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Thesis Prospectus

Fall 2011

Prostitution and Human Trafficking in Brazil

Research Question/Overview:

Brazil is a country on the rise in more ways than one. With a supercharged economy, endless development, and winning bids to host the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics in 2016, it is obvious that the country is in the midst of an economic and social renaissance.

But even while it continues to enjoy all of the glitz and glamour of these economic and social developments, Brazil continues to struggle with an issue that threatens to tarnish its public image as international attention begins to shift towards Rio de Janeiro. After Thailand, Brazil is considered to have the worst problem with human trafficking *in the world*.¹

But even as Brazil grapples with the ever-worsening human trafficking epidemic, adult prostitution—an occupation that many consider to be have close ties with trafficking—remains legal.

But has the legality of prostitution in Brazil affected the prevalence of human trafficking in the country? This is the question that I aim to explore, and answer, in my thesis. I will research what kind of ties exist between the two, and how are they being addressed as Brazil rushes to polish its international image while developing the necessary historical framework to put this issue into perspective.

¹ *Brazil Prostitution Crisis* [Web Article]. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2011, from Libertad Latina website: http://www.libertadlatina.org/LA_Brazils_Child_Prostitution_Crisis.htm

My thesis will examine the relationship between legal adult prostitution and illegal human trafficking, and seek to determine whether or not the presence of legal, relatively unregulated prostitution in the country has an effect on the human trafficking epidemic (particularly of women) in Brazil.

I find myself in the unique (and rather fortunate) situation where I have the opportunity to begin my thesis research this semester as a junior before living in Brazil for the entire calendar year of 2012. Because of my odd circumstances, the amount of research that I have been able to conduct to date is rather limited. In order to help myself strategize how I will develop my thesis, I have structured the *Background* section of this prospectus in much of the same way that I plan to break up my research. The *Data/Methodology* section will focus primarily on explaining where and how I intend to begin exploring my topic this semester and conduct my research abroad. While studying in Rio de Janeiro, I hope to conduct my own research, to include—but not limited to—an observational study and a content analysis of Brazilian papers and magazines. I will discuss my intentions further in the *Data/Methodology* section of this prospectus.

Background and Initial Findings:

As it was seen with South Africa, the honor of hosting the FIFA World Cup offers a country innumerable social and economic opportunities, and it provides incredible incentive to update and improve many parts of the critical state infrastructure. In the case of Brazil, projects to build municipal stadiums, improve roads, and to expand the major Rio de Janeiro airports have been underway since the country won the bid in 2007.² But as Brazil prepares, concerns about corruption, lack of transparency, and human rights violations are rising. As Katie Vinton asserts in the *Harvard International Review*, “It

² Brazil will stage the 2014 World Cup. (2007, October 30). *The BBC*. Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/football/internationals/7068848.stm>

remains to be seen if the Cup will give the Latin American nation a moment to shine or if it will exacerbate realities of structural insufficiency and corruption.”³

Now it is no secret that hosting large, international events like the World Cup and Olympics thrusts a country into the world’s center stage, and every small move is subject to the intense scrutiny of the global community. It is for this reason that I find Brazil’s attitudes and actions towards prostitution and human trafficking so intriguing. Whereas many countries where prostitution is illegal—like the United States—are critical of the open policy in Brazil, other states are apathetic and even share similar laws.⁴ (The U.S. has gone so far as to adopt a strong policy against legal prostitution in any form, citing that “prostitution and related activities—including pimping and patronizing or maintaining brothels fuel the growth of modern-day slavery by providing a façade behind which traffickers for sexual exploitation operate.”⁵)

When it comes to human trafficking, however, the international community is highly critical of the situation in Brazil. And as the World Cup and Olympics grow ever nearer, that criticism has only increased.

Defining

The first step that I will take to address prostitution and trafficking in Brazil will be to construct an applicable definition of each for the purpose of my thesis. Though a variety of definitions are available from numerous sources—state governments, NGOs, etc.—many are subject to the agenda of the author and suffer certain biases.

Prostitution: I will explore definitions from various NGOs and governments and discuss what I believe to be the strengths/weaknesses of each. I will describe what I find to be the most in-use

³ VINTON, K. (2011). Is It Time for Brazil?. *Harvard International Review*, 33(1), 7-8. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

⁴ *Prostitution Laws of the World* [Map]. (n.d.). Retrieved from Wikipedia database.

⁵ United States Department of State. *The Link Between Prostitution and Sex Trafficking*. 24 Nov. 2004.

definition in Brazil itself, and then go on to explain what definition I will use for the purpose of my thesis.

Human trafficking: As a parallel to the section on prostitution, I will explore definitions from various NGOs and governments and discuss what I believe to be the strengths/weaknesses of each. I will describe what I find to be the most in-use definition in Brazil itself, and then go on to explain what definition I will use for the purpose of my thesis.

