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Violence, the state and gendered indigenous agency in the Brazilian Amazon

José Miguel Nieto Olivar 

Public Health Faculty, University of São Paulo; Sao Paulo Research Foundation, São Paulo, Brazil

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to understand feminine and indigenous forms of *agency*, especially that of the young women living in a specific Amazonian city, and the ways these forms emerge within and against the grammatical *frame* of insecurity, fear, death, and segregation that is produced by the Brazilian neo-colonial project in the Amazon. I am interested in understanding the ways in which these women relate to a *frame* that places them in an ordinary *state of exception* between violent death and biological reproduction. I argue that the practices of sexual and economic exchanges between indigenous women and 'white men' are fertile for reflecting on these forms of agency in a frame of colonial *contest*. Finally, I suggest that these forms of agency indicate an analogy with counter-colonial mechanisms of cultural *cannibalism*.

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*The movement of the image or the text outside of
confinement is a kind of 'breaking out,' so that even though
neither the image nor the poetry can free anyone from prison,
or stop a bomb or, indeed, reverse the course of the war, they
nevertheless do provide the conditions for breaking out of
the quotidian acceptance of war and for a more generalised
horror and outrage that will support and impel calls for justice
and an end to violence.*

Judith Butler, *Frames of War*, 11.

La poésie antillaise sera cannibale ou ne sera pas

Suzanne Césaire, 1942 (apud Mascot, 2015: 110)

Introduction

It was early in the morning on 14 November 2016, when a swarm of people began to gather around an abandoned track just a few metres away from This City's¹ main avenue. In the middle of the scrub, the lifeless body of a young indigenous woman had been found. Voices quickly elaborated and spread the news, and photos were taken by passers-by – then circulated via WhatsApp and on Facebook – portraying the naked body of an indigenous teenager, harmed, injured, her school uniform and bag cast by her side. Sarah, 17 years old,² was killed by 'suffocation, strangulation and aggression' (according to official reports) after leaving school, and 'raped' (according to everyone else).

In 2010 and 2014 I made several short-term visits (of about 10 days) to This City as part of an anthropological research project on gender and Amazonian frontiers. In 2016 I carried out ethnographic fieldwork for 3 months – with the financial support of the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP: process 2013/26,826–2) – which aimed to understand the dynamics and social meanings given to the cases and narratives of 'sexual exploitation' and violence I had collected in 2010 and 2014. In order to focus on the experiences of indigenous women, the research was carried out in collaboration with a regional indigenous women's organisation that approved the research. The research followed both the Code of Ethics of the Brazilian Anthropology Association (of which I am a member), and Regulation 510/2016 from the National Council for Ethics in Research (CONEP- *Conselho Nacional de Ética em Pesquisa*), regarding ethical procedures for social science research.³

Field research abided by these regulations by presenting my intentions to participants, with transparency about the nature of the study, and by maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants. I obtained consent from all participating individuals and regional indigenous organisations in the city. In understanding the vulnerable position of the groups focused upon in this study, the site of the research has been made anonymous. In doing so, I have also respected the privacy of individuals and their families, due to the sensitive nature of the topic as well as the cultural standards of the society in which I was doing the research. Ethical clearance was obtained from my own university in accordance with recognised ethics codes and regulations.

In the ethnography, I linked Sarah's death – which still occupies a nebulous place in official records (eventually reconfigured to erase the rape) – to the many stories of abuse, violence, and death that I had heard in 2010 from indigenous women living in This City. 'It has been going on forever' was a comment often made by local women referring to this kind of violence, and constitutes the starting point for my research questions. In particular, Sarah's death was connected in a paradoxical way, as I will show later, to the persistence of cases of and narratives about the sexual exploitation of indigenous 'girls' (locally and institutionally understood as sexual violence).

The form and persistence of these murders and type of violence, their associated moral judgements, the fear they instil, and their non-exceptionality and non-criminal organisation, reveal a *frame* in the ethnography.⁴ This *frame* places the workings and destructions of This City's political project on these young women's bodies – a project that, as we shall see, has its teleological engine in the notions of 'civilization', 'integration', 'defence', and 'security'. Murder and sexual violence therefore reveal the workings

of the exercise of *power* in This City,⁵ as well as the ways in which this exercise determines the conditions of possibility of *governmentality* and *the state*.⁶ I will suggest that the unexceptional character of these relations structures a certain form of *exceptionality*⁷ of power/the state in this (neo)colonial context.

As Anne McClintock has demonstrated for feminist and de/postcolonial aims, the voracity of colonial power should be read in relational terms as a *contest*,⁸ and properly understanding circumstances of contest require us to go beyond identifying the *frame* and denouncing the violence that constitutes it. My aim in this article is thus to begin to understand feminine and indigenous forms of *agency*⁹ – especially of younger women – and the ways they emerge within and against this grammatical *frame* of insecurity, fear, death, and segregation. To use Judith Butler's terms,¹⁰ I am interested in understanding the ways in which these young women relate to a *frame* that does not make their lives legible while alive, but which places them in an unexceptional and ordinary *state of exception* between violent death and biological reproduction.

