

2014

# Stripping Autonomy: Coloniality and the Production of Territory vis-à-vis Canada's Exotic Dancer Visa Program

Victoria Larson

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Stripping Autonomy:  
Coloniality and the Production of Territory  
vis-à-vis Canada's Exotic Dancer Visa Program

Victoria Larson  
May 2014

Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Bachelor of Arts degree in Geography

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Adviser, Professor Joseph Nevins

## Abstract

This paper traces the making and unmaking of a unique former temporary visa program in Canada: the Exotic Dancer Visa Program. Using theories of territory and colonialism, I imaginatively analyze the construction of the Canadian state and migrant exotic dancer bodies as spaces reflective of the surrounding social order to recognize structurally violent discourses and ideologies. Drawing connections between Canada's history of colonial nation-building tactics as a white settler nation, I ask that we recognize the continued legacy of colonialism within the state's immigration policy to unsettle and discomfort our complacency within a "post-colonial" world. By conceptualizing the body as a space, this thesis reimagines territory using theories on geographic scale so that the internalized subjectivities produced by the EDVP can be understood to constitute migrant territories which are peripheral within the dominant territory of the state. Drawing from press coverage of various formative scandals, and court cases regarding legal activity within strip clubs, I interrogate the ideologies and discourses perpetuated by the media which constructed not only the EDVP in itself, but the migrant and state territories. Ultimately it is my hope that by exploring the production of colonial territories in relation to the EDVP, a space for discomfort and recognition of complacency within a world dominated by violence and discourse can be acknowledged, and inspire self-reflection and change.

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## Acknowledgements

To Joseph Nevins, for constantly inspiring and challenging me to explore the world with critical optimism, and advising this thesis with kindness and care.

To Mark Hoffman, for relentless support and impassioned conversation which guided me throughout this semester.

To my parents, for always supporting me at Vassar, where my passions have flourished within and outside of the classroom.

To my friends, for without your encouragement, entertainment, and constant love, I could not have completed this endeavor.

## **Chapter One**

### **Why the Exotic Dancer Visa Program Matters: Understanding Territory and Colonialism**

Choosing a topic to spend your final year of undergrad exploring as you construct your thesis is intimidating, to say the least. For me, this process took months, as I attempted to combine my academic passions into a perfectly encapsulating subject through which I could explore gender relations across state borders. Thus began my Google searches: “women in migration,” “US border and gender,” “immigration policy pertaining to women,” and so forth. Remembering an influential article I read last year by activist scholar Nandita Sharma concerning the systematic violence of anti-trafficking rhetoric, I searched for “Canadian anti-trafficking laws” and accidentally stumbled upon a Canadian temporary visa program for exotic dancers. The headline read: “Ottawa brings down curtain on foreign strippers” (Curry 2012). I did not realize at the time, but this short article about the official end of the Exotic Dancer Visa Program would start me on a journey through Canadian legislation, newspaper articles, radical feminist thought, critical theory, discourses on violence and colonialism, all of which have come together in significant ways to not only produce this thesis, but a new dedication to continued study and exploration of these intersecting topics.

The Exotic Dancer Visa Program (EDVP) allowed for migrant exotic dancers to enter Canada without the same legislative action most temporary work visas necessitate. The program was rather unknown within Canada's temporary immigration programs, and throughout its 34 year tenure, Citizenship and Immigration Canada did not release statistics or any information concerning the program; therefore, the making of the EDVP was perpetuated by the media coverage of a series of scandals and court cases which came to define the program. My initial interest in the program stems from this erasure of exotic dancer migrant stories: there is very little information on the EDVP available. I wanted to uncover the history of the program and how and why it came to be. My goal was to find the missing voices, the voices of the migrant exotic dancer women—however, these voices have been completely erased, their retrieval is impossible, and I learned I had to work within the dominant discourses of the Canadian state to explore the EDVP. With time, my explorations came to be more nuanced as I considered different theories and methodologies.

This process of uncovering the making of the EDVP took me in myriad directions. I read Canadian immigration law, transcriptions of court cases, histories of immigration programs concerning women, feminist articles on embodiment, and theories on sex work. Throughout this research process, I knew the EDVP was perpetuating discourses which were rooted in systematic violence. What was missing was a topic to substantiate these themes. David Delaney's theory on the territory was the first analytic tool which helped me develop the argument I make in this thesis.

Territory, as defined by Delaney, is a "bounded social space that inscribes a certain sort of meaning onto defined segments of the material world" (Delaney 2005: 14). The

territory is a place of societal crossroads, placing significance into the other spaces surrounding it. Further, “territories reflect and incorporate features of the social order that creates them...territories are not simple artifacts by any means. Rather, they are fundamentally *constitutive* of the social orders whose features they express” (10). In essence, territories are dialectically produced by and productive of surrounding and overlapping spaces. For Delaney, territories are dynamic signifiers of social power; territories reveal the complex hierarchies and stratification of power within space, and how it affects the construction of that space.

When conceptualizing the significance of territory, I began to understand the ways that the EDVP produced multiple territories: that of the Canadian state, and that of the migrant exotic dancer body. Territory is a powerful tool through which to understand the EDVP and its effects on not only the state, but also the individuals affected by the legislation. Considering the body as territory allows for significant and complex analysis unavailable without the spatial dimension Delaney provides. By understanding the body as space, we can understand the various forces which constitute the embodied experience of the individual. We, as bodies, reflect our surrounding environment and constitute it, just as Delaney defines territory. As we are bounded by our corporality, bodies can signify social power in the same manner Delaney suggests.

Further, understanding the body as space allows for analysis of the overlapping, incestuously productive, and dynamic elements of territory which Delaney’s theory provides. Delaney addresses this fluidity and the overlapping nature of territories via his theory on verticality. He states, “[v]erthicality concerns the territorialized distribution of power among conceptually distinct entities with respect to some discrete segment of social



space” (Delaney 2005: 31). In other words, each territory is bounded in itself; however the relationship between these territories is overlapping and power is distributed between them. This includes both actual and metaphorical power relationships between the territories. Delaney complicates the stasis of power within space in regards to the overlapping, co-produced territories he discusses. These overlapping, significant spaces of embodiment and personality are the intersections for various spaces and discourses.

Bodies are mapped and produced in specific ways, reflecting the power dynamics within and between territories. When reflecting on the manners in which the EDVP constituted migrant territories, the relations to colonial power became too significant to ignore. In regards to the EDVP, the territories in (co)production are that of the body and state. The uneven power between these territories and manipulation of migrant territories by the state aligns with colonial projects. The ways that the territories of the body were mapped in systematically violent ways, as I discuss throughout this thesis, is the same way colonies were mapped by colonizing powers. These territories, the migrant body and the colony, were mapped as bundles of resources to be exploited by the colonizer under the guise of growth and development. The colonizing powers used the colonies as tools for political domination, natural resources, surveillance, and control; and oftentimes, the colonizer had distinct interest in maintaining difference across space in order to constantly Other the colonized (Young 2001: 18).

Like the colonies, the EDVP migrants were resources, or objects, of sex and pleasure. As I will detail in the third chapter of this thesis, the exotic dancer migrant territories, which their bodies were produced as, experienced the same colonial violence as the more traditional iteration of the colony. Further, the EDVP’s connection to colonialism

is significant for the state sponsored control of women's bodies. Control of female bodies' mobility and sexuality is inherent within the nation-building project, and thus, the development of national territories. And finally, the systematic erasure of the voices of the colonized is reflected in the EDVP's lack of statistics, information, and stories from exotic dancer migrants. Thus, although not the "traditional" conceptualization of colonialism, understanding the EDVP and the production of territories vis-à-vis coloniality allows for a nuanced and complex critique of immigration policy.

Drawing from the theories of territory and colonialism, throughout this thesis I ask: how was the EDVP made and unmade? What does it illustrate about the dynamic interrelationship between the production of women's bodies—in the form of Eastern European exotic dancers—and Canada as territories? What does this say about the ties between gender, geographic scale, nation-statism and territory? An examination of Canada's historical and current attitudes and policies towards foreign bodies, especially female gendered ones, reveals that the answers to these questions are tied to hegemonic beliefs, domination over foreign women, and the concealing of truths through legislative practices of colonialism. The answers to these questions are messy and complex, revealing dichotomous and complicated discourses produced throughout the tenure of the EDVP; this thesis is the beginning of my exploration to unveil these answers.

### *Theoretical Framework*

Throughout this thesis I employ various theoretical frameworks to substantiate the narratives told through the making and unmaking of the EDVP. Most central is that of the territory, as outlined above. However, to understand territory and especially verticality,

geographic scale is important to consider. Geographic scale, most generally, refers to the various delineations which space is broken into for analysis, for example the global, national, local, community, home, body, and so forth. Though fundamentally simple, scale is important for the possibilities of understanding difference and sameness across space. Yet scale is too often accepted as a static, hierarchical concept. Though vertical nestings of scale exist, such as the home being situated within the community, many geographers insist that this does not necessitate a top-down production of space. Rather, “local and transnational processes and practices are producing (materially and discursively) the very fabric of the global” and so forth (e.g. the home can produce the community, the body the national—and vice-versa) (Leitner and Miller 2007: 117). By considering the relationship between geographic scales as fluid, dialectical, and permeable, we can move beyond the hierarchical stasis of classic geographic rhetoric to a more radical understanding of space.

Additionally, I focus on the relationship between the nation and the body, both as territories and as geographic scales. Feminist rhetoric on the significance of the body, such as Jennifer Hyndman’s theory of feminist geopolitics, allows us to access embodiment as a tool to understand how the body can possess territory. According to Hyndman, the body is a site through which power, (in)security, and mobility can be comprehended. This thesis appreciates scale as a non-hierarchical entity, this is not to deny that real hierarchical powers are enforced upon and played out across territories and scales—the body being a site of these sometimes-violent realities (Hyndman 2004: 309). Embodiment, then, refers to both the understanding of how the body is situated in a multiplicity of scales in specific regard to security, mobility and power, and the very act of existing within one’s body. To put Hyndman in conversation with Delaney and theorists on geographic scale, we can see

how the body conveys and signifies the social order of the surrounding territory, and is simultaneously constitutive of those surrounding territories, as the non-hierarchical overlapping of scales allows for dialectical production. The body is an important, yet often neglected, territory through which we can understand multiple scales and social hierarchies.

### *Methods and Methodology*

Employing such theories, I utilize a variety of methods and particular methodology to construct this thesis. To understand the making and subsequent unmaking of the EDVP, I used multiple secondary and primary sources. This includes transcriptions of court cases, Canadian legislation, newspaper articles published worldwide during the EDVP, as well as some academic articles and books on the themes which emerged during the creation of this thesis. Through this collection of sources, I examine not only the making and unmaking of the EDVP and its effects, but the historical circumstances that created Canada as a territory in which such a seemingly radical immigration policy could come into existence. This historical background allows for a more critical and contextualized analysis of the EDVP to understand the coproduction of territories on multiple scales and discourses surrounding exotic dancing and immigration in Canada.

In terms of methodology, I draw heavily on feminism, critical theory and discourses of colonialism. In particular, the radical feminist lens which sees society as organized and dominated by patriarchy and prescriptive gender relations, as well as being critical of other institutions including socioeconomic class structure, is appealing for many reasons. Further, radical feminism seeks to understand how the domination by men over society transcends time and space and then dismantle the structural power and violence of the patriarchy. Not

only does such a lens help to understand the existence of the exotic dancing industry, but also the tensions within Canadian political discourse regarding the EDVP. Yet critical theory allows me to take radical feminism further in understanding the complexities of the EDVP.

