MEDIATED COMPLICITY: SEX WORK, THE STATE AND MISSING WOMEN IN VANCOUVER'S DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts
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Abstract

More than sixty women disappeared from the streets of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside between 1978 and 2001. This study examines newspaper coverage of the arrest and trial of Robert Pickton, the man accused (and on six counts convicted) of murdering 26 of those women, all sex workers who worked on the neighborhood's strolls. I consider the analyses provided by the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* and argue that they were instrumental in demonstrating that a consideration of the serial killer himself was entirely inadequate to explain what had happened in the Downtown Eastside. Their narratives established police negligence, the social dislocation of street-involved women and the particular perils of living in the Downtown Eastside as core themes of the story. Yet by scrutinizing the definitions provided by these newspapers, I demonstrate that the dominant themes that emerge from their coverage provide explanations which insufficiently consider the range of instruments and assumptions which operated to imperil the women that disappeared. I argue that the coverage effectively reduces the case to a series of contingencies and camouflages the functioning of cultural and structural systems of domination. It offers, I contend, a series of coherent explanations that hold particular individuals and practices accountable but largely omit, conceal, or erase altogether the broader socio-political context that rendered those practices possible.

I elaborate this contention in four core arguments, each of which corresponds to a chapter of this project. In the first substantive chapter I argue that the coverage's focus on police negligence provides a compelling way to understand how more than sixty women could disappear. But by overemphasizing this explanation, I suggest, the state's role in the crisis is limited to personal and bureaucratic failure and broader considerations

of its culpability are effectively minimized. The next chapter extends this analysis by looking carefully at three core ways that the state itself might be implicated in the violence. Here, I look carefully at the relationship between the crisis and the retrenchment of state systems of social solidarity, the ongoing effects of colonial violence and the criminal regulation of prostitution. The following chapter examines how the coverage operates to establish street-involved sex workers as morally and socially distinct from other women and argues that such renderings operate to make their presence in the 'dangerous' inner-city understandable, an important discursive move that helps to rationalize and explain the violence committed against them. The final chapter argues that the neighborhood itself is produced as a space of chaos and criminality. I challenge such renderings by demonstrating how particular economic and political patterns have operated to isolate the Downtown Eastside from other city spaces and to concentrate particular social phenomena there. The thread that courses through all of these chapters is an attempt to reveal that the coverage's prevailing explanations are 'ideological,' inadequate and incomplete.

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My interest in the Downtown Eastside and the politics of sex work was provoked when I participated in the Parliamentary Internship Program in 2004-2005. I spent most of that winter doing research for a member of the Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws. In spite of our political differences, I am indebted to my friend Hedy Fry, Member of Parliament for Vancouver Centre, who made it possible for me to immerse myself in this work and generously provided me with the opportunity to attend committee hearings in Western Canada. I would also like to acknowledge Libby Davies of the NDP and Real Menard and Paule Brunelle of the Bloc Quebecois who – in spite of the prevailing culture of cowardice that animates political Ottawa – were able to mount a potent challenge to the set of legislative instruments that have caused immeasurable harm to people involved in prostitution, particularly at the street level.

That year, my fellow interns taught me a lot about how the Beast works and I want to thank them too, including the ones who, against my stern advisement, enlisted with law schools and the Liberal party.

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"Once we became aware"

For decades, local police and politicians demonstrated a distinct lack of concern as dozens of women disappeared from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Beginning in 1978, women began to vanish with a marked frequency from the neighborhood's streets where many of them worked in the sex trade. Decades later, when an official list was finally compiled, the grim tally of the missing would stretch above sixty. Yet as that list had grown (and with an accelerated velocity in the 1980s and 1990s) authorities had paid scarce attention. At best, they had failed to notice that a genuine crisis was unfolding.[1] At worst, they had failed to care. Friends and allies recall encountering dismissive or disinterested investigators as they reported that their loved ones had gone missing. At the same time, authorities stressed publicly that street level sex workers were a notoriously "transient" population and suggested that the missing women would likely turn up at one point or another.[2] They were devastatingly wrong.

By contrast, residents of the Downtown Eastside had long been aware that something disturbing was unfolding in their midst. Since 1991, local activists had been organizing an annual Valentine's Day march, a public opportunity to honour victims of violence and demand justice for the disappeared. But in spite of their efforts, few outside of the neighborhood's rugged twenty-one blocks – then as now, Canada's 'poorest postal code'- seemed to take much notice.

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[1] To avoid potential confusion, I want to clarify how I use the term 'crisis.' Some of the literature that informs this project employs the term in a precise theoretical sense but my own use is less developed. When I refer to the case of the missing and murdered women as a crisis, I am not referring to a larger 'crisis of capital' or a 'crisis of legitimacy' but rather the events related to the disappearance of dozens of women from a densely populated neighborhood. The term conveys, I think, an appropriate urgency.

[2] Beverly Pitman, "Re-mediating the Spaces of Reality Television: *America's Most Wanted* and the Case of Vancouver's Missing Women," *Environment and Planning* 34 (1), 2002, 174.

It wasn't until 1998 -the number of disappeared already alarmingly high- that local journalists began to investigate. As their digging began to reveal the magnitude of the situation, a growing number of concerned citizens began to demand answers. Local politicians were quickly losing the luxury of indifference. It was in this context that Vancouver Police announced that they would offer a reward of up to $100,000 for information related to the case in July 1999. The initiative, funded and supported by municipal authorities, marked a stark reversal of Mayor Phillip Owen's initial position on the matter. Weeks earlier he had argued that it would be "inappropriate" to use public funds to provide a "location service" for prostitutes.[3] But his refusals had become a political liability. Facing mounting public pressure, he had to act decisively.

For many of those who had demanded action, the reward marked an overdue acknowledgement that the crisis was real. The day it was announced, a police spokesperson confirmed the severity of the situation; Anne Drennan told reporters: "once we became aware...that there was clearly something wrong here, something that we should be concerned about, we started to kick in additional resources."[4] But a well documented record contradicts police claims. Clearly, no such vigorous pursuit of answers had transpired 'once' police had become 'aware' that women were disappearing. By contrast, police and municipal authorities had displayed a chronic lack of interest as the case had spiraled out of control. According to local news reports, a single detective had been in charge of all of the missing women cases as late as July of 1998, an alarming revelation in the face of a cluster of new disappearances between 1993 and that year.[5]

[3] Robert Anthony Phillips, "Mayor: No Reward in Missing Women Case," *APBnews*, 9 April 1999, http://www.missingpeople.net/mayor_no_reward-april_9,1999.htm

[4] Stevie Cameron, *The Pickton File* (Toronto: A.A. Knopf Canada, 2007), 85.

[5] Lindsay Kines, "Police Target Big Increase in Missing Women," *Vancouver Sun*, 3 July, 1998.

Advocates charged that it was the women's status as prostitutes and drug addicts that had disqualified their cases from police attention. Others added that because the women were from the Downtown Eastside, their disappearances seemed to matter less to authorities. The neighborhood's reputation as a site of concentrated deviance and criminality was already well established by local media discourses. As one politician asked rhetorically: "do you think if 65 women went missing from Kerrisdale [an affluent Vancouver neighborhood], we'd have ignored it so long?"[6]

The reward would not have happened had activists not galvanized a popular "clamour" that forced officials to move decisively.[7] Well-attended demonstrations in the spring of 1999 were important symbols of a mounting public outrage. In an effort to demonstrate that they were taking the situation seriously, police officials soon assigned new officers to the investigation.[8] But this alone was insufficient to appease the concerned. After police issued two $100,000 rewards for information related to a series of home and garage invasions, allies of the missing women began to question official priorities. In the wake of a visit from the sensational television crime program *America's Most Wanted* – in town to do a segment on the disappearances- municipal officials finally acquiesced and funds were secured in time to mitigate embarrassment. When the segment aired, host John Walsh praised police efforts and spoke approvingly of the reward.[9]

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[6] Daniel Wood, "House Rules," *Vancouver Magazine* (April, 2004), http://24.85.225.7/PACE2/docs/pdf/House_Rules_Vancouver_Magazine-April_2004.pdf.8.

[7] Bob Stall, "Mayor to Propose Skid Row Reward: Mayor Backs Reward in Hooker Mystery," *The Province*, 25 April, 1999, http://www.missingpeople.net/mayor.htm

[8] Lindsay Kines and Lori Culbert, "3 Officers Join Hunt for Missing Women," *Vancouver Sun*, 14 July,1999, B4.

[9] Pitman, "Re-mediating the Spaces of Reality Television," 174.

By the following summer, however, little hard evidence had been gathered and the police department announced that they would scale back the review team that had been established. But even as police attention ebbed, the number of disappeared continued to mount; seventeen women went missing between 1999 and 2001. Again confronted with a spiraling public relations disaster - and an ever-expanding roster of missing women - Vancouver police joined with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to form the Missing Women Joint Task Force in 2001.

One year later, the new unit raided a farm in suburban Port Coquitlam. As it became clear that the search was related to the missing women, the raid quickly took on a robust media profile. Local and national media were captivated by speculation that Robert Pickton – one of the farm's owners who had been detained on a series of weapons charges- was being considered as a suspect in the case; anticipating that the dramatic prosecution of a serial killer was about to unfold, news agencies put the story at the top of their agendas.

Two weeks later, police confirmed media speculation and Pickton was charged with murdering two of the missing women. Within a year, ten additional murder charges were added to the indictment against him. By 2005, that number would climb to twenty-seven. If convicted, he would earn the dubious distinction of being Canada's most notorious serial killer. Not surprisingly, media interest matched the magnitude of the accusations and the story generated prominent coverage for months.

That same interest returned with a pronounced vigour in January 2007 when the trial phase of the proceedings against Pickton began in New Westminster.[10] A veritable

[10] During the *voir-dire* hearings, the original indictment was split in two; the Crown was instructed to proceed initially with six charges of first-degree murder.

swarm of journalists had descended on the suburban courtroom as nearly 400 media workers from around the world had been accredited to cover the story.[11] For most, it was a short assignment. They were there to provide an initial context and would return again when a verdict had been reached.

For the Canadian print media, however, the trial seemed to merit a more thorough examination. Correspondents were enlisted to follow the minutia of trial developments but also to put the story in a larger socio-political context. In fact, for many newspapers this work had already begun. Since the initial raid of the Pickton farm nearly five years earlier, they had run stories which attempted to look beyond the particular *modus operandi* of the accused and examine what else could help to explain how dozens of women could be made to disappear. Many reporters looked to the Downtown Eastside for answers. Lurid portrayals suggested that the neighborhood's 'mean streets' and the social status of people on society's 'fringes' offered part of the answer. Police negligence and bureaucratic inefficiency seemed to offer another. The case, they had determined, was bigger than a deranged killer. It was also about a criminal underworld, a dangerous part of town, rapacious addictions, damaged and vulnerable individuals, and indifferent or incompetent authorities. By the time Pickton was convicted a year later, local and national audiences had been exposed to an expansive consideration of these dimensions.

Reconsidering dominant explanations

In many ways, the print coverage of the proceedings against Pickton was laudably expansive. Members of the press were instrumental in demonstrating that a simple

[11] Stevie Cameron, *The Pickton File*, xii.

consideration of the serial killer himself was entirely inadequate to explain what had happened in the Downtown Eastside. They established police negligence, the social dislocation of street involved women and the particular perils of living in the Downtown Eastside as core themes in their explanations of the tragedy.

Nevertheless, these prevailing explanations provoke a number of questions. Are considerations of irresponsible policing sufficient to explain the state's complicity in the crisis?[12] Do sympathetic portrayals of the victims disrupt the relentless stigmatization and demonization of street-involved women? Do examinations of the Downtown Eastside provide audiences with the analytic tools to understand why social suffering and violence seem to have become so concentrated there?

This study is primarily an attempt to answer these questions. By examining narratives in three of Canada's principal daily newspapers, I demonstrate that the dominant themes that emerge from coverage of the arrest and trial of Robert Pickton provide a series of explanations which insufficiently examine the range of instruments and assumptions which operated to imperil the women who disappeared from the Downtown Eastside. I argue that the coverage effectively reduces the case to a series of contingencies – albeit an expansive list of them- which camouflage the functioning of structural and cultural systems of domination. They offer, that is, a series of coherent explanations that hold particular individuals and practices accountable but largely omit,

[12] Given its diverse uses in political and theoretical traditions, it is important to clarify how I use the term 'state' in this study. Very specifically, I employ the term to refer to the three levels of government which exercise jurisdiction in Vancouver: the municipal government of the City of Vancouver, the provincial government of British Columbia, and the federal government of Canada as well as the various agencies and institutions that operate under the oversight of all three. Within the Canadian confederation, responsibilities are divided between the various levels of government. For example, the Criminal Code is administered federally while most social policy is administered at the provincial level. In most urban centres, including Vancouver, policing is administered by municipal authorities. Accordingly, I use the term 'state' because it affords the generality needed to discuss the role of all three levels of government in reproducing marginality.

conceal, or erase altogether the broader socio-political context that rendered those practices possible; the analyses that follow attempt to counter these partial explanations.

I begin this effort by establishing the theoretical and methodological approach that informs this study. Next, I elaborate four core arguments, all of which correspond to a substantive chapter. Each highlights one particular erasure or mystification that emerges from the explanations provided by the coverage. Chapter one argues that the coverage's focus on police negligence provides a compelling way to understand how more than sixty women could disappear. Considerations of incompetent or unconcerned policing offer potent explanations for the dramatic lack of official response as the list of missing women continued to swell. But by overemphasizing this explanation, I contend, the state's role in the tragedy is limited to either personal or bureaucratic failure and broader considerations of state culpability are effectively minimized. In chapter two, I extend this analysis by looking carefully at three core ways that the state itself might be implicated in the tragedy. I demonstrate that the retrenchment of state systems of social solidarity, the ongoing effects of colonialism, and the criminal regulation of prostitution, were (and are) central to the marginalization and endangerment of certain women. Accordingly, I examine the degree to which these particular modes of subordination are considered in the coverage. In chapter three, I examine how press narratives explain the lives and motivations of street-involved women. I consider how certain portrayals establish street-level sex workers as morally and socially distinct from other women. Descriptions which establish women as damaged and deranged, I contend, operate to make their presence in the 'dangerous' world of the inner city understandable, an important discursive move that helps to explain and rationalize their victimization. In

chapter four, I argue that the neighborhood itself is produced as a space of chaos and criminality. I demonstrate that such portrayals produce the area as a dangerous and detestable zone, a marginal space where violence and criminality are to be expected. Here, I challenge the suggestion that the neighborhood's problems can be explained by the presence of a 'criminal' element. I counter such descriptions by demonstrating how particular economic and political patterns have operated to isolate the Downtown Eastside from other city spaces and to concentrate particular kinds of behaviours and deviant social phenomena there.

The common thread that courses through all of these substantive chapters is an attempt to reveal that the explanations provided by the coverage are inadequate, partial, or incomplete. I attempt to supplement these definitions by expanding the definitions of whom and what might be considered complicit in the production of the intersectional modes of marginalization and dispossession that give this tragedy its particular form.

Chapter 1: Theoretical framework and methodological approach

The assertion that the coverage examined produces a series of dominant 'definitions' that mislead or deceive must be considered in some detail. It is not sufficient to suggest -without qualification- that these mystifications simply *appear* in news narratives. In fact, the contention that deception occurs at all begs a number of important questions: were the press implicated in a grand conspiracy to conceal the 'true' nature of the crisis? Are individual journalists beholden to a certain constellation of power and therefore compelled to distort? Do structural limits or editorial expectations somehow restrict a full telling of the story of the missing and murdered women? My own view is that a strictly conspiratorial analysis of the mass media – one that suggests individual journalists knowingly and actively deceive – is simply untenable. Nevertheless, as the analysis that follows will demonstrate, there are jarring disconnections between the explanations of the crisis that are privileged by the coverage and a well established historical record which seems to contradict them. But if journalists themselves do not actively attempt to deceive, how can we account for these disparities?

In this section I suggest that a particular conception of ideology provides a useful way to approach this question; it offers a series of potent analytical tools which help us make sense of the partiality of the coverage. Following Stuart Hall and others, I theorize ideology not as a static or removed set of propositions but as a series of representational and discursive practices which are embedded in commonsense or taken-for-granted assumptions about what our society is and how it works.[1] However, before I elaborate my own usage of the term, it is important to briefly trace some of the ways that concepts

[1] Hall, Stuart, "The Whites of Their Eyes," in *Silver Linings: Some Strategies for the Eighties*, eds. George Bridges and Rosalind Brunt (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1981), 10.

of ideology have been both taken up and challenged by other researchers. Not least because the term's meaning is hotly disputed; it has been employed divergently by a host of different intellectual and political traditions. Terry Eagleton suggests it is a "*text* woven of a whole tissue of different conceptual strands."[2] In one context, it might be defined rather innocuously, as a set of simple "action oriented" beliefs, for example. In another, it might be defined more severely, as the "indispensable medium in which individuals live out their relations to a social structure of false ideas."[3] Despite its diversity of meanings, however, the relative difficulty of defining ideology is hardly the only thing that makes its invocation contentious. The most potent challenges to the efficacy of the concept are theoretical. Accordingly, I begin this chapter by examining some of the challenges to its validity as a category of analysis. Next, I examine how some recent scholarship – and particularly research related to the mass media and the case of the missing and murdered women – either intersects with, or jars against, notions of ideology. Then, I explain my own usage of the concept in some detail, noting how it differs from other approaches. In the final section, I explain my methodological approach.

The contested terrain of ideology

If we begin with the suggestion that ideology is a "generative matrix" in which our ideas about the world are formulated and produced, the concept's applicability to theories of power and domination is easily grasped.[4] Within Marxist traditions,

[2] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (New York; Verso, 1991), 1.

[3] Slavoj Zizek,"The Spectre of Ideology," in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Zizek (London: Verso, 1994), 3.

[4] Ibid., 1.

ideology's relationship to domination – its usefulness, that is, to maintaining the hegemony of a particular ruling bloc- has taken on a number of diverse forms but might be usefully divided into two general categories. On the one hand, ideological domination might be considered as a process of intentional deception. Here, ideological production is conceived as the deliberate proliferation of false ideas, a process of strategic manipulation aimed at securing the acquiescence and consent of subordinate classes. A number of commentators point to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' 1845 text *the German Ideology* as an exemplar of this tradition.[5] Here, the authors argue that through the legitimating work of "ideologists"- those who "take every epoch at its word and believe everything it says and imagines about itself"- the ideas of the ruling elite appear "independent" of lived conditions. Through this deceptive work, the exploitation and domination of subordinate classes become obfuscated and naturalized in a social milieu where ruling classes are able to represent their own ideas as "the only rational and universally valid ones."[6] On the other hand, other Marxist analysis has focused on the 'spontaneous' functioning of a dominant ideology. Adherents to this model suggest that dominant ideas are not simply imposed from above but rather imbedded in the practices of everyday life. Antonio Gramsci, for example, stressed that the consent of the "great masses" was largely secured unconsciously as individuals were afforded a relatively autonomous freedom, constrained only by a minimal coercion and the "direction imposed

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[5] See for example: Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt, "Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology ...," *British Journal of Sociology* 44 (3), 1993: 473-499.

I am uneasy about setting up Marx and Engels in this way. As Jorge Larrain cautions, Marx himself never provided a "fully formed" definition of ideology. He observes that Marx's work is marked by "severe fluctuations" in both its usage and definition of the term.

[6] Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence Hugh Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 130-132.

on social life" by the dominant group.[7] The legitimacy of the dominant few, in this schema, is "subtly, pervasively, diffused throughout the habitual practices" of daily life and "intimately 'interwoven' with culture itself."[8] Louis Althusser also stressed that domination was achieved through a diffusion of dominant ideology across the social plane; he makes a clear distinction between "ideologies in general" –modes of social consciousness which encompass the sprawling range of "ethical, legal, and political" forms- and "ideology" as such, the all-pervasive totality which disciplines and shapes the whole of the individual's existence. In this view, nothing is outside of ideology; individuals are "always already" interpellated (made subjects) through its processes; the very contours and limits of individual subjectivities are constructed inside of an all pervasive ideological enclosure.[9] Thus we have here two distinct theories of domination. The former proposes a strategic and intentional imposition of ideas while the latter proposes that domination takes root when those ideas become imbedded in routine practices and culture itself. What both theories share, however, is the view that exploitation and the rule of the few is fundamentally maintained through the production of a dominant ideology, a set of ideas which shape the direction of social life in favour of particular interests.

In recent decades, the notion of a 'dominant ideology' has become the subject of significant derision. Marxist theory, in particular, has been accused of ascribing an

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[7] Antonio Gramsci, "Intellectuals and Hegemony," in *Marxism: Essential Writings*, ed. David McClellan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 267.

[8] Eagleton, *On Ideology*, 114.

[9] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971), 154-163.