To this end, the first part of the article formulates a more general hypothesis for understanding the comment 'it has been going on forever': that is, that the form and persistence of this violence should be understood within the framework of invention and fabrication of This City as a site of the Brazilian (neo)colonial contest. To do this, I will follow the sparse historical bibliography on the construction of the city (especially from the 1970s), and will accompany it with oral memory data collected during my 2016 fieldwork especially Mrs Inacia's memories of her youth.

In the second part of the article I consider the possible ways in which young indigenous women deal with – or enact – the frame. In particular, I examine a form of agency described to me by Rosa, an 18-year-old indigenous woman. Empirical data collected during fieldwork in 2014 and 2016, in relation to the frame described and existing literature on *sex work*, *prostitution*, and *sexual economies*, will allow me to argue that the practices of sexual and economic exchange between indigenous women and 'white men' are a particularly fertile ground for reflecting on these forms of agency. In addition, going beyond analyses by McClintock and Butler, I suggest that these forms of agency indicate an analogy with counter-colonial mechanisms of cultural *cannibalism*.¹¹

Finally, this article is one of the first analytical approaches, based on empirical data, to an issue widely discussed in the political networks of indigenous women (and anthropologists) in Brazil: on forms of sexual and intersectional violence based on gender, ethnicity, and generation against indigenous women of different ages and ethnic groups. It is a large and complex field of research. Before presenting some conclusions, this article therefore also seeks to make room for future studies by suggesting some analytical possibilities, and by pointing out the gaps in available data.

Framing This City: violent, urban, and colonial grammars

The aim of this section is to highlight what I have been calling a *frame*: to contextualise This City's history of recent military manufacture, the ultimate form of an old process of colonisation in the Amazon, that diachronically situates the violence that I am referring to within it. This section aims to explore, through the investigation of historical records

and personal memories, the significance of the local commentary on the persistence of sexual violence and murders of indigenous women: 'it has been going on forever'.

This City is located in the Brazilian Amazon. At least 90% of and is typically presented as an indigenous city, *urbanisation*, and the relationship between *city* and *community* having a central role in both the anthropological literature and the political discussions about it. The City's central character in regional contemporary social issues is directly linked to the way in which processes of urbanisation have been developed in the region and, particularly, to the way in which This City was invented and built at the end of the twentieth century. Limitations of space here, will not allow me to go into great detail about the colonial occupation of the region.

This City is often said to have roots in a *maloca*¹² of *Passés indians* and the building of a Portuguese Fort in the mid-eighteenth century, which initiated a gradual process of colonial settlement, that went from fort to parish, then to commercial outpost, and which was described by the early-twentieth-century German ethnologist and explorer, Koch-Grunberg, as a 'miserable den, almost without any inhabitants...' (source: local history book). From 1916, with the arrival of a Catholic Mission, regional conditions were created to enable the city's gradual growth and its eventual political and military making.

With their activities clearly directed towards education and labour management, the Salesian Mission set up a system of indigenous boarding schools in the native communities where they mustered children and youths in agricultural and urban 'study and work camps'. These missionary settlements definitively shaped the ongoing, century-long process of 'civilizing and catechesis', while also constituting the region's first systematic investment in the construction of indigenous cities. And yet, while the Salesian Mission pushed forward a mammoth and systematic programme of urban, productive, and labour management, it was only in the 1970s, and on the military government's road to 'progress' and 'integration' that it started to become the city it is today.

The military government, which had seized national power in 1964, was profoundly interested in national defence and sovereignty, but also in 'progress' and in managing both Brazilian territory and the country's abundant natural resources. Federal Law 5449 of 1968 'framed' (*sic*) This City as a national security area, thus placing it within the scope of major governmental projects for the development of infrastructures and highways, aiming to definitively cut into forest and indigenous territories and expand the Brazilian agricultural front to its foremost national limits. The project meant the construction of sub-stretches of two trans-Amazonian and transborder highways.

Between 1973 and 1974 a Brazilian Military Construction and Engineering Battalion (BEC- *Batalhão de Engenharia e Construção*) was air transported in its entirety from than 5,000 km away. The aim was to build roads, a permanent military settlement and a city which would act as an 'outlet'. Along with the BEC came the famous powerful building 'firms', as people remember them: more than four public and private corporations specialising in building infrastructure. According to historical records, between 1970 and 1980 the population went from 785 to 3,102 inhabitants, with 6,000 people registering as city inhabitants between 1974 and 1976. According to one historian and military scholar in his book about This City: 'Men and machines made their way into the

forest, *cutting into the Amazon rainforest*, announcing progress and development, [...] absolutely certain that they would accomplish their mission' (my emphasis).

These thousands of soldiers and workers were largely single 'white' men, who built the city as a materialisation of progress, of regional integration and civilization, and as a performative space for 'racism'.¹³ Thus, a new *frontier* was installed once and for all, a new colonial *exception*, with no declared war, without a temporal argument, without any nostalgic absence of democracy (which has never existed in that colonial process), to produce a *frame* of permanent reproduction, 'integration and security' (as the national military project put it) and, of domination and consumption as conditions of existence.

