

Amanda De Lisio, PhD
University of Toronto

Deviant Development and Spiritual Interpellation: Sex Work and the Sport Mega-Event in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Abstract

This paper will examine the role of religion in the everyday life of women involved in sexual commerce in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Treated popularly as amoral or morally ambivalent, the women involved in sexual commerce harness religious imaginaries in defence of love, sexuality and femininity. Connected to the broader theme of migration and mobility, it will investigate the manner in which religion is resourced as a form of protection by women historically marginalized in development processes, such as those accelerated in (sport) event-led urbanism. The globally recognized sport mega-event has been widely criticized as a military industrial complex trade show – an undeniable appendage to the business of war increasingly needed to “softly” showcase the latest in athleticism and ammunition to the (watching) world (Manley & Silk, 2013; Prouse, 2013; Sugden, 2012). In order to understand state-led violence that is directed at local informal economies, the sport mega-event must first be “imagined” as both a target of “foreign” terrorism (see Atkinson & Young, 2012) and a catalyst for urban reform. These imaginaries, popularly associated with the event, rationalize the exorbitant effort (and cost) needed to militarize and police host cities; yet there is evidence that these globally determined security strategies prioritize and protect global capital in lieu of the local populace (see, e.g., Bennett & Haggerty, 2014; Cornelissen, 2011; Gaffney, 2010; Giulianotti, 2010; Kidd, 2016; Schimmel, 2012). Through the collection and analysis of ethnographic (i.e., interview, participant observation) data, this paper will reflect on the everyday injection of religion (migration of certain religious/spiritual practices) as an instrument through which women are able to realize desire, and encounter momentary salvation in the midst of predatory capitalist expansion.

Key words: Sex work, event-led urbanism, religion, spirituality