Althusser contends that subjectivities are constructed inside of ideology and given their particular form by the prevailing "ideological state apparatuses," structures which in capitalist societies include the Church, the family, the educational system, the mass media, and most state and civil society institutions. Taken together, these apparatuses operate to generate a particular result: "the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation."

overly deterministic position to capitalist class relations and reducing the complexities of domination to a rigid economistic analysis. Some of these detractors –particularly post-structuralists- have attacked the notion of ideological 'directionality.' Michel Foucault was an early standard bearer of this assault. He was suspicious of the structuralism of Marxist theorizing and particularly what he saw as the willingness of its proponents to reduce domination to a single and coherent explanatory meta-structure.[10] He rejected the view that an all-determining "infrastructure", that is, a definitive "material [or] economic determinant" (the economic 'base' in Marxist language) was at the root of all domination. He noted that notions of ideology are inherently limited by their claim to stand "in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth."[11] Others echoed Foucault's suspicions. Jean-Francois Lyotard – whose early work had defined ideology as a form of "concealing"- came to associate ideologies with "totalizing metanarratives," explanations which, in his view, lacked all credibility in the contemporary milieu. He contended that amongst the ever proliferating "multiplicity of narratives", grand narratives were no longer viable, particularly given the absence of a "neutral metalanguage" capable of arbitrating between them.[12] Similarly, Jean Baudrillard, who contended that reality itself was merely simulation and simulacra, argued that concepts of ideology which sought to expose "false representation" and replace it with truth served only to further conceal that "the real is no longer real."[13] He argued that it is "always the

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[10] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), 118

[11] Ibid., 118; Bob Ellis and Rodney Fopp, *Ideology: From Marx to Mannheim and Postmodernism* (The Australian Sociological Association, 2000), 8.

[12] Ellis and Fopp, *Ideology*, 9; Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[13] Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *the Blackwell Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Anthony Elliott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 329.

aim of ideological analysis to restore the objective process; it is always a false problem to restore the truth beneath the simulcrum."[14] With varying degrees of commitment, each of these critiques is informed by the view that the social totality itself is radically contingent; as such, no interpretative framework or unitary theory of domination can be adequately employed to make sense of it. Their critiques of ideology are animated by an aversion to analytic closure. Yet Jorge Larrain argues that this is a self-defeating hostility. As he puts it: "paradoxically, the aggressive postmodernist stand fails fully to eradicate, and implicitly postulates, the totalizing perspective it seeks to abolish and therefore ends up contradicting itself."[15] Similarly, Slavoj Zizek argues that to renounce "the very notion of extra-ideological reality and accept that all we are dealing with is symbolic fictions" – to assert, that is, that ideology is a vacuous concept because there is no coherent 'actuality' for it to distort- is little more than a "quick, slick, 'postmodern' solution" which in the end operates as "ideology, *par excellence*."[16]

In spite of these apparent contradictions, however, the post-structuralist rejection of a broad theory of ideology does provide an important insight. It highlights, I would suggest, the reductive arrogance of assuming that one holds a privileged view which is itself *outside* of ideology. As Zizek asks: "does not the critique of ideology involve a privileged place, somehow exempted from the turmoils of social life, which enables some subject-agent to perceive the very hidden mechanism that regulates social visibility and non-visibitily?"[17]

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[14] Ibid., 337; Ellis and Fopp, *Ideology*, 10.

[15] Jorge Larrain, "Stuart Hall and the Marxist Concept of Ideology," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 64.

[16] Zizek, "The Spectre of Ideology," 17.

[17] Ibid., 3.

More recent Marxist analyses, however, have attempted to redeem a concept of ideology 'in general' by deploying it in ways that depart from the "essentialism and class reductionism" that previous conceptualizations have been accused of reproducing.[18] For example, Ernesto Laclau has argued that while "not every contradiction in society can be reduced to class contradiction, every contradiction is overdetermined by class struggle."[19] Larrain suggests that Laclau's observations challenge the Althusserian conception by proposing that the dominant ideology cannot be both "a level of any social formation" and simultaneously "the opposite of science" or truth.[20] Similarly, Hall at one point attempted to develop a Marxist notion of ideology that was bereft of the hubristic claim to scientific certainty. He argued that since difference cannot be simply reduced to identity, the social totality must be understood more diversely than through the singular 'contradiction' of class domination which is thought to "manifest…or express…itself at all levels." Therefore, the particular form that a society takes must be seen as "constructed through the *differences* between, rather than the homology, of practices."[21] Importantly, Larrain argues that the formulations of ideology proposed by both Hall and Laclau signaled an abandonment of the "negative" notion of ideology - false ideas in the service of power and sustained class exploitation- in favour of a "neutral" conceptualization. He suggests that Hall's notion in particular breaks with a classic Marxist view of ideology as 'distorted' discourse and adopts the view that all discourses – by virtue of their essential partiality- are in fact ideological.[22]

[18] Larrain, "Stuart Hall and the Marxist Concept of Ideology," 48.

[19] Ibid., 49.

[20] Ibid., 49.

[21] Hall, "In the Whites of Their Eyes," 11.

[22] Larrain, "Stuart Hall and the Marxist Concept of Ideology," 50-51.

Hall proposes what he calls a Marxism "without guarantees." He argues that "determinacy" cannot be seen in terms of the iron-clad functioning of capitalist domination and the attendant ideology which camouflages its operation. Rather, "determination" occurs through a process of "setting limits", establishing "parameters", and defining "the conditions of existence."[23] Hall defines ideology itself in rather neutral terms as:

> ...the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation- which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works.[24]

Ideology becomes 'negative,' for Hall, when it is employed in the service of domination. Thus ideological domination, "the problem of ideology" in his lexicon, occurs when certain ideas grip the "minds of masses" and become a "material force" that helps to unite a particular "bloc" and "maintain its dominance and leadership over society as a whole."[25] Yet importantly, what distinguishes Hall's view from other conceptions of domination is that it consciously attempts to avoid reductionism or any claim to scientific certainty. He advocates an "open horizon of Marxist theorizing" which maintains a notion of "determinacy" but resists "guaranteed closures."[26] Larrain distinguishes this gesture from the post-structural approach by suggesting that it – along with other Gramsci-inspired Marxist theorizing- does not involve a "loss of faith in reason and truth."[27] Rather, it proposes that ideologies exist in infinite multiplicity and do not

[23] Stuart Hall, "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism Without Guarantees," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996), 45.

[24] Ibid., 26.

[25] Ibid., 27.

[26] Ibid., 45.

[27] Larrain, "Stuart Hall and the Marxist Concept of Ideology," 64.

necessarily serve particular modes of domination. For Larrain, however, this adoption of a 'neutral' conception of ideology is not without its problems. While it provides important insights in to the way political discourses are transformed and reconstructed, how they gain widespread currency at certain moments and fall out of fashion at others, it does so at the expense, he argues, of the "negative" concept of ideology and the pursuit of the determining base of domination.[28]

Ideology and the case of the missing and murdered women

As I note above, the present project is primarily concerned with a consideration of the newspaper coverage's concealment of certain dimensions of the case of the missing and murdered women. Zizek argues that the task of the "critique of ideology is to discern the hidden necessity in what appears to be mere contingency."[29] In many ways, the present project is engaged in such a critique. In the chapters that follow I demonstrate how particular explanations of the crisis have operated to conceal, minimize or deny the 'hidden necessity' inherent in the functioning of particular systems of domination, even if such explanations don't reduce the crisis to mere 'contingency.'

Some of the academic studies that have considered media representation of the missing and murdered women have also attempted to reveal a certain 'hidden' logic of domination. For example, Yasmin Jiwani and Mary-Lynn Young's survey of case-related articles that appeared in the *Vancouver Sun* between 2001 and 2006, argues that a reproduction of historically entrenched (and contemporarily prevailing) stereotypes about street-involved women, aboriginality, and the sex trade more generally has had the effect

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[28] Ibid., 64.

[29] Slavoj Zizek, "The Spectre of Ideology," 4.

of "demarcat[ing] the boundaries of respectability and degeneracy" and reproducing particular kinds of marginality. Their analysis of the coverage observes that journalists employed a "moral and racialized economy of representations" to describe the women that had disappeared.[30] They invoke Sherene Razack's suggestion that:

> ...within this economy, racialized status, such as Aboriginality, interlocks with prostitution to position these women in the lower echelon of a moral order...the stereotypical attributes ascribed to both of these positions feed into and reproduce common-sense notions of itinerant and irresponsible behavior, which is then seen as naturally inviting victimization.[31]

Dara Culhane's considerations of the crisis suggest that a similar journalistic logic has operated to conceal particular women (primarily aboriginal women) behind a "regime of disappearance," a pattern of "knowledge" which "selectively marginalizes and/or erases categories of people through strategies of representation that include silences, blind spots, and displacements that have both material and symbolic effects."[32] Jennifer England echoes these sentiments and suggests that representations of the missing women have rendered them simultaneously invisible (in Culhane's sense) and hyper-visible; she suggests that they are at once "inside and outside the gaze of the state."[33]

My own project has much in common with these other studies. Their insights have shaped my own thinking about the representation of the missing women and I draw on them repeatedly in the analysis that follows. Perhaps the central theoretical departure

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[30] Yasmin Jiwani and Mary-Lynn Young, "Missing and Murdered Women: Reproducing Marginality in News Discourses," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31 (2006), 902.

[31] Ibid., 902.

[32] Dara Culhane, "Their Spirits Live Within Us: Aboriginal Women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver," *American Indian Quarterly* 27 (3-4), 2003, 595.

[33] Jennifer England, "Disciplining Subjectivity and Space: Representation, Film, and its Material Effects," *Antipode* 36 (2), 2004, 300.

of my own study, however, is an insistence on the terminology of ideology to describe the ways in which these 'logics' of domination function. I elaborate on this below.

Ideology and news discourses

Mass media institutions have access to striking concentrations of symbolic power; as such, they exist in a decisively ideological sphere, they are key sites where social meanings are produced and distributed.[34] Thus not surprisingly, communication researchers have long been interested in the relationship between mass media messages and social and political power. In their seminal consideration of a perceived mugging outbreak in the United Kingdom, Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts consider why news narratives have tended to "reproduce and sustain....definitions of...situation[s] which favour the powerful."[35] Thirty years later, the premise of their inquiry is hardly controversial; a wide diversity of scholarship has been dedicated to answering precisely this question and a number of compelling schools of thought have been mobilized and developed to do so.

In light of now well-established suspicions about the 'effects' of media practices, it is easy to forget that other scholarly traditions have considered (and, in some cases, continue to consider) mass media institutions as exemplars of engaged democratic citizenship. As Robert Hackett and William Caroll observe, mass media scholarship was once dominated by a series of liberal-pluralist assumptions that presented the institution of journalism as a "watchdog against the abuse of power, a righter of wrongs, a humbler of hubris and arrogance, a promoter of positive social change, [and] an agent to comfort

[34] Hall, "In the Whites of Their Eyes," 10.

[35] Stuart Hall, Charles Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Robert, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan Press: 1978), 65.

the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."[36] In the first half of the twentieth century, researchers from the famed Chicago School saw the potential of mass media communication as inherently democratic. Social behaviorists, like George Mead, argued that the proliferation of instruments of mass communication would provide a basis for social unity by providing individuals with the means to "identify themselves with each other."[37] These approving assessments of the press were often sustained and reproduced by what media institutions said (and continue to say) about themselves. David Taras, for example, suggests that the "mirror model" – which holds that mass media news discourses mirror reality and reflect issues and events as they truly are- is "widely accepted" among individuals working within news generating organizations.[38] Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Jamieson suggest that notions of media "mirroring" are still common among news institutions and animate professional pretensions of "objectivity."[39] Yet others have challenged this paradigm, suggesting that news discourses do not merely reflect reality but act as active agents of representation that hold up a "distorted mirror" which alters fundamentally the content it reflects.[40]

More prominently, a wide diversity of scholars have argued that the relationship between media output and political power hinges crucially on questions of ownership. Indeed, researchers have argued that the status of news generating organizations as

[36] Robert Hackett and William Carroll, *Remaking Media: The Struggle to Democratize Communication* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 21.

[37] George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), 326.

[38] David Taras, *The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics* (Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1990), 5.

[39] Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Institutions of American Democracy: The Press* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 69.

[40] David Taras, *The Newsmakers*, 7.

privately-owned corporations has engendered a near seamless relationship between media messages and the interests of capital. Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman famously proposed that a "propaganda model" could be used to evaluate the extent of this relationship. They claimed that media messages must be evaluated according to the five "filters" through which they must pass before being deemed fit for publication or broadcast.[41] Thus the outputs of corporate media institutions will tend to reflect the interests of its owners, the interests of advertisers and those who fund its activities, the interests of those who are deemed appropriate sources and able to provide information quickly (well financed and organized government and private institutions, including the military, for example), the need to avoid "flak" from centers of power, and the prevailing ideologies of a society's most powerful interests (for Chomsky and Herman this included the "national religion of anti-communism").[42] Consistently, Michael Parenti has maintained that corporate ownership has had a decisive impact on media outputs. He argues that because corporate power permeates the "entire social fabric" of our societies, "opinions that support existing arrangements of economic and political power are more easily treated as facts." Prevailing notions of "objectivity", therefore, necessarily reflect these particular biases and much of "what is reported as 'news' is little more than the uncritical transmission of official opinions."[43]

Yet others have argued that while the 'ownership model' is instructive, a thorough analysis of the relationship between media messages and established power must

[41] Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 29-31.

[42] Ibid., 2.

[43] Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality: The Politics of Mass Media* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 51.

consider the 'relative autonomy' of individual journalists. Hall et al. stress that news messages are themselves a social product and insist that understanding their relationship to power requires understanding the "professional ideology" in which they are incubated and deployed.[44] To this end, the authors examine the professional practices which shape news discourses. They point to a series of structural necessities that influence news production to explain why media institutions tend to provide an 'overaccessing' to people in powerful positions. But perhaps more centrally for our present purposes, they argue that media messages are necessarily proscribed within "distinct ideological limits" and thus necessarily provide "frameworks" for evaluating issues which tend to tip in favour of established authority. Similarly, Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek, and Janet Chan have conducted a sprawling survey of media practices and found that news discourse serve an inherently conservative function in that they perpetually "represent order" by installing particular views of "morality, procedural form, and social hierarchy" that promote particular "versions and visions" of social control.[45] Nevertheless, they argue that the contention that "news reproduces [a] law-and-order ideology in favour of the powerful" is simplistic. They suggest that because the effects of media messages "vary substantially," conclusions about their particular impacts are often too presumptive.[46] Todd Gitlin echoes this sentiment; he warns against the view that "media imprints are uniformly potent," a dangerous assumption, in his estimation, which can quickly lead the critic to "collapse the whole of life into a shadow projected by the garish light of the

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[44] Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Robert, *Policing the Crisis*, 53.

[45] Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek, and Janet Chan, *Representing Order: Crime, Law, and Justice in the News Media* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 3-4.

[46] Ibid., 19.

media, a dumb show played out on the wall's of Plato's cave."[47] Yet others still, especially Pierre Bourdieu, stress the importance of recognizing that power is dispersed in particular and often autonomous "fields" which are themselves situated in a broader constellation of political possibility. Hackett and Carroll summarize this approach's applicability to the mass media, they suggest that it "invites us to consider journalism and mass media as relatively autonomous fields within a broader field of power, which is itself structured in dominance."[48]

My own theoretical approach is informed by a number of these positions. First, while I want to distance myself from a conspiratorial view of the media, I do want to stress that the three newspapers on which this study is based are owned by coroporate conglomerates with a undeniable set of 'interests.' Nevertheless, I hold that many of the problematic messages that the coverage reproduces have more to do with the "professional ideology" of news production than with the structure of their ownership.[49] Ultimately though, I agree with Hackett and Carroll that "the media are powerful in so far as they comprise a concentration of society's symbolic power."[50] Following Bourdieu, I think it is useful to consider particular media institutions as somewhat autonomous but stress that the opinions they produce are primarily shaped by the prevailing 'frameworks' which are themselves the products of a broader 'field' of dominant power.

Ideology and the present study

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[47] Todd Gitlin, *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms our Lives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), 141.

[48] Hackett and Carroll, *Remaking Media*, 33.

[49] Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Robert, *Policing the Crisis*, 53-57.

[50] Ibid., 33.

My own usage of ideology – perhaps the central analytical category of the present study- is informed by Hall's definitions of the concept. In the substantive chapters that follow, I consider how press reports reproduce particular ideological positions which have the 'effect' of establishing particular 'frameworks' through which audiences are given the opportunity to 'make sense' of the crisis of missing and murdered women in particular and the spaces and inhabitants of the Downtown Eastside in general. Following Hall, I consider ideology not simply as the political preferences or beliefs of individuals but rather as broad analytical space – a "field of power," to borrow a phrase from Bourdieu- in which individuals tend to formulate their understanding of the world that they inhabit.[51] Moreover, I share Hall's contention that our individual positions of identification are frequently constructed within the boundaries of prevailing ideologies. As Larrain summarizes Hall's position: "ideologies are not really produced by individual consciousness but rather individuals formulate their beliefs…within positions already fixed by ideology."[52] Thus while I heed Foucault's warning about the wide proliferation of sites of power and share Lyotard's suspicions about the analytic closure provided by explanatory 'metanarratives,' I remain committed to the view that a theory of ideology offers an effective way to confront the pronounced contradictions inherent in press representations of the crisis. I accept the contention that, in some sense, all discourses are 'ideological' in that all discourses are partial and subjective. Nevertheless, I am concerned in the present study only with those discourses that – by virtue of this partiality- provide definitions which support and sustain an established constellation of power or particular modes of domination. When I invoke the term ideology in the

[51] Ibid., 31-33.

[52] Larrain, "Stuart Hall and the Marxist Concept of Ideology," 49.

analysis that follows, it is precisely and exclusively this relationship that I am referring to.

In the analysis that follows, I will argue that a prevailing ideological logic was not only central to the production of the very possibility of the crisis but also at the core of the dominant news discourse mobilized to explain it. I agree with England that "although the boundary between discourse and everyday life is fluid, complex, and often disrupted, it is important to trace these connections, particularly when discrimination and oppression are at work."[53] At the core of the analysis that follows is a prevailing interest in unmasking the material dispossession that particular discursive constructions conceal. Yet I pursue these erasures and obfuscations 'without guarantees;' I make no claim to scientific closure or conceptual certainty.

Methodological Approach

Using microfiche archives, I extracted case-related materials from the Ontario editions of the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the *National Post*. In order to keep my study manageable, I focused on three periods of heightened interest in the case: period 1 begins with the initial raid on the Pickton farm and ends shortly after Pickton was charged with the initial counts of first-degree murder (8-27 February, 2002), period 2 encompasses the opening week of the trial and the days that immediately preceded it (20-27 January, 2007) and period 3 encompasses the week surrounding the verdict and sentencing of the convicted (1-12 December, 2007). Taken together, the three periods yield a total of 157 articles and a large number of corresponding images and photographs.

[53] England, "Disciplining Subjectivity and Space," 296.

Informed by Cultural Studies approaches to the mass media, my study is primarily concerned with an analysis of the context and content of press messages. To the degree that it was possible, I sought to suspend my own preconceptions about what I might find and allow the themes that were most significant in the coverage itself (either in their absence or their presence) to guide the questions that shaped my inquiry. The substantive arguments that follow are largely based on particular representational patterns that became evident in the course of this process. I employed two primary criteria in deciding which themes were most significant. First, I attempted to isolate messages which were prominent, remarkable, and repeated. This strategy is informed by Robert Entman's view that the most influential media messages are those which recur repeatedly and are displayed prominently or those which employ language and images which are "culturally resonant." He suggests that such resonance is produced through the deployment of text and image which is "noticeable, understandable, memorable and emotionally charged."[54] Secondly, I attempted to isolate themes which situated the case itself in a larger socio-political frame. Here, my approach is informed by the principles of what some have called Critical Discourse Analysis. By focusing on the larger context of particular utterances the critic is able to "expose the taken-for-granted nature of ideological messages."[55]

It is important to acknowledge that this approach lends itself to a few particular intellectual dangers. First, if we start from the premise that media messages are themselves significant – and therefore worthy of our scrutiny- we run the risk of

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[54] Robert Entman, "Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame After 9/11," *Political Communication* 20 (2003), 417.

[55] Frances Henry and Carol Tator, *Discourses of Domination: Racial Bias in the Canadian English Language Press* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2002), 72.

assigning too much importance to messages which may well be inconsequential. Second, it is important not to assume that because certain media messages are expressed with force or prominence that they will necessarily affect audiences forcefully. News discourses are instruments of knowledge construction, to be sure, but that knowledge is processed and reconstituted in ways at least as diverse as the audiences that process it. Finally, it is also important to be cautious about assuming the broad applicability of my observations. With these potential shortfalls in mind, I have attempted to limit my analysis to a sample of news discourses small enough to allow for a certain precision of observation but large enough to be representative of particular trends in the way story of the missing women was reported.