Critical theory is a sociopolitical school of thought which critiques the way society produces power through violence and ideology while stressing the importance of human autonomy and responsibility. The goal of critical theory is to “determine when theoretical statements grasp invariant regularities of social action as such and when they express ideologically frozen relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed” (Habermas 1971: 310). In other words, critical theory seeks to recognize when theories are truly describing patterns of “social action,” and when theories are describing ideologically “frozen” power relationships in place due to structures. The goal of critical theory is to unveil the power of ideology to determine interactions within society so that the ideologies can be changed and broken. Critical theorists posit that, in our society, the prevalence of ideology and lack of self-reflection by individual actors makes for an acceptance of beliefs which are controlled by those in power, for the furthering of their power. In other words, the world is not viewed as an embodied place; individuals become complacent and are subject to unreflected consciousness, their agency in their own autonomy reduced by the prevalence of dominant ideology.

In regards to the EDVP, critical theory helps me in analyzing the tension between the patriarchal organization of the world and the embodied agency all individuals possess. Critical theory is useful for understanding the construction of Canadian territoriality through the EDVP by way of public, ideologically driven, “ways of seeing.” And finally,

critical theory's postulation that such "frozen relations of dependence" can be changed leaves hope for a transformation of Canadian society's objectification and victimization of migrant exotic dancers.

And finally, this thesis employs colonialism, as previously discussed, as a methodological tool. By bringing attention to the connection between states, bodies, and colonialism, it is my hope that readers can engage with the process of self-reflection within a "post-colonial" world dominated by colonial power relationships.

### *Chapter Narrative*

Chapter 2 explores the historical origins of the Exotic Dancer Visa Program. Though the program began in the 1970s, immigration policies pertaining to the control of foreign women as well as prostitution laws in Canada dating decades earlier created an environment in which the EDVP could exist. This chapter looks at the socio-political policies which led to the creation of the EDVP, and the earliest stages of the program itself.

Chapter 3 traces the making of the EDVP throughout the 1990s and early 2000s to understand how the controversies and press coverage of these scandals produced not only the EDVP itself, but the Eastern European migrant exotic dancers. In doing so, the chapter also considers how the struggle around the EDVP constructed the migrant bodies as territories. This chapter draws connections between feminism, David Delaney's theory of territory, geographic scale, colonialism, and the EDVP itself while stressing the significance of embodied autonomy for the migrant exotic dancers.

Chapter 4 asks how the EDVP and the surrounding contestation and controversy shaped Canada. What was being asked of the nation, and how did the state respond?

Further, how does the EDVP speak to the production of Canada's territory? What does the scandalous nature of the program say about Canada's immigration policy, and political atmosphere? In this chapter I employ critical theory to understand the dominant beliefs regarding the EDVP and migrant exotic dancers, and ask how such ideologies reflect and produce Canadian territory.

Finally, Chapter 5 details the unmaking of the EDVP and questions the benefits and downfalls of ending the program. The EDVP was entangled with controversy throughout its tenure for its connections to sex work, trafficking, and violence. Yet, the program was also a legal migration option for sex workers, an already marginalized group of peoples. Thus, the demise of the EDVP was contested in various ways and must be interrogated with care.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Looking Back: Socio-Political Historical Context for the EDVP**

Through immigration policy, media attitude, and national ideology, the Exotic Dancer Visa Program unquestionably produced female gendered bodies in objectifying, harmful, and as I argue, colonial ways; however, there is a long history of colonial and racist endeavors in Canada which control, manipulate, and stigmatize foreign and national female bodies. Canada's earliest immigration and colonial projects as well as prostitution laws throughout the nation's history exemplify the ways in which the state sought to produce women, especially migrants, in distinct yet complex manners—for example, as bourgeois and passive, yet exotic and sexual. This chapter looks at this history to understand the socio-political context in which such a controversial program as the Exotic Dancer Visa Program could begin and flourish for so many years. By asking how non-British and non-French-origin women have been Othered throughout Canadian history through immigration, foreign, and sex-industry policy, I show how the EDVP is part of a legacy starting from Canada's earliest colonial immigration endeavors and experiments with racialized bodies through its prostitution policies.



*(Re)Creating the Raced, Gendered Body:  
Early Canadian Immigration and Its Effect on Women*

In the early and mid-nineteenth century, British and French colonists settling the land we now call Canada viewed the Native populations as barbarous peoples in need of control and change—the classic colonialist story. Within this new Canadian population, myriad enthusiastic missionaries were seeking such challenges to “save” the Natives. These earliest missionary projects, in which colonists moved to Native villages to restructure their societies to match bourgeois standards of living, reveal how entrenched gender and geographic scale are with colonialist, bourgeois ideals, such as Christian passivity, and the hegemony of the settler society (Morgan 2004: 31).

These colonialist “civilizing” projects included a regendering of society. Regendering included reproduction of the relationships between genders within the Native communities to align with the settler’s gendered values—this most often included the de-equalization of the genders and subsequent production of values where man is provider and woman is familial and passive. Regendering was a project both in transforming power relations between the colonizers and colonized, and transforming the subjectivities of the colonized Native groups (Morgan 2004: 41). In Upper Canada’s missions, the regendering involved a changing division of labor, moving women out of the fields and woods where they worked alongside the men and into the home. Homes were redefined to become the center of all that is domestic and familial, falling perfectly in line with bourgeois standards (Morgan 2004: 37). Yet the goal of the missionaries was not merely to gain power through a regendering and restructuring of the Native societies, but to change the subjectivities of these populations as well. “[T]o transform Aboriginal subjectivity, to change the ways that

Aboriginal men and women felt and thought about themselves as husbands and fathers, wives and mothers” was a project that included not only control of space but of the mind as well (Morgan 2004: 41). In the words of post-colonial scholar Homi Bhabha, the Native Canadian populations became “mimic people, as they embodied the desire for a reformed, recognizable [O]ther” (Morgan 2004: 40). This demonstrates the changing subjectivities of the Native populations via the colonialist missions. The Native populations internalized the project of the colonists in regards to the desire for a “recognizable Other.” The Natives were searching for a population to represent the Other—a relationship fostered by the discourse perpetuated in the colonial missionary project (Morgan 2004: 41). Thus, the successful regendering and rewriting of subjectivities of Native populations was achieved.

While the restructuring of Native societies is most often (rightly) criticized, it is important to note the complexities of the restructuring of Upper Canada’s Native populations. While the home and community were transformed in generally negative ways through these missions,<sup>1</sup> the female body was transformed in ways both negative and positive. Though Native women were prescribed a “degraded” identity, the missionaries produced a newfound power and autonomy for the Native women. Through being written into the sphere of the domestic within the home, they came to control the power within this sphere, thus granting the Native women an agency and power previously unforeseen. Quoted voices of Native women at this time reveal that “their lives had been improved immeasurably by the missionaries” as geographic scales—the body, home, community, et cetera—became safer spaces by the autonomy granted by their newfound status of human being; a status “formerly denied to the by their own culture” (Morgan 2004: 37). These

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the home was reconstructed as a representation of a society’s civility based on its tidiness and comfort, a representation which was trivial as it lacked any substantive proof in the correlation between civility and tidiness.

earliest missions demonstrate how colonization transcends scale, and significantly, demonstrate how the body became a central part of Canadian colonization tactics.

As the colonial projects through Canada's nation-building process continued, mid to late nineteenth century British Columbia began to import white, female immigrants for a variety of purposes. "White women were routinely constructed as the penultimate solution to the supposed 'problem' of race and gender." The issue with gender was a fear of homosocial behavior among men working long days in the backwoods. Homosociality does not necessitate sexual relationships, but rather a preference for same-sex friendships and relationships. Male friendship being seen as a "problem" reveals entrenched patriarchal values which fear homosexuality and constantly strive for hegemonic reproduction to further the nation-building process. The racial "problem" was produced in the racist tensions surrounding Other bodies inhabiting and "tainting" the "purity" of the settler colony. Therefore, to solve these "problems," filling the labor market with non-threatening white bodies, thereby discouraged relationships (non-conjugal and conjugal) between races and within the same-sex (Perry 2004: 51).

These white women immigrants inhabited an extremely grey area in Canada. While their race came to represent empire, due to the reproductive power of women and the potential for them to spread whiteness, as immigrants these imported women rarely occupied only a privileged positionality. In fact, oftentimes these women became hybrids of racist tendencies. This hybrid stemmed from their race and position of privilege as symbols of colonial power, yet their status as non-citizens was constantly being reproduced within cohorts of other, non-white immigrants. Oftentimes this was demonstrated by their language or habits being embedded with jargon or customs of other immigrant population

(Perry 2004: 61). These hybrid identities reproduced both the desires and fears of the colony. Thus, the bodies of imported white women were the intersections of the dichotomous identities of the colonizer and the colonized.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, ethnic enclaves began to emerge throughout Canada, separating immigrants from their counter, white citizens. Though enclaves are often interpreted as a “natural response to the inclusion of ‘immigrants’ into Western societies,” in reality “[ethnic enclave’s] emergence needs to be placed in the context of imperial and national struggles over the racial composition of white settler societies” (Dua 2004: 71). This suggests that rather than viewing enclaves as necessary responses to hegemonic settler societies, enclaves can be viewed as perpetuation of the colonialist project of spreading whiteness and eradicating difference. While white women were imported then integrated into society (albeit for continued colonial purposes), other immigrants were not granted the safety and freedom to traverse the nation due to their race and/or ethnicity; instead, they were limited in their mobility by their enclaves. Ethnic enclaves were a colonial and national project as they maintained and perpetuated racial ideals of Canada (as a white settler society). Due to their limited mobility and ability to traverse geographic scales beyond their enclaves, the threat of the Other bodies to the colonial project was limited vis-à-vis the ethnic enclaves—enclaves contained and isolated the threatening, non-white peoples.

Another significant era in early colonial Canadian manipulation of the female body can be found in the disagreements over Asian in/exclusion. This debate over the in/exclusion of Asian women particularly demonstrates the racialized and gendered nature of the colonial nation building process. The debate took place between Canadian

policymakers throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Those who were pro-exclusion claimed that by disallowing the entrance of Asian women, Asian men would in turn be reproduced as temporary residents, as their wives and families were unable to immigrate to Canada (Dua 2007: 453). Further, those on this side of the debate attempted to code Asian women, especially Chinese women, as immoral prostitutes; one commissioner bluntly stated “[t]he Chinese are the only people coming to the continent the great bulk of whose women are prostitutes” (Dua 2007: 451). Pro-exclusion debaters stated that the Asian women did not stand in line with the bourgeois values of passivity, respectability, and whiteness.

Those on the anti-exclusion side claimed that allowing Asian women to migrate to Canada would reduce miscegenation (Dua 2007: 458). Therefore, by allowing Asian women to join Asian men in Canada, white women would not marry and reproduce with Other men. Of course, such assumptions reproduce racism and perpetuate white supremacy. But both sides of the debate are significant for the ways they furthered the colonial project of the white settler society, and reveal deep racial and gendered prejudices within the nation-building process. This debate also demonstrates how sexuality is central to the nation-building project. The control of sexuality meant the perpetuation of whiteness and colonialism.

These early nation building and immigration projects clearly show the colonial history of Canada and the control over migrant, female bodies as part of state agenda. Demonstrated in part by the importation of white women to maintain racial “purity” and discourage racial inter-mingling, it is clear that within these projects and policies the female

body was highly sexualized. Canada's policies, and lack thereof policies, towards prostitution further demonstrates the state manipulation and control over women's bodies.