This was an exceptional power for unexceptional structural relations, not a *state of exception* as was understood in European liberal theory.¹⁴ Agamben follows Benjamin in his description of the historical transformation of the principle of exceptionality until its final consolidation as a normative form of government in Western European states (plus the United States), mainly through war. Thus, his emblematic study of the *state of exception* could be historically useful to approach *western democracies* as separate entities, which ignores their colonial performance, their geopolitical extensions of power. Agamben's study is deeply grounded in a perspective which ignores gender and racial relations, that is strictly metropolitan, and that also has a specific temporality (constructed around the time of modernity, the time of war, exception as an ongoing temporality). However, the present case study demonstrates the need to operate such analyses through a different key: an interpretive key which takes into consideration feminist political philosophy's critique of the state,¹⁵ and which understands liberalism not as a constitutionally defined nation-state concentration, but as a colonially expanding net of *carnal* geopolitically distributed power.¹⁶

It is in that military, non-indigenous, and masculine unexceptional state, in that very 'cutting into the Amazon forest', that the most recent past of what 'has been going on forever' is located.

To better explore this, I can present the words of Mrs Inácia here, an indigenous woman in her seventies who was educated in the Mission boarding school and has lived in the city since the 1970s. In her words, the tension of violence could be sensed (but the 'wild' slippages of desire, too):

Then some more people from the firms arrived (...) Five crews came in. There were lots of white people. The road was packed: 'Let's go dance, let's go dance', with their long hair bundled up. I was very scared of them...I wouldn't go out anymore...but then I did...Then I went wild and I would just want to run away from the restaurant [where she was working].

...and by then there was a few party houses. The parties were full of people...and there were no indigenous people, only people from outside and people who already lived here. The police would *hunt down* [indigenous] women who went to parties, and the ones who went to lots of parties were called in to go and live at the brothel,¹⁷ so I got really scared and stopped going out... They used to last there for one month, two months and then couldn't take it any longer, they died. There was no so indigenous people yet [living in This City]. (...) They arrived here after me and got pregnant really quickly... (...)

When the firms arrived, there were lots of deaths; they would especially rape young women who stayed out too late. They would abuse them, take them to the side of a road. Even their bottoms... They ended up dying without being buried, on the roadside... (...) That's what

happened back then, when they made women pregnant and killed them...And it's those children who are committing that kind of crime now.¹⁸

The phrase 'It's been going on forever' is not a metaphor nor does it designate an imprecise feeling of oppression. Since the 1970s these relationships have been taking social forms such as unwanted (or unrecognised) pregnancy, rape, and then sexual exploitation. It was not just about the military. Authors also identify taxi drivers (also non-indigenous and outsiders) in these narratives from the late 1990s. In 2010 we learnt from an official source that every single member of the local Military Police was under investigation for sexual crimes. Many narratives of 'abuse', 'orgies' and 'exploitation' of underage indigenous minors were pointed specifically at members of the military and, especially, powerful local tradesmen and their sons.

Such common knowledge surfaced spectacularly in 2013, when a Federal Police investigation revealed 'an alleged network of sexual exploitation of indigenous minors' (source: newspaper articles). The press reported that some 16 'girls' of ages ranging from 13 to 16 had been heard as part of the judicial proceedings. Using helicopters and military jets, federal agents arrested nine people: three important local businessmen from the same family, one army officer, a former city councillor and two indigenous women accused of having lured the 'girls' to the crime scenes. Despite the operation's spectacular character and apparent success, by 2016 the three businessmen were back at the head of their businesses, and had not been subjected to any major juridical or social penalty. Nothing outside of the Federal Operation itself and its associated images appeared to overcome or break away from a grammar that is well-known to everyone. As the women who explained it to me put it in 2014, such violence had been 'going on forever'.

One particular narrative from 2016 revealed the scale of these crimes dramatically. It was provided by an indigenous woman in her mid-forties, who told me how the same businessmen – who are all brothers – had also harassed her as a teenager on her way home from school. 'The same ones?' I asked in shock. 'The same ones.' She answered. 'You mean these brothers have been harassing, abusing and exploiting indigenous young women from this city for twenty years?' 'Yes, at least one of them has'.

So, in this case of 'exploitation', the 'going on forever' comment constitutes a statement of the genealogies, bodies, and specific names persisting in time, ingrained into the city's commercial and political structures. The three brothers, who arrived with the time of the building firms own a large part of the city's land, hold prominent local positions of power – including formal political power – and the effective control of land and primary consumption goods, as well as the economic means.

These three brothers' *unexceptional* history gives us an idea of the grammatically accepted rules within which commercial agents *can* exert power and, indeed, puts commerce at the centre of power analyses. Long-standing trading families have held local executive power and legislating posts in an almost hereditary fashion. This City's commerce benefits from the salaries of civil servants, mainly the military, and also, follows a long-standing tradition of exploitation of indigenous bodies, products, needs, and money in the Amazon.¹⁹ Every now and again, when access to certain types of food, tools, and fuel becomes more difficult, indigenous peoples' debt with traders, and even that of indigenous traders with white traders, becomes quite an

unexceptional form of relationship and exercise of power. As proven by the Federal Operation and later developments, such a form of power relationship has its gender and generational counter-part in the violent asymmetry of sexual transactions where young indigenous womens' bodies operate as the object of exchange, paid for by 'old whites'. Ultimately, those non-indigenous men receive no direct economic return for this particular 'commerce' (as the Federal Police Inspector named it in newspapers); benefit comes in the form of the very performative actualisation of gendered and racialised power, of colonial asymmetry and relations – which lie at the very basis of all other transactions.