Source selection and the Canadian newspaper

I chose to examine these particular newspapers for a number of reasons. First, all three are non-Vancouver based. As such, their correspondents did not have the luxury of assuming that audiences were acquainted with the case. Unlike local newspapers, where the crisis had been extensively considered for years, these sources were all relative newcomers to the story when it acquired a national profile in 2002. Accordingly, each needed to establish the broader context of the case for its audience; it needed to situate developments in actual space (and particularly the spaces of the Downtown Eastside), and explain how more than sixty women could disappear. This necessity determined a certain consistency between the news rhythms of each source which allowed me to compare them rather coherently. Secondly, each source reaches (and presumably influences) a broad readership. As figure 1.1 demonstrates, these are the three most

circulated English-language dailies in the country. The *National Post* and the *Globe and Mail* are the country's only dailies which reach a national audience while the *Toronto Star* is produced and distributed in the country's most densely populated region. Thirdly, other dailies tend to rely on wire services and press agencies for much of what they publish while these papers produce the majority of their content internally. As such, they serve a generative rather than reproductive function within their parent corporations; news narratives produced by these papers often re-circulate through other outlets. This is particularly notable given the sprawling range of media outlets held by each source's ownership group. As figure 1.2 demonstrates, *Bell Globemedia* (owner of the *Globe and Mail*), *CanWest Global* (owner of the *National Post*), and the *Torstar Corporation* (owner of the *Toronto Star*), collectively produce nearly half of the newspapers circulated each day in this country. Finally, newspapers in general, and these three in particular, are said to "continue to be important sources of information for political and business elites."[56] As Walter Sonderlund and Kai Hildebrandt argue, newspapers "tend to drive the agendas of other media, especially of television news."[57] This is particularly notable in a case like this one, where particular political practices are held up to scrutiny.

Figure 1.1 English-language Canadian newspapers, by circulation (2007)

Newspaper (Canada)	Average Daily Circulation	% of total daily newspaper circulation
Toronto Star	465,803	9.9
Globe and Mail	337, 387	7.2
National Post	206,003	4.4
Toronto Sun	194,042	4.1
Vancouver Sun	171,782	3.6
Total	1,009,193 (top three)	21.58 (top three)

Source: Canadian Newspaper Association

[56] Kai Hildebrant and Walter Sonderlund, *Canadian Newspapers in the Era of Convergence: Rediscovering Social Responsibility* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005).

[57] Hildebrant and Sonderlund, *Canadian Newspapers in the Era of Convergence*, xvi.

Figure 1.2 Average daily circulation, by ownership group (2007)

Newspaper (Canada)	Average Daily Circulation	% of total daily newspaper circulation
CanWest (National Post)	1,163,886	24.8
Torstar Corporation (Toronto Star)	654,164	13.9
Bell GlobeMedia (Globe and Mail)	337,387	7.2
Total	2,155,437	45.9

Source: Canadian Newspaper Association

Given the abundance of recent research that demonstrates Canadians are now relying on a broad diversity of sources for information about current affairs, it is necessary to explain why this study relies exclusively on newspaper narratives.[58] Indeed, the former leaders of news dissemination, the nightly network television news and the daily newspaper, have seen their influence wane in recent years as a wide proliferation of web-based and specialty channel sources have eroded their dominance. In spite of these trends, however, both have retained a significant stake in mass media markets. Television remains by far the most relied upon source with more than 65% of poll respondents reporting that they consult it regularly.[59] While daily newspapers continue to lag significantly behind their televisual counterparts, they remain the second most consumed medium with slightly less than 20% of respondents reporting regular consultation. They are most read, moreover, by Canadians aged 45-64, a powerful and influential demographic.[60] Notably, newspapers have retained a significant edge on radio

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[58] Alfred Hermida. "Canadians Increasingly Going Online for News," *Newslab*, 30 June 2008, http://www.newslab.ca/?p=56.

[59] Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, *Final Report on the Canadian News Media* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2006), http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/tran-e/rep-e/repfinjun06vol2-e.htm#_Toc138068491

[60] Ibid.

and magazine sources in all demographics and an edge on internet sources in most.[61] Yet in spite of these successes, newspapers no longer enjoy the consumer loyalty that once seemed inevitable. Accordingly, research that considers the political importance of newspaper messages, must account for this decline. It cannot simply be assumed that print narratives are representative of 'media opinion' generally; they must be understood as one group of articulations in an ever-expanding field.

On the surface, the diversification of media sources would seem to signal a correlative diversification of media opinion. But while technological advance has afforded alternative news sources an unprecedented capacity to reach audiences, recent trends in media ownership suggest that the diversity of news narratives is contracting. The vast majority of widely-consulted media outlets are now owned by a small number of corporate conglomerates. This trend has been particularly pronounced in the Canadian newspaper industry.[62] In some urban centres, this concentration has resulted in a near or total monopoly of newspaper ownership. For example, *CanWest* has achieved total saturation in Regina, Saskatoon, and Vancouver, where they control all of the city's dailies and total linguistic saturation in Montreal where they control all of the English-language dailies (see figure 1.3).[63]

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[61] Ibid.

[62] For example, the holdings of the CanWest Corporation account for nearly 30% of average daily circulation in Canada; *Sun Media/Quebecor* publications account for over 20%; *Torstar* corporation publications account for nearly 15%; *Power Corporation* publications account for nearly 10%; *BellGobe Media* publications account for more than 7%.

[63] Hildebrant and Sonderlund, *Canadian Newspapers in the Era of Convergence*, 98.

Figure 1.3 Urban market share, by ownership group

Market daily	Ownership Group	Market share of television newscasts (%)	Market share of newspapers (%)
Vancouver	CanWest	70.6	100.0
Edmonton	CanWest	39.7	60.0
Quebec City	Quebecor	47.1	56.2
Toronto	Bell Globemedia	43.8	18.3
	CanWest	33.0	11.5
Regina	CanWest	28.3	100.0
Montreal (English)	CanWest	5.0	100.0
Montreal (French)	Quebecor	37.1	60.4

Source: *Canadian Newspaper Ownership in the Era of Convergence*

Yet concentrated media ownership is not exclusively a print phenomenon. Most of the major newspaper-holding conglomerates own other media outlets too. *CanWest*'s sprawling corporate empire marks an extreme but not unique example of this cross-media convergence. In addition to a wide diversity of local and national newspapers, the corporation now controls a major national television broadcaster with dozens of local broadcast affiliates, a host of specialty cable channels, a series of high profile web-based news sources, radio stations, magazines, and other key communications assets. Though less pronounced, this trend is much the same with other media conglomerates, including *Bell GlobeMedia* and *Torstar*. These few conglomerates wield a decisive influence in local and national mediascapes, they have an unrivalled capacity to define both how the news is presented and what counts as news at all. [64]

[64] While it would be too simplistic to suggest that all of the outlets contained under a single ownership umbrella produce identical interpretations, it would be equally simplistic to assume that content isn't routinely shared between them. The diversity of interpretation that might have otherwise been produced is stifled by a reliance on a small group of narratives distributed throughout the corporation's assets. One journalist who appeared before a Senate committee illustrated this concern: "One [of the issues with cross-media ownership] is just a simple question of the diversity of voices and the number of different people who are out there reporting. It makes sense, and it is practically true, that if you have five different people for five different organizations chasing the same story, the likelihood is that some of them will come up with more information than others." This fear of a creeping uniformity has become so pronounced that a House of Commons committee mused openly in a 2003 report about the possibility of erecting regulatory barriers to ensure that newspaper and television newsrooms are run independently of each other.

In the substantive chapters that follow, there are few references to these questions of media ownership, consolidation, and convergence. My analysis is focused on the content of media messages and makes little acknowledgement of the corporate environment in which they are incubated and shaped. In spite of this absence, I remain convinced that questions of ownership are central to questions of the ideological content of media messages. I omit considerations of these relationships in the interest of thematic precision alone.

Chapter 2: Defining the boundaries of the crisis

The crisis of the missing and murdered women presents a potent challenge to liberal-pluralist claims about the essential fairness of governance in Canada. The absence of a dramatic official response as for two decades scores of women disappeared from a densely populated urban neighborhood demonstrates profound contradictions of the state's assumed capacity to provide a basic level of universal protection. It jars against widely held views that Canada is a "humanistic, tolerant, and accommodating society."[1] More precisely, the crisis provides compelling evidence of the selectivity of the Charter-enshrined guarantee of individual "security of the person," demonstrating that the protective and restrictive capacities of police and other authorities are not dispensed with blind universality but rather meted out with sharp particularity.[2] Fully considered, the crisis is about much more than the psychopathic caprices of a serial killer. Far more centrally, it reveals how a particular group of marginalized women could be disqualified from the protective assurances of the state.[3]

The media storm generated by the arrest and trial of Robert Pickton offered a rare opportunity for these divisions to be considered publicly. Indeed, as the story developed and reports of unresponsive policing, bureaucratic bungling, and the cold dismissal of a population assumed to be 'transient' became part of the story's larger narrative, such considerations seemed a genuine possibility; as the depths of official negligence became more known, the legitimacy of certain state institutions and actors began to be called in to

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[1] Frances Henry and Carol Tator, *Discourses of Domination*, 228.

[2] Section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) establishes that every citizen has the right to "life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice."

[3] Following Jiwani, I use the terms "racialize" and "racialized" to reflect the socially constructed nature of race. (see *Discourses of Denial*, xviii)

question.[4] Yet in spite of the willingness of many journalists to criticize official failure – in some cases installing it as a central theme in their explanations- the news discourses on which this study is based have had the paradoxical effect of actually camouflaging the state's role in the tragedy. In this chapter, I argue that press narratives that focused on the negligence of local authorities – what I call the 'negligence narrative'- actually operated to mask much larger contradictions of the state's claim to protect and restrict without distinction. Moreover, I argue that they have had the effect of legitimating the prevailing political order by defining the boundaries of the crisis in ways that erase or minimize its implication in the violence.

Liberal assumptions and news narratives

In liberal societies like Canada, the authority of the state in said to be rooted in a social contract which establishes all citizens as entitled to certain rights, restrictions, and assurances. In contrast to the state which rules by coercion, the liberal notion of 'government by consent' establishes the state as a representative authority. It is mandated to ensure a common 'peace' through the maintenance of institutions which mediate conflict, address contradictions, and afford certain guarantees universally. The state's monopoly on the legitimate use of violence – the power to police and incarcerate, for example- is said to be rooted in the larger imperative of maintaining a prevailing sense of order.[5] Yet such authority is not merely given, it is sustained through demonstrations of the state's fundamental adherence to certain normative standards. For Jurgen Habermas, the legitimacy of liberal power is contingent on the ability of

[4] Pitman, "*Re-mediating the Spaces of Reality Television*,"174-177.

[5] Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Robert, *Policing the Crisis*, 66-70.

authorities to make persuasive claims, "arguments that they are acting in accordance with social norms."[6] Thus as Ericson et al observe, state power is justified through demonstrations of commitment to established procedures, actions that communicate congruence between the decisions of officials and determined standards of what constitutes an acceptable exercise of power.[7] Where authority is premised on the presumption of a consensual society, those who hold power must demonstrate their commitment to certain core universalizing practices, including the maintenance of institutions that ensure the public expectation of particular forms of equality. As the structural expressions of codified sets of norms, the legal institutions are vital to this legitimating process.[8] The authority of police forces, for example, is deemed legitimate because it operates to restrict and protect in accordance with a universal standard, the Criminal Code. Conversely, institutions which fail to demonstrate a commitment to these established norms risk a potential challenge to their legitimacy.

News narratives play a vital role in representing and maintaining this prevailing order. Numerous commentators contend that media institutions have the ability to establish the very "boundaries of public discourse" and that "within these boundaries priorities are set and public agendas are established."[9] Ericson et al suggest that such narratives are important sites for state actors and institutions to win legitimacy for their

[6] Jurgen Habermas quoted in Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, *Representing Order*, 7.

[7] Ibid., 8.

[8] Ibid., 8.

[9] Henry and Tator, *Discourses of Domination*, 235. See also: Augie Fleras and Jean Kunz, *Media and Minorities: Representing Diversity in a Multicultural Canada* (Toronto: Thompson Educational, 2001); Teun van Dijk, *Racism and the Press* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Robert, *Policing the Crisis*; Yasmin Jiwani, *Discourses of Denial* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006).

political preferences by establishing their practices within broader definitions of 'order.' As they put it:

> The news-media institution is pivotal to the ability of authorities to make convincing claims. It offers a pervasive and persuasive means by which authorities from various institutions can attempt to obtain wider consent for their moral preferences. Moral authority is always subject to *consent*, and legitimacy is always something that is *granted*.[10]

So conceived, news discourses constitute a distinct site of social struggle where claims and counter-claims compete to define the analytic boundaries of a given event or issue.[11]

Yet numerous researchers contend that such contestations disproportionately benefit established authority and reproduce the legitimacy of the prevailing political order.[12] To take such a position, however, is not necessarily to take a strictly conspiratorial view of the media as a set of institutions which intentionally persuade and manipulate in the service of power. More nuanced analyses have suggested that the structural tendency to reproduce 'order' (and the state as its legitimate broker) has more to do with established journalistic practices which rely on certain "taken-for-granted value commitments and reality judgments" which are naturalized and transformed into common sense.[13] Hall et al stress the importance of attending to the ways in which news stories are almost always articulated within pre-existing ideological structures which "form the basis of our cultural knowledge," a process which frequently reproduces "crucial assumptions about what society is and how it works."[14] One such assumption is the "consensual nature" of modern liberal democratic societies. They contend that

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[10] Ericson, Baranek, Chan, *Representing Order*, 8.

[11] Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes," 10.

[12] Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Robert, *Policing the Crisis*, 59.

[13] Hackett and Caroll, *Remaking Media*, 31.

[14] Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Robert, *Policing the Crisis*, 54-56.

conventional journalistic processes of signification both "assume" and "construct" this view by offering modes of understanding that reflect the view that "we have fundamental interests, values and concerns in common." News narratives which always-already assume a prevailing consensus carry with them a series of profound political implications. Such views, they propose, operate to deny or minimize major "structural discrepancies" between groups by reproducing the notion that legitimate institutional structures exist to mediate contradictions and provide certain guarantees universally.[15] In their enumeration, such narrations assume that political institutions guarantee a base-level equality of access in formal decision-making processes, economic structures allow individuals to have "a stake in the making and distribution of wealth", and the law operates to protect and restrict in a consistent way. They offer explanations of events, in short, which legitimate the prevailing political order by suggesting and assuming that society operates from a "framework of agreement."[16]

In the analysis that follows, I argue that the coverage which forms the basis of this study provides an explanation of the 'crisis' which reproduces core assumptions about the consensual nature of Canadian society. I contend that in their effects (if not in their intention) such narrations operate to 'manage' the crisis by providing compelling 'ways of seeing' which occlude broader questions about the legitimacy of the prevailing political order itself and its liberal claims to egalitarian representation.

Defining the crisis: the negligence narrative

For media audiences in Vancouver, the view that police failure was complicit in

[15] Ibid., 54-56.

[16] Ibid., 54-56.

the tragedy of the missing and murdered women was already well-established when authorities began their excavation of the Pickton farm in 2002. As Beverly Pitman observes, accusations that both the mayor and the police had bungled the case began to emerge with the first local coverage of the disappearances in 1998 and 1999. She argues that the 'negligence' narrative –though secondary to other explanations- became part of the "media mill" for three reasons. First, it aligned with the stigmatization of the Downtown Eastside as a centre of criminality and vice which had been privileged in dominant media discourses for nearly two decades. Second, friends and supporters of the missing women managed to make the case that the police operated on a double-standard and had avoided instigating a full investigation because the victims worked in the street level sex trade. Third, for a brief period, the "representational work" of supporters, activists, and sympathetic journalists had managed to generate an outpouring of sympathy that transcended well-established divisions between the Downtown Eastside and other parts of the city. And while Pitman observes that this "uncommon kind of community" was eventually eroded by the inscription of fears that a serial killer was at work – the installation of a "Jack the Ripper" template- it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that these criticisms of police mismanagement did play a role in early coverage.[17] In their survey of case-related content in the *Vancouver Sun*, Jiwani and Young also observe that police negligence was sustained as an element in the dominant narratives but was profoundly overshadowed by a shift in media focus toward Pickton himself.[18]

Outside of British Columbia, however, the tragedy of the missing and murdered women didn't become a major news story until authorities began to search the Pickton

[17] Pitman, "Re-mediating the Spaces of Reality Television," 175-176.

[18] Jiwani and Young, "Missing and Murdered Women," 905.

farm in February 2002. Previously, considerations of police negligence were largely restricted to local media analyses. When the case did begin to develop a truly national profile, however, this critique was an important part of its narration. In fact, within forty-eight hours of the initial raid, police negligence had been established as a central theme in the coverage of all three of the data sources studied. Appearing beneath headlines like 'Police slow to accept crime link', 'B.C. police lashed over probe', 'Response by police under fire', and 'Police told about farm many times', these first stories inaugurated a period of incisive police criticism.

From 8-22 February nearly one third of all articles related to the case dealt directly with the failure of law enforcement.[19] Friends and supporters of the missing were central to this critique; their frequently quoted accounts of disinterested investigators, ignored information, and a general unwillingness to take disappearances seriously, established official negligence as a definitive explanation. Such claims were powerfully re-inscribed by the repeated invocation of authorized knowers, including criminologists and politicians, and legitimated by interviews with a former Vancouver detective who openly acknowledged that scant resources were dedicated to the disappearances and that tips, including one linking some of the missing women to the Pickton farm, were often not acted upon or ignored altogether.[20]

By 23 February, however, two first-degree murder charges had been issued and the focus of the coverage shifted decisively away from the offences of the police and

[19] Eight of the twenty-seven case-related articles that appeared in the 8-22 February period considered police mismanagement directly. For a few of the most potent examples see: 'Police Slow to Accept Crime Link' (*Toronto Star*, 8 February), 'Relatives of Missing Demand Inquiry' (*Toronto Star*, 12 February), 'B.C. Police Lashed Over Probe' (*Globe and Mail*, 9 February), 'Ex-officer Says Limits on Resources Hurt Probe' (*Globe and Mail*, 12 February), 'Police Told About Farm Many Times' (*National Post*, 8 February).

[20] Robert Matas, "B.C. Police Lashed Over Probe," *Globe and Mail*, 9 February 2002, A1.

towards those of the accused himself. From 23-27 February, the 'negligence' narrative was consigned to the margins of the coverage and considered directly only once in a *Globe and Mail* editorial.[21] In this latter period, information about the police largely chronicled the daunting task of accumulating evidence in a challenging and unconventional crime scene. Accordingly, the established image of a selectively responsible, selectively protective, police force had begun to be eroded by a sustained focus on the hyper-professionalism and scientific precision of those carrying out the forensic investigation. Thus from the arrest forward, the negligence narrative began to lose its central positioning. As figure 2.1 demonstrates, the narrative never fully vanished from the coverage but neither did it return with the same vigor that characterized its initial articulation.

Figure 2.1 Acknowledgement of police negligence in three coverage periods

Source	8-27 February, 2002	20-27 January, 2007	20-27 January, 2007
Toronto Star	4	2	1
Globe and Mail	3	1	1
National Post	2	1	1
Total	9	4	3

Yet in spite of its fading centrality, it is important not to underestimate the significance of this narrative, particularly given its preliminary potency. Hall et al argue that early definitions frequently provide the "primary interpretation" of a news story, offering explanations which "command the field…in subsequent treatment" and install an interpretive framework which is "extremely difficult to alter fundamentally" once it has

[21] Fourteen case-related items appeared in the data sources in the 23-27 February period; one of these dealt directly with police negligence.

been established.[22] If we accept this logic, then we must consider the 'negligence' narrative as more than a short-lived story, a blip on the media radar. On the contrary, we might consider it as one of the key paradigms through which the crisis of the missing women was rendered 'intelligible' for national audiences, as a formative and 'tone-setting' discourse. Through its clear delineation of a culpable party, the 'negligence narrative' began to offer a coherent way of understanding the absence of a comprehensive state response as the list of missing women continued to swell for more than two decades. In other words, it operated to define negligent policing as a key problem and thus provided a framework through which the tragedy might become understandable. In this sense, we might consider its early centrality as a process that shaped the contours of the debate, prescribing certain limits on how the crisis might be understood and who might be considered complicit in it.

A close analysis of the coverage offers compelling evidence to support this thesis. For example, it is in the 16 news stories, columns, and editorials which consider the effects of police negligence, that we find the vast majority of claims which implicate the state in the violence of the crisis. The most critical recurring voices – family members Rick Frey and Maggie DeVries and the prominent criminologist John Lowman, for example- are largely confined to these articles. Frey's interventions –when not limited to narrations of grief - are primarily condemnations of selective policing. In one statement he laments what he perceived to be an official spirit of dismissal: "I'm sure the thought was it's another druggie, who cares."[23] In another, he remarks "we felt ignored and brushed aside and we felt Marnie was being brushed aside because people just saw her as

[22] Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Robert, *Policing the Crisis*, 58-59.

[23] Daniel Girard, "Relatives of Missing Demand Inquiry," *Toronto Star*, 13 February 2002, A1.

a drug addict and a prostitute."[24] DeVries challenges this same culture of negligence. In one paradigmatic quotation, she asked of police performance: "if they're behaving like that with this case, then how is it with everything else? Everyone in Vancouver should be concerned about this."[25] Elsewhere she contends that if women from another part of Vancouver had gone missing with the same marked frequency, "there would be mayhem…there would be searches and media interest and rewards."[26] Lowman echoes these sentiments. In one article he argues: "clearly those responsible for the investigation did not show as much concern about the health and safety of the prostitutes that they should have."[27] And elsewhere: "the information out there gives the impression [the police] did not make this a priority the way it should have been."[28] What is particularly notable about these quotations and the 'negligence' narrative more generally, is that they tend to appear in relative isolation. That is, they articulate one very specific way that the state was complicit in the tragedy – police failure- but they do so in a way which occludes the role of other forms of state violence in reproducing marginality, namely the conditions produced by the law, receding systems of social solidarity, and the ongoing effects of racism and colonialism, which I discuss at length in the following chapter.[29] As

[24] Toronto Star, "Victim Impact Statements at Pickton's Sentencing," *Toronto Star*, 12 December, 2007, A27.