### *Canada's Earliest Sex Industry Laws*

Prostitution has never been illegal in Canada—that said, it hasn't been exactly legal either. This grey area surrounding prostitution in Canada has not diminished the stigmatization of sex workers throughout the nation's history. Since the state's founding, Canadian laws at various times penalized either the prostitute or the client. Most often, the prostitute herself was criminalized. The first policies on sex work emerged in the 1880s and 1890s; by this point, the dominant discourse of prostitution had constructed sex work as a social evil, and laws reflected a protectionist attitude. This attitude is consistent with middle class values of morality and refined sexuality, and seeks to protect society from the degraded values of prostitution by demonizing and criminalizing the workers (Faraday 1991: 6). Yet within these laws and the broader discourse on sex work was the reproduction of the Madonna/whore dichotomy of sex work wherein some women are innocent victims of systematic and direct oppression (Madonna) and others choose a life as sex workers due to their poor morals ("whores"). Faraday explains the dichotomy in relation to Canadian ideology on prostitution in the early twentieth century:

a respectable Madonna both needed and deserved legal protection both from sexually aggressive men and also from a woman's own poor judgment. A disreputable whore, meanwhile, deserved the law's condemnation for flouting middle class conceptions of respectable sexuality (1991: 10).

Bourgeois values in combination with changing, often vague law wrote prostitutes (and in turn, other sex workers) into a grey area of dual identities. However, it was not only the laws which were producing and criminalizing sex workers; the media reproduces stigmatization as well, which had also a policing effect on prostitutes.

The Canadian press mediated<sup>2</sup> the dominant opinions on the sex work industry through the reproduction of ideology. The overarching yet often contradictory themes that emerge through newspaper accounts of the sex work industry throughout Canadian history include contagion, culpability,<sup>3</sup> trafficking and risk of trafficking, and societal failure (Hallgímsdóttir et al. 2008). The public saw prostitutes and other sex workers as morally and physically detrimental to society due to their degraded ethics and risk of sexually transmitted infections, which the public assumed they embodied. Further, by including narratives of class and “ethnoracial anxieties” into these accounts, the fear associated with moral contagion only increases. And while sometimes the societal and institutional pressures and failures are recognized, the “blame” (because, prostitution is a problem after all) nearly always falls to the woman (Hallgímsdóttir et al. 2008). Prostitution was something to be feared greatly, for both the ability of sex work to corrupt young adults, but the risk of trafficking as well. The Madonna/whore distinction was very much reproduced through the media stigmatization of sex work as well as official policy.

### *Fertile Soil: Foreign Women and Sex Workers in Canada*

As soon as settlers began to colonize the land we now know as Canada, the female body has been an object and desire for control by the state. Regardless of their ethnicity

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<sup>2</sup> The use of the past tense here is not to deny the Canadian press’ continued mediation of dominant ideology and opinion on sex work today.

<sup>3</sup> The ideology which perpetuates that the prostitute is to “blame” in the degradation of society.

and race, the earliest women migrants in Canada were manipulated in distinct manners to fit into a bourgeois society which feared difference. In this way, they were either seen as tools to whiten and domesticate men, or excluded into enclaves to maintain racial hegemony. Yet these phenomena clearly extend beyond the earliest civilizing missions or immigration policies. Throughout the twentieth century, the state's interest in the foreign female body continued its colonial legacy. For example, during Finland's Winter War against Russia (1939-1940), the Canadian media had vast campaigns featuring sexualized, feminine Finnish bodies in order to sway public opinion during the war in support of Finland. Finnish-Canadian scholar Varpu Lindström noted that Canada's stance in this war was surprising and slightly unmotivated; the state essentially decided to stand with the underdog, Finland, and depict the war as the battle between David and Goliath. Through the reproduction of Russia as a "bully" and bastion of communism, Finland was seen as a "gallant and heroic" nation standing against the corruption which Russia represented. While Finnish immigrants in Canada welcomed the support (Lindström 2004: 287-288), the representation in the media continued to perpetuate colonialism.

Advertisements showing Finnish women in traditional dress or in working situations "beside the men" sold newspapers and garnered support for Finnish war efforts. The exotic women were written as sisters of Canadians as women in the nation identified with them (Lindström 2004: 310). These advertisements demonstrate not only Canada viewed foreign female bodies as tools of the state, but also the racial desires of the state. "Finish women conveniently fit with the exotic—but not too exotic—notions of 'white goddesses'" (Lindström 2004: 307). She was white yet foreign and therefore exotic, the perfect combination for the state to perpetuate myths of sisterhood yet eroticize her for appeal to



men. As demonstrated by this and earlier examples, Canada used women's bodies as colonial tools. And in addition to being tools of colonialism, Canada also used women's bodies as tools for sex. Through its precarious laws surrounding sex work, which continue to this day, Canada has been able to maintain the necessity of sex workers while simultaneously demonizing them through common ideology. While the media and Christian ethics construct sex workers as threatening and degrading, the law has allowed for their continued work.

### *The Creation of the Exotic Dancer Visa Program*

Throughout this chapter, I have shown how Canadian attitude and policy towards immigrants and sex industry workers throughout its history created the socio-political context of colonized liberality in which the EDVP could be established. The creation of the EDVP has been described more as a loophole in immigration policy than an official beginning to a policy. In 1978, a new Immigration Act reformed immigration legislation, including the temporary work visa program. Within this temporary work visa program exists the Labour Market Opinion (LMO). A positive LMO demonstrates that there is no Canadian available for the job and acts as a pre-approval for employers to hire temporary foreign workers without the usual application and validation periods (Citizen and Immigration Canada 2013). Within the Immigration Act of 1976 was a positive LMO for exotic dancers (Macklin 2003: 466; Healey 2013). This blanket validation was created to allow for the cross-border, reciprocal movement of exotic dancers between Canada and the United States throughout the 1970s and 1980s. With the positive LMO, Canadian strip clubs could offer foreign exotic dancers jobs, and all she had to do was arrive at a Canadian

port of entry where she would receive her work permit. This removed the application process and waiting associated with temporary work visas (Macklin 2003: 467). These visas were renewable on a frequent basis, as long as the exotic dancer's employment continued. This pre-approval went unnoticed for many years; however, in the early '90s when the first defining controversy of the program was exposed, anger and suspicion surrounding the positive LMO entered the media spotlight (a matter I discuss in the following chapter).

It is significant to note that the positive LMO was given to the exotic dancing industry for the benefit of a group of migrants with generally similar characteristics to Canadians, those from the United States. It was not until the early 1990s with the reordering of many societies in Eastern Europe that "non-normative" immigrants used this "loophole". Though there are no officially published statistics regarding migrants under the EDVP, multiple estimates show that the majority of the women came from Eastern Europe, specifically Romania. It was not only the complex "liberal" environment of Canada that produced the EDVP, but the disordering and rebuilding of society in Eastern Europe which allowed for the flourishing and production of the EDVP. With the dissolving of the Soviet Union and fall of communist regime in Romania, new migration between these geographic spaces and Canada began around 1989. As social structures fell, migration became a viable desire for many in Eastern Europe. With these changing regimes, much of Eastern Europe entered a "globalized world" filled with images of Western society and things civilized. The promises of Canadian society were seemingly available for their newfound consumptive freedom (Culic 2010: 345). Thus, migration between Eastern Europe and Canada began, and oftentimes women used the positive LMO for the exotic dancing industry as a gate to the West.

Just as early Canadian laws concerning immigration and prostitution law shaped and Othered female bodies, the EDVP and its making and the discourses of stigmatization and victimization with which the program is inextricable produced Eastern European migrant exotic dancer bodies as distinct territories, representing of individual sites of societal and political struggle, including a colonial legacy. The next chapter explores the formative events in the making of the EDVP, and how they produced these bodies as territories by interrogating the dualistic identities prescribed to these women through press reports of scandal, court cases, and changing immigration policy.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Co-Construction: Producing the EDVP and the Migrant Exotic Dancer Body as Territory**

With the established socio-political order of colonialism and sex work's legal status in Canada, the EDVP continued to grow. Throughout the 1990s, media accounts and the ideology dominated opinions from the public produced not only the Exotic Dancer Visa Program itself, but the Eastern European migrant exotic dancers, as territories, in complex and contradictory ways as well. Via their reports of the scandals constitutive of the EDVP, the press utilized the languages of stigmatization, victimization, objectification, and xenophobia, shaping a dominant ideology within the Canadian public which incorporated these violent discourses and reproduced the Madonna/whore dichotomy of sex work, and colonial legacies concerning state control over female gendered bodies. This chapter traces the connection between the making of the EDVP and the production of migrant exotic dancer bodies as territories. I argue that through the discourses on exotic dancing and migration produced by the media, the women were constructed as objectified, exoticized victims—the contradictions within these identities not to be disregarded. As these bodies reflected and constituted the social order surrounding them, I employ David Delaney's theory on verticality and postcolonial theories on internal colonialism to show how these

migrants were produced as peripheral territories within the Canadian territory, and further demonstrate the colonial violence the migrant territories internalized.

In order to make such connections and analyses, this chapter initially details the making of the EDVP. I first trace the rise of the EDVP, drawing from the press coverage of various scandals throughout the 1990s and early 2000s as well as court cases definitive of what constituted legal activity within strip clubs. Then, by incorporating how the discourses perpetuated by the media throughout the program produced a violent public ideology, I investigate the construction of migrant territories vis-à-vis the EDVP and the colonial legacy revealed in such an analysis.

#### *Discovering the EDVP: “Gorby’s Girls”*

With the falling communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe and newfound migration Westward in the late 1980s and early 1990s, non-American exotic dancers began employing the EDVP. The migration of exotic dancers from Eastern Europe was discovered in 1991 when “Gorby’s Girls,” the first formative controversy of the EDVP, unfolded. In April of that year, Canadian authorities arrested eleven Soviet migrants, all women aged 18-25. Using visitors’ visas, these eleven women traveled to Canada believing they were to work as models (Conroy 1991). After one woman escaped the strip club where she was working, she revealed to a police officer the conditions in which they lived for several months, saying “[i]t was like slavery. We weren't allowed to go anywhere. We weren't even let outside for a breath of fresh air. We were always under guard.” She described how eventually they simply became indifferent to the unpleasantness of stripping (Priest and Wong 1991). Authorities arrested the two men who orchestrated their

trafficking and charged them with hiring and aiding “illegal” workers; meanwhile, the women faced deportation. “Gorby’s Girls” made their way into the international media spotlight, revealing not only the positive LMO in the Immigration Act of 1976, but also the overwhelming and negative ideology reproduced by the media concerning exotic dancers, especially foreign ones.

The women known as “Gorby’s Girls” were not part of the EDVP; they were trafficked with visitors’ visas. Nonetheless, media outlets quickly discussed the temporary work visa exception for exotic dancers. Articles from various Canadian newspapers took a condescending tone towards both the policy and dancers, describing the blanket exception as a way for “foreign striptease artists to strut their stuff in Canada,” (Watson 1991) and as “[strippers] very own section in the country’s immigration laws...[which], as an added bonus, [allows them to] stay in Canada for as long as they have work!” (Brent and Wong 1991). One article compared the women to “Little Bo Peeps,” objectifying and sexualizing the women through nursery rhymes, yet also stating that “[Gorby’s Girls] knew exactly what they were doing when they came over and what they were coming over to do,” thereby denying the violence and trafficking faced by the Soviet women (Rowley 1991). This violence being the physical violence traffickers commit upon the bodies of victims, and the systematic violence which the discourses of trafficking produce. The media generally ignored the details of trafficking and abuse faced by the eleven Soviet exotic dancers, instead inscribing the language of stripper-shaming and xenophobia into the public ideology.