Women: micro-politics, agency, and breaking out

'I am a local city dweller, and I, better than anyone, know that this news is very biased. I am not saying any of the accused are saints, but believe me, the young women involved are far less saintly than them. Far from being these poor innocent souls (...) [...] those women hang out in party houses, on the side of the beach or elsewhere, offer themselves, usually drunk and wearing micro-clothes, hoping to get pregnant and make a nice pension for themselves, as is generally the case. If you don't believe me, ask any soldier's wife [...] everyone knows those young women' kind of reputation who, as we speak, continue to work as local prostitutes, and not exactly for the odd chocolate or sweetie, as Mr. Inspector here puts it...'

MILLENA22²⁰

The above comment is a response from a 'city dweller' to one of the news reports regarding the Federal Operation. It helps me to introduce the following section and connects to several points raised by Mrs Inacia's words. Here we see a moral re-elaboration of events, bodies, and relationships involved in the Federal Operation. The commentary points to the nocturnal and sexual practices of indigenous young women and how they threaten military wives. So, in this section I will draw upon ethnographic data from 2014 and 2016 to deal with this ambiguous and interstitial space in which young indigenous women *perform* their bodies, genders, and sexualities within the *frame* of the violence described above and the heavy moral judgements. Through the explanations given by Rosa, a young indigenous woman of 18, and in diachronic connection with Mrs Inacia's memories of youth, I will try to advance an understanding of these forms of agency, their potentialities, and limits.

In this article I understand *agency* according to Strathern's work,²¹ for whom it can be seen as the capacity to *impinge on ranges of efficacy* in the constitution of embodied gender relations.²² Strathern's notion of agency is directly connected to a *theory of action* as processes of *performativity* and the *materialisation* of relationships. In that sense, agency is connected to the comprehension of social life and of reality as *enactments*, as Annmarie Mol suggested following Butler's *performative acts*.²³ In this sense I am working with an idea of *agency* influenced by discussions and theoretical feminist elaborations of the so-called ontological and epistemological turn of the 1990s, about *acts*, *action*, *performativity*, and *materialisation* as the basis of understanding social life. At the same time, I see Gayle Rubin's classical work on the notion of sexualised and politicised agency as greatly relevant to my approach²⁴

To situate this approach I can go back to Mrs Inácia's words.

They [the bosses, the priests and nuns] would just say: 'if you want to be left alone, stay in at the boarding school, it's up to you... If that's the kind of life you want, then go out...' That's why I would never go out, I would listen to the bosses... If I'd gone out I'd have five children by now... (..) Then, when I met the Sergeant, he would take me out for a walk on a Saturday or Sunday, but the bosses always waited up for me to come back... When the bosses left, *then I went wild, real wild... I wanted to try...* I met this blue-eyed North-Easterner [in reference to the men from the Northeast of Brazil who came to work with the army and the firms] who wanted to take me away, but the boss wouldn't allow it...' (my emphasis).

Mrs Inácia's 'going wild' makes me focus on an entire level of emerging acts, which is informative about local micro-politics²⁵ and refers to transformations dissolved into the topology of relationships between (young and female) indigenous people and (adult male) 'whites'. It is a level which can answer questions about how these women manage to keep living within frames of non-legibility, and how they appropriate these *frames*, consume them and push them to the limit to do more than survive.

In her book about gender and interethnic relations in the Amazon, Lasmar²⁶ takes agency into account to approach these relationships through marriages between indigenous women and 'white men', and their actualising effect on a *cultural* tendency to gear themselves – the indigenous people- towards *the world of whites* (which, according to the author, constitutes a regional cultural orientation). While Lasmar's intuition to consider agency, affection, intimacy, conjugality, and money as the mediating weapons strikes me as absolutely right, we need to be cautious. It is definitely not for marriage that Mrs Inácia 'goes wild' or that these bodies are cast in the scrub. It is non-marriage; it is sex, youth, desire, streets, nights out, drink and money, and the moral judgements operating as the *frame* unfolds. This evidence takes us to the realm of the intersections and articulations between sex, money, affections, conjugality, and the social production of gender, race, generation, moralities, and power.²⁷

A good scene for these relationships is provided by fieldwork I carried out in 2014 with anthropologist Adriana Piscitelli. A group of officers from the Brazilian Airforce were also in This City on a flight training expedition: they were 'the aeronauts'. Mostly tall white men, with muscular bodies, they wore accessories and clothes from well-known brands, and spent every night in the city's bars. They were always surrounded by plenty of women of different ages, including adolescent and adult indigenous women, as well as non-indigenous health workers, teachers, etc. Young indigenous women would gather in groups which were also linked to young indigenous men: they would come and go from one group to the other, flirt with the aeronauts, drink with them with some mutual disinterest; free themselves of the aeronauts' attempts to physically capture them, and alternatively dance and thoroughly enjoy the company of their indigenous peers, who would await a few metres away, inside or outside the bar.