[25] Jane Armstrong, "Inquiry Into Handling of Disappearances Urged," *Globe and Mail*, 11 February, 2002.

[26] Globe and Mail, "Asking how 50 Women Could Just Disappear," *Globe and Mail*, 27 February, 2002, A16.

[27] Daniel Girard, "Relatives of Missing Demand Inquiry,"A1.

[28] Mark Hume and Ian Bailey, "Police Told About Farm Many Times," *National Post*, 9 February, 2002.

[29] Notably, however, both Maggie DeVries and John Lowman have been outspoken critics of these larger factors elsewhere. In *Missing Sarah*, a published memoir of her sister's life, in testimony before a House of Commons subcommittee, and elsewhere, DeVries has been critical of the state's role in endangering street-level sex workers. She has been a strident advocate of public policy changes that would allow street-involved women to gain control over their own bodies and the conditions of their own work. Lowman, moreover, has been one of the most prominent advocates of prostitution law reform, arguing throughout a sprawling body of

the only sustained criticism of the state in the coverage, these narratives operate to minimize other factors through a univocal stressing of this single causal condition.

In considering the implications of this one-dimensionality, it is worth returning to Hall's suggestion that primary interpretations often produce a framework which comes to 'command the field' of other narrations. An interpretation, that is, which sets an ideological limit. I want to suggest that the 'negligence' narrative constitutes such a framework and operates to limit the possibility of a broader analysis. By producing the sex worker as a subject fundamentally alienated from the protection of the police, these narratives lend themselves to a coherent, if facile, way of explaining how so many women could be taken without eliciting an aggressive response by the state. To the degree that the state can be held accountable, negligence is defined as *the* problem and the crisis takes on a degree of analytic closure. Importantly, the demands for redress and political change that are scattered throughout the coverage are primarily focused on police protection, demanding that people on the margins of society be equal recipients of its assurances. Moreover, calls for a public inquiry into the way the investigation was handled, tend to promote such a process as a way of understanding and ultimately rectifying the culture of dismissal that defined the police reaction. With the field of analysis so defined, solutions are largely restricted to strategies that would make law enforcement institutions more accountable by ensuring that they include the marginalized and the street-involved under the umbrella of their protection. Demands are primarily articulated as demands for 'recognition' of the unrecognized. The spirit of these claims is

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work that the state has been complicit in violence against sex workers in a number of important ways. Yet these more profound structural criticisms are all but absent from the coverage. Where they do appear, it is primarily through veiled or implied statements, with direct criticisms confined to a few marginal spaces within the coverage. Criticisms of the state are almost exclusively articulated as criticisms of police negligence.

powerfully evidenced by a post-conviction editorial that appeared in the *Toronto Star*. Here, the editors surmised that if "any good comes of the Pickton case, it is that mainstream society and its institutions will hopefully pay attention more quickly when people on the fringes come to harm."[30] Focused as it is on winning attention for those on the 'fringes,' such an analysis fails to interrogate the existence of the 'fringe' itself. The critique which limits itself to improving the experience of being marginalized, brackets the larger imperative of erasing marginality altogether. Thus one danger of the negligence paradigm is that it privileges questions of recognition even as it occludes questions of redistribution.[31]

The point here is not to deny the significance of police mismanagement. On the contrary, it is important to recognize the key role that this official disregard played in reproducing the conditions of endangerment in which the victims operated. Rather, I wish to underscore the limits of an analysis that explains this heinous set of crimes as a simple coupling of irresponsible policing with the psychopathic practices of a serial killer. While there is some acknowledgement of violence as an everyday reality for street level sex workers (discussed at length in chapter 4), taken in its totality the coverage tends to reproduce this facile binary.

I want to stress that the 'negligence' narrative itself is not reducible to one simple uninterrupted form. Within this narrative, there are divergent explanations of neglect. Some accounts privilege individual abdications of responsibility, signaling the personal failure of the "few unscrupulous men" who refused to take a growing crisis seriously, an

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[30] Toronto Star, "Measure of Relief in Pickton Verdict," *Toronto Star*, 10 December, 2007.

[31] Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age," *New Left Review* 212 (July-August, 1995), 70.

approach which isolates individual actors as culpable.[32] Other accounts privilege structural explanations, pointing to a lack of information sharing between police forces and other bureaucratic impediments as the barriers that stalled an adequate response.[33] What both kinds of explanations have in common is that they produce a 'problem' which is manageable. For example, whether the problem is the few 'bad apples' who shirked their responsibility or the series of inefficient or error-laden bureaucratic practices which endangered a certain population, relatively simple political reconfigurations might be employed as solutions. Answers exist within the established political order. Through this logic, an irresponsible mayor can be (and was) voted out of office, police leadership can be replaced, and policing practices can be refined and made more accountable. But as long as this critique remains contained within the spheres of individual responsibility or bureaucratic bungling, it poses little threat to the legitimacy of the prevailing political order.

Conclusions

The advent of the Pickton trial and the intense media interest that enveloped it created the potential for a thorough public consideration of the full dimensions of the crisis of the missing and murdered women. Such an analysis might have presented a compelling challenge to liberal pluralist assumptions about the universality of state protection. Yet despite the marked presence of narratives which identified specific forms

[32] Sherene Razack, *Dark Threats and White Knights : The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the new Imperialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 7.

In the introduction to *Dark Threats White Knights*, Razack interrogates the "official story" of Canadian violence in Somalia which installs the image of a "gentle, peacekeeping nation betrayed by a few unscrupulous men" as explanatory. Her interest in the ways that 'bad apple' narratives (which produce individual transgressors as aberrations in otherwise accountable institutions) work to camouflage the operation of hegemonic systems of subordination strikes an important note of harmony with this project.

[33] See for example: Matas, "B.C. Police Lashed Over Probe," A1.

of state negligence, the coverage examined operated to effectively 'manage' the state's culpability in the tragedy by privileging police negligence as definitive while omitting other forms of state complicity in their narrations. In the chapter that follows, I consider some of those forms of state complicity at length.

Chapter 3: Absolving the State

The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.[1]

- Anatole France, 1894

The coverage's core explanations of the crisis of missing and murdered women limit the ways in which the state might be considered complicit in the tragedy. As I argue in the previous chapter, narrations of state culpability are primarily limited to the 'negligence narrative' which privileges disinterested or unaccountable authorities as a key explanation. In this chapter, I dispute the sufficiency of such narrations by establishing three central ways that the state has operated to imperil marginalized women in British Columbia. I argue that sweeping retrenchments of state systems of social solidarity after 1983, amendments to the Criminal Code targeted at curbing street prostitution, and the persistent effects of state colonial policy are foundational to the distinct set of dangerous conditions in which most of the missing and murdered women lived and worked.

The analysis that follows has two objectives. The first is to establish specific ways that state policy has operated to imperil street-involved women. The second is to examine the degree to which those policies are examined by print narratives which have sought to explain the crisis to their readership. More precisely, I look at two forms of dispossession. The first is the direct dispossession of personal security that is created by state policies which marginalize and endanger. The second is the indirect dispossession which is made manifest through the creation of an "ideological absence which is then made material."[2] In other words, explanations of the crisis which omit or minimize state

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[1] Anatole France, *The Red Lily* (New York: the Modern Library, 1917).

[2] Adrienne Burk, "In Sight, Out of View: A Tale of Three Monuments," *Antipode* 38 (1), 2006, 50.

complicity have the ideological effect of 'dispossessing' the victims of the experience of that violence. The erasure of specific state culpabilities naturalizes their violence, an ideological process which works to legitimate their material perpetuation. As key agents in the construction of our knowledge about events and institutions that are central to establishing the "boundaries of public discourse", news discourses are particularly well placed to shape how the crisis is understood by broad audiences.[3] As such, they are also particularly well placed to "explain, rationalize and resolve [the] unsupportable contradictions and tensions" which are at the core of the state's role in the crisis.[4] In the analysis that follows, I attempt to unmask three of these contradictions and the ideological absences which camouflage them.

The violent rise of the neoliberal state

There is a considerable body of research that demonstrates that questions of class inequality are routinely omitted from news narratives in Canada.[5] To take one stark example, researchers examining the content of the *Vancouver Sun* in the 1990s found a persistent inattention to questions of poverty. They observed that references to issues of economic marginalization declined by nearly one third in a period where poverty in British Columbia actually increased by one fifth.[6] While the reasons for such omissions are complex and certainly connected to the de-contextualized nature of news itself, it is

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[3] Henry and Tator, *Discourses of Domination*, 235.

[4] Ibid, 226.

[5] See for example: Graham Knight, "Strike Talk: A Case Study of News," in *Critical Studies of Canadian Mass Media*, ed. Marc Grenier (Toronto: Butterworths, 1992); Donald Gutstein and Robert Hackett, *Question the Sun! A Content Analysis of Diversity in the Vancouver Sun Before and After the Hollinger Takeover* (Vancouver: Newswatch Canada, 1998); and Robert Hackett and Richard Gruneau, *the Missing News: Filters and Blind Spots in Canada's Press* (Ottawa: Garamond Press, 2000).

[6] Hackett and Gruneau, *the Missing News*, 199.

worth examining the consequences of their silence. To that end, I consider how press reports that focus on conditions in the Downtown Eastside do so in a way that disconnects them from broader shifts in state social policy and the particular political economies which define them. In this section, I argue that the social and material dangers of poverty in British Columbia –and especially the acute variants found in the Downtown Eastside- are inseparable from the sweeping political developments that have occurred in the province over the last three decades. The emergence of a new politics of the right and the retrenchment of established systems of social solidarity correspond closely with the period in which so many women were taken from the Downtown Eastside. While the relationship between these phenomena is not exclusively causal, explanations of the crisis of the missing and murdered women that occlude these political considerations risk camouflaging one of the ways that state practices were complicit in the tragedy.

State structures of social solidarity have been very publicly under siege in British Columbia since Premier Gordon Campbell was elected to the provincial legislature with a commanding majority mandate in 2001. Yet the rise of a new right politics – of which Campbell's Liberals are only the most recent and radical standard bearers- has its origins in a process of disintegration that began in earnest decades earlier. As many have observed, the gradual disillusionment of the 'post-war settlement' – a de-facto pact of non-aggression between capital, labour, and the state born of the economic turmoil of the 1930s and wrought in the political tumult of the 1940s- is intractably connected to changes in global markets that occurred in the 1970s. In Canada as elsewhere, the "settlement" had produced many of the social guarantees that would become synonymous

with what David Harvey has called the "embedded liberalism" of the Keynesian welfare state.[7] They were gains that many thought to be irreversible as the model of the large interventionist state proved remarkably proficient in the 1950s and 1960s.[8]

Yet by the end of the 1960s, the high rates of growth that had defined the economies of advanced capitalist countries had begun to be threatened by surging levels of unemployment and inflation.[9] Canada's competitiveness in global markets began to decline sharply as inflation eroded the desirability of Canadian products and unit labour costs continued to rise above those of its major trading partners. Resource-reliant economies like British Columbia's suffered more than others, as advanced capitalist countries began to rely increasingly on cheaper materials from elsewhere. As inflation and the national debt spiraled out of control in the mid 1970s, Pierre Trudeau's Liberal federal government sought relief through reductions in real wages, a move away from Keynesian principles, and a new emphasis on restraint.[10]

Crisis had afforded the opportunity for a dramatic new political realignment; as Bryan Palmer has observed, it was precisely the "mushrooming character of the budgetary deficits" that "provided the ideological and economic legitimation for the rise of the political right."[11] Considered in this way, we are reminded that the process of social disintegration that has its roots in the crises of the 1970s was not inevitable but the product of a series of calculated political decisions. As Hall observes of the rise of

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[7] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11.

[8] Bryan Palmer, *Solidarity: The Rise and Fall of an Opposition in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1986), 18.

[9] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 12.

[10] Palmer, *Solidarity*, 12.

[11] Ibid., 14.

Thatcherism in the United Kingdom –a realignment born of similar conditions- "political and ideological work is required to disarticulate old formations...the 'swing to the right' is not a reflection of the crisis: it is itself a *response* to the crisis."[12]

The realignments inaugurated in the 1970s and early 1980s paved the way for the ascendancy of a pervasive new politics of neoliberalism, albeit with varying levels of enthusiasm in different jurisdictions. With the deregulation and opening of global markets and the Keynesian model increasingly disparaged as obsolete, states began to adopt new strategies to best position their economies and societies to compete in the international marketplace. The raft of devotees to this philosophy that were elected in the early 1980s –notably in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada- championed the 'competition state' and sought to replace regulation with flexibility, protective tariff schemes with free trade, and state structures with private enterprise. Marked by a defined hostility towards the interventionism of the 'big state', these regimes of the new right imagined a world where the market was central and governments were relatively distant, acting merely as the providers of a basic social and political infrastructure while ensuring the reproduction of a stable environment for accumulation.[13] As Stephen McBride and Kathleen McNutt observe of neoliberalism, the state is decreasingly able to act as a "decomodifying hierarchy" with the capacity to take certain activities out of the market; by contrast, it acts increasingly as a "collective commodifying agent."[14] Welfarist policies of redistribution and universal assurance give way, in this ideology, to an emphasis on

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[12] Stuart Hall, "The Great Moving Right Show," in *The Politics of Thatcherism*, eds. Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (London: Marxism Today, 1983), 23.

[13] Stephen McBride and Kathleen McNutt, "Devolution and Neoliberalism in the Canadian Welfare State: Ideology, National and International Conditioning Frameworks, and Policy Change in British Columbia," *Global Social Policy* 7 (2), 2007, 183.

[14] Ibid., 183.

personal responsibility and flexibility through a "valorization of the 'rational economic actor and market relations'."[15] Thus for Janine Brodie: "at the heart of the new philosophy of public management is a tidal shift from communitarian collective values towards notions of family and individual responsibility."[16] While for Nancy Fraser, the individual -in the era of market flexibilization- becomes an "actively responsible agent" who, as a "subject of (market) choice and a consumer of services" is invested with the obligation to "enhance her quality of life through her own decisions"; she is rendered an "expert on herself, responsible for managing her own human capital to maximal effect."[17] The two-fold result of this shift, according to Marina Morrow, Olena Hankivsky and Colleen Varcoe, is an increased reliance on individual solutions to public problems and an "increasingly 'fiscalized' social policy where financial considerations trump all others."[18]

Since the early 1980s a procession of provincial governments in British Columbia have demonstrated – with varying degrees of zeal - an allegiance to the politics of neoliberalism. Their predecessors in the post-war period, a mix of conservative and social democratic regimes, had presided over an expansionist process of 'province building,' marked by the creation of a large provincial civil service, a Fordist project of accumulation grounded in mass production and mass consumption, major investments in

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[15] Janine Brodie, "The Politics of Social Policy in the Twenty-First Century," in *Citizens or Consumers? Social Policy in a Market Society*, ed. David Broad and Wayne Anthony (Halifax: Fernwood Press, 1999), 43.

[16] Ibid., 43.

[17] Fraser, "From Discipline to Flexibilization? Rereading Foucault in the Shadow of Globalization," *Constellations* 10 (2), 2003, 168.

[18] Marina Morrow, Olena Hankivsky, and Colleen Varcoe, "Women and Violence: The Effects of Dismantling the Welfare State," *Critical Social Policy* 24 (3) 2004, 360.

social infrastructure, and by 1975, a relatively progressive labour code.[19] But the crisis born of the recession of 1981-1982 acted as a key pretext for the "phased abandonment" of this model as the right-aligned Social Credit government of Bill Bennett was re-elected on a controversial platform of "restraint" in 1983.[20] In the ensuing years, the state embarked on a dramatic process of unraveling the social gains of the post-war period even as an unprecedented mass mobilization organized to confront them. The notorious 1983 budget prioritized 'balance' and fused with a bundle of connected legislation to take aim at the rights of organized labour and begin the process of hollowing out the state's social infrastructure.[21] In the confrontations that followed – most notably in the fall of 1983, when an opposition calling itself *Operation Solidarity* mobilized hundreds of thousands in an "epic battle" against the regime that would last 130 days- the state demonstrated its willingness to use coercion in the defense of its 'crisis-management' strategy.[22] By 1987, however, a series of compromises and public relations failures had effectively muted the popular opposition and the repressive state activism of 1983 began to give way to a "more expansive hegemonic project" constructed around a "right populist appeal" to consumerist notions of "public interest" and libertarian notions of democracy.[23]

Social Credit's revolution in the 1980s had so altered the terms of governance that by the time the centre-left New Democratic Party (NDP) was elected to govern in

[19] Palmer, *Solidarity,* 10-16.

[20] William Caroll and RS Ratner, "Social Democracy, Neo-Conservatism and Hegemonic Crisis in British Columbia," *Critical Sociology* 16 (1), 1989, 34.

[21] For a comprehensive account of the content of the 1983 budget and the related 26 pieces of legislation, see, Palmer, *Solidarity*, 19-24.

[22] Palmer, *Solidarity*, 9.

[23] Caroll and Ratner, "Social Democracy, Neo-Conservatism and Hegemonic Crisis in British Columbia," 34.

1991, a new set of structural limitations had been constructed, tightly prescribing social democratic ambitions within its boundaries. Thus while the party did accomplish some modest gains, its leadership found itself rigidly constricted on questions of capital accumulation in the increasingly globalized marketplace. As they governed through to 2001, pressures to pursue a policy of "fiscal discipline" pushed them to reproduce many of the strategies championed by their predecessors.[24] By 1993, for example, the party had abandoned its traditional solidarity with marginalized peoples and reinvigorated the campaign against social assistance recipients, unleashing a less dramatic but still robust set of welfare cuts by 1995. For Caroll and Ratner, the "brokerage pragmatism" of the NDP had proved an inherently flawed approach in the "political economy of ascendant neoliberalism" where the "stricture of not alienating the business community" had become a central concern.[25]

Yet what might have seemed a "discernable if reluctant" engagement with neoliberalism under the NDP gave way to an enthusiastic embrace of the ideology and a return to right militancy with the election of Gordon Campbell's Liberals in 2001.[26] As Social Credit had in the 1980s, the Liberals embarked on a decidedly radical program of reformation, a process which would include the single deepest cuts to social spending in Canadian history.[27] Following the introduction of a sweeping set of tax reductions- an initiative that created the largest deficit in the province's history- the Liberals sought to streamline the state by gutting some its core social functions. Few programs were

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[24] William Caroll and RS Ratner, "The NDP Regime in British Columbia: A Post-Mortem," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 42 (2), 2005, 183.

[25] Ibid., 189.

[26] McBride and McNutt, "Devolution and Neoliberalism in the Canadian Welfare State," 177.

[27] Morrow, Hankivsy, and Varcoe, "Women and Violence," 364.

immune to cutting but income assistance was among the most aggressively targeted. Welfare spending was slashed by 30 percent -$581 million over three years- while an unprecedented new set of restrictions were imposed on recipients, including changes to who was to be considered "employable" and time limits on eligibility.[28] The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives called it "a bad time to be poor" as some recipients had their already meager incomes reduced by as much as $395 per month.[29] McBride and McNutt observe that a series of "disquieting trends" followed these reductions, as thousands lost their eligibility. For example, food bank usage and homelessness surged. Meanwhile, a series of childcare programs were terminated, childcare subsidies were reduced, and the three government ministries responsible for children – including the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's services- suffered a cumulative budget reduction of $843 million from 2001-2004.[30] At the same time, employment equity programs were cancelled, medical premiums went up, access to legal aid services was reduced, and the universal prescription drug program was converted in to an income-based pharmacare plan.[31]

[28] Seth Klein and Andrea Smith, *Budget Savings on the Backs of the Poor: Who Paid the Price for Welfare Benefit Cuts in BC*, (Vancouver: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2006),1.

[29] Ibid., 1.

[30] McBride and McNutt, "Devolution and Neoliberalism in the Canadian Welfare State," 191

[31] Ibid., 191.