The controversy faded from media headlines within a month of the women’s discovery. In 1994, however, the media once again discussed “Gorby’s Girls” as

Citizenship and Immigration Canada rejected the women's applications for refugee status. Though most of the women filed for refugee status, all were expected to return to Russia, as judges ruled their fear of persecution upon return was not sufficient ("Russian stripper loses refugee bid" 1994).

The entire controversy, from initial discovery of the trafficking to media depiction and response to it, established the national attitude towards migrant exotic dancers in Canada. Further, the themes that emerged through the press coverage of "Gorby's Girls" would continue throughout the tenure of the EDVP: xenophobia, objectification, and victimization. This dichotomy of victim yet disposable object was clearly established in the description of the migrant exotic dancers. They were victims of an intolerable home condition of Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, and of trafficking; yet they were shamed for their work as strippers and ultimately given the clear message of their disposability with their deportation from Canada. This plural identity completely removed their autonomy, demonstrating that their own opinions and experiences were unimportant to in Canadian ideology.

### *The Grey Area of Lap Dances: Court Cases of the 1990s and Changing Legislation*

These themes and plural identities prescribed to the migrant exotic dancers not only emerged in media coverage, but also were reproduced by the rulings of the Canadian Supreme Court in various cases throughout the 1990s. The first influential case regarding the environment and law in strip clubs was *R. v. Tremblay*.<sup>4</sup> The defendants were charged with operating a common bawdy house. In the defendant's club, nude performers were

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<sup>4</sup> Full title: Jean-Paul Tremblay, Patricia Tremblay, Peggy Obas Malval, Doris Tremblay, Marleine Jean, Robert Bourdeau, Chantal Girouard, Christiane St-Louis et Brigitte Tremblay v. Her Majesty The Queen

dancing in cubicles for individual clients, and while there was a no touch policy, the clients were permitted to masturbate. Peepholes—not for voyeurism but for surveillance—were used to monitor these cubicles. In their ruling, the court established “the community standard of tolerance” surrounding lap dancing.<sup>5</sup>

*R. v. Tremblay* was the first case in which the community standard of tolerance was defined and used in regards to exotic dancing, and would prove of great importance in cases to follow. The courts determined that due to the private nature of a cubicle, given that “the existence of the monitoring peephole...was hardly enough to render the act any more public...than it was when performed between two persons apparently alone in the room” (*R. v. Tremblay*), the act fell below the community standard of tolerance. Thus, *R. v. Tremblay* legalized the private lap dance in Canada. However, this ruling also produced a grey area regarding the legality of lap dances outside of private cubicles, as it was never explicitly stated in the ruling whether lap dancers were legal in the main space of the strip club.

The 1997 case *R. v. Mara*<sup>6</sup> addressed that grey area. In this case the owner of a strip club was charged with allowing indecent performances of “varying degrees of sexual contact between the nude “dancers” and patrons at the tavern” (*R. v. Mara*). The court ruled that these performances, which took place in the main space of the strip clubs, exceeded the community standard of tolerance, even if consent between client and dancer was given,

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<sup>5</sup> This community standard of tolerance is described by the court as a test for indecency, like the one used in obscenity cases, [which] involves an analysis of the impugned acts involving several considerations. These accepted standards of tolerance, which are contemporary and change with the times, and which reflect the stands of society as a whole, exist and should not be exceeded. The decision as to whether the acts fall below the community standard of tolerance rests with the court. The determination must be made objectively in accordance with the contemporary standards of the Canadian community, and not merely project a judge’s own personal ideas of what is tolerable (*R. v. Tremblay*).

<sup>6</sup> Full title: Patrick Mara and Allan East v. Her Majesty the Queen



because the performances were “harmful to society in many ways: it degrades and dehumanized women; it desensitizes sexuality and is incompatible with the dignity and equality of each human being...” (*R. v. Mara*). With this ruling, the popularity of “champagne rooms,” or private cubicles such as the ones contested in *R. v. Tremblay*, skyrocketed in Canadian strip clubs (Rimniceanu 2007: 33). It was clearly established that lap dances were for private cubicles, as contact in the main area of the club was forbidden, and further, that exotic dancing was not a respected profession in the eyes of the court.

Finally, in 1999 *R. v. Pelletier*<sup>7</sup> ruled that lap dancing was legal after an undercover police officer entered a strip club where he received a lap dance in a champagne room, during which the dancer allowed him to touch her buttocks and breasts. The court decided that such acts were not actually indecent (referring again to the community standard of tolerance), and thus lap dancing was legalized (*R. v. Pelletier*). Despite the grey area regarding the changing legality and nuances of lap dancing, throughout the 1990s migrant exotic dancers were often performing lap dances and other questionably legal activities in strip clubs, due to misinformation regarding the laws governing strip clubs, and fear of losing their jobs and therefore their visas if not willing to satisfy clients. With this newfound legality, much of their work was protected under law, a presumably positive outcome for the migrants. However, the court cases stirred their own controversy surrounding the EDVP and environment of exotic dancing in Canada.

With these court cases, a political interest in strip clubs circulated in the media, revealing the prevalence of migrant exotic dancers. The press claimed that the EDVP was toxic for Canada and did not stand in line with the values of the nation. One federal

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<sup>7</sup> Full title: *Thérèse Blais Pelletier v. Her Majesty The Queen*

official, in a letter detailed by a Canadian newspaper, stated that the government considered the EDVP to be “incompatible with Canada’s highly publicized international opposition to the trafficking in women for the purposes of sexual exploitation.” Reporters claimed that the positive LMO was unnecessary and the shortage of Canadian women in the stripping industry was false (Oziewicz 1997). The critics emphasized how the migrant exotic dancers were fast-tracked into the country without required procedures for other temporary workers (Rimniceanu 2007: 45). The themes of victimization and stripper-shaming were once again apparent, and the criticism was loud enough for response from the government.

This criticism led to contradictory messages from different departments within the Canadian state. First, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) announced their intention to revoke the positive LMO. The response from the adult entertainment industry<sup>8</sup> was fervent, as club owners and massage parlour operators lobbied together and claimed that an end to the blanket validation would result in major job losses as Canadians as strip clubs and massage parlours would be forced to close due to serious labor shortages. Following that outcry, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada issued a statement that Canadian jobs were not in danger and there was indeed a shortage of workers for the industry, therefore validating the need for the EDVP. While the positive LMO remained, the process for the EDVP changed slightly, and more approvals were needed from CIC before an exotic dancer was able to migrate (Rimniceanu 2007: 45). The ultimate result of this controversy was the retention of the program *de jure* to support the interests of the private adult entertainment industry, with its elimination *de facto*, a

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<sup>8</sup> This refers to both strip clubs and massage parlours. While not subject to the same media scrutiny, massage parlours often hired temporary workers, sometimes from Eastern Europe. McDonald et al’s study, detailed later in this thesis, focuses on sex workers in both of these locales.

reflection of the criticism against it and stripper-shaming circulated by the press (Macklin 2003: 478).

This contradiction is seen as the number of visas approved under the EDVP plummeted. Though there are no statistics from CIC to confirm the number of migrants, different sources reveal the decreases. One source claims that in 1997, immigration officers rejected 106 of 195 visa applications from Budapest. Two years later in 1999, there were only eight applications, with zero approved (Macklin 2003: 478). Another report indicates that under the Liberal government of the 1990s, over 1,700 migrants entered the country under the EDVP while another stated that 400 visas were issued a year throughout the 1990s, mostly to Europeans (“Exotic Dancers No Longer Qualify For Canada Work” 2012; Heinzl 1999). Though the source of these numbers is unclear, they nonetheless display an interesting trend which speaks to the changing policy and vast reduction of visas that is seen in the last years of the EDVP. The rather secretive nature of the program due CIC’s lack of statistics regarding EDVP migrants and the general lack of discussion regarding the program speaks to the ways that the government produced the migrant exotic dancers as disposable; they were not afforded the attention given to other subsets of Canadian immigration—their stories were completely erased.

Further, the changing policy was fueled by interest in Canada’s role in trafficking in women worldwide. While there is no denying the connections between trafficking and the EDVP, it is unfair to assume all exotic dancers are forced into the profession, because such an assumption removes their agency (see Sharma 2005). In fact, interviews with migrant

sex workers and industry service providers<sup>9</sup> in Canada revealed that trafficking was not in the vocabulary used by the migrants to describe their reality. When asked about trafficking, very few of the interviewees knew the term, and once explained none believed the term pertained to their situation (McDonald 2000: 20). “They did not see themselves as ‘victims’ but saw their own experiences as fairly ‘normal’ and trafficking that happened to other women which was viewed as a ‘bad thing’” (McDonald 2000: 37). This stands in contradiction to the service providers that were interviewed and spoke of constant victimization and also stands in contradiction to the portrayal of the migrants by the Canadian media. The change in EDVP policy would therefore increase trafficking in and violence against women as they faced more complications in migrating to Canada and turned to less-than-legal migration options.

Recognizing women’s autonomy in such a situation includes understanding the patriarchal society that limits their options for income, and thus the desire of some to enter the lucrative sex work industry. The removal of these migrant exotic dancers’ agency fits into the larger pattern of identities prescribed by the media coverage of controversy and court cases. By terming these women victims without incorporating their own opinions, the forced/voluntary dichotomy of sex work, which reproduces patriarchy on national and individual levels and perpetuates gender-based violence as well as stripper-shaming, is reinforced incessantly (Doezema 1998: 32). This victimization extends into themes of xenophobia and objectification as well, as women occupy a liminal place in global migration.

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<sup>9</sup> Service providers included those in the following fields: “health-related services, ethnic-specific agencies, agencies run by workers involved in the sex industry, legal services, shelters, [and] women’s centres/stop-in centres.” (McDonald 2000: 14)

Essentially, women migrants occupy spaces of dualisms and “inbetweenness.” Frequently women migrants are imported to do the “dirty work” of the most wealthy countries and to “occupy certain gender-specific status[es],” which can be simply stated as sex, child-rearing, and domestic labor (Macklin 1999: 24). These three categories all fall into the larger category of temporary workers, an already objectified and exploited group of peoples. As non-citizens originating from the non-West, migrants from Eastern Europe can be compared to migrants from the “Third World,” especially in regards to their experiences in Western, “First World” countries. The myth of the “disposable third world woman” describes the woman who “has no specific cultural profile other than an undefined one that is found in an amorphous region called “the third world,”” and like her origin is amorphous, her character is seen as the same as all others in this category (Wright 2006: 4). Ultimately, women migrants are constructed as disposable through their “sameness;” there are plenty of others like her, so the story goes, who desire to work in the West in the realms of sex, child-rearing, and domestic labor.

That said, women migrants are also seen as particularly vulnerable due to their gender identities. This is a direct result of the patriarchal society in which we all live. There are “time-spaces [which] are coded dangerous for women’s bodies to enter.” Yet society does not recognize the danger of these “time-spaces” not make any attempt to transform these time-spaces to be inclusive. Rather than taking responsibility for this systematic violence against women through exclusionary practices, the woman is instead constructed as a “fallen woman” who is weak and stupid, a victim of her own vanity and desires (Silvey 2006: 70; Doezema 1998: 38). Her discomfort in time-spaces is seen as the result of her own “issues.”

This is revealed through the processes and discourse of migration. Generally speaking,

[i]mmigration has...been clearly gendered. In immigration, women [are] treated as *women*, whose natures and capacities [are] perceived very differently from men. As significantly, women [are] also treated differently on the bases of their racial categorization and ethnic membership, for they [represent] a different form of participation in the nation-building process (Arat-Koc 1999: 207).