During those nights, we never once saw any indigenous young women publicly kissing or caressing any of the aeronauts, nor performatively investing in sexualized dance or more erotic gestures to seduce them or capture their attention. Indeed, the greatest expenditure, in terms of public erotic dance, was not carried out not by any woman, but by the aeronauts themselves. On one of their nights out, two of the younger, taller, and whiter ones, with their highly worked-out bodies, leapt onto the stage for a full strip-tease style dance demonstration, lifting their T-shirts, and showing their tight abs.

Rosa, a 17-year-old indigenous woman who lived with her military husband, dubbed this form of female teenage agency 'whorishness and nastiness' ['putaria e sacanagem' in Portuguese].²⁸ She explained to me that this was a common practise among peer friends of both sexes. Despite what these terms may suggest, in her explanation the central element of the night out is not sex, but drinking and friendship. A group comes together at night and go from their peripheral neighbourhoods to the Praia neighbourhood, where 'white people' go to the most. The aims of the mission are the 'old men' (preferably 'whites'). The young women are beautifully made up, to enhance their eyes and long black hair, and they place themselves within the visual field of the 'old man' as if to elicit advances and invitations, but without making any overtly seductive moves. The 'old man' buys a drink, which the young woman will disdainfully accept. She sits down by herself or with another friend and, as more of her friends casually arrive, they will graciously accept drinks as a pre-requisite for the 'old man' to continue enjoying the company of the pretty young woman (or women).

The 'old man's' hands make uncomfortable advances which are always interrupted. He might ask whether they can have sex at the end of the night: 'maybe, maybe', she might answer [whorishness]. But as the night approaches its end, she will ask to go to the toilet and, one after another, everyone slowly leaves [and nastiness].

In this power game, the sexual counter-gift is not 'necessarily' (Rosa) granted nor strictly exacted. Rarely does the money spent by the man actually turn into sex, although several doors obviously open up in that direction, (such as pressure, ensuing invitations, casual encounters, greater gifts, etc.). On the other hand, we should not lose sight of the fact that, despite all the violence, sex exists, both in terms of more or less systematic economic transactions and in those of libidinal searches which seek affection and sexual pleasure. 'Going wild', as Mrs Inacia remembers. Rosa, like virtually all the indigenous young women I talked to in different situations, had close links with some of the women involved in the case which was to become famous. Some of them, like the 17-year-old who filed a lawsuit because 'the old man started messing with her little sister', were neither forced nor tricked, and saw those non-indigenous 'old men' and that ontologically asymmetric 'prostitution' as a stable source of income and certain goods.

Appropriating my own mispronunciation of 's' (which, in Brazilian Portuguese is voiced as 'z' in English) and 'ç' (which is unvoiced) when I asked about 'marrying members of the military' (which created a confusion between 'hunting' [caçar] and 'marrying' [casar]), Rosa laughs and says that she and her friends do in fact enjoy 'a good hunt'. They always know the time and place where, as one would say about hunting game or tree-fruit 'we're getting lots of soldiers!!'. These soldiers can be the aeronauts – the perfect objects of 'whorishness and nastiness' or some kind of 'prostitution' – but also 'nice and young little recruits', such as Rosa's husband himself, with whom she has interwoven several different links of affection and transactions.²⁹ So how do we understand 'whorishness and nastiness' as agency?

Several feminist anthropological studies of the so-called *sexual economies* in post-colonial contexts help us to put 'whorishness and nastiness' into perspective as a sexually and economically mediated feminine, indigenous, and youth agency. The sexual, affective, and economic cross-linkings presented by Cabezas³⁰ help us to understand the sinuous passages between affections and *tactical sex* outside of sex work. In Kempadoo's work³¹ those passages are operated by Jamaican youths and teenagers

who detach themselves from dominant local morality through sexual negotiations with adults. The social mobility of women – and families – in social positions marked by processes of impoverishment and racialization through these sexual and economic arrangements, has been studied by Piscitelli³² in the context of transnational tourism in Brazil. And the power of young women, in terms of *erotic power*, was studied by Groes-Green among young Mozambican women in their sexual-and-economic encounters with *white expats*.³³ Finally, Montgomery's thick ethnography of Thai children engaged in prostitution, unlike other authors, incorporates in her analyses children's voices and explanations, as well as the experiences of violence.³⁴

Taking into account the data and arguments above, it is possible to get a better understanding of 'whorishness and nastiness'. Although much research is still to be done before more conclusive analyses can be carried out, partial results allow us to think that it is in the intensification and administration of money, joy, of collectively produced dancing and strongly aesthetic erotic, nocturnal and juvenile potency, that those young women partially and temporarily displace and revert the colonial process of sexual consumption of which they are the object.