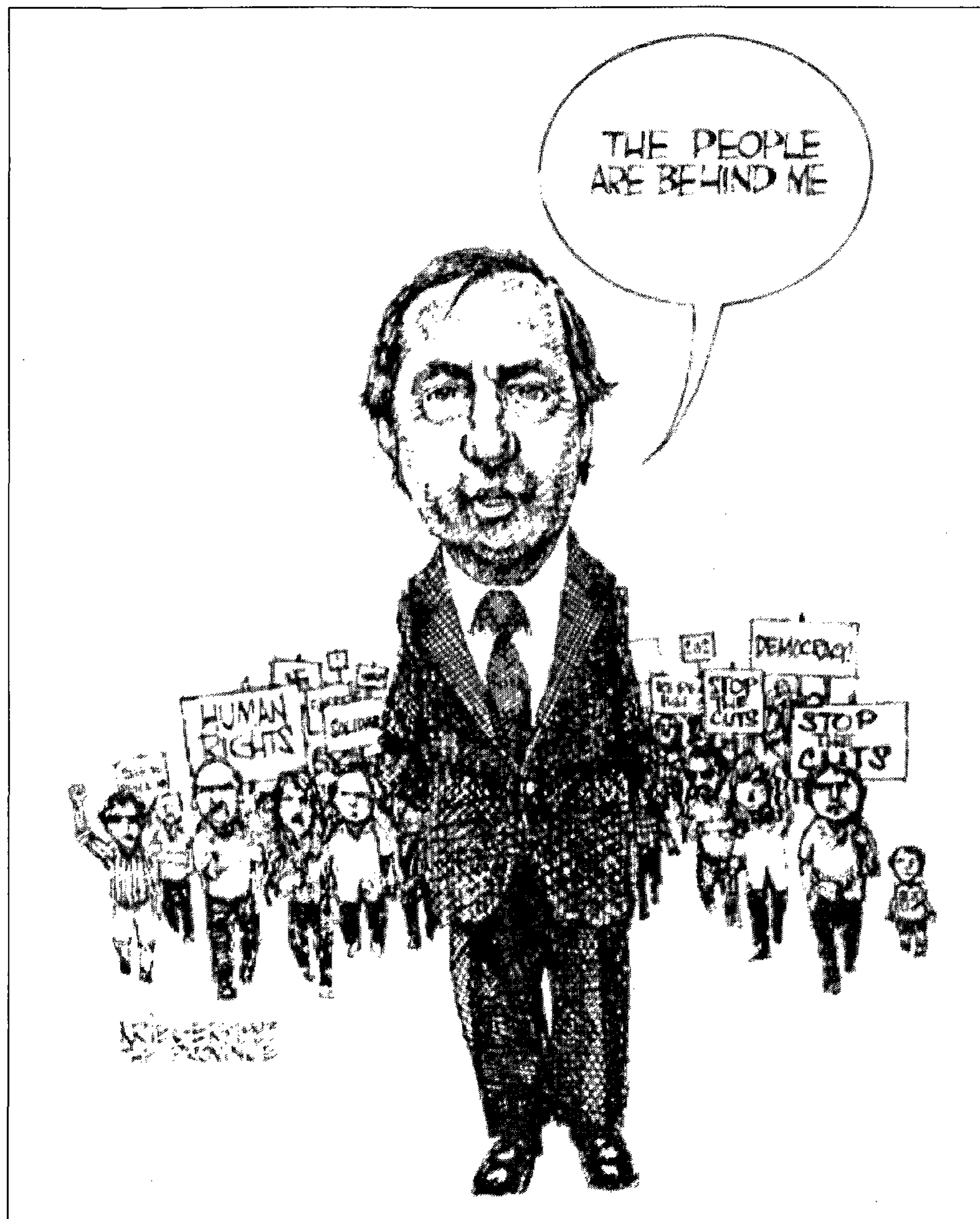

Figure 3.1 Premier Bill Bennett during the *Operation Solidarity* mobilizations of 1983 with the people "behind him."[32]

[32] This image originally appeared in Marjorie Nichols, *Bill Bennett: the End* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1986).

While the Liberal assault on social infrastructure is merely one aspect of what amounts to a comprehensive restructuring program, it is also an expression of a core neoliberal value. The move towards a skeletal state is fundamentally premised on a notion of "active citizenship" constructed in contrast to "dependency."[33] Central to this distinction is the view that well-being is an individual and not a social concern.

Within the ambit of Canadian federalism, however, sub-national governments like British Columbia's are not the sole arbiters of state policy; provincial decision making is always disciplined by developments at the federal level and increasingly by global structures and markets. Thus the rise of this particular variant of neoliberalism is irrevocably connected to broader national shifts. Accordingly, numerous commentators point to a series of decisive renegotiations of the federal-provincial relationship, and particularly a process of devolution inaugurated in the mid 1990s, as definitive in the rise of the new right. The federal Liberals came to power in 1993 calling for a militant crusade against the massive budgetary deficits that plagued their predecessors. Once elected, they demanded temporary austerity while they returned the country to fiscal order. With their 1995 budget, they slashed funding for health, education, and social welfare by 25% leaving provincial and municipal governments with the necessity of drastically altering service delivery.[34] And while the Chrétien Liberals did manage to eliminate the inherited deficit, there has been little restoration of social spending as servicing the national debt and tax 'relief' have become the favored expenditures for

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[33] Klein and Smith, *Budget Savings on the Backs of the Poor: Who Paid the Price for Welfare Benefit Cuts in BC,* 1-2.

[34] In addition, the 1995 federal budget reorganized transfer payments to the provinces, scrapping the established Canada Assistance Plan – which earmarked funds for specific social spending categories-replacing it with the Canada Health and Social Transfer which lumped transfers together allowing the provinces to determine specific allocation of funds, a process, which Brodie and others have observed, effectively eliminated the national state's capacity to ensure universal standards of social security.

large budgetary surpluses.[35] In fact, as Brodie has observed, the federal "government can claim a victory against the deficit largely because it shifted monies from insurance schemes...and shifted the financial burden of social policy to the provinces."[36]

What was rationalized as short-term austerity soon became the status-quo as the federal government adjusted to embrace the new ideological 'consensus' that championed market flexibility and a shrinking state as the cornerstones of economic prosperity. In the process of this reconfiguration the Canadian state has not only shifted its political *raison d'etre*, it has also hastened the neoliberalization of sub-national governments. For McBride and McNutt, the millennial radicalism of British Columbia's ruling Liberals is but a mimicking of a process that occurred federally in the 1990s. In their view, the province lies at the end of a chain of national and supra-national influences. Public consent for Gordon Campbell's reformist zeal is necessarily linked to the "ideological and policy environment apparent at the global and continental level...which facilitated Canada's adjustment to neoliberalism" in ways which allowed or encouraged sub-national governments to follow suit.[37]

The effects of neoliberal restructuring have been acutely felt by British Columbia's most impoverished, many of whom live and work in the Downtown Eastside. Economic marginalization has grown in British Columbia since 1983 and low-income people have become more susceptible to the series of physical and social dangers associated with limited economic power. Street-level sex workers who operate in the

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[35] Ellen Russell and Mathieu Dufour, *Alternative Federal Budget, Economic and Fiscal Update: Can Ottawa afford more Conservative government promises?* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2007).

[36] Brodie, "The Politics of Social Policy in the Twenty-First Century," 42.

[37] McBride and McNutt, "Devolution and Neoliberalism in the Canadian Welfare State," 194.

Downtown Eastside – a constituency of which nearly all of the missing and murdered women were part - are not merely affected by these trends, their ranks have likely been swollen by them. Research conducted by the Pivot Legal Society in 2004, concludes that many who work in the neighborhood's street-level sex industry do so to compensate for inadequate social assistance. Even those who are able to get beyond the stringent vetting process required to establish welfare eligibility, face assistance rates which have slipped significantly below Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off rates. Beneath those levels "people are forced to spend almost all their income on food, shelter [and] clothing."[38] Many are forced to look for additional sources of income elsewhere. The possibilities of finding licit work are severely truncated by further structural barriers (including basic difficulties like accessing consistent use of a phone, childcare, work clothes, and money to pay for public transportation).[39] The challenges of securing employment are significant for those with scant resources and many have turned to prostitution as a means of providing basic necessities for themselves and their families. Contrary to widely held popular and academic views that insist that those working in prostitution do so to support a drug addiction, Culhane observes that such assertions often invert the situation. She notes:

> ...poverty is identified as the *outcome* of drug addiction...poverty is rarely analyzed as a causal condition that gives illicit drug use and sex work their particular public character and devastating consequences in this place, at this time.[40]

Indeed, poverty itself creates precarious conditions for those who shoulder its burdens. Income level is well established as a primary determinant of physical well-being and

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[38] Pivot Legal Society, *Voices For Dignity: A Call to End the Harms Caused By Canada's Sex Trade Laws* (Vancouver: Pivot Legal Society, 2004), 13-14.

[39] Ibid., 13-14.

[40] Culhane, "Their Spirits Live Within Us," 596.

those without means experience worse health than other Canadians.[41] Parents living in poverty are more likely to lose custody of their children.[42] Those without means or access to systems of support are far less likely to find adequate housing. Not surprisingly, homelessness in Vancouver has increased by an estimated 131% since 2002.[43]

In fact, a wide diversity of research demonstrates that impoverished people have become increasingly vulnerable in the province since neoliberal policies began to aggressively reshape state structures in 1983. It is crucial to recognize the political dimension of these shifts; if we acknowledge that poverty exposes people to precarious conditions then we must acknowledge that state policies which leave poverty unchecked or increase its prevalence do themselves operate to endanger low-income people. If marginalization was the common denominator shared by the missing and murdered women and the restructurings I have described have served to marginalize, then there is reason to expect that the conditions of endangerment that presupposed the crisis continue to persist and have likely been amplified.

Considerations of poverty are not omitted in the coverage studied. With relative frequency, all three sources describe the missing and murdered as impoverished people who lived in an impoverished neighborhood. Yet more significant than the mere presence of such descriptions is the particular context of their utterance. The relentless branding of sex workers as members of a deviant addicted cast – a phenomenon which I consider in detail in the following chapter- overshadows broader considerations of the

[41] Pivot Legal Society, *Voices For Dignity*, 14.

[42] Ibid., 14

[43] Greater Vancouver Richmond District, *Metro Vancouver Homeless Count Figures* (Vancouver: GVRD, 2008).

state's role in reproducing marginality and economic insecurity. Even the most sympathetic accounts – the best of which challenge the stigmatization of sex workers and consider the role of public policy in the crisis directly- tend to re-centre the provocative coupling of 'drug addict' and 'prostitute' in their analyses. In one such account, the *Toronto Star*'s lead reporter argues that the characterization of sex workers as "dirty [and] debauched" is instrumental to their classification as a disposable population by authorities and the broader public. Yet as she bemoans this branding, the author herself re-centers deviant practices as the core explanation for the women's vulnerability even as she enumerates the multiple "societal ills" that are brought to bear upon street-involved women. She writes:

> The protracted mass murder of these women is not singularly about prostitution. There are plenty of societal ills that transected, creating a fetid environment for survival sex where women sell their bodies for a pittance, for drugs. Poverty, homelessness, addiction, abandonment, abuse and neglect.[44]

Thus even in this enumeration, which appears amidst a rare journalistic effort to restore dignity to this "invisible" legion of the "cavalierly dismissed", drug dependency is installed as the central factor in their imperilment, the prime motivation for "survival sex."[45] Indeed, themes of narcotic dependency stand as a powerful backdrop throughout the coverage, even tempering the few articles which attempt a broader analysis of how sex workers are rendered vulnerable. Of the 156 articles that I examined, only two attempted substantive considerations of the role of state social policy in endangering street level workers.[46] The most thorough of these appeared in the *Globe and Mail* under the secondary headline "Root causes remain the same." Author Mark Hume insists that

[44] Rosie DiManno, "Lurid Trial Reinforces a Stigma," *Toronto Star*, 27 January, 2007, A14.

[45] Ibid, A14.

[46] See for example: Mark Hume, "The Downtown Eastside: A Haunting Ground For Many, a Hunting Ground For One," *Globe and Mail*, 10 December, 2007, A1.

the crisis of the missing and murdered is about more than the particular atrocities of a serial killer. He invokes neighborhood activist Harsha Walia at length, allowing her quotations to link dramatic reductions in state social spending to spiraling levels of poverty, homelessness, child apprehension, and a generalized vulnerability in the neighborhood. Yet the article's condemnatory tone is tempered by its final paragraphs. Beneath a jarring photograph of a women staring out vacantly from her spot on a Downtown Eastside sidewalk, the article concludes:

> A few hours after the Pickton verdict came down yesterday, a young woman who wouldn't give her name, squatted on a sidewalk on East Hastings, near the intersection with Gore Avenue....
> The woman looked glassy-eyed and when she was asked what she thought of the verdict, she nodded her head loosely and answered: "crack?"
> For $20 dollars she would have gotten in a car and driven away with anyone.[47]

The provocative conclusion of Hume's article underscores the centrality of individual transgression in the explanations of the crisis that suffuse the coverage. Vulnerability is repeatedly conceived as the inevitable outcome of dangerous 'lifestyle' decisions, as the unfortunate but unavoidable corollary of the decision to become involved in the inner city's illicit underworld. Economic marginalization, in this schema, is produced as the effect and not the cause of participation in prostitution and illicit drug markets.

There are considerable consistencies between this privileging of individual 'lifestyle choices' and the ideological foundations of the politics of neoliberalism. Indeed, both hold the individual actor as fundamentally responsible for their own well-being while playing down – or disregarding altogether- the role of the state and its public policies in countering individual destitution. When poverty is individualized it is divested of connections to the larger political economy to which it corresponds. So

[47] Hume, "The Downtown Eastside: A Haunting Ground For Many, a Hunting Ground For One," A1.

understood, solutions to vulnerability become conceived as individual and not public solutions.

Yet beyond this privileging of individual responsibility, it is the cynical characterization of poverty and destitution as inevitable, which demonstrate the most pronounced congruence between the coverage studied and a neoliberal world view. Indeed, the repeated characterization of the Downtown Eastside as a drain on the public purse – described as a "poverty sinkhole" where predatory individuals develop "poverty empires" - coupled with the repeated assertion that "despite the best intentions of police and politicians over the years" the core problems have persisted, implies that public attempts to eliminate economic marginalization are likely to fail with a population more interested in scoring drugs than taking control of their own lives.[48] In fairness, significant state resources have been dedicated to eliminating some of the neighborhood's problems and a substantial number of social services and resources have been concentrated in the area for quite some time. Yet most have adopted short term harm reduction strategies aimed at curbing immediate vulnerabilities. And while such initiatives are important, they do little to counter the foundations of economic vulnerability. Through its fixation on violent exchanges between predatory individuals and 'drug addicted prostitutes', the coverage masks the predatory violence of the state itself whose adherence to the individualized politics of neoliberalism continues to erode the possibility of erecting structures which ensure basic standards of well-being.

[48] Rosie DiManno, "For Eastside Girls Nothing's Changed," *Toronto Star*, 22 January, 2007; Gary Mason, "Business as Usual in the Wretched District," *Globe and Mail*, 24 January, 2007.

Criminal law and the attack on street prostitution

The coverage also operates to obscure state culpability in the tragedy through a minimization of the effects of the criminal law on the working conditions of street level sex workers. While prostitution *per se* is not illegal in Canada, a series of Criminal Code provisions target it indirectly, rendering it effectively impossible to sell sex without transgressing the law. Sections 210-213 criminalize communication for the purposes of selling sex, living off the "avails" of a sex worker, the keeping of a "common bawdy house", transporting individuals for the purposes of purchasing or selling sex, and procuring the services of a sex worker.[49]

It is important to put the current law in some historical context. While prostitution itself has never been a crime in Canada, it has always been regulated indirectly. The current legal controls were raised from the ashes of the old vagrancy laws, repealed in 1972. Under this decidedly-gendered regime, any woman who could not account for her presence in the public space ran the risk of being prosecuted as a prostitute. Widely interpretable, the vagrancy provisions gave law enforcement almost infinite latitude in determining who might be considered in violation of the law. Yet as Deborah Brock has observed, cultural shifts which began to emerge in the post-war period initiated a process of sweeping political and social change and "the Canadian state was forced to take an increasingly active role to maintain its hegemony in the face of movements for social and sexual liberation."[50] Accordingly, the state initiated a major overhaul of the Criminal Code in the 1970s; new prostitution legislation was designed to

[49] Sections 210-213 of the Criminal Code are reproduced in their entirety in Appendix A.

[50] Deborah Brock, *Making Work, Making Trouble: Prostitution as a Social Problem*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 6.

curb the perceived public "nuisance" of prostitution, abandoning its previous focus on moral transgression. To this end, new legislation set its sights on the act of "solicitation" itself. While prostitution *per se* remained technically legal, the necessary step of negotiating a transaction was now forbidden by law. Courts began to struggle with the interpretation of what constituted "solicitation." Judges across the country had to decide whether a suggestive gesture could constitute a criminal violation.[51] In 1978, the Supreme Court offered some clarification. In *R vs. Hutt* they ruled that 'solicitation' must be both "pressing and persistent" and that a single gesture or proposition was no longer sufficient to merit prosecution. While the decision didn't strike the law down, it did make it harder to enforce.[52]

In the years that followed, as arrests under the "solicitation" provision dwindled and municipal attempts to control street prostitution were deemed *ultra vires* in several court decisions, the view that prostitution was becoming a widespread crisis. The media played an important role in the construction of this social problem. The *Toronto Star*, for example, ran a series of articles entitled the "prostitution crisis" in 1984, claiming that commercial sex was fast becoming an un-policed fixture of the urban landscape. [53] Yet as both Lowman and Brock have argued, the *Hutt* decision alone is insufficient to explain the spread of street prostitution after 1978. They observe that deepening economic recession, a contracting female labour pool, as well as police crackdowns on the indoor trade (which, in Vancouver, pre-date the Hutt decision), were all complicit in driving sex

[51] Ibid., 45-46.

[52] Ibid, 45.; Paul Fraser, *Report of the Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution,* Volume 2 (Ottawa: Ministry of Supplies and Services, 1985), 419-420.

[53] Brock, *Making Work, Making Trouble*, 52.

workers to the streets.[54] Nevertheless, the ruling was largely blamed for an increased presence of prostitutes on the streets and interest groups (primarily neighborhood groups) forced the state to take new action.

In 1983 the federal Ministry of Justice appointed a commission to study the state of prostitution. The Fraser Committee, as it came to be known, reported that sections 210-213 were often "contradictory and self defeating."[55] They called for an overhaul of the strategy, recommending that some of its restrictions be relaxed. In 1985, however, the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney took a different approach. They repealed the 'soliciting' law and replaced it with the more stringent 'communicating' law that banned all communication for the purpose of selling sex and expanded criminality to both sex worker and client.

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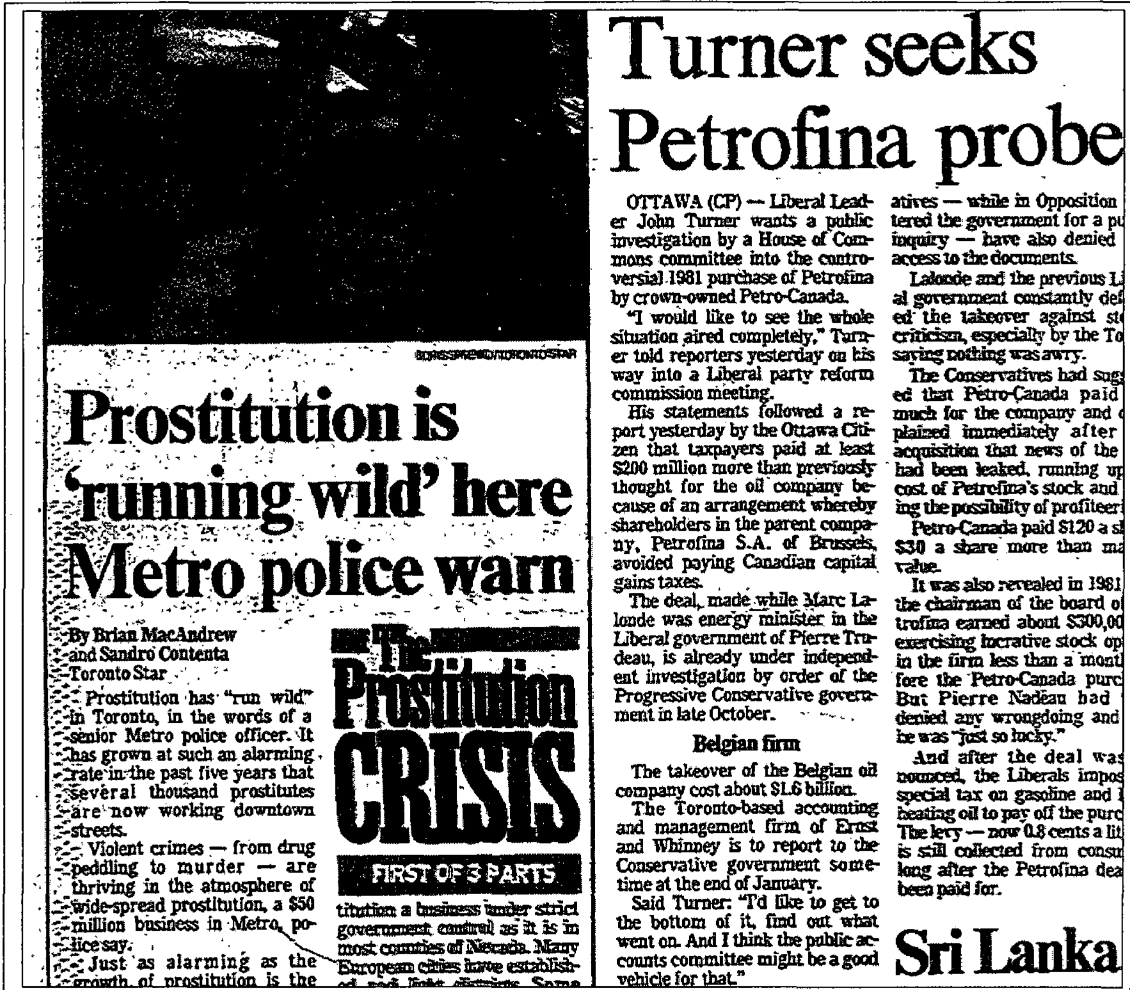
[54] Ibid., 56-57; John Lowman, "Violence and the Outlaw Status of (Street) Prostitution," *Violence Against Women 6* (9), 2000, 998-1001.