In other words, women are codified into the discourse of migration by their gender (and race). They are treated as such, thereby limiting their mobility to traverse national boundaries and find safety within the nation. Women, especially the foreign, non-citizen migrants attempting to enter spaces which seek to exclude them, are constructed, for example, as victims of their own selfishness rather than recognizing the ways they are oppressed by structural violence (Silvey 2006). When the work of the migrant is as controversial as sex work, this de-recognition of violence and construction of culpability is only heightened, as is the case with the EDVP.

### *Competition Among Women: Ethnic Rivalry in Canadian Strip Clubs*

Interviews with women in the EDVP and Canadian exotic dancers reveal that ethnic rivalry between groups of women in strip clubs was a frequent reality. These rivalries reproduced the willingness for the migrant exotic dancers to “go further,” as the migrants typically performed lap dances for less money than the Canadian women. This was not the result of an “ignorance of existing laws, isolation from sources of information and support, or even a prudent strategy of and self-preservation,” but rather the result of the “racialized,

ethnicized intragender hierarchy wherein migrant East European, Latin American and Asian women are differentially exoticized and hyperfeminized in contradistinction to Canadian women and to one another” (Macklin 2003: 482). In other words, through the exoticization of migrant exotic dancers they were prescribed ultra-sexual positions within strip clubs which often resulted in extra-legal activity, such as lap dances (for reduced prices). This presumed willingness to “go further” was inscribed in the dominant ideology through the exoticization of and, contradictorily, xenophobic attitude towards the foreign female gendered body, as well as patriarchal standards of competition which fosters divisions between women. Often these divisions surrounded issues of money—the Canadian women were frustrated because they made less than the migrants (McDonald et al. 2000: 57).

These rivalries between exotic dancers within strip clubs encouraged animosity and jealousy. As these women were economically dependent on agents, brokers, or club owners, turning to one another for solace was discouraged or prohibited. The inability for relationships between Canadian and migrant exotic dancers was particularly disadvantageous for the migrants, as the Canadian women would have provided important information regarding social and health services. (McDonald 2000: 58). The rivalry perpetuated a fear of reaching out to medical, social, ethnic, and other services.

Further, the rivalry reproduced the victimization of the migrant exotic dancers. Due to their unwillingness or inability to reach out to social services, and their status as lower-class non-citizens, Canadian dancers saw the migrant exotic dancers as victims. Oftentimes, Canadian exotic dancers approached their profession as a voluntary choice and did not understand why many Eastern European dancers felt a guilt or moral burden stemming

from their participation in the sex work industry (McDonald 2000: 37). But victimization must be understood in the context of a particular society—so, as the Canadian women described the migrants as victims, it is important to recognize that by “[i]dentifying as “victims,” they could abdicate responsibility for their role in the maintenance and perpetuation of sexism, racism, and classism, which they did by insisting that only men were the enemy” (hooks 1984: 46). In other words, we cannot forget the role of all exotic dancers in the reproduction of the systems of oppression by which they are challenged. The discourse of sex work is constituted and internalized by sex workers themselves. In recognizing this I do not seek to partake in victim blaming of the women who are indeed victims of violence from the discourse of sex work, but rather to recognize the myriad ways migrant exotic dancers especially were victimized throughout the EDVP, and further, how this victimization was internalized as part of their territory.<sup>10</sup> These ethnic rivalries which promoted animosity, fear, and victimization produced doubt in Canada as a safe space for the migrant women.

### *Attempting Change: Strip Club Raids through Project Almonzo*

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as controversy surged throughout the media and public due to the EDVP and its potential ties to trafficking, a coalition of various authorities initiated Project Almonzo in attempt to end any extra-legal practices in strip clubs. In seeming contradiction to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada’s announcement of the legality and need for the EDVP and the ruling of *R. v. Pelletier*, Project Almonzo was a series of raids of strip clubs in Toronto. The joint-commission

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<sup>10</sup> Later in this chapter I discuss the construction of these migrants as territories vis-à-vis the EDVP.



operation included the Toronto police morality squad, Ontario's Alcohol and Gaming Commission, the Ontario Provincial Police, York and Peel region police, the federal Immigration Department and the Toronto Licensing Commission (Oziewicz 2000). The joint commission used arrests and raids to send a message about prostitution and the exploitation of foreign women; between 1999 and 2000, the joint commission charged more than 670 owners, agents, and dancers with various crimes ranging from operating brothels to being occupants of bawdy houses (Freeze and Jiménez 2004). The public and activists alike considered Project Almonzo to be a successful investigation of trafficking in women for prostitution, and it focused on both migrants who entered Canada without documentation and those with visas through the EDVP (Oziewicz 2000b). Regardless of their immigration status, an estimated 81 migrants were charged, most of them from Eastern Europe (Appleby 1999). While some of the reports of Project Almonzo acknowledged that the migrants often resorted to sex acts because it was the only way to make money, they were uninformed of the law, or were forced to by agents or club owners, press reports continued to use the language of victimization and stripper-shaming ("Foreign Women Forced to be Hookers." 1999). However, the government and pro-exotic dancer academics alike accept Project Almonzo as a successful and positive program.

The success of Project Almonzo lay in its goal to arrest the traffickers, not the women (McDonald 2000: 68). While some women were charged, education programs were offered which, if attended, dropped all charges for first time offenders (Crawford 2004). Project Almonzo not only raised awareness about the realities of "indecent" (i.e. prostitution) within strip clubs and the violence against migrant women, but also increased awareness for the migrants about their rights and the laws of exotic dancing. Despite the

language of victimization employed in media reports and by those in charge of the project, and the charges against some women, Project Almonzo's goals were important and sent a message that the Canadian government was willing to stand with exotic dancers. Unfortunately, the Project ended only one year after its initiation due to budget constraints; since then no similar education or criminal investigations and programs have taken place in Canada (Macklin 2003: 485).

Project Almonzo added another complex layer to the already entangled web of scandal and grey area that produced the EDVP and the migrant dancers. Awareness of the extra-legal activity in strip clubs serves to benefit all exotic dancers; however, the migrant dancers' legal status was put at risk through the raids and their victimization was furthered. The erasure of the migrants' voices leads one to believe the commission was disinterested in the opinions and realities of the women—the authorities assumed all the migrant exotic dancers were trafficked. Thus, the women were assigned the label of “trafficked” regardless of how they came to be strippers, further removing their agency as humans and laborers, and instead victimizing them, while reproducing the forced/voluntary dichotomy of sex work.

### *Migrant Exotic Dancers in Politics: Strippergate*

In 2004, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Judy Sgro made headlines with a controversy termed “strippergate.” Three days before her reelection, Sgro signed a special ministerial permit for one of her campaign workers, Alina Balaican, who was also an exotic dancer with the EDVP. This permit meant she could not be deported and could remain in

Canada for two years as she filed for permanent residency; Sgro cited humanitarian factors for her approval, yet denied that she had ever met Balaican (Fife 2004).

The press worldwide attempted to make “strippergate” an insurmountable scandal, calling for Sgro’s resignation, Balaican’s deportation, and an end to the EDVP. The language of stripper-shaming once again was rampant, as reporters claimed Balaican was a “desperate immigration hopeful” who worked for Sgro to charm her way out of deportation, and was also an unworthy immigrant whose “only apparent skill is removing her clothes and backing the right [Member of Parliament]” (Martin 2003). Others claimed that Canada was “an international laughingstock [for] creating a special category for the sorely needed labour of foreign strippers who can waltz into the country almost at will...” (Garvey 2004). International news stated that the idea of a “Canadian political controversy” was an oxymoron to begin with, since Canada has an international reputation of neutrality and passivity, and these reports claimed the EDVP was a ridiculous, un-Canadian, program (“Oh Canada” 2004). Clearly the “strippergate” controversy was one entwined with discussions of the EDVP, the discourse of exotic dancing, politics, and immigration reform. However, there were some important realizations about Canadian immigration policy that surfaced in its aftermath.

“Strippergate” arose after important yet abrupt changes to immigration policy went overwhelmingly unnoticed by the Canadian public and media. In 2002, CIC revoked an old policy that allowed for non-permanent residents in Canada who were married to Canadian citizens to remain in the country while immigration officials processed their application for residency. The new policy forces those without status out of the country while processing takes place (Thompson 2004). Balaican, recently married to a Canadian,

would have been affected by this new legislation. Upon the expiration of her temporary work visa, she would have been forced to leave Canada without Sgro's ministerial permit.

Beyond attention to this change in immigration policy, changes to the EDVP followed this scandal. A month after "strippergate" was exposed, the Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan announced an immediate end to the EDVP, stating "that HRSDC has decided that there will no longer be a national Labour Market Opinion for this particular industry" (LifeSiteNews.com 2004). Despite the 1999 reiteration of the EDVP which made it significantly more difficult for exotic dancers to migrate, reports revealed that in 2003, 661 visas had been issued, 582 of them for women from Romania ("Oh Canada" 2004). With the marked controversy of "strippergate," the EDVP once again changed significantly, but the unmaking of the Program would be a process of eight years. Ultimately, "strippergate" continued to perpetuate the language of stripper-shaming and introduced xenophobia into the language used by the press to criticize both the EDVP and the migrants themselves.

### *The Body As Territory*

Throughout all of the aforementioned controversies, court cases, and relationships within strip clubs, the EDVP rose to be a complicated and secretive immigration option that particularly attracted women from Eastern Europe. Here I argue that this program, in all its complexity, produced these migrant bodies as territories. As I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the territory is an interesting and powerful analytic tool in regards to the body. Recognizing the body as space allows us to understand how those with power map, control, view, and manipulate the body as a resource—just as those in power

map, control, view, and manipulate more recognizable physical spaces, such as that of the colony. Delaney's territory is an enclosed space which signifies meaning and "conveys, refers to, or implicates social power." (Delaney 2005: 17). Importantly, territories are constitutive of the "social orders" which they reflect (10). Internal and external forces reproduce and signify meaning which human beings embody. On a literal level, the body is a bounded space by physicality. Also incorporated into territories are discourses within the surrounding social order. The EDVP produced discourses of exotic dancing, victimization, objectification, and so forth which in turn produced inescapable subjectivities within all the migrants in the program. Thus, the body can be understood as a territory which reflects and incorporates the surrounding social order.

The EDVP produced these migrants as territories through the continued dehumanization, manipulation, and devaluation of their autonomy. The Eastern European migrant exotic dancers became territories representative of the intersections of these varying discourses, which perpetuated this immigration program. These ideologies and discourses included violent realities for the migrant territories. The incessant victimization and objectification stripped them of agency. Through the exoticization of these migrant territories their spatiality can be understood as peripheral. Their territory became inextricable from the EDVP they embodied a hyper-sexualized and differentiated Other. This territory was not to be incorporated into Canada, but rather was for the distinct pleasure of Canadian men. The status of the migrant exotic dancers as temporary laborers further iterated their positionality outside of the nation. However, these migrant territories occupied space within the dominant, national territory of Canada.

With Delaney's theory on verticality, we understand that territories are overlapping; in their incestuous nature they reflect and constitute one another. Thus, the migrant territories were peripheral spaces within a dominant territory, and the relationship between these territories is dialogical. Here we can begin to unravel the complex ties the EDVP and the construction of migrant territories have with colonialism.

### *Internal Colonialism: Domination over Peripheral Spaces*

Postcolonial scholars have dissected the relationship between modern, liberal ruling practices and classic colonial domination. Often these scholars point towards examples of unequal economic development within states, segregated living within cities, or educational disparity as examples of internal colonialism (sdonline 2012). When conceptualizing internal colonialism and its relation to the EDVP, socio-economic factors can certainly be cited, however, I argue that by using Delaney's concept of territory we can understand internal colonialism in more nuanced ways.