For this, I consider Butler to have provided a central and inspirational contribution in analysing the possibilities of poetry (as the dance, the friendship, the desire, the make-up, the joy, the farce) produced in contexts of military colonial domination – like war. As stated at the beginning of this article, poetic and aesthetic acts do not have the intention or primary capacity to end the war, but to make life possible through the *circulation of the frame*:

But if the *frame* is understood as a certain 'breaking out', or 'breaking from', then it would seem to be more analogous to a prison break. This suggests a certain release, a loosening of the mechanism of control, and with it, a new trajectory of affect'.³⁵

As well as boyfriends and street or school mates, 'little recruits', 'soldiers', and other young members of the military (and in some cases businessmen's sons, too) appear as the perfect partners for sexual encounters and, returning now to Lasmar, for opening up possibilities for marriage: because, as well as 'giving things' they are 'young and handsome'.³⁶

On the other hand, 'whorishness and nastiness' is a transformation of that 'going wild' with parties and drinking which Mrs Inacia described, as well as a staunch counter-effectuation of dominant morality – counter-effectuation, because it does not ignore, nor act outside the moral grammar, but rather in terms of the grammar's limits and negativities, impinging and producing new effects. Facing such a solid system of colonisation, 'whorishness and nastiness' becomes a translating mechanism of family history and genealogy, the possible control of going wild, the tool produced by those women to enact the frame on their own terms, to enhance their own capacity of impingement, within the *frame* – in its most ordinary and carnal dimension.

So, might we think that 'whorishness and nastiness' is not just a *release, a loosening of the mechanisms of control*? I am suggesting that we can think it as a technology through which these young women publicly create a tension in their own existence and in the frame of the sexual function expected by the colonial process. However, through the *cannibalistic* and poetic appropriation of that function, this technology allows them to, if

not control, at least intervene and manipulate; to *whore and make nasty* the frame's forms and possibilities. I therefore use the idea of *cannibalism* in a very specific way.

Firstly, by putting into dialogue notions about 'hunting' and 'devouring', in the context of relations between sexuality, gender and money,³⁷ with the literature on Brazilian indigenous anthropology concerning *cannibalism* and *predation* in symbolic terms, as cultural mechanisms of appropriation, war, and kinship production.³⁸ More recently, *cannibalism* has been analysed as a political and anthropological idea of decolonising tension.³⁹ Briefly, *cannibalism* indicates a specifically warlike mode of relationship that is constitutive of the self.⁴⁰ Thus, *to cannibalise* (a body, an act, a desire, a poetic), is to partially appropriate it, to partially consume it, to digest it carefully (so as not to be poisoned) and, from there, to move forward in the creation of one's own body, acts, etc. This new creation, in one way or another, should destabilise the original materiality that was consumed.

Second, I suggest that this form of agency challenges the grammatical system of colonisation and government which is present in the city's history and in the forms of violence we have portrayed: the perpetual asymmetric relationship between young indigenous womens' sexuality and bodies, and the money and bodies of 'white' men. The challenge comes in the poetic and collectivised attempt to appropriate, unravel, and tightly reorganise the market of desires, risks and money. Thus, 'whorishness and nastiness' turns itself into a technology which is intensely erotic, in a local sense indigenous, and which tries to radically transform the programmatic imposition of pain and submission into a performative creation of joy and beauty. 'Whorishness and nastiness' could be understood as a feminine, indigenous, carnal, and urban translation of the intricate network of violence and desires that configure the neo-colonial *contest* linking the 'indigenous world' and 'the world of whites' (in Lasmar' terms).

Conclusion

This article begins with a death scene and finishes with a tense libidinal and economical party. In the middle of this space we found a neo-colonial city in the Amazon, 'sexual exploitation' and Mrs Inacia's memories. The aim of this article has been to locate specific forms of the agency of young indigenous women in This City, against, through and within a landscape of sexual violence. This violence is the effect of the configurations of *power* and *state* in the city, and strives towards the performative enactment of a *frame* which places young indigenous women in the constant seesaw between death and biological reproduction, between 'exploitation', rape, and murder, in the midst of the historical weight of the (un)doing of 'civilizing' and securitization projects.

This City's history is therefore performatively actualised in a *frame* where the lives of these young indigenous women, are ordinarily produced as non-lives. The scenario, in turn, defines the forms of the *power/state* as an 'outlet' and a military investment which, in the name of a certain understanding of the project of progress and 'national integration', and in stark contrast with the ideology of 'defence', produces a world of absolute (in)security for indigenous subjects, particularly young female ones. It is an extremely established, vertical, masculine, racialised, militarised, religious, neo-colonial coordination of agents of power (*governmentality* and *state*). So what is *exceptional* here?

In the light of liberal European analyses of *exceptionality*,⁴¹ such a *state* appears as a strictly non-*exceptional* colonial construct. The distinctions and basic concepts of European democratic (and self-centred) liberalism, by which *exception* is indeed exceptional – that between law and politics, full equality of rights, the universalized principle of the right to rights, its institutionally civil character, its devised separation from other forms of power, etc. – are simply non-existent in this city's official fabrication programme. Any ensuing analysis about exceptionality and the state would therefore imply the need to reconstruct the history and political philosophy of the *state of exception* along post/decolonial and feminist lines.⁴² It would therefore also have to acknowledge that state exceptionalism should be understood from a counterpart perspective of the *state* itself, from the colony and not from war, from the *stateless*⁴³ and not from the gaze of 'Western' European states' onto themselves. It should be understood from the bodies and forms of agency of indigenous women in neo-colonial settlements.