[55] John Lowman, "Reconvening the Federal Committee on Prostitution Law Reform," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 171(2), 2004, 147.



Prostitution is 'running wild' here Metro police warn

By Brian MacAndrew
and Sandro Contenta
Toronto Star

The Prostitution CRISIS
FIRST OF 3 PARTS

Prostitution has "run wild" in Toronto, in the words of a senior Metro police officer. It has grown at such an alarming rate in the past five years that several thousand prostitutes are now working downtown streets.

Violent crimes — from drug peddling to murder — are thriving in the atmosphere of wide-spread prostitution, a $50 million business in Metro, police say.

Just as alarming as the growth of prostitution is the

titution a business under strict government control as it is in most counties of Nevada. Many European cities have establish-

Turner seeks Petrofina probe

OTTAWA (CP) — Liberal Leader John Turner wants a public investigation by a House of Commons committee into the controversial 1981 purchase of Petrofina by crown-owned Petro-Canada.

"I would like to see the whole situation aired completely," Turner told reporters yesterday on his way into a Liberal party reform commission meeting.

His statements followed a report yesterday by the Ottawa Citizen that taxpayers paid at least $200 million more than previously thought for the oil company because of an arrangement whereby shareholders in the parent company, Petrofina S.A. of Brussels, avoided paying Canadian capital gains taxes.

The deal, made while Marc Lalonde was energy minister in the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau, is already under independent investigation by order of the Progressive Conservative government in late October.

Belgian firm

The takeover of the Belgian oil company cost about $1.6 billion.

The Toronto-based accounting and management firm of Ernst and Whinney is to report to the Conservative government sometime at the end of January.

Said Turner: "I'd like to get to the bottom of it, find out what went on. And I think the public accounts committee might be a good vehicle for that."

atives — while in Opposition tered the government for a pu inquiry — have also denied access to the documents.

Lalonde and the previous Li al government constantly def ed the takeover against st criticism, especially by the To saying nothing was awry.

The Conservatives had sug ed that Petro-Canada paid much for the company and c plained immediately after acquisition that news of the had been leaked, running up cost of Petrofina's stock and ing the possibility of profiteeri

Petro-Canada paid $120 a sh $30 a share more than ma value.

It was also revealed in 1981 the chairman of the board o trofina earned about $300,00 exercising lucrative stock op in the firm less than a mont fore the Petro-Canada purc But Pierre Nadeau had denied any wrongdoing and he was "just so lucky."

And after the deal was nounced, the Liberals impos special tax on gasoline and h heating oil to pay off the purc The levy — now 0.8 cents a lit is still collected from consu long after the Petrofina dea been paid for.

Sri Lanka

Figure 3.2: The *Toronto Star* announces that the sex industry has "run wild" in the city's urban core in part one of the three part "prostitution crisis" series published in December 1984.

The changes to the law introduced in 1985 have created a distinct set of dangers for sex workers, particularly at the street level. A wide diversity of research has demonstrated that the new regime and particularly the 'communicating' provision (s. 213) have hindered workers' abilities to take precautions on the stroll.[56] Researchers, advocates, and sex workers appearing before a parliamentary committee charged with reviewing the laws from 2004 to 2006, testified that the regulations create a situation where workers are forced to operate in poorly-lit isolated conditions at the margins of the urban space in order avoid the attention of police and residents likely to register complaints.[57] While soliciting clients in such locations did reduce the risk of arrest, it also amplified the likelihood of robbery, harassment, and predation.[58] Witnesses argued that this scattering of workers coupled with the frequent necessity of changing locations, minimized opportunities for sex workers to share information with each other, including reports of dangerous clients. Moreover, they reported that isolation and fear of arrest forces sex workers to make quick assessments of potential clients and that price and services are much harder to negotiate after getting in to a client's car. Katrina Pacey of the Downtown Eastside's Pivot Legal Society reported:

> Sex workers describe their fear of being caught by police while negotiating the terms of a transaction with a potential client. As a result, they feel rushed in these negotiations and

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[56] See for example: House of Commons Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws, *The Challenge of Change: A Study of Canada's Prostitution Laws* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2006); Pivot Legal Society, *Voices for Dignity*; Pivot Legal Society, *Beyond Decriminalization: Sex Work, Human Rights, and a New Framework for Law Reform* (Vancouver: Pivot Legal Society, 2006); Lowman, "Violence and the Outlaw Status of (Street) Prostitution."

[57] In 2003, the House of Commons adopted a motion to form a subcommittee mandated to review Canada's prostitution laws. From 2004-2006, the Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws (SSLR) conducted hearings across the country. They issued their final report – "the Challenge of Change: a Study of Canada's Criminal Prostitution Laws"- in December 2006.

[58] House of Commons Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws, *The Challenge of Change*, 62.

> are not able to take the time required to adequately assess a client and to follow their own instincts, or to maybe note if that client is on a bad date list.[59]

Yet Lowman argues that the laws have also had a cultural effect, operating to further erode the already diminished status of street-level workers, making them even more vulnerable to predation. He links the criminalization of prostitution and the stigma it reproduces to the high rates of homicide committed against street-level sex workers.[60] He links the criminalization of prostitution and the stigma it reproduces to the high rates of homicide committed against street-level sex workers. In testimony before the committee he argued that the communicating law has "played a pivotal role in creating a social and legal milieu that has facilitated these homicides" adding that the law itself tends to make women working in the bottom levels of the trade more vulnerable.[61]

Indeed, contemporary laws have disproportionately affected sex workers operating at the street level in their application. While the street-trade accounts for a relatively small part of the overall industry in Canada –estimates range from five to twenty percent – police enforcement efforts have been overwhelmingly directed at this sector.[62] Justice statistics demonstrate that since being enacted into law, the 'communication' provision has accounted for more than ninety-percent of prostitution related offences reported by police.[63] The most recent official survey of Canadian crime statistics confirms the persistence of this pattern. As figure 3.3 demonstrates, in 2003 s.

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[59] Ibid., 65.

[60] Lowman, "Violence and the Outlaw Status of (Street) Prostitution," 1007.

[61] House of Commons Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws, *The Challenge of Change*, 62

[62] House of Commons Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws, *Edited Evidence: 30 May 2005* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2005); House of Commons Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws, *The Challenge of Change,* 64.

[63] House of Commons Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws, *Edited Evidence: 16 May, 2005* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2005).

213 accounted for roughly ninety-six percent of prostitution offences reported by police forces across British Columbia.

Figure 3.3 Prostitution-related incidents reported by police, British Columbia (2003)

Offence	Reported Incidents (2003)	Charges (male)	Charges (female)
Bawdy house (s.210)	15	1	2
Procuring (s.211, 212)	62	15	4
Communication (s. 213)	1822	149	190
Total	1899	165	196

Source: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (2003)

These figures reveal the profound unevenness of enforcement practices. Focused as it is on the 'public' nature of the offence, s.213 targets street-level workers almost exclusively, while the other provisions are more commonly used in policing the indoor trade. The marked disparity in application demonstrates that while law enforcement is a constant menace for workers on the strolls, indoor workers are far less likely to be charged. In terms of punishment, comparative studies have also demonstrated that women are affected far more negatively by the enforcement of s.213, a provision which applies to both the client and the seller of sex. While men and women are charged under s.213 with roughly equivalent frequency, women are far more likely to be convicted, incarcerated, and sentenced to the maximum penalty. As figure 3.4 demonstrates, women were found guilty of 'communication' at a rate of 68% while men were convicted at a rate of 29%; women were sentenced to incarceration in 38% of convictions compared to an incarceration rate of 6% for men; by contrast, convicted men were spared incarceration and ordered to pay fines in 38% of cases compared to a rate of 15% for convicted women.[64]

[64] House of Commons Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws, *Edited Evidence: 16 May, 2005*

Figure 3.4 Conviction and incarceration rates for prostitution offences (2003/2004) - Canada

Sex of accused /offence	Conviction rate	Incarceration rate	Decisions resulting in fines as maximum penalty
Male /s.213	29%	6%	38%
Male/s.210-213	31%	-	-
Female/s.213	68%	38%	15%
Female/ s.210-213	59%	-	-

Source: Jones (2005); Kong and Aucoin (2008)

Undoubtedly, the broad category 'street prostitution' encompasses a wide diversity of experience but it is also the sector in which many of the most impoverished and vulnerable sex workers operate. Moreover, as the case of the missing and murdered women demonstrates with particular pronouncement, it is here that intersecting systems of subordination – including racism, patriarchy, and capitalism- interlock most aggressively with law enforcement. As Lowman put it to a parliamentary subcommittee:

> There are all sorts of issues intersecting here – race, class, gender. We don't talk nearly enough about the class issues that are involved here. It's always the lower-class women in prostitution who receive the brunt of law enforcement efforts.[65]

To borrow a phrase from Lisa Sanchez, prostitution law has been far from an "equal opportunity subordinator" in its application.[66]

Acknowledgement of the imperiling effects of the contemporary legal regime is indispensable to any thorough consideration of the epidemic levels of violence committed against street-involved women in this country. In the coverage studied, however, discussion of the law is decidedly peripheral. As figure 3.5 demonstrates, only 8 of 157 make reference to these sanctions. Of these, 6 might be considered 'critical' in that they question the merit of criminalization or call for some kind of legal reform. Additionally, 3 of these identify at least one way that the law has endangered prostitutes, but only 1

[65] House of Commons Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws, *Edited Evidence: 30 May, 2005*

[66] Lisa Sanchez, "The Global E-rotic, the Ban, and the Prostitute-Free Zone: Sex Work and the Theory of Differential Exclusion," in *Environment and Planning* 22 (2004), 879.

considers a particular provision directly. Yet it is not merely the small number of references which is significant here, it is also their location within the coverage. As figure 3.6 demonstrates, only 1 critical reference appears in a news story while 4 critical references appear in editorials. Only 1 case-related column made reference to the role of the law while not a single non-editorial headline alluded to it. Thus the editorial page marks the single site where this theme was considered with any kind of repetition.[67] And while the editorials themselves are important, in one case providing a thoroughly incisive account of the imperiling effects of the 'communicating' provision, the effectiveness of their critique must be considered within the context of the larger group of narratives.[68] When the infrequency of this critique is weighed against the arresting sensationalism of the narratives of drug addiction, serial murder and police negligence that saturate the other pages -repeatedly enunciated by dramatic photographs and headlines- its relative impotence is brought in to sharp relief.

Figure 3.5 References to the criminal prohibition of prostitution in three coverage periods

Coverage period	Toronto Star	Globe and Mail	National Post
8-27 February, 2002	1	1	0
20-27 January, 2007	1	1	1
1-12 December, 2007	1	1	1
Total	3	3	2

[67] This trend seems to follow a certain journalistic logic; news stories are intended to provide concise accounts of new developments while editorials are intended to offer opinions and interpretations. In this sense, it seems only fitting that a critical analysis of the law would be confined to the editorial page. Yet such a narrow view- which obscures that news accounts are themselves interpretations, the end products of a process of 'sorting and selecting'- is insufficient to explain the absence of the law in the coverage. The sheer magnitude of coverage – in some cases accounting for more than ten items in a single newspaper edition- meant that news stories provided far more than accounts of daily developments.

[68] Globe and Mail Editorial Board, "A Law That Aids Predators," *Globe and Mail*, 11 Dec 2007.

Figure 3.6 Location of references to criminal prohibitions of prostitution in three coverage periods

Source	News Stories	Editorials	Columns
Toronto Star	1	1	1
Globe and Mail	1	2	0
National Post	0	2	0
Total References	2	5	1
Total Critical References	1	5	0

In spite of the relatively small number of critiques of the law that appear in the coverage, the three sources demonstrate a far greater willingness to implicate the state in this regard then they do on questions of economic distribution. While the poignancy of these criticisms is certainly minimized by more provocative narratives, it is important to acknowledge that each of the sources do level at least one robust interrogation of the desirability of criminalizing prostitution. Yet in spite of their condemnatory language (in some cases spiked by a hint of righteous indignation), none of the authors acknowledge the law's most disturbing dimension: the radical unevenness of its intent and application.

Though not entirely homogenous, a prevailing logic unifies the six articles which are critical of the law. In general terms, the authors argue that the law itself has failed in its objective of eradicating street prostitution and has had the undesirable effect of making sex work more dangerous. Several call for reform or abolishment of the provisions and some offer theories about why such changes have not yet been effected. In terms of the latter, the most common hypothesis is that a prevailing cultural prudishness or conservatism stands in the way of the decision to liberalize or even legalize prostitution. For example, the *Toronto Star*'s Rosie DiManno argues that there is "still too much residual Puritanism and paternalism for prostitution to be accepted as a

legitimate service profession."[69] An editorial also published by the *Toronto Star* proposes similar barriers to reform; it suggests that "the notion of prostitutes working in a safe area or legal brothel offends us, while we accept the fact they work daily in desperate and deadly situations."[70] The *Globe and Mail* is more precise in its assessment of why the laws remain on the books. In an editorial which provides the most robust critique of the regulations, they argue that the ruling Conservative party's position that legalization would bring too great a "social cost" has stalled the drive for law reform.[71] The *National Post*, for its part, criticizes the laws but remains agnostic on questions of why they persist.

While these hypotheses are compelling, each provides a characterization of the 'problem' which obscures a more fundamental question. By privileging a lingering moralism as the primary barrier to reform, the critical articles operate to reproduce the notion that the violence of the law is born of a prevailing desire to regulate the moral conduct of individuals.

Moral condemnation is undoubtedly one dimension of the contemporary regime – a theme I take up more generally in the chapter that follows - but it is decidedly secondary to the law's central preoccupation of spatial control. The most notable achievement of the communication provision (s.213) has not been to eliminate street prostitution but to remove it from certain spaces while containing it in others. Indeed, the long history of stroll evictions and sex worker displacements in Vancouver tells us more about the political expediency of protecting certain spaces from 'undesirable' populations

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[69] DiManno, "Lurid Trial Reinforces a Stigma."

[70] Toronto Star, "Silent Accomplice in Pickton Case."

[71] Globe and Mail, "A Law That Aids Predators."

than it does about a perceived desire to curb certain moral transgressions. The conviction statistics listed above (figure 3.4) demonstrate that in practice, policing has been primarily interested in curbing the visibility of prostitution. Accordingly, street prostitutes -in Vancouver, the most racialized and economically marginalized sector of the industry- not only bear the brunt of police repression they are also pushed out of safer spaces and in to the isolation of the urban margins. Under the guise of protecting public spaces from dangerous activities, vulnerable individuals are rendered even more vulnerable. As Razack has argued, the representation of public space as "a unity that must be protected from conflict," presents us with "a compelling example of how we might consider space as a social product by attending to the social hierarchies" that it reveals.[72] Prostitution laws which target public 'communication' enshrine sex workers as illegitimate users of the public space while the comparatively 'peaceful' behavior of others enshrines them as the "legitimate users and natural owners of the public space."[73] I argue that it is primarily prostitution law's ability to 'protect' certain public spaces which accounts for its persistence. As such, analyses of the political challenge of making sex workers less vulnerable which privilege a lingering moralism as a core explanation for the 'impasse' offer a limited understanding of the violence of the state's regulation of prostitution.

Colonialism and its discontents

The state's complicity was also minimized through the erasure of connections between state violence and the dramatic overrepresentation of aboriginal people in the

[72] Sherene Razack, *Race, Space and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002), 9.

[73] Ibid, 4.

grim roster of missing and murdered women. According to an *Amnesty International* report, aboriginal women accounted for roughly one third of the sixty women whose disappearances from the Downtown Eastside were being investigated by police in 2004.[74] Indeed, many of the women whose remains were uncovered on the notorious Port Coquitlam farm were aboriginal, including four of the six people that Pickton would eventually be convicted of murdering. Consistently, significant research has demonstrated that aboriginal women are decidedly overrepresented in the Downtown Eastside's sex trade, including two studies that suggest they account for more than half of all workers.[75] Additionally, a study conducted in 2000 for the province's now-eliminated Ministry of Women's Equality argued that aboriginal women under 26 accounted for roughly seventy percent of people working in the neighborhood's lowest paying prostitution sectors.[76] Yet the full significance of these figures does not become clear until Downtown Eastside's aboriginal population is weighed against that of the city as a whole. According to the most recent Canadian population census, less than two percent of the population of Vancouver self-identified as aboriginal.[77] The arresting disparity between the relatively small percentage of the population that identified as aboriginal and the extraordinarily high percentage of aboriginal women counted among the missing and

[74] Amnesty International, *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*, (Toronto: Amnesty International, 2004), 50.

The report noted that aboriginal people account for 19 of 61 (nearly 31.1 %) disappeared persons (60 women and one transgendered person).

[75] Melissa Farly, Jacqueline Lynne and Ann Cotton, "Prostitution in Vancouver: Violence and the Colonization of First Nations Women," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 42 (no. 2, 2005); see also Sue Currie, *Assessing the violence against street involved women in the Downtown Eastside/Strathcona: A needs Assessment*, (Vancouver: Ministry of Women's Equality, Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society, 1995).

[76] Culhane, "Their Spirits Live Within Us," 597.

[77] This figure is based on Statistics Canada's 2006 Census of the Canadian population which recorded a total population of 571,600 in the city of Vancouver Census proper (as opposed to the larger metropolitan area). Within this population, 11,145 people identified as "aboriginal."

murdered demands a thorough interrogation. Yet in the comprehensive coverage on which this study is based, such an interrogation is conspicuously absent. As figure 3.7 demonstrates, only 13 of the 156 articles examined make any acknowledgement of the crisis' striking aboriginal dimension. Moreover, as figure 3.8 demonstrates, only seven of those references directly acknowledge the aboriginal heritage of specific victims. Significantly, none of the articles invoke the abundant body of research that clearly demonstrates the disproportionate "burden of social suffering carried by aboriginal people in this neighborhood."[78]

3.7 General references to aboriginality in three coverage periods

Coverage period	Toronto Star	Globe and Mail	National Post
8-27 February, 2002	2	2	0
20-27 January, 2007	1	1	1
1-12 December, 2007	1	3	2
Total (13)	4	6	3

3.8 Specific references to the aboriginal heritage of victims in three coverage periods

Coverage period	Toronto Star	Globe and Mail	National Post
8-27 February, 2002	2	1	0
20-27 January, 2007	1	1	0
1-12 December, 2007	0	1	1
Total (7)	3	3	1

Taken together, the small group of references fit in to two general categories. References in the first grouping are inferential. They acknowledge aboriginality indirectly, either by alluding to particular cultural signifiers or by offering clues in biographical portraits of the victims. For example, one article notes that a group of mourners wore "medicine bags…carrying spiritual items" and another reports that a

[78] Culhane, "Their Spirits Live Within Us," 595.

victim's mother found comfort in a "smudge ceremony" while another still cites a particular First Nation as the birthplace of one of the victims.[79] References in the second grouping are less suggestive; they note the aboriginal heritage of some of the victims more directly. These references tended to appear in either short victim biographies or as isolated components of larger statements about the crisis. One such reference, which appeared in a *Globe and Mail* editorial, is typical of the latter phenomena; it reads:

> The women who vanished were for the most part prostitutes and drug addicts. Many were aboriginal. Some were mentally ill. They were part of a much-abused underclass in a derelict part of town, and the main assumption of the police, even as more women disappeared, was that they had left town.[80]

This and similar claims do acknowledge that "many" of the victims were of aboriginal descent, but they offer no further consideration of what such a statement might imply or why such overrepresentation might be significant. Indeed, not a single article attempts to place aboriginal overrepresentation in a larger historical context. This alarming set of omissions amounts to nothing short of an erasure of the devastating effects that historical and contemporary state policy has had on aboriginal peoples and communities in British Columbia. Of course, significant media research reminds us that the mainstream press is not in the business of providing historical context. As 'event-driven' institutions, newspapers tend to focus on the immediate details of a given conflict. Time and spatial limitations demand that stories be lean and precise. Yet for the purposes of the present study, such arguments are decidedly limited. Far from offering a simple matter-of-fact account of event-based developments, the coverage examined is saturated with background articles, speculative columns, and other submissions that go far beyond the

[79] See for example: Petti Fong. "It Means a lot...We Can Move On, " *Toronto Star*, 10 December, 2007; Rob Mickleburgh, "Guilty Verdicts Make for a Bittersweet Day," *Globe and Mail*, 10 December, 2007, A16.

[80] Globe and Mail, "Asking How Fifty Could Just Disappear," A16.

conventional limitations of 'just-the-facts' reportage. Narratives about the missing and murdered women which sanitize the story of its aboriginal dimension, work to simplify and depoliticize the complexities of the case by limiting culpability to a violent criminal, a negligent police force, and the self-selected dangers of a street-involved 'lifestyle.' In effect, such narrations operate to extricate the state from an ever-shrinking list of responsible parties by telling a story from which it is excluded.