Firstly, as discussed in the previous chapter, state control over and manipulation of the female gendered body is inherent in many colonial projects. Thus, the legacy of colonialism is apparent with the administrative and patriarchal control over the exotic dancer migrants within the EDVP. I argue that it is the same gendered and systematic violence perpetuated by the state in both colonial contexts, whether it was the mid-nineteenth century or the turn of the twenty-first. This violence is ideological and systematic, demonstrated by the exploitative nature of colonial projects. The bodies of these migrants and the former colonies were mapped and exploited as bundles of resources by the colonizer. Their (the migrant's or the colony's) autonomy was stripped

from their embodied being as they became defined by their purpose for and/or within the dominant, colonizing territory. An examination of the EDVP reveals that without autonomy, these migrants were territories, not humans, in the administrative desires of the state. Just as the colonizers surveilled colonized subjects in attempt to control the population through administrative practices and limits on mobility, the state abused surveillance power of these migrant territories in particular. Beyond the patriarchal surveillance and systematic violence perpetuated by the act of watching female bodies strip, Canada's administrative control of these territories is significant. As noted earlier in this chapter, CIC did not release statistics or any information regarding this program, making the manipulation of these migrant territories a project managed completely by the colonizer. Therefore the language of colonialism proves to be a useful and analytic discourse for the EDVP.

If we are to understand the Eastern European migrant dancers as peripheral territories, then we can understand that Canadian control over these bodies is colonial, even in a "post-colonial" world. Within the classic colonial narrative is the domination over, and exploitation of, Other spaces—usually the foreign nation-state in which natural resources could be harnessed by the dominant power. The migrant territories face the same violence committed in the colonies. Perhaps heightened by occupying the hegemonic space of the colonizer, the migrant territories would be constantly confronted by objectification and exploitation—in this case, in the forms of exoticization and victimization via press accounts and the political scandal of the EDVP.

The very making of the EDVP and colonialism are inextricable. Throughout the various scandals which formed the program, the discourses which produced the colonial

reality were constantly reiterated. These discourses—victimization, exoticization, objectification, and so forth—have real and violent repercussions, demonstrated by the women’s deportations, lack of access to medical and social services, and the constant public shaming of their status as exotic dancers and foreigners. As the migrant exotic dancers were produced as territories, they reflected, constituted, and embodied a social order of colonialism.

The social order of the Canadian territory was similarly constructed vis-à-vis the making, and eventual unmaking, of the EDVP. The following chapter details the construction of Canadian territory through the discourses and ideologies produced by the EDVP, an examination which ultimately reveals the colonialist beliefs inherent within the state which are veiled by the language of progression.



## Chapter Four

### Nation-Building through Gendered Immigration Policy: The Production of Canadian Territory

Similar to the production of the body as territory, the production of national territories is a confluence of intersecting forces which constitute and reflect social order. National territory production includes the forces of self-perception, law and legislation, international relations, and so forth. The Exotic Dancer Visa Program encompasses all of these factors, as well as other important aspects of territory building: gender relations, attitude towards foreigners and exclusionary practices, racial attitudes, and attitudes towards sexuality. Throughout the creation and eventual unmaking of the EDVP,<sup>11</sup> the public called upon Canada and its government to respond to the scandalous moments, that were integral to the program itself, in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways. While some responses reproduced the language of victimization or the “Madonna” view of sex work, others purported that migrant exotic dancers were “whores” in need of deportation. The government responses to these outcries took shape as changing policy in the EDVP and changes in other, more general immigration law.

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<sup>11</sup> The unmaking of the EDVP is discussed in chapter 5.

Throughout this process the government and public, and the ideologies they perpetuated vis-à-vis the media, produced a Canadian territory that claimed to be radical due to the EDVP. While the program is, no doubt, very liberal in its attitude towards sex workers—inviting this population into the state stirred controversy among conservatives for this public opinion on sex work—in reality, Canada used the EDVP to further colonial projects via the control and manipulation of female gendered bodies and the systematic violence against women and migrants. This chapter interrogates the disjuncture between Canada’s claimed status as a bastion of progressiveness and the reality of coloniality a close study of the EDVP reveals in relation to the construction of Canada’s territory.

#### *Canada’s Self-Image: Problematizing Liberal Multiculturalism*

Canada’s population, as well as the international community, generally reports that the nation is a liberal, tolerant, and multicultural society. Of course, these terms are vague generalizations which come with their own set of counter-opinions; yet the point still stands that Canada is widely regarded as a progressive and mostly neutral territory (i.e. not intrinsically involved in many dramatic world affairs such as wars on ideology, including the war in Iraq, or more abstract wars, popular in the United States, such as the “war on poverty”) (McCullough). This perception is fostered through various official policies which reproduce ideologies and the language of multiculturalism, e.g. “progressive” immigration policy for refugees, anti-trafficking laws, and the official multiculturalism policy. Through these perceptions, Canada is constructed as a liberal stronghold with progressive attitudes and policies.

What is obscured through these vague generalizations about Canada's national character are racist and colonial realities which shape and are reproduced through the very laws producing Canada as progressive. For example, Canada's multiculturalism policy and ideology seek to eradicate racism through legislation directed towards non-discrimination policy and the promotion of different cultures. Though it is not necessarily unique to Canada, this oftentimes results in the erasure of difference through attempts to force other cultural realities to fit norms established by dominant, hegemonic values. What is unique in the case of Canada is the existence of such difference eradication in official law (Dewing 2012: 3-4). But the ideology of multiculturalism has become pervasive and continues to obscure the colonial repercussions of such policies, i.e. the need to control foreign bodies through legislation and dominant opinion. An ideology of multiculturalism and language of radical progressiveness obscures the fact that the state perceives migrants as bundles of resources to be exploited and used for the development of hegemonic power—true to the colonialist nature of Canadian immigration policy. Further, the very pervasiveness of the multicultural ideology conceals the nuances (which often reveal the problematic institutions prevalent throughout society) through the creation of an “imaginary consensus” that claims all Canadians seek to end racism and promote cultural celebration (Moodley 1983: 321). Multiculturalism created a distinct national environment which exemplifies the complicated nature of self- and international- territorial perception.

Understanding this air of nationalism is further complicated through immigration policies. Since “controlling which strangers enter is a powerful expression of a nation's identity and autonomy,” (Kelley 2010: 7) the EDVP is especially contentious, revealing, and formative in regard to Canadian territory.

### *The EDVP as Progressive: Unpacking Sex Radicalism*

Canada attempted to claim its status as a bastion of progressiveness due to the radical opinions on sex work reproduced by legislation which supports exotic dancers. Such progressive and radical opinions are sometimes referred to as sex radicalism; these opinions are centered on a person's right to her/his body and autonomy in sex. Even progressing further than dominant feminist rhetoric on right to the body, sex radicalism purports that sex, seduction, and various sexual practices including prostitution, exotic dancing, and so forth, should be mainstream in society's language and ideology. Embedded within this rhetoric of sex radicalism is the goal of reclaiming the "whore" identity as a powerful symbol of agency. (Queen 2001: 94-95). Further, part of this project must include ending the stereotype that sex workers are "driven to a demeaning lifestyle by a damaged history" or corruption stemming from society (Queen 2001: 100). Dissolving the Madonna/whore dichotomy in this way would return the agency to the person participating in sex work.

While the liberal government and media maintained that the EDVP was a progressive program, due to the policy's "welcoming" attitude towards sex workers, the program did not attempt to subvert dominant and oppressive tropes in any way. As Human Resources and Skills Development Canada reaffirmed the need for the visa program, the state reasserted the claim of being a safe space for a marginalized group of peoples with no substantiation. Conservatives starkly opposed the program by claiming ties to trafficking, yet the deeply embedded bourgeois attitudes towards sex work generally underlay their opposition (Healey 2013). This debate over the EDVP between the Canadian conservatives and liberals allows us to recognize a certain progressiveness to the EDVP in

its uniqueness. However, such a claim reproduces the violent realities for sex workers, especially migrant sex workers, in Canada. The ideologies perpetuated by the media's varying and dichotomous reporting on the program, and the state's changing opinions on legal activity within strip clubs, fail to move beyond dominant discourse—which, reproduces the Madonna/whore dichotomy of sex work and thus fails to allow any autonomy in the territories produced by the EDVP. Thus, the claim that Canada was a bastion of progressiveness because of the EDVP's existence is not only violent, but simply fails to recognize the reality of how Canada was produced as a territory in relation to the EDVP. We must continue to interrogate the making of Canadian territory through this program to understand how colonialism was a real violence inextricable from the EDVP.

#### *Canadian Law and the EDVP: Creating and Complicating a National Territory*

Throughout its existence, there was little known about the EDVP due to lack of official statistics or dialogue regarding it, which greatly influenced the ways in which legislation and national response to the program redefined Canadian territory. The very creation of the program demonstrates how secrecy was an inherent aspect. This creation is referred to as a “loophole;” it was not publicized and the press did not take interest with the establishment of the positive LMO<sup>12</sup> for the exotic dancing industry in 1978. Rather, this blanket validation went uncontested and the economies of both the United States<sup>13</sup> and Canada could benefit as strippers freely crossed the international boundary without any controversy (Macklin 2003: 467). This is further demonstrated by the lack of any

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<sup>12</sup> The positive LMO was the blanket validation due to a shortage of Canadian citizens in the field.

<sup>13</sup> The positive LMO was assigned to the exotic dancing industry to fill the shortage in the industry primarily by way of cross-boundary travel between the United States and Canada for strippers as the industry was demanding in the late 1970s, thereby benefitting the economy of the U.S. in the EDVP's earliest stages.

discussion or coverage of the EDVP in times when scandal, such as “Gorby’s Girls,” Project Almonzo or “strippergate,” was *not* rampant. The non-disclosure of statistics or straightforward information concerning migrants participating in the EDVP perpetuates a reality which erases any representation of the migrants themselves. It appears that the mainstream language used by the government, media, public, and exotic dancing industry did not call attention to the program to avoid unnecessarily bad press. This secrecy produced a liminality which allowed the state to exercise more control over the migrants since their program and stories were very largely unknown. The migrants were in the hands of Canadian public opinion, press coverage, and changing legislation, reducing their autonomy greatly and bolstering that of the national territory. This element of control was important to both the shaping of the migrant body and Canadian territory.

As detailed in the previous chapter, three consequential court cases in the 1990s shaped the realities of working in Canadian strip clubs through the (re)definition of lap dancing, champagne rooms, and the community standard of tolerance. These court cases, *R. v. Tremblay*, *R. v. Mara*, and *R. v. Pelletier*, reflect how the complicated images of exotic dancers are produced through media and the law. These cases also reflect the significance of controlling gendered bodies for the maintenance of national image.

By producing a grey area surrounding the legality of various sex and/or seduction practices in strip clubs, Canada effectively allowed for, yet did not account for, the ephemeral and versatile experiences of stripping, experiences which differ from body to body. The control afforded to Canadian courts to rule on embodied themes such as consent and agency reproduced the multifarious control of the state over the body. Here,

we can understand the body as place of intersecting identities, all of which the state seeks to control vis-à-vis the EDVP. Feminist scholar Melissa Wright explains,

[t]he body materializes as a site of multiple identities, where no single identifier establishes the sole definition of the subject's existence (or its "essence"), is vital if we are to understand how the laboring body, under capitalist conditions, emerges as an embodied site of exploitation and accumulation (Wright 2006: 13).