Looking at those young indigenous women and following their gaze as they perform different forms of agency in the city, takes us to a different comprehension of state exceptionality. Its key resides in the articulation of notions such as colonial contest and frame in relation to gender, agency, and sexuality in ethnical forms. The young women's *enactments* multiply⁴⁴ the *contest*, *impinge upon* the *frame*, and also prevent us from arriving at monolithic conclusions via *indigenous kinship*⁴⁵ or through *trauma*⁴⁶ or victimisation. *Like gender, sexuality is political*.⁴⁷ My own position has been guided by empirical evidence of the importance of these fluxes and transactions ('going wild', 'whorishness and nastiness'), and by my own trajectory researching prostitution and *sexual economies* in a dialogue with (previously mentioned) feminist authors in this field.

The quest for agency therefore does not solely lead to resistance but to the relationship between performing and enacting the world, and the efficacy of its impact. This is the place that I have attempted to mark with poetical logic and colonial cannibalism. So it is in the tense entanglement between gender and sexuality, through libidinal and economic anxieties, between rigidly disputed moralities, and in the materiality of everyday bodies in contact, that it becomes possible to think of a (erotic and necropolitical) theory about the state, about power, agency, security, and gender in This City.

Finally, to understand the possibilities of re-framing and of efficacy, it is important to question the possible relations between Rosa and Sarah, between 'whorishness and nastiness' and death. Is it possible for young women to avoid death? Is 'whorishness and nastiness' a special risk for women? To avoid harassment and rape the city's women avoid certain streets and unknown taxis; to avoid death Mrs Inacia stayed at home. But by taking the risk, just as Rosa did, she went out, 'went wild', dated, became pregnant and did not die. Sarah's case is, let's say, a reflex demonstration, in negative, of the inevitability of death. If Mrs Inacia told us about the women who were outside so late at night and were 'hunted' by police and taken to the brothels until they died, and if other deaths similar to Sarah's used to be read in the key of women's moral deviations, Sarah's case is different. It was the only case I encountered in 2016 that created a public outcry in the city. The fact that she was not murdered in a party house, or dressed in 'micro-clothes', at dawn, or leaving drunk at a nightclub drunk, caused her morality to be rescued and thus the immorality of her death to be denounced.

This non-causality is important in thinking about the limits of agency to impinge upon the frame, the non-exceptionality of power structures, and gender (in)security.

Non-causality is the mark of the uncertain and easy expansion of fear among women who inhabit the city (especially, young women), and as a consequence, has powerful effects in maintaining strong asymmetries regarding the *precariousness* of life.⁴⁸ At the same time, a technology of ‘whorishness and nastiness’ appears to intensify the ability to effectively impinge upon fear, the city, the night, the bodies, and sources of money, while young women ‘hunt’ for a husband and weave strong relations of friendship and care.

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Notes on contributor

José Miguel Nieto Olivar teaches Anthropology of Body and Health, Gender and Sexuality, at the Public Health Faculty of the São Paulo State University (USP, São Paulo, Brazil). He is a graduate in Social Communication with a MA in Latin-American Literature, both from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Bogotá, Colombia), and a PhD. in Social Anthropology from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (Porto Alegre, Brazil). Between 2010 and 2017 he was a researcher at the Center for Gender Studies PAGU, at the State University of Campinas (Campinas, Brazil), with two fellowships and a grant from the São Paulo State Research Foundation (Fapesp). Has experience in social programmes and in anthropological research projects in Colombia and Brazil on issues of gender, sexuality, human rights, sex work/sexual markets, sexual and reproductive health, young people’s sexuality, human trafficking and sexual exploitation, borderlands and the Amazon region. He collaborates with the Centro de Investigaciones en Sociedad, Salud y Cultura (Colombia), the Brazilian Network of Sex Workers, and the Gender-based Violence Watch on Amazon.

ORCID

José Miguel Nieto Olivar  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7648-7009>

Notes

1. I have made the specific site of analysis anonymous, identifying it just as ‘This City’ to avoid the potential identification of participants. Several bibliographic entries used as background research have also been omitted in order to maintain the participants’ anonymity.
2. All the names were changed as well as other information that could facilitate the identification of interlocutors. Quotation marks are used here to indicate emic words, categories, or speeches. For theoretical concepts and bibliographic citations I use *italics*.