The arrival of European settlers in British Columbia brought fundamental and irreversible change to the aboriginal communities which had occupied those territories for countless generations. Yet as Jean Barman insists, it is important to dispense with a vision of pre-contact aboriginal life that imagines original inhabitants as existing in some sort of static and idyllic state; on the contrary, adaptation to new circumstances was already deeply woven in to aboriginal histories. What altered fundamentally with European contact, however, was the velocity of those developments.[81] In considering the historical relationship between settlers and indigenous peoples in British Columbia, it is crucial to acknowledge a certain degree of cooperation; European trappers, to take one example, relied heavily on indigenous knowledge and technology to conduct their trade.[82] Nevertheless, the colonial imposition of a new social and economic order coupled with a prevailing spirit of disregard for aboriginal peoples did, in turn, produce a devastating set of social and political consequences for the colonized.[83] The history of European settlement in what is now British Columbia is wrought with dislocations, dispossessions, erasures, and a literal decimation of populations. Moreover, from contact to the present

[81] Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: a history of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 151.

[82] Ibid., 152.

[83] Ibid., 152.

day, aboriginal peoples have been subjected to a pernicious racism that imagined them as outside of the dialectic of modern 'progress.' As Elizabeth Furniss puts it:

> Native peoples have been perceived not as existing in complex societies, having their own systems of government, their own social and political institutions, and their own highly-developed technologies, but as a child-like, savage race, having only a rudimentary degree of social organization, living a precarious, hand-to-mouth existence, and adhering to superstitious, pagan beliefs.[84]

It was this attitude and the attendant sense of settler entitlement to the land that flowed from it, that was at the core of what recent scholarship has described as the construction of British Columbia as an inherently white settler society. As Renisa Mawani explains, the process of British settlement in the province was not simply about the establishment of a settler colony but rather an attempt to construct a decidedly *white* settler society which was necessarily built on the "attempted genocide and conquest of Aboriginal peoples as well as the importation and exploitation of cheap racialized labor."[85]

Whether we accept the thematic of the 'white settler society' or not, the historical record of state participation in specific dislocations and dispossessions of Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia is undeniable. As Barman demonstrates, multiple levels of government were party –albeit with different levels of participation- in the dubious transactions that drove Aboriginal people out of established communities in Vancouver, particularly in False Creek and the Burrard Inlet peninsula which is now the site of Stanley Park.[86] Yet as in other Canadian jurisdictions, the dispossession of aboriginal peoples extends far beyond the legal and extra-legal expropriation of lands. For example, the Canadian state's unilateral capacity to define who counts as a 'status Indian' has held

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[84] Elizabeth Furniss, *Victims of Benevolence: The Dark Legacy of the Williams Lake Residential School* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1995), 15.

[85] Renisa Mawani, *The 'Savage Indian' and the 'Foreign Plague': Mapping Racial Categories and Legal Geographies of Race in British Columbia, 1971-1925* (Ph. D diss., University of Toronto, Toronto, 2001), 40.

[86] Jean Barman, "Erasing Indigenous Indigineity in Vancouver," *BC Studies* 155 (Autumn, 2007), 3-30.

sweeping implications in determining who is entitled to inhabit reserve lands, access specific benefits established by the Indian Act, as a host of other entitlements. As Jo-Anne Fiske observes, aboriginal women have been particularly vulnerable to the state's power to define "status"; she notes that prior to the 1985 amendments to the Indian Act, a woman who married a non-aboriginal would both forfeit her own status as well as the future status of her children. After the enactment of pernicious new legislation in 1951, in fact, a woman losing her status through marriage also lost membership in her local band and her right to reside on reserve lands.[87]

Yet perhaps the most damaging of the expansive list of state policies that exacted their violence on aboriginal peoples was the establishment of a network of residential and industrial schools beginning in 1879. The schools, which took aboriginal children away from their homes on reserve lands and transported them to a network of campuses across the province, were charged with the ominous directive of killing "the Indian" in order to "save the child."[88] The schools were largely administered by church bureaucracies but as John Milloy observes:

> ...behind every school principal, matron, teacher and staff member who worked in the school system, and behind each participating denomination, stood the Canadian government and the Department of Indian Affairs, which was symbolic of Canada's self-imposed "responsibility" for Aboriginal people set out in section 91:24 of the British North America Act.[89]

Yet it was not simply the racist premise on which the schools were established nor was it simply the trauma of removing children from their communities that have made the legacy of residential schools so devastating. It was also the patterns of colossal neglect,

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[87] Jo-Anne Fiske, Political Status of Native Indian Women: Contradictory Implications of Canadian State Policy," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 19 (no. 2, 1995), 6.

[88] John Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879-1986* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999), xv.

[89] Ibid., xii.

chronic under-funding, and a widespread tradition of violence and abuse that have secured the system's place as one of the most horrific episodes in the history of the Canadian colonial project.[90] As the Leadership Council of the British Columbia Assembly of First Nations observed, the system, which wasn't entirely abandoned until 1986, has been unparalleled in its impact on aboriginal communities and peoples. They note that it has produced "...a lack of parental role-modeling, breakdown of family cohesion, lack of ability to foster interpersonal relationships, feelings of inferiority, loss of cultural identity and discontinuation of family traditions" in many of the communities that it affected.[91] Indeed, as Milloy has observed:

> ...it is clear that the schools have been, arguably, the most damaging of the many elements of Canada's colonization of this land's original peoples and, as their consequences still affect the lives of Aboriginal people today, they remain so.[92]

Ward Churchill takes Milloy's damning assessment even further, arguing that the residential school system and its impacts constitute an act of genocide in accordance with international law. He notes that the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide lists "forcibly transferring children" from one group to another as one of its core definitions of the crime. Significantly, the Canadian parliament omitted this definition when ratifying the convention domestically.[93]

In considering the impacts of these legacies of state violence, it is important to acknowledge the striking overrepresentation of aboriginal peoples in nearly every measured indicator of social and physical suffering in this country. Such figures are

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[90] Ibid., xiv.

[91] First Nations Leadership Council of British Columbia, *Long-term Impacts of Canada's Residential Indian School System* (Vancouver: First Nations Leadership Council of British Columbia, 2008), p.1-2

[92] Milloy, xv.

[93] Churchill, Ward. "Healing Begins When the Wounding Stops: Indian Residential Schools and the Prospects for "Truth and Reconciliation" in Canada." *Briarpatch* (June/July), 2008.

particularly striking in the Downtown Eastside. Research conducted by regional health authorities at the height of the crisis of missing and murdered women in 1999, gives some indication of the depth of the social, physical, and economic challenges that aboriginal people continue to confront in Vancouver's inner city. In that survey, the Vancouver Richmond Health Board reported that aboriginal families are frequently exposed to a "wide prevalence" of risk factors, including inadequate or unsafe housing, widespread unemployment or underemployment, domestic violence and social isolation. They note that 80% of aboriginal children live in poverty and that more than half of aboriginal families in the region are headed by a lone female parent. Moreover, about half of Vancouver's "children-in-care" (a term that generally refers to children who have been removed from their homes by provincial authorities) are of aboriginal descent. Infant mortality rates were recorded at levels roughly twice as high as those of the total population while aboriginal adults were eight times more likely to die from alcohol and narcotics. In fact, their research suggests that this cohort has a life expectancy roughly 16 years lower than that of its non-aboriginal counterparts. High levels of HIV infection in Vancouver's inner-city, moreover, have had particularly devastating consequences for aboriginal women who are reported to be more than three times as likely to die from the disease. [94] In spite of efforts to improve the situation –including the reassertion of control over health and social services by aboriginal people through the establishment of Urban Aboriginal Health Centres- many of these indicators of marginalization have persisted.[95] A wide diversity of recent research demonstrates that inadequate housing,

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[94] Vancouver/Richmond Health Board, *Healing Ways: Aboriginal Health and Service Review* (Vancouver: VRHB, 1999), iii-vii.

[95] Cecilia Benoit, Dana Caroll and Munaza Chaudry, "In search of a healing place: aboriginal women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside," *Social Science and Medicine* 56 (2003), 822.

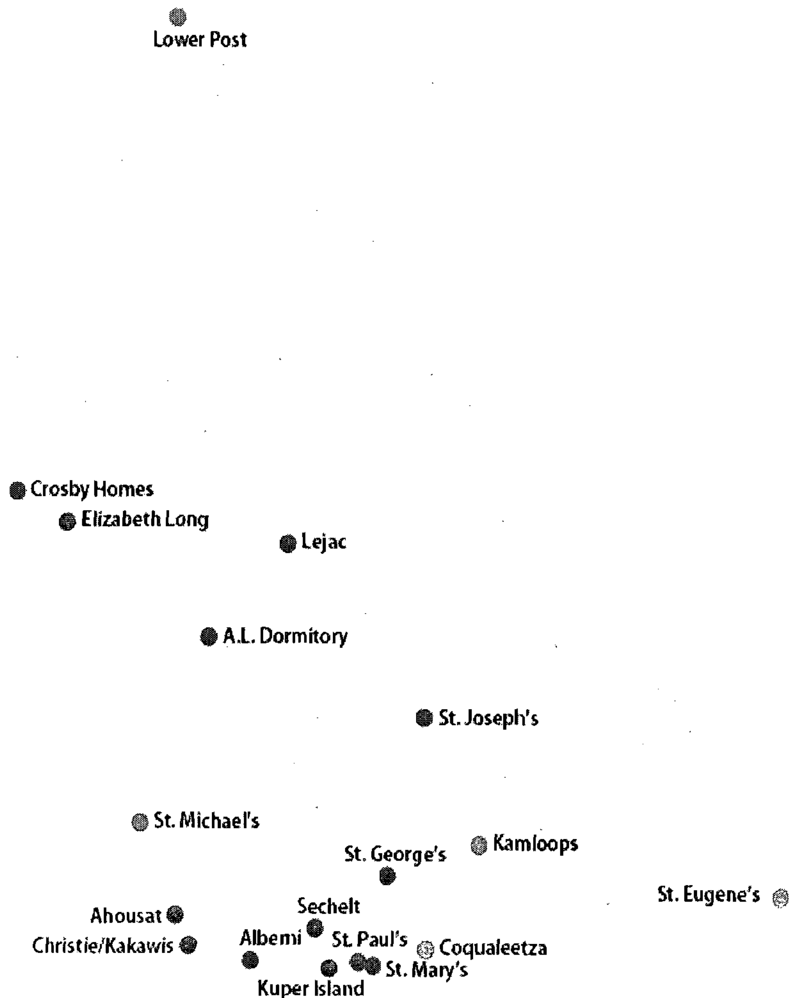
exposure to HIV and other communicable diseases, unemployment, addiction, familial abuse, exposure to violence and racism, and a significant list of other vulnerabilities, continue to affect aboriginal people more acutely than others in the neighborhood.

While it would be too simple to posit an exclusively causal relationship between these indicators and the legacies of state violence outlined briefly above, any assessment which omits this dark history defies a growing body of research which notes that the ongoing traumas of colonization continue to have significant affects on indigenous peoples and communities. In their consideration of the marginalization of aboriginal sex workers in Vancouver, Melissa Farley, Jacqueline Lynne and Ann Cotton argue that "colonization and racism result in extensive and insidious trauma that wears away at its victims' mental and physical health", frequently resulting in symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder.[96] Moreover, as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) identified more than ten years ago, the high incidences of violence recorded in aboriginal communities are inseparable from the history of colonization in Canada. According to evidence presented at the Commission's hearings, factors contributing to patterns of violence include "the breakdown of healthy family life resulting from residential school upbringing, racism against aboriginal peoples, [and] the impact of colonialism on traditional values and culture."[97] These patterns of violence have been decidedly gendered in their affects. Statistics Canada reports that aboriginal women are significantly more affected – both than aboriginal men and non-aboriginal women- by physical and psychological spousal abuse and spousal homicide as well as non-spousal

[96] Farley, Lynne and Cotton, "Prostitution in Vancouver," 245.

[97] Stastics Canada, *Violence Against Aboriginal Women*, 2006, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-570-x/2006001/findings-resultats/4054081-eng.htm

violence, stalking and criminal harassment.[98] In fact, domestic violence has been



identified as a major cause of Aboriginal migration from reserves and remote communities to urban centers. The RCAP found that nearly sixty percent of aboriginal people who migrate to urban areas are female and that family related reasons (including spousal and familial abuse) were most commonly identified as the motivation for migration.[99] These figures may provide some indication of why, in a neighborhood

[98] Ibid.

[99] Government of Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 4, Gathering Strength* (Ottawa: Government of Canada), 573.

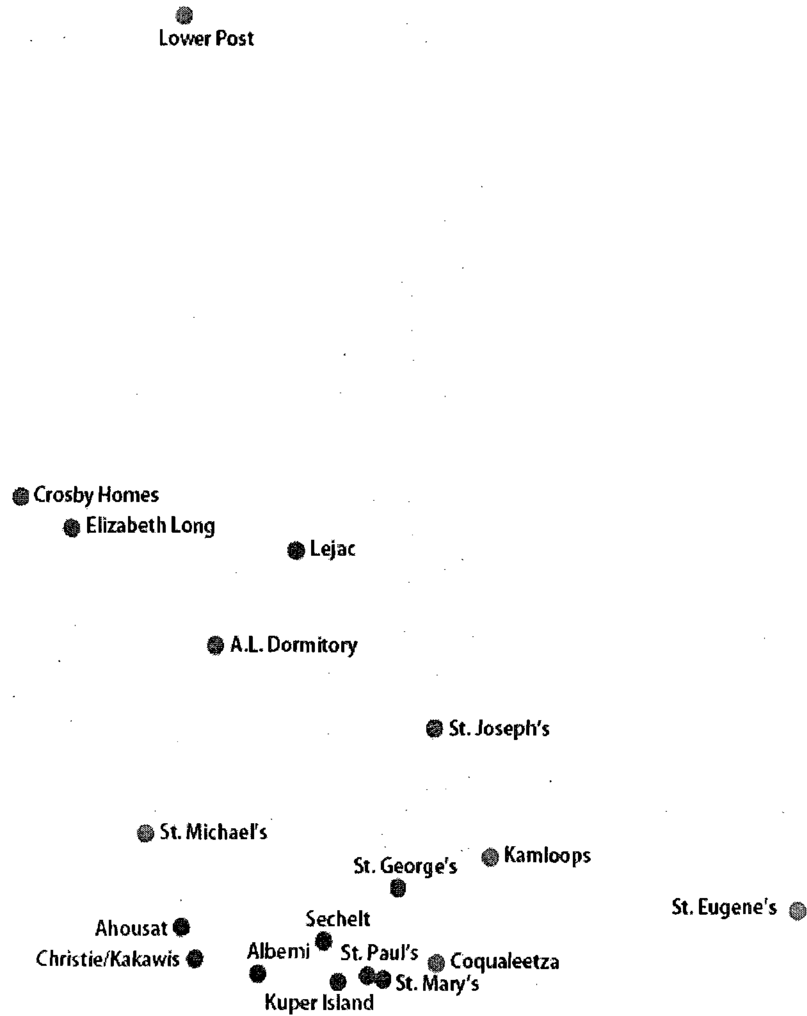


Figure 3.9 Geographical distribution of British Columbia's residential and industrial schools (1861-1974)[100]

[100] Image taken from British Columbia's "First Nation's Summit" webpage, accessed August 2008 {http://www.fns.bc.ca/}

where men outnumber women by a margin of nearly three to one, the aboriginal population remains roughly balanced along gender lines.[101] Significantly, while six percent of Vancouver's aboriginal residents are themselves survivors of residential schools, nearly sixty-five percent have family members who were 'educated' in the system.[102] Thus while "it would be shortsighted to see aboriginal women in the [Downtown Eastside] merely as victims of larger structural forces, without a sense of agency about how to change their situation", as Cecilia Benoit suggests, it is important to interrogate how legacies of state violence continue to have persistent affects.[103] To acknowledge that many of the neighborhood's residents live their lives through a "social cartography" shaped by the "experiences of racism and the reserve system, by the dislocations of residential school and foster care."[104]

Given the striking body of research that identifies aboriginal people as a particularly marginalized group in the Downtown Eastside, it is difficult to understand why this dimension of the 'story' is so startlingly overlooked in the coverage examined. Particularly since so much of this research comes from sources not generally considered controversial by the news establishment, including government reports, studies conducted by Statistics Canada, and various well-established advocacy groups. For Culhane, the "regime of disappearance" of which this erasure is a symptom, is constructed through media practices which privilege the exoticism of drug use and violence over the

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[101] Benoit, Caroll and Chaudry, "In Search of a Healing Place," 824.

[102] Statistics Canada, *Aboriginal Peoples Survey: Community Profiles* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2001), http://www12.statcan.ca/english/profil01aps/highlights.cfm

[103] Benoit, Caroll and Chaudry, "In Search of a Healing Place," 824.

[104] Leslie Robertson, "Taming Space: Drug Use, HIV, and Homemaking in Downtown Eastside Vancouver," *Gender, Place and Culture* 14 (5), 2007, 529.

"mundane brutality of everyday poverty," rely on epidemiological categories that pathologize and medicalize marginalization, and demonstrate a pronounced disinterest in the strategies of resistance and alternative visions which emanate from the subjects at the centre of their narratives.[105] At the convergence of these practices, she contends, narrative accounts depoliticize aboriginal marginalization by stripping it of its historical linkages to colonial state practices and disguising its racial dimension. She writes:

> The thread that ties these themes together in the specific context of Downtown Eastside Vancouver is a particular form of "race blindness." Recognition of the burden of social suffering carried by Aboriginal people in this neighborhood – and in Canada as a whole- elicits profound discomfort in a liberal, democratic nation state like Canada, evidencing as it does the *continuing* effects of settler colonialism, its ideological and material foundations, and its ongoing reproduction.[106]

In building on Culhane's view that a persistent racial blindness informs journalistic practices, I want to distance my analysis from a view of media operatives as simple propagandists operating in the interests of a dominating group. It is important to reiterate that the view of a prevailing media ideology that informs this study, locates it in the set of "taken-for-granted value commitments and reality judgments [and] assumptions which are naturalized [and] transformed over time" which inform the professional culture of mainstream journalism.[107] Given this theoretical positioning, we might consider the erasure of aboriginality in the coverage not as a deliberate strategy of denial but rather as a pattern of signification which is informed by certain 'commonsense' assumptions about the nature of Canadian society which erase its sharp racialized divisions. Frances Henry and Carol Tator's notion of "democratic racism" is particularly useful here. It identifies the tendency of "dominant discourses" to operate from a set of assumed norms that

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[105] Culhane, "Their Spirits Live Within Us," 595.

[106] Ibid., 595.

[107] Hackett and Caroll, *Remaking Media*, 31.

imagine Canada as a "White, humanistic, tolerant and accommodating society."[108] Such assumptions erase and naturalize the well established histories of violence and racism which have underpinned the state's colonial policies, reproducing the view that "because Canadian society [and its formal state structures] upholds the ideals of a liberal democracy, it cannot possibly be racist."[109] Connectedly, the coverage's erasure of aboriginality - its 'race blindness' to put it in Culhane's terms- illustrates how the narratives examined operate to reproduce certain assumptions about the Canadian state. They uphold the view that fundamental ideals of liberal egalitarianism at the core of governance in this country by camouflaging the "insupportable contradictions and tensions" at the core of colonial state policies and their ongoing effects.[110]

Finally, it is important to acknowledge an inherent danger at the core of analyses like the one I have just provided. By focusing on the effects of state violence on aboriginal women, researchers run the risk of re-centering the state and enacting a further erasure of the women themselves. It is crucial to be weary of representations in which "the women fail to appear as active agents or are silenced as victims."[111] Indeed, the Downtown Eastside is not merely a space where the horrific dramas of repressive policing, abject poverty, and neo-colonial subordination are played out upon the bodies of a victimized population. By contrast, the neighborhood remains a fertile ground for resistance and a key site for the elaboration of a politics of decolonization. Overly epidemiological analyses, many of which I draw in this chapter, can have the inadvertent effect of muting resistance by privileging victimization. And while it is important to

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[108] Henry and Tator, *Discourses of Domination*, 228.

[109] Ibid., 229.

[110] Ibid., 226.

[111] Jiwani and Young, "Missing and Murdered Women," 899.

acknowledge the effects of state policy on aboriginal peoples, it is also important to acknowledge that the most effective forms of resistance to those policies lie in the decolonizing efforts of aboriginal peoples themselves.

Conclusions

This chapter considers a few of the specific ways that the state has been complicit in the tragedy of the missing and murdered women in Vancouver. It also demonstrates how news discourses have denied or minimized these complicities either through direct omission or strategies of representation that have downplayed their centrality. While it is crucial to heed Gitlin's warning and be wary of overstating the influence of media messages, it is also crucial to interrogate the role that such messages play in shaping imagined understandings of how the state operates in Canada. At their worst, the narratives discussed above reproduce the view that governance in Canada, though imperfect, is essentially guided by prevailing values of tolerance, egalitarianism, and benevolence. In this chapter I have attempted to disrupt such views by offering compelling evidence of the contrary. I contend that the rise of neoliberalism in British Columbia has operated to further marginalize low-income people, that the criminalization of prostitution has targeted specific sectors of the industry while allowing others to operate with relative impunity, and that the state's colonial policies continue to have pernicious effects on aboriginal peoples. I argue that all of these political strategies have been complicit in producing a social and political milieu where scores of marginalized women could be made to 'disappear' without eliciting a sweeping public response (prior to 1999, that is) and a vigorous response by the state. News discourses which downplay

or omit connections between these specific state culpabilities and the crisis itself, have the ideological effect of rationalizing and resolving contradictions to the state's claimed commitment to a basic egalitarianism.[112]

[112] Henry and Tator, *Discourses of Domination*, 226.