But the bodies in the EDVP are not only sites of capitalist accumulation, which is afforded to them by their identity as laborers. The stripper's gender, racial and ethnic identities are intrinsic to her experience in her profession; the Canadian Supreme Court's rulings regarding their profession did not consider these intersectional identities, though. The Canadian Supreme Court created the grey area in the legality of lap dancing and other activities within the strip club with no attention to the widespread state of contention between ethnic groups in strip clubs and the differing realities of what stripping entailed for the various cohorts and individuals. Essentially, these rulings furthered the perpetuation of migrant territory as site of exploitable resources due to the likelihood of the migrant to dance within this liminal, grey area. By producing confusing and open-ended laws that delve into themes of consent, private versus public space, and prostitution, control over these racialized and gendered bodies under the guise of progressive laws (e.g. allowing lap dances) while maintaining a safe environment for the workers (e.g. surveillance of champagnes rooms) was afforded to the state. Like the grey area produced through these court cases, the state's response to the EDVP's various scandals perpetuated liminal spaces of control and manipulated language, thereby granting more control to Canada and further obscuring the reality and experiences of the migrant exotic dancers.

As the EDVP gained media attention through the scandals, the press privileged dichotomous language which reflected the ways in which Canada gained control over these bodies. For example, looking at the press' coverage of the reconstructed iteration of the program in the late 1990s, through the reduction of visa acceptances with more particular standards for the program, reveals the power of language to continually reproduce liminality surrounding the state of the EDVP. In response to public criticism, Citizenship and Immigration Canada announced their intention to revoke the positive LMO for the exotic dancing industry. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, though, claimed that an end to the positive LMO would create huge job losses and reverberate throughout the industry; ultimately, the program continued though it became much more difficult to gain a visa through the EDVP (Rimniceanu 2007: 45).

Throughout this back and forth, the press coverage further complicated the dichotomous nature of the program—not necessarily in binary terms, though. The press at times employed language reinforcing the Madonna/whore and forced/voluntary distinctions in sex work, and similarly, they wrote demands to rid Canada of foreign “whores.” Simultaneously, the press employed the language of victimization, and the thus removal of autonomy followed. What makes this more complex is that these various rhetorical framings and ideologies were used in the same articles, demonstrating how the press (nor the public) had straightforward conclusions and concrete opinions regarding the EDVP. As the press coverage reified the EDVP in such vague yet sensitive and charged terms, the state was given extreme flexibility in their ruling and production of legislation of controlling these bodies. Politicians and officials could employ the same contradictory language, speaking of victimization and creating issue with the industry to appease whoever was



criticizing the program. Though the public was calling for an end to the EDVP through various criticisms, the state maintained and increased their control, as demonstrated by the exchange between CIC and HRSDC in the late 1990s.

So, why was it in the best interest of the nation to continue the EDVP despite the myriad complications? In the late 1990s and again after “strippergate,” CIC increased restrictions and made the visa-granting process through the EDVP nearly impossible. Since immigration laws are formative of nation building and exclusionary processes define sovereignty (Mountz 2010), the increased control over the EDVP resulted in control over national image. The EDVP became a space within which the contradictions of opinion and policy towards foreign, objectified bodies were played out. By obscuring the EDVP through changing policy, vague language in court cases and contradictory, inflammatory language in press coverage, Canada’s control over the bodies only increased. Not only was the women’s legal immigration status controlled by the state, but the legality of various acts in their workplace, and sense of belonging in Canada as well (reflected in the press coverage and public stigmatization). Though it seemed that through the continuation of the EDVP Canada was making a statement regarding the importance of the program for helping a marginalized population gain legal entry into the state and protection under law, the reality of the migrant stripper’s situation reflects a different narrative.

Once granted their temporary work visas, foreign exotic dancers received no state sponsored (or privately funded, in fact) support (e.g. health clinics, language classes or education on the nation’s immigration laws), despite Canada’s relentless claim of multiculturalism, and publicized support for other migrant laborers (McDonald et al. 2000: vi). Essentially the migrants were invited into the state then simultaneously victimized,

objectified, and codified as “whores.” The Canadian legacy in immigration and refugee law rarely recognized gender-based oppression as legitimate (Morris 2003). Further, the “tropes, stereotypes, and objectifying discourses that in their production as enacted stigmas form part of an apparatus of symbolic regulation and sanction of individuals who exchange sex commercially” (Hallgímsdóttir et al. 2008: 135). In other words, the ideology produced by and constitutive of public opinion regarding sex workers further oppresses and stigmatizes these individuals. In order to aid and accept these migrants, conscious reflection on these ideologies must be at the forefront of action. Therefore, not only is the system stacked against female migrants to begin with, but also the additional stigmatization of exotic dancers through national (if not global) ideology erased them from the constructed public imagination of migrants. With the EDVP, Canada claimed an image of progressiveness because of the uniqueness of the program; the liberal government took pride in opening the state’s borders to this marginalized population for the supposed air of radicalness which accompanies positive views on sex work. Yet the EDVP also allowed the continued state control of female bodies, as well as the reproduction of dominant ideology stigmatizing the migrant exotic dancers.

Additionally, by denying resources (or information about resources) available to other temporary workers and migrants in Canada including language classes and health services (Boyd 1986: 47), the state pushed these migrants into the shadows while reaping the benefits in being seen as progressive in their openness and tolerance to marginalized groups. This furthers the message that these women were not to be incorporated into the nation—they were resources for the betterment of Canadian territory and society.

Broader Canadian immigration policy fits into this same narrative of hidden colonialist sentiment under the likeness of progressiveness. Throughout the 2000s, Conservatives introduced various bills to Parliament which attempted to put colonial, designative power into the hands of immigration officers and the Minister of Immigration. This power was the ability of the officer/Minister to designate an individual or group of migrants as potential trafficking victims, thus restricting their potential for mobility without granting them autonomy—or, even opening dialogue about trafficking with these “victims.” Though such bills appear to be protective measures against institutions of oppression, such as trafficking, the reality is much more complex. The language employed in these documents speaks of “exploitation and abuse,” but these words are never defined. Therefore, immigration officials are allowed to act according to their own discretion regarding the control of the foreign body. In regards to exotic dancers applying for visas, Parliament states that “[t]he officers are trained to detect and screen out applicants who may be potential victims of human trafficking,” with no further elaboration (Bill C-10 2011). Ultimately, the Minister of Immigration may designate any group (or individual) of migrants as “designated foreign nationals” or “irregular arrivals.” Such a designation restricts their ability to apply for asylum or refugee status, and prescribes entire populations to singular narratives thereby removing their autonomy, i.e. the Minister could designate all women from a particular country to be at risk for trafficking, and therefore as designated foreign nationals (Bill C-4 2011). Canada’s repeated need for control of the gendered, racialized foreign body (since this legislation refers specifically to human trafficking and exotic dancing, areas with overwhelmingly female majorities) is clearly demonstrated in multifarious immigration policies.

The challenges for Canada understood through an examination of the EDVP and the greater context of immigration policy demonstrate a complicated juggling act between progress and deeply embedded colonialism. Throughout the EDVP, Canada treaded carefully between discourses on progressive immigration policy and discourses on human trafficking. By perpetuating a grey area instead of making any definitive statements regarding official opinion on foreign exotic dancers or intelligible policy changes, Canada was granted the flexibility to adapt the program and their statements with the tumultuous nature of the program itself. Ultimately, this turbulence reflected poorly on the politics and general organization of the EDVP, demonstrating that not only were the bodies of the migrants produced as territories in complicated manners, but Canada itself was as well.

From first observation, the EDVP reveals its complicated essence. Reactions to the existence of the program vary from awe and support for the potential opportunities for which this could allow for exotic dancers, to disgust with the very thought of supporting sex workers. The public and official opinions surrounding the program continued to obscure the EDVP by adding more red tape to the already messy industries of immigration and sex work. The various discourses the media perpetuated throughout the program reproduced Canadian territory as a bastion of progress, yet did not recognize the ways the territory fell short and was ultimately colonial. This indistinct veil of progressiveness or multiculturalism, which represented Canada as a territory throughout the EDVP, was embedded with the control and manipulation of gendered, racialized bodies for the benefit of the nation's image. While the program set an important precedent for the future of international mobility for sex workers, the colonialist elements of this program only furthered the oppression of migrants, women, and sex workers. Until maintaining power over Othered

bodies and viewing these migrant territories as resources is not a priority and goal of immigration policy, the territory produced through the legislation will be tainted with unacceptable institutionalized oppression. Despite its seemingly radical air, the EDVP was problematic and displayed various sites of tension, contradiction and bigotry in the territory.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Looking Forward: The Unmaking of the EDVP and “Post-Colonial” Canada**

In 2012, Canada’s Immigration Minister announced that “[t]he government cannot in good conscience continue to admit temporary foreign workers to work in businesses in sectors where there are reasonable grounds to suspect a risk of sexual exploitation” (Newcomb 2012). With this statement, the 34-year temporary visa program known as the Exotic Dancer Visa Program was ended. But the making of the EDVP’s end involved a series of controversial events, continuing the theme of scandal inherent throughout the program. This chapter details the steps of unmaking, and analyzes the benefits and complexities of ending an immigration program for exotic dancers.

Despite the removal of the positive LMO for the exotic dancing industry following “strippergate,” temporary work visas continued to be granted on case-by-case bases for migrant strippers. Though notably different than the original iterations of the EDVP, foreign exotic dancers continued to stir controversy. In 2005, six male strippers wanted to migrate from the United States to Toronto where they had jobs lined up in strip clubs for Pride Week festivities. They were granted visas immediately, creating uproar within the exotic dancing industry. The Adult Entertainment Association, a coalition of strip club

owners and agents, claimed that there was a double standard allowing homosexual males into Canada while (presumably) heterosexual females were continually denied visas (Jiménez 2005). Notwithstanding the Adult Entertainment Association's anger, the positive LMO was not reinstated. However this event was significant for bringing attention to the gendered conflicts encapsulated by the EDVP and speaks to ethnic opinions of CIC, as American males were granted visas Eastern European women were struggling to find.

Then, in 2007 Conservatives introduced Bill C-57, An Act to Amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, in Parliament. If enacted, Bill C-57 would have given immigration officers the discretion to reject applicants for temporary work visas if they perceived a risk of the migrants' "being humiliated, degraded or sexually exploited." Opponents labeled the bill as "a crass move that would bar legitimate visa applicants while doing little to protect women from the underground sex trade" and accused the Conservatives of playing on their "morally traditional voter base" (Panetta 2007; Dobretta 2007). An anonymous letter to the editor remarked that "[b]y restricting the inflow of foreign strippers, the Conservatives have opened up new opportunities for our young girls (and boys). The government should be congratulated for encouraging our children in such endeavours" ("So you think you can dance?" 2007). While some opponents had the best interests of the migrant women at the forefront, including their safety from traffickers, others reiterated the language of stripper-shaming which accompanied the EDVP from its roots.

Though Bill C-57 did not become law, the resurfacing of the EDVP showed that granting visas for exotic dancers continued to be a controversial matter. With the reports of Bill C-57, the press once again circulated conflicting statistics on temporary visas for exotic

dancers. While one article claimed that the government had granted 67 EDVP visas in 2004 and fewer than 10 in 2005, another claimed there were 600 visas given in 2004 (Dobrata 2007; Panetta 2007). Such contradictory reports demonstrate the continued secretive nature of and erasure embedded within the program—CIC did not release statistics and when no controversy was brewing, the EDVP went unnoticed.