3. Please see: <http://www.abant.org.br/?code=3.1>, and <http://conselho.saude.gov.br/resolucoes/2016/Reso510.pdf>.
4. In Judith Butler's *Frames of War*, the author suggests to understand *the war* as a *frame* that organises the space of vision, the limits of imagination, the logics of sense in the times and spaces, in the bodies and ethics affected by its action. In our case we are not referring a war, but, as we shall see, some characteristics of the power relations and of the *State* organisation make the analogy possible.
5. An extensive literature about ethnic wars and forms of sexual violence specifically addresses a feminist interpretive framework, by directly correlating masculinity and violence, and sex and oppression (See on the references McKinnon, Olujic, Eriksson & Stern, Gangoli, Lentini, Segal, among others). From a similar theoretical framework, see the works of Segato. While I am familiar with such (see Olivar & Pacheco), the present work takes on a different direction.
6. Governmentality is a notion associated with a Foucauldian analysis of biopolitics and the government of population/territories in which government is not just exercised by state institutions, but also by churches, NGOs, community leaders, and not only based on written laws but also normative regulations and devices (see Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*; see also Butler, "Gender Regulations"). The *Capillary Level of Power*, refers to local, personal, community *extremities* that are sensitive to power and the ways in which it is produced and exercised *from below*, entangled in daily life, desire, the *truth* of knowledges; this is in opposition to centralised and vertical interpretations of power (see Foucault *Power/Knowledge*, 39, 96, 201, 255).
7. Agamben, *Estado de Exceção*.
8. McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.
9. Latter I will back to this concept.
10. Butler, *Frames of War*.
11. Mascot, *Hegel and the Black Atlantic*; Viveiros de Castro, *Metafísicas Canibais*.
12. The term *maloca* refers originally to an indigenous hut or shelter made of sticks and palm-trees, but like many other terms referring to indigenous life, also denotes negative or disorderly qualities, and can mean a 'mixed bag', or a 'bunch'.
13. 'White' is a very common category used by indigenous people in Brazil to identify non-indigenous people, thoughts, acts, institutions, rationalities, etc., and does not necessarily mean *white* in terms of colour or race (biologically, or genetically). 'White' as an emic category involves different 'whites' and is, thus, a relational and processual *ontological* category. I use the word 'racism' here as an emic term through which a Tukano woman addressed me one night as I drank beer at the bars in a peripheral neighbourhood. In her view, a 'white, real white' man like myself should not be there. 'Aren't you disgusted to be here?' She asked. 'Disgust? Why should I feel disgust? Because of racism...' she concluded.
14. See above 7.
15. Brown, *States of Injury*; Dhawan (org), *Decolonizing Enlightenment*.
16. Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment* and *The Empire of Love*.
17. Mrs Inácia and her husband talk about the existence of two brothels connected to the presence of the 'firms', where mainly outside young women worked.
18. I met Mrs Inácia and her family thanks to the collaboration of the indigenous women's organisation. We met several times, talked on different topics and shared moments of leisure. This fragment is taken from an interview about 'the time of the firms' carried out by me on 15 October 2016 at Mrs Inácia's house, and later translated to Portuguese with the help from an indigenous teacher.
19. See: Taussig, *Shamanism*; Andrello, *Cidade*.
20. Reader's comment on the news on Federal Operation.
21. Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*.
22. *Ibid.*, 93.
23. Mol, *The Body Multiple*; Butler, *Performative Acts*.
24. Rubin, *Thinking sex*.
25. Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory*.

26. Lasmar, de Volta.
27. See: McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Cabezas, *Economies of Desire*; Piscitelli, "Sexual Economies."
28. I met Rosa while I was living in a rented room in downtown (a 'white' part of the city), and she wanted to help me with my research. She and her young husband (a 21-year-old non-indigenous soldier) were one of three similar couples that lived there. She was born in the city and grew up living with her mother, brothers, and sister in an indigenous neighbourhood in the periphery of the city.
29. Note the important analogy here: Mrs Inacia describes the punishments inflicted by the police, as 'hunts' to force the young indigenous women out on the streets at night to become prostitutes. Unable to bear this, they would die prostitutes inside brothels. There is a certain analogy with the present: the women involved in 'exploitation', or who practise 'whorishness and nastiness', and who 'hunt' soldiers are turned, through practise and public discourse about them, into 'prostitutes' and could be then raped and murdered outside a club or in the midst of night traffic in a city which no longer has any brothels.
30. Cabezas, *Economies of Desire*.
31. Kempadoo, *Sexing the Caribbean*.
32. Piscitelli, "Shifting Boundaries"; "Sexual Economies."
33. Groes-Green, "To Put Men in a Bottle."
34. Montgomery, *Modern Babylon?*
35. Butler, *Frames*, 11.
36. Here it is interesting to remember all the local women's sexual and affective predilection for certain men from the outside (preferable with light skin colour skins and with better economic conditions) that is analysed by authors as like Piscitelli and Cabezas.
37. Olivar, *A Feast*.
38. Fausto, *Banquete de gente*.
39. Viveiros de Castro, *Metafísicas Canibais*; Mascot, *Hegel and the Black Atlantic*.
40. Viveiros de Castro, *Metafísicas*.
41. See above 7.
42. Dhawan, *Decolonizing Enlightenment*.
43. Butler & Spivak, *Who Signs the Nation-state?*
44. Mol, *The Body Multiple*.
45. See above 26.
46. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, 14.
47. See above 24.
48. Butler, *Frames*.

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