures mark, in broad terms, all Brazilian women, the locals basically sexualize/racialize the native women when they are accompanied by foreigners.

Here in Fortaleza, a foreigner arrives, fixes himself up quickly with a Brazilian woman, and then goes off to the *forro*, you see? I was barred from there. It was just when I was with Lupo, it was really annoying. It is racism. But after a time, I went back, but I went back alone and they let me in, no problems. That's why I couldn't understand it. I got in without a fuss. Now, if I go in with a foreigner, I'll definitely get barred...

As if the fact of accompanying foreigners would automatically sexualize them, on these occasions native women are rendered inferior by their male compatriots who assign them the label of prostitutes. That procedure, which sets in motion racial categories, might acquire priority in the distinctions between classes in the local context. In the words of a tour guide from Ceara:

Everybody here is pretending, nobody knows who is who, or what they do, it is not the colour, or the hair, or the clothes which identify the social category, or the profession, nothing. On Thursday, my colleague, who is a guide as well, accompanied someone to dinner, a group of Portuguese men, people of a high level in a Portuguese bank, directors and so forth. At the *forro*, there was a blitz, one of these carnival blitzes, stopping everyone who was a foreigner and asking them for their passports. They called her a prostitute: "if you're with them it's because you are a whore"... I myself, have suffered the same kind of prejudice in hotels, here on the beach, in the company of my husband who is Italian, "look over there at the gringo who has made sure he's going to have a good time with the *morena*).

Conclusion

The differentiations set into motion in this context of "sex tourism of the middle class" in Fortaleza acquire meaning within the frame of hierarchies strictly connected to the structural localization of the nationalities in play. To be precise, the crucial importance of the localization relativizes the relevance of class which, respecting certain limits, dilutes itself in the face of nationality. And, in this field, gender and race "act" as metaphoric agents of economic and cultural power inherent in these transnational relations. These two categories play an active part in the updating of imperial conceptualizations through which the native men and women are rendered inferior and the foreigners are privileged. These conceptualizations express themselves through constructions of gender, or alternatively through those connected to race. In other words, conceptualizations created in the intersection between gender and nationality or between colour and nationality are alternatively used in the sexualization and devaluation of the native women.

In this context, however, sexualization of the country and of the people is far from restricting itself to the international visitors. It is precisely this aspect which makes the ideas about the trips of these tourists more complex. This sexualization is present in the perceptions that the female interviewees have of themselves and in the (tough) manner in which they are evaluated and discriminated against by the native men when they accompany foreigners. In the frame of these convergences and divergences, the nuances acquired by this sexualization, which are intimately connected to the possibilities of agency obtained by these girls, allows a better understanding of the dynamic of these transnational encounters.

Marking, in the reading of these foreigners, all Brazilian women, this sexualization facilitates the creation of the climate of uncertainty which shades these

international encounters, propagating “romances” and opening ways for the eventual departure for a foreign country even for the girls who go on *programas*. And the extreme sensuality attributed to these girls opens paths for them which destabilize linear criteria of inequality. It is not just about the possibility of crossing, through these relationships, local class barriers. These girls, integrating the transmission of a romantic and sexual knowledge in the (strategic) essentialism mediating their relationships with the foreigners, also negotiate, on the basis of the sexualization of which they are the objects, their positioning in these relationships.

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