It was not until 2012 that the EDVP officially ended, when Bill C-38 gave immigration officials “the power to refuse and invalidate both new and previously-held visas given to foreign-born exotic dancers” (“Exotic Dancers No Longer Qualify For Canada Work” 2012). Estimates show that in 2011 only 12 new exotic dancers immigrated to Canada, though the number of extensions of visas for those already in the state was much higher. With the new legislation, hundreds of migrants who had been renewing their visas while already working in Canada lost their legal status, categorizing them no longer as temporary workers, but as undocumented migrants. With Immigration Minister Jason Kenney’s announcement of the end of the EDVP, the government once again cited trafficking and victimization (Curry 2012).

This attention to trafficking pleased some, while others were frustrated with the end of the EDVP. Timea Nagy, a victim of trafficking in the 1990s when she was 19 years old, expressed her gratitude for the end of the visas. Her story—one of abuse by traffickers and threats if she did not pay her transporters—mirrors that of other trafficking victims (Mandel 2012). Meanwhile, the Adult Entertainment Association, as well as sex workers themselves, took issue with Bill C-38. Tim Lambrinos, head of the Adult Entertainment Association, claimed that “the word exotic means foreign, and that’s what people want to see” (Curry 2012). He feared that there would be a shortage of labor, and threatened to undertake



aggressive campaign to recruit foreign, as well as national, students from Canadian universities instead (Newcomb 2012).

Others working in the industry expressed concern with the end of the EDVP as well. Canadian sex worker, Julie Grant, stated that “one of the things that happens so often in sex work, is when people are discriminating against us, and are trying to abolish our industries, what they do is act as if they are doing it for our...protection.” Her statement reveals that sex workers themselves doubt the government’s claims to stand against trafficking and with the women (Curry 2012). Regardless, with the new legislation, an official end to the EDVP occurred.

With each media blitz from the late 1990s until the program’s end in 2012, the press reflected an increasingly unsatisfied Canadian public; often cited were the EDVP’s connections to trafficking in women. Therefore, there is an inherent difficulty in condemning the end of the EDVP, since the discourse of trafficking was made inextricable from the program by the Canadian government. Yet we need to interrogate the discourse of trafficking further. As activist and scholar Nandita Sharma argues, the very rhetoric of anti-trafficking within the global North perpetuates systematic violence against women:

anti-trafficking campaigns act as the moral regulatory arm of White nationalist movements by denying migration to those who are deemed incapable of deciding for themselves if and when they should move. This, again, works to reposition nonwhites in particular, in subordinate position within the nation-states in the global North and within global capitalism (Sharma 2005: 105).

By bringing our attention to the power relationship within this rhetoric, we can begin dissecting how the state’s language of anti-trafficking reiterated colonial relationships. With

the use of this discourse, the state removed all autonomy from the women who desired to move to Canada. Rather than attempts to curb violence against women, Canada's anti-trafficking rhetoric reinforces the systematic silencing of migrant, female gendered voices. Essentially, the constant iterations of anti-trafficking rhetoric within the unmaking of the EDVP perpetuated the coloniality of the program. As Sharma notes, this rhetoric is another vein through which the state can harness power and control over Others—in this case, via mobility and victimization. As the women with visas under the EDVP became undocumented in 2012, their mobility was further limited, their rights stripped, and therefore, their safety severely limited.

Thus, in order to respect the autonomy and agency of the migrant exotic dancers, it is imperative to engage with the discourse of trafficking in different manners. As Sharma states, “only by mobilizing to end practices of displacement while ensuring that people are able to move according to their own self-determined, willful needs and desires will feminists be able to contest global practices of exploitation and abuse” (Sharma 2005: 106). Here, Sharma dissects the rhetoric of anti-trafficking and asks that activists, governments, feminists, and so forth move beyond our current immigration and trafficking paradigm. If we can respect the autonomy of the migrant and see beyond a reflexive description of all women migrants as trafficked, then—and only then—we can make active strides towards ending trafficking in women and children. Further, the rhetoric of anti-trafficking continues to remove the women's agency through the reproduction of the forced/voluntary dichotomy of sex work. By assuming that women fall into one of two binary categories, it reinforces the notion that some women are “whores” and others are “Madonnas.” Firstly, both categories fail to accurately describe the situation sex workers find themselves in and

instead these categories reproduce patriarchal and derogatory descriptions of women. This binary also furthers violence against women by failing to recognize the spectrum of experiences of sex workers. They are silenced by the victimization and stigmatization.<sup>14</sup>

Beyond the connections to anti-trafficking rhetoric and perpetuation of the forced/voluntary dichotomy of sex work, an end to the EDVP also created a new group of exploited migrants by removing a legal pathway for exotic dancers to enter Canada. As feminist scholar and activist Audrey Macklin stated, “[i]f there is one group of people who are even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation than temporary workers, it’s illegal migrants” (Macklin 1999: 26). The 2012 end to new visas and renewals only further limits the migrants’ access to resources, increases the shaming of their profession—now without documentation—as well as increasing xenophobia. By taking away their legal status, their rights were severely limited, which further increases the violence they face within the dominant territory. As undocumented migrant territories, their status as peripheral would only be furthered. Navigating Canadian territory would now not only be a challenge of victimization, stigmatization, objectification, and xenophobia, but also include the challenges of deportation, inaccessibility to resources, and incredible fear.

Discussion of the EDVP reveals many contentious and distressing realities. Ultimately, understanding how the women were produced as territories raises questions about what should have been done, and what is the proper and fair response to such a controversial and important subject. Though an attempt to curb trafficking, the cessation of EDVP did not punish the traffickers, rather it punished potential “victims.” Perhaps instating another program such as Project Almonzo, focused instead on reducing illegal and

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<sup>14</sup> See Doezeema 1998 for more on the forced/voluntary binary of sex work.

extralegal activity in strip clubs and punishing those responsible, not the women, would be a more beneficial and fair response to a fear of trafficking within the exotic dancing industry. However, the end of the EDVP and resulting debate allows for a feminist analysis which reveals alternative possibilities to changing the program.

Within the feminist movement, there are conflicting opinions on sex work. Most often cited in these debates is pornography. Anti-pornography advocates claim that pornography is a pervasive entity which sets vicious standards for women while reproducing abhorrent levels of sexism (Mackinnon 1987: 131). Generally speaking, such views on pornography translate into other realms of sex work including exotic dancing. In contrast, other feminists argue that sex work is a viable profession and acceptable choice for women. The nuances of this opinion usually include discussions of patriarchal society and at what point the choice becomes a necessity due to women's positionality and oppression. Since sex work is often a choice necessitated by oppression—including the inability to make money in other sectors of the formal or informal economy—it is very possible the end of the EDVP has negatively impacted the women's quality of life. While important to understand anti-sex work feminists, I believe it is also necessary to give voice and autonomy to the sex workers, including access to resources and rights which accompany legal status. Therefore, perhaps the best “solution” to the EDVP was not ending it at all and instead reforming the application process, and increasing accessibility to social and health resources for the migrants.

Ignoring the negative aspects of the EDVP, however, is naïve. The rivalry between Canadian and foreign exotic dancers produced a toxic work environment. Rather than fostering such a sense of place, it is important instead to practice solidarity between women

as a political and ethical goal (Mohanty 2003: 7). By creating alliances not along lines of shared oppression, but rather upon common goals and interests, including their profession, women can stand against dominance from patriarchy (hooks 1984: 47). This includes producing a different migrant territory; “[w]omen need to know that they can reject the powerful’s definition of their reality—that they can do so even if they are poor, exploited, or trapped I oppressive circumstances. They need to know that they exercise of this basic personal power is an act of resistance and strength” (hooks 1984: 92). Exotic dancers need not accept the dominant ideologically produced opinion on their profession, and instead can indulge in self-reflection for recognizing their own potential and agency as individuals. Focusing on solidarity rather than an end to trafficking would allow for migrant women and Canadian dancers to reshape the reality of their workplace and embodied experiences as exotic dancers, rejecting the seemingly invariant relationships society’s belief in hegemonic ideology produces. This, in turn, would produce a new migrant territory which reflected and embodied a safer, and perhaps empowering, socio-geographic order. For foreign exotic dancers, solidarity would allow for easier access to resources, education on the legislation which governs the exotic dancing industry and their rights as immigrants in Canada. Instead, the language of trafficking furthered the division between women and created fear in the lives of the migrants.

### *Moving Forward in Post-EDVP Canada*

Very little has been written regarding the EDVP in academia; in fact, I was only able to find one academic article and one Masters-level student paper on the topic. This neglect, once again, speaks to the secrecy of the program itself, and also a disinterest held

by academia in engaging with the exotic dancing industry for its many complications. Even feminist scholars tend to focus on pornography or prostitution within the sex work industry, where the influence of patriarchy is more apparent and opinions tend to be binary (pro- or anti-) rather than falling on a complex spectrum in which myriad factors must be considered. In writing this thesis, I hope to open space for more dialogue regarding the connections between the sex work industry, exotic dancing particularly, and the fluidity and constitutive powers of space as geographic scale and territory. By engaging both critical theory and feminism, it is my intention to reveal the complexities of the EDVP through multiples lenses to demonstrate the various interplays of power dynamics which can be seen in the program. Ultimately, it is my hope that further radical immigration options will emerge for exotic dancers which privilege their autonomy and open opportunities for empowerment.

Throughout this thesis I have purposefully employed nontraditional analyses and utilized inflammatory language. Conceptualizing the body as territory can be an unsettling notion. By thinking of our own spatiality, we open ourselves, our territories, up to the influential power of surrounding social order. Recognizing fluidity within the body as space, further discomforts, allowing for creative and progressive reimaginings which lend themselves to the potential for change. Using the body as territory was not a choice for the sake of knowledge, but rather a choice to unsettle one's positionality within the world to produce new understandings coupled with critical (self)analysis. As we recognize that our bodies are mapped and constructed as territories, we can unpack the challenging discourses we too often ignore and internalize.

By putting the EDVP and state sponsored control over female-gendered bodies in the context of colonialism, it has been my intention be provocative and inflammatory. Too often, meaningful analysis and reflection is hidden behind a veil of politeness—the fear of offending does not allow for the discomforting moments in which the pervasiveness of violence is recognized throughout society. Yet we must grapple with the perpetuation of colonialism in a “post-colonial” world. Recognition and discomfort is the first step in working towards the systematic change, which overthrowing colonialism would include.

Yet striving towards systematic change is the goal of any critical analysis of legislation and discourse, such as this thesis. Recently, I learned that the Canadian Supreme Court, as well as the media and public, are once again entangled in debate over sex work. These debates call attention to the complicated laws of prostitution in Canada as three sex workers have claimed that current sex work laws, which make public discussion for the purposes of sex work illegal, are unconstitutional as they increase the chances for violence since all conversation must happen in private—the Supreme Court agreed (*Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford* 2013). Now, the government is in the process of rewriting these laws, opening the space for critique of the system, and the potential for positive change. It is my hope that in this transitional and liminal period in Canadian sex industry law, the discourses and ideologies that perpetuated colonialism throughout the EDVP can be transformed. After all, with critical theory’s critique of society, and its production of power through structural violence, comes the possibility for ideological change. We must not stray from the uncomfortable projects of understanding colonialism, and the discourses of victimization, objectification, and exoticization, which affect not only migrant exotic dancers but all women within hegemonic territories—for it is in that discomfort that new

analyses and possibilities can be discovered. Studying the making and unmaking of the Exotic Dancer Visa Program vis-à-vis the production of territory opened this space of discomfort for me, and it is my desire that this project inspires others to similarly engage.



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