Prostitution/human trafficking of minors: Both the prostitution and human trafficking of children under the age of eighteen are illegal in Brazil, and although the government,

Sex tourism: Sex tourism is a term that I only first learned about as I began my research for my thesis, and it is such an interesting/important phenomenon in modern Brazil that I feel it is necessary that I develop a concrete definition. As the World Cup and Olympics approach—two events that will draw hundreds of thousands of tourists from around the world—I believe that it will be important to keep this term in mind.

Exploring the History

Prostitution: As with most countries of the world, prostitution has a long history in Brazilian state and society. In this section I will aim to construct an accurate description of the phenomenon of prostitution as it has existed in Brazilian history.

Human trafficking: Arguably the earliest form of human trafficking, slavery has a deep, strong roots in Brazilian history. More slaves were transported to Brazil than to any other destination, roughly forty percent of all slaves sent to the Americas.⁶ Decades behind the United States, slavery was not fully

⁶ Cowling, C. (2010). Debating Womanhood, Defining Freedom: The Abolition of Slavery in 1880s Rio de Janeiro. *Gender & History*, 22(2), 284-301. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0424.2010.01591.x

abolished in the country until 1888⁷, by which time more than 4 million people had entered Brazil in chains between 1501 and 1886.⁸ I will explore if/how this history is tied to the modern human trafficking trade in the country.

Exploring the “who”

Prostitution: Who are the women who voluntarily employ themselves as prostitutes? Although it is a relatively broad question, information on the general demographics of Brazilian prostitutes is readily available. According to the State Department’s 2011 Human Rights Report on Brazil, prostitutes work in all areas of Brazil, but are concentrated in large cities and tourist destinations, such as Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Salvador de Bahia.⁹ Brazil as a country has a very wide range of races, cultures, and ethnicities, and each region is different. I hope to analyze the demographics of some of the more key areas through my research.

Human trafficking: Both men, women, and children are victims of the human trafficking trade, but it is women and children that are most often involved in sexual exploitation and forced prostitution. According to the NGO Reference Center on Children and Adolescents, patterns of sexual exploitation of children corresponded to the distinct economic and social profiles of the country's regions¹⁰, and the same is true for adult victims as well. I hope to study these patterns in demographics and trafficking.

I also hope to gather information on trafficking routes. Specifically, what are the demographics of the victims being trafficked *within* the country, and how do they differ from those being trafficked

⁷ Bergad, L. W. (2007). *The comparative histories of slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States*. Cambridge] University Press. xiii.

⁸ Cowling, C. (2010). Debating Womanhood, Defining Freedom: The Abolition of Slavery in 1880s Rio de Janeiro. *Gender & History*, 22(2), 284-301. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0424.2010.01591.x

⁹ United States Department of State. *2010 Human Rights Report – Brazil*. 08 April 2011.

¹⁰ United States Department of State. *2010 Human Rights Report – Brazil*. 08 April 2011.

into and out of Brazil? Who are the traffickers? I suspect that many traffickers are tied to the drug trade, as it would be convenient to use the same smuggling routes.

I will also seek to explore the different social and political stances and movements regarding both prostitution and human trafficking today. I will research how prostitution and human trafficking are viewed by the government, political parties, citizens etc. I will also explore the activities/interests of foreign governments and NGOs in the country, as they represent a very active and vocal segment of the population. Additionally, I plan on focusing on how moves to regulate human trafficking could raise questions about prostitute's rights.

Brazilian Law

A topic that I foresee myself spending a lot of time researching is Brazilian law; specifically the laws and regulations that pertain to prostitution, trafficking, and—to an extent—sex tourism. Since this is a rather complex topic, I thought it best to outline my main points below.

Prostitution: I will seek to answer the following questions:

- What laws and regulations govern the act of prostitution in Brazil?
- How strict are the laws?
- What is the punishment for breaking these laws?
- How does corruption play a role?

Human trafficking:

- What laws and regulations govern human trafficking in Brazil?
- How strict are the laws?
- What is the punishment for human trafficking?

- How often is it punished? According to the US Department of State's *2011 Trafficking in Persons* report, although the number of trafficking investigations and prosecutions increased in the past year, few traffickers actually faced jail time.¹¹
- How does corruption play a role? Corruption has played a large role in the history of the Brazilian government, and it to plague the country's efforts to report and prosecute human trafficking today. This past year, authorities convicted seven police officers of human trafficking-related complicity.¹²
- What services are provided for victims? Although they do exist, services for victims of human trafficking—especially considering the number of people estimated to be involved in the trade—are woefully inadequate. The Brazilian government continues to rely on non-governmental organizations and civil groups to work with victims. In my research, I hope to analyze how Brazil is working with NGOs and—to a certain extent—foreign governments to address the human trafficking epidemic.

Exploring the Modern Causes

From my preliminary research into the modern causes that have contributed to the rise in prostitution and trafficking in Brazil, I have observed that both international governments and NGOs attribute many of the same factors to both phenomena. According to a 2007 Congressional Research Service report, these factors include, but are not limited to: (1) global demand for sex workers, (2) political, social, or economic crisis, natural disasters, (3) *machismo* culture, (4) limited economic opportunities for women in Latin America.¹³

¹¹ United States Department of State. *2011 Trafficking in Persons Report – Brazil*. 27 June 2011.

¹² United States Department of State. *2011 Trafficking in Persons Report – Brazil*. 2011.

¹³ United States Congressional Research Service, *Trafficking in Persons in Latin America and the Caribbean*, H.R. Doc. No. 110th Cong.-RL33200, at 8 (2007).

Prostitution: I will discuss specifically the key factors that cause Brazilian women to turn to prostitution as a way to earn a living.

Human Trafficking: I will also discuss at length the factors that contribute to human trafficking, especially those factors with which prostitution does not share. What are the main drivers of human trafficking in Brazil? Is the demand mostly domestic, or international? How does corruption play a role?

I foresee this being one of the most important sections of my thesis, as the similarities/differences in factors that will arise between the two will provide invaluable perspective as I seek to answer my research question. Evaluating and assessing similar trends could unearth key relationships between prostitution and trafficking in Brazil.

Data/Methodology

As outlined in the *Background* section of this prospectus, there are specific areas where which I plan to begin my research. I have tentatively outlined it as such because I feel that in order to thoroughly research both prostitution and trafficking in Brazil, I need to be able to understand what makes them unique, but also what commonalities they share. By breaking it up by topic and then again by subject, it was easier to not only plan out my research, but identify specific questions for each as well.

Additionally, planning out the first stages of my research in this way has helped me to identify not only possible gaps in my areas of research, but strategize *where* I might be able to find the information and data that I need.

In order to find the most credible and up-to-date information as possible, I will be relying heavily on reports published by the Brazilian government, the United States State Department, various NGOs and credible human rights groups. The key here is to identify biases that may attempt to inflate (or underestimate) the truths.

Additionally, as the 2014 World Cup draws nearer, I will pay increasing attention to world news regarding Brazil's preparations for the event. Although pieces on corruption, social issues and other "growing pains" associated with the country's scramble to update its infrastructure have already been published, I expect the volume of related reports to increase in both quantity and credibility.

As I mentioned in the *Overview* section of this prospectus, I am beginning the thesis research/writing process as a junior because I have the opportunity to live in Brazil from January of next year through December; and entire calendar year. The length of my stay in the country will not only help to drastically improve my Portuguese language skills, but will give me the time and opportunity to conduct my own independent research while I am there. PUC-Rio—the university that I will be attending—offers several classes whose course material could lend themselves to my topic.

Proposed Observational Study

One of the tools that I am considering to assess the nature of the association between prostitution and human trafficking is an observational study. The observational study that I have begun to design would be set up as such:

- *Independent variable*: the implementation of a new policy regarding prostitution in Brazil (in this example, I will use the 2002 move to by the government recognize "sex worker" as an official occupation)
- *Dependent variable 1*: the estimated number of prostitutes in the country, by year both before and after 2002
- *Dependent variable 2*: the estimated number of women caught in human trafficking, by year both before and after 2002

In comparing the estimates for human trafficking from both before and after 2002, if trafficking rates showed a significant and unexplained increase after that year, it may suggest that certain ties between the trafficking and prostitution exist in Brazil. However, I must be careful to verify my results with other indicators, as correlation does not necessarily imply causation. A well-planned and thorough observational study to explore these ties could be beneficial to my overall research, and I will continue to develop the study as I get closer to the spring semester.

Notes on Data:

- *Data on prostitution:* Although I know that the occupation of “sex worker” has been officially recognized by the Brazilian government since 2002¹⁴, I am not sure what kind of data the government may have been collecting prior to that year.
- *Data on human trafficking:* The clandestine nature of human trafficking presents a major issue when it comes to data. Most studies and assessments available to the public are based on estimates from the Brazilian government or various NGOs, as concrete data is not readily available. I hope to find yearly estimates from credible sources in the international community, but have been unsuccessful as of yet. Depending on the credibility of the estimates that I find, *the validity of this study could be called into question.*

Proposed Content Analysis

In addition to a possible observational analysis, at the suggestion of my thesis advisor, I plan on conducting a content analysis of Rio de Janeiro newspapers and magazines over the course of my study abroad program. This analysis would monitor the major press outlets for stories and columns on prostitution, human trafficking, and related topics. The analysis would track both the volume of works

¹⁴ Metro.co.uk. (2008-10-29) Official website gives tips to prostitutes. Retrieved on 2011-09-11.
<http://www.metro.co.uk/news/world/378227-official-website-gives-tips-to-prostitutes>

on these topics and the content itself, and assess public opinion based on the content. I hope to continue to develop a methodology for this project as the semester continues.