Chapter 4: Producing the Prostitute

The figure of Robert Pickton is unmistakably the central preoccupation of the coverage studied. He is portrayed variously (and somewhat contradictorily) as a cold predator, a raucous binger, and a cunning criminal. But also as daft and illiterate, a folksy pig farmer noted for his "poor hygiene," pinkish skin, and greasy, straggly hair.[1] These characterizations couple with reports of the offender's grisly history of violence to establish Pickton as an archetypically sinister figure.

Yet media interest in Pickton is hardly restricted to an analysis of the man himself or even the crimes that he committed. Rather, press accounts have been decidedly focused on the 'universe' in which he preyed, the spaces in which he trawled and the particular 'kinds' of women that were his victims. Accordingly, the figure of the street-involved sex worker is indispensable to these accounts. In this chapter, I contend that the coverage provides a coherent framework for understanding who the 'prostitute' is and what, precisely, motivates *her* sustained participation in the precarious market of the street. I argue that it produces her (and it's always 'her') as a "distinguishable social type," a drugged, dazed, deviant, dissolute, and corrupted Other whose affiliation with a notorious underworld places her in constant threat of danger and predation.[2]

Importantly, however, such descriptions are not univocal. More sympathetic portrayals also produce sex workers as *victims*, not merely of the danger of the stroll, but also of a long history of predatory abuse, personal devastation, and all-consuming addiction. They are produced as members of families, as daughters and wives, as sisters

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[1] Petti Fong, "A Pig Farmer Who Seemed Easy to Ignore," *Toronto Star*, 10 December, 2007, A16.

[2] Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: the Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, 3rd edition (London: Routledge, 2002), 1.

and girlfriends. Yet both in spite and as a result of these seemingly sympathetic portrayals, the prevailing definitions of the 'prostitute' that emerge from the coverage reproduce and reflect core ideological assumptions about the trade; they elide fundamental considerations about what drives individuals to its 'lowest sectors.' In the analysis that follows, I begin by briefly examining how historical representations of sex workers as members of a criminally dangerous underworld and agents of moral corruption have shaped contemporary understandings. Next, I consider the particular ways that the figure of the 'prostitute' has been defined in the coverage studied. Then I consider how statements attributed to the family and friends of the missing and murdered women, advocates and allies of street-involved women, and sex workers themselves contribute to the construction of this larger image. Finally, I consider a few of the ideological implications of these prevailing definitions, the dominant paradigm, through which the figure of the prostitute is produced.

Criminal danger and moral corruption

The iconic figure of the prostitute has been ascribed a series of divergent popular meanings. As Phillip Hubbard has observed, sex workers have not only been a source of simultaneous "fear and fascination" in Western societies, they have also been constituted as a potent affront to an established morality, as a "nefarious" and deviant other.[3] Yet despite the persistence of this fear, fascination, and condemnation, prevailing representations of the essential nature of the 'prostitute' have never been static; they have been transformed by a series of historical permutations. Chris Greer and Yvonne Jewkes

[3] Phillip Hubbard, *Sex and the City: Geographies of Prostitution in the Urban West* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 1.

note that "the boundaries separating different categories of deviance and dangerousness are not fixed and immutable, but fluid and permeable; they constantly change as a function of shifting cultural sensibilities and public concern."[4]

Researchers that have considered the mass-mediation of prostitution in news discourse have identified a number of characterizations which have had particular degrees of potency in different periods; to note just a few, sex workers have been defined as vectors of disease and contagion, as entrapped sexual slaves, as morally depraved, as criminally culpable, as victims of the "white slave trade," as endangered persons, as "fallen" women, as symbols of community failure, as "feeble-minded," as a public nuisance, as an affront to public respectability, as unpredictable addicts, and as deranged individuals.[5] Of course, many of these labels have long vanished from popular usage and remain relevant only as symbolic residues of abandoned discursive claims. Nevertheless, contemporary media narratives have privileged their own set of characterizations which have established prostitutes as "distinguishable types" – as particular kinds of "folk devils" – which retain much of the fear and loathing expressed by these earlier iterations.[6] In this section, I examine the persistence of two such stigmatizations. First, I consider how the prostitute has been constituted as a source of danger and criminal deviance. Then I consider how the prostitute has been constituted as a symbol of moral corruption. Both are of central importance to the considerations of the coverage.

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[4] Chris Greer and Yvonne Jewkes, "Extremes of Otherness: Media Images of Social Exclusion," *Social Justice* 32 (no. 1, 2005), 23.

[5] Maggie O'Neill, Rosie Campbell, Phillip Hubbard, Jane Pitcher and Jane Scoular, "Living With the Other: Street Sex Work, Contingent Communities and Degrees of Tolerance," *Crime, Media, Culture* 4 (1), 2008); Helga Hallgrimsdottir, Rachel Phillips and Cecilia Benoit, "Fallen Women and Rescued Girls: Social Stigma and Media Narratives of the Sex Industry in Victoria, B.C.," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 43 (3), 2006; Joan Sangster, *Regulating Girls and Women: Sexuality, Family, and the Law in Ontario, 1920-1960* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[6] Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 1.

Representations that have romanticized and celebrated the figure of the prostitute as a symbol of vivacious hedonism and sexual liberation have long been countered by a persistent association of commercial sex with a sinister underworld of criminality and danger. As Erin Van Brunschot, Rosalind Sydie and Catherine Krull put it: "the obverse of the 'whore with a heart of gold' is the depraved, dissolute and deviant image of the prostitute."[7] Since at least the 19th century, street prostitution or 'kerb-crawling' has been associated with particular urban zones of illicit activity and the criminal activities that have been presumed to animate them. Judith Walkowitz notes in her survey of prostitution in late-Victorian London that the figure of the street prostitute operated as a "public symbol of female vice."[8] For Van Brunschot et al, elements of this 19th century image have been sustained in contemporary depictions. In considering prostitution narratives in Canadian newspapers from 1981-1995, they observed a sustained conflation of prostitution with deviance and criminality, accented by an assumed seamlessness between street-level sex work and narcotic dependency.[9] Further, Helga Hallgrimsdottir, Rachel Phillips, and Cecilia Benoit observed a similar phenomenon in their survey of prostitution-related articles that appeared in Victoria's daily newspaper - the *Times-Colonist* - between 1980-2005. They note that prostitutes were routinely produced as cunning criminals believed to "take pride in circumventing the law and avoiding arrest."[10] In Canada, of course, the association of prostitution with criminality is exacerbated by the legal regimes that criminalize practices related to selling sex, as I

[7] Erin Van Brunschot, Rosalind Sydie, and Catherine Krull, "Images of Prostitution: the prostitute and print media," *Women and Criminal Justice* 10 (4), 1999, 48.

[8] Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 21.

[9] Van Brunschot, Sydie, and Krull, "Images of Prostitution," 66.

[10] Hallgimsdottir, Phillips, and Benoit, "Fallen women and rescued girls," 268.

describe in chapter 3. Lowman contends that the "outlaw status" of prostitution has had devastating implications for sex workers. By constructing prostitutes as criminals, he argues, the law has reproduced an ideological context where "a woman working the street is particularly vulnerable to predatory misogynist violence."[11] Importantly, the illicit nature of prostitution in Canada forces the industry underground, a phenomena that reaffirms both its actual and imagined connections to various forms of criminal activity.

Yet the sex worker's status as a symbol of danger is not simply related to her perceived connections to criminality. More centrally, perhaps, is the widespread perception that sex workers are vectors of disease. This is particularly true in Vancouver, where the Downtown Eastside was deemed the centre of an HIV epidemic in 1997.[12] Notably, intravenous drug use and sex work were seen as central factors in the outbreak, a perception that marked prostitutes as a decidedly dangerous population. Crucially, the association of disease with danger has been particularly pronounced with HIV. As Jean Comaroff has noted, the virus has come to be seen as a "quintessential sign of all that imperils a civilized future-in-the-world, an iconic social pathology." Indeed, the persistent elision of sex work with the dangers of disease has had the effect of "marking out pathologized publics" and "crystallizing latent...anxieties."[13] As Ericson et al have argued, symbols are central to ordering "collective views of the world." [14] The symbol of the prostitute has long contributed to such orderings, by providing an archetypical

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[11] Lowman, "Violence and the Outlaw Status of (Street) Prostitution,"1004.

[12] Jeff Sommers and Nicholas Blomley, "The Worst Block in Vancouver" in *Stan Douglas: Every Building on 100 West Hastings*, ed. Reid Shier (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, Contemporary Art Gallery of Vancouver, 2002) 20-21.

[13] Jean Comaroff, "Beyond Bare Life: AIDS, (Bio)Politics, and the Neoliberal Order," *Public Culture* 19 (1), 2007, 197-204.

[14] Ericson, Baranek and Chan, *Representing Order*, 5.

negative against which the norms of 'civilized' citizenship are contrasted and distinguished.

Sex workers have also been represented as potent symbols of moral corruption. The degree to which such characterizations have been sustained and reproduced through media narratives offers a compelling illustration of the news media's capacity to "participate in the constitution of moral boundaries of the society" in which they report.[15] For much of the twentieth century, for example, prostitutes were branded by press narratives as 'fallen women,' imagined, that is, as individuals who had strayed from the norms of acceptable female subjectivity and descended into a rank world of festering immorality and licentiousness. This has been particularly true of street-level workers, whose 'corruption' was plainly visible to the public gaze. As Hubbard has argued, this "visible eroticization of the public realm" came to represent the "most significant affront to a modern, patriarchal society in which women were considered as best confined to the sanctity of the feminized domestic space."[16]

Yet even as patriarchal notions of acceptable female behaviour have transformed, some argue that the exchange of sex for commercial gain has remained a potent symbol of moral degeneracy. For example, researchers have observed that press narratives in the United Kingdom have persistently branded sex workers and clients as "morally degenerate" precisely because of their "willingness to reduce sex to commercial exchange."[17] For Hubbard, the repudiation of this commercial sexuality is bound up in a desire to preserve certain heterosexual norms. He argues that contemporary views of

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[15] Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek, and Janet Chan, *Visualizing Deviance: A Study of News Organization* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 60.

[16] Hubbard, *Sex and the City*, 77

[17] O'Neill, Campbell, Hubbard, Pitcher, and Scoular, "Living With the Other," 76.

prostitution as immoral often reflect the view that "woman's sexuality should only be expressed or available within the confines of a domesticated and reproductive relationship."[18] As such, the visible 'immorality' of public prostitution has come to be seen as an affront to the enjoyment of city spaces by the 'mainstream' public. An editorial published in 1981 by the Victoria *Times Colonist* captures this condemnatory spirit succinctly:

> Whores...not only offend...the law, they are an embarrassment when the family goes downtown for dinner. They speak of the community's failure. They are also seen as a threat by some wives and mothers and they are bad for business.[19]

This assessment offers a potent example of the ways in which street-involved women have been contrasted against (and seen as antithetical to) conventional female subjectivities.

The assumed danger of the prostitute's immorality - her capacity to bring corruption into the sphere of morally upright men and women- marks her as a 'threat' to mothers and daughters. An important contrast is established here. The threatening 'whore' is set up in binary opposition to the virtuous (uncorrupted) figures of the 'mother' and 'daughter.' For Jiwani and Young, such characterizations have had important implications. In their survey of the *Vancouver Sun*'s coverage of the case, they note that this binary demarcates those "bodies that can and should be saved from those that are considered beyond redemption."[20] Traditionally virtuous women (mothers, daughters, wives) are set up in sharp contrast to the 'runaways' and 'throwaways' mired in the corruption of street level commercial sex. As we shall see, this contrast has

[18] Hubbard, *Sex and the City*, 2.

[19] Quoted in Hallgrimsdottir, Phillips and Benoit, "Fallen Women and Rescued Girls," 279 (originally published 22 October, 1981).

[20] Jiwani and Young, "Missing and Murdered Women," 900.

important implications for the present study, particularly in the ways in which journalists have attempted to restore 'dignity' to the missing and murdered by valorizing their status as family members and contrasting those 'redeemable' aspects of their lives with the immoral practices of sex work and narcotic addiction.

Producing the prostitute

The coverage studied produces a relatively coherent if uncomplicated image of the 'prostitute.' With notable consistency between them, each of the three newspapers mobilizes a series of recurring themes to explain this figure. They offer compelling ways to understand who it is that enters the industry and what it is that motivates her sustained participation in it. With little disruption, she is portrayed as a woman powerfully consumed by addiction, constantly at risk of predation and violence, yet undeterred by (or oblivious to) the constant peril of her work. Her presence on the stroll is frequently explained by reference to previous victimization, a foundational personal tragedy narrative that preceded her 'descent.' Such personal histories explain the terror of the street as only the most recent of a series of abuses. At the same time, her connection to the illicit drug trade and the 'outlaw status' of her work mark her as part of a deviant and criminal underworld, as a member of the illicit class that reproduces chaos in the inner city. Moreover, as I explain in the following chapter, she is produced as intractably linked to the 'degenerate space' in which she works. By virtue of that association, she is subjected to the same "unremitting stigmatization" as the neighborhood itself.[21] These themes are reproduced in both the substantive textual explanations that suffuse the

[21] Geraldine Pratt, "Abandoned Women and Spaces of the Exception," *Antipode* 37(5), 2005, 1062.

articles themselves and the visual culture of the coverage, particularly in the prominent photographs and headlines which act as "cognitive organizers" further embedding this dominant rendering.[22] In this section, I describe these representations in some detail.

While prostitution itself is a constant theme in the coverage, the image of the sex worker is primarily shaped through a group of 18 articles and profiles which attempt to provide some substantive information about who the people that enter the street-level industry are. The majority of these articles (13) are profiles of the six women that Pickton would eventually be convicted of murdering; the others (5) are more general stories about women currently working in street-level prostitution.

The former group – the victim 'profiles'- are marked by two somewhat contradictory patterns. In one sense, they attempt to overcome the powerful brandings of 'prostitute' and 'addict' by highlighting some of the more banal aspects of the women's lives and personalities. To this end, they are memorialized diversely: one as a poet and artist, another as a loyal friend, another as someone who loved the colour pink, to name just a few. Such descriptions attempt to transcend stigmatization by positioning each victim as a subject who was 'more' than part of a deviant underclass. But they also attempt to invest each victim with a personal history beyond her association with the Downtown Eastside. Accordingly, these articles are also the central vehicles through which each of the women's tragic personal histories are described, her foundational 'descent.' Their central narrative function, however, is the production of each woman as a member of a family (a daughter, a mother, a sister), whose absence is mourned, an important consideration which I discuss at length below.

[22] Jiwani and Young, "Missing and Murdered Women," 904.

In another sense, however, these profiles also operate to powerfully consolidate the victims' status as members of a deviant class. They are marked by a profound emphasis on addiction, disease, survival sex, and violence; such signifiers of 'degeneracy' are central to these ostensibly sympathetic profiles. Indeed, attempts to memorialize respectfully, usually by highlighting each women's allegiance to commonsense notions of 'respectability,' are tempered by persistent allusions to her deviance. This phenomenon is manifest in the short victim profiles which suffuse the coverage (and are often one paragraph or less). In one such example, Serena Abotsway is remembered as a "bubbly kind-hearted woman…[who] was an intravenous drug user and a prostitute." Georgina Papin is remembered as a woman who "dressed nicely and smoked crack cocaine before going to work as a prostitute." Andrea Joesbury is remembered as a "polite, quiet woman…[who] was in a methadone program when she disappeared."[23] In each of these paradigmatic instances, signifiers of conventional 'decency' are countered by reminders of a prevailing 'degeneracy. '

These victim profiles, however, are far more 'balanced' than the 5 articles which describe sex workers still working in the industry. With varying degrees of sensationalism, this group of articles produces a strikingly narrow image of the street-involved woman. She is defined as the archetypically itinerant and irresponsible individual; divested of all context, she is produced as one-dimensional in her addiction, concerned only with the atavistic pursuit of her next 'fix.' Importantly, descriptions of current workers are inflected by a persistent (and sometimes only suggestive) pattern of comparison, that marks them as one and the same with the disappeared. Indeed, in many

[23] Globe and Mail, "The Victims: Six Who Were Killed," *Globe and Mail*, 3 December, 2007, A6.

places the conflation is unmistakable; current workers are produced as the fortunate ones who, as reporter puts it, "survived the era of a serial killer [only to] continue to risk it all...beatings, rape, disease."[24]

The cohesive image of the 'prostitute' is further accomplished by the photographic culture of the coverage. In total, 29 images of street-involved women appear in three coverage periods. Of these, 24 are photographs (or groups of photographs) of the missing and murdered women themselves while the other 5 are of presently street-involved women. Of this first group, 21 are composed of "mug-shot" style images, all of which appeared on the official 'missing women' posters produced by civic authorities, a link, which as Jiwani and Young observe, "reinforce[s]...the women's association with criminality." [25] These 'line-ups' saturate the coverage, appearing at least once on the front page of all three of the data sources. They are unflattering, close cropped, and conjure associations with familiar prisoner processing photographs. Clustered together as they so often are, these 'mug-shot' collages collapse distinctions

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[24] DiManno "For Eastside Girls, Nothing's Changed" A1.

The textual production of the 'prostitute' does not occur in isolation; it is imbedded in a visual culture which consolidates the themes discussed above. Headlines and sub-headlines are central to this process; they provide key messages – "cognitive organizers"- that orient the reader's interpretation by setting the tone of the news page and establishing what information is relevant.[24] Importantly, certain salient terms recur in these titles and reinforce themes of deviance. For example, the terms 'prostitute,' 'hooker', 'sex worker,' and 'sex trade worker' appeared in 12 headlines and sub-headlines while the terms 'addiction,' 'junkies,' and 'drugs,' appeared in 8. To put these figures in context, the words 'missing' or 'missing women' appeared 21 times in the coverage. Prostitution is privileged in headlines roughly half as many times as disappearance and narcotic dependency is emphasized roughly one third as many. Yet the headline culture is as interesting in what it implies as what it omits. In spite of the dire economic circumstances in which many of the missing and murdered (as well those currently selling sex in the Downtown Eastside) are said to endure, there is not a single reference to economic marginalization in any of the headlines or sub-headlines; the term 'poverty,' for example, does not appear in a single title. Moreover, in spite of the striking overrepresentation of aboriginal people among the missing and murdered, only one reference to aboriginality appears in the headlines, a disturbing erasure that further signals the coverage's prevailing unwillingness to interrogate this trend.

[25] Jiwani and Young, "Missing and Murdered Women," 898.

between individuals, producing the collective as a common caste, those who experienced a shared destiny born of a shared 'lifestyle.'

Yet while the photographs of the missing and murdered suggest deviance largely through association, the five photographs of currently street-involved women accomplish this association directly. Indeed, these arresting images feature women injecting heroin, smoking crack, soliciting clients, sitting glassy-eyed on a dirty sidewalk and loitering on an industrial loading bay. On their own, they have a dramatic effect, signaling the radical distance of their subjects from conventional norms of safety and purity. Simultaneously, they invest textual accounts of deviance with the authority of graphic proof. Yet their significance is amplified by the headlines that accompany them. One appears beneath the headline "can't get lower than this" while another appears above the title "always on edge." Another makes the link between those currently on the street and the disappeared unmistakable; a lurid shot of women injecting narcotics in to her neck appears alongside the headline "I guess I'm lucky to be alive" (see figure 4.1).

THE TORONTO STAR Sunday, February 10, 2002 A7

■ NEWS

'I guess I'm lucky to be alive'

Continued from A1

rock of crack cocaine, which will take the edge off for half an hour.

Governments at all levels have developed various programs aimed at improving life for area residents. Police, who are being accused of dragging their heels in the investigation of the missing women because it involved predominantly drug-addicted prostitutes, have also launched numerous crackdowns on drugs, sex and crime over the years.

But at the epicentre of the downtown eastside, Main and Hastings Sts., it appears, from the dizzying pace of illicit activity, that those attempts have met with little success.

A parade of men and women thrust crumpled bills at a man doling out vials of crack cocaine.

Some go down alleyways or into nearby public washrooms to smoke it, while others flick on their lighters and inhale, oblivious to the traffic whizzing by.

One transvestite in a pink miniskirt holds court while a barefoot woman

LIFE AND DEATH: Shelley Creor, a prostitute and drug user originally from Toronto, uses the mirror of a parked van to help her shoot heroin into her neck in Vancouver's eastside. Creor, 38, has worked as a hooker for 11 years.

Figure 4.1: "lucky to be alive" (*Toronto Star*, 10 February, 2002)

Accredited sources and authoritative statements

Within professional cultures of news production, accounts of observed reality are expected to be grounded in (or corroborated by) the "authoritative statements" of "accredited sources."[26] Such practices are central to preserving the news organization's reputation as a disinterested and impartial observer. Outside evidence from established authorities is employed to confer a sense of 'objectivity' and universality on the otherwise subjective accounts of individual journalists. As some have observed, such practices have had the important effect of providing a systematic "over-accessing" to the media to individuals and organizations in "powerful and privileged institutional positions."[27] Others have observed that news discourses do not merely mediate information about particular events through institutional authority; they also provide

[26] Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Robert, *Policing the Crisis,* 58.

[27] Ibid, 58.

"knowledge about who are the key power holders, the 'authorized knowers' in the knowledge society."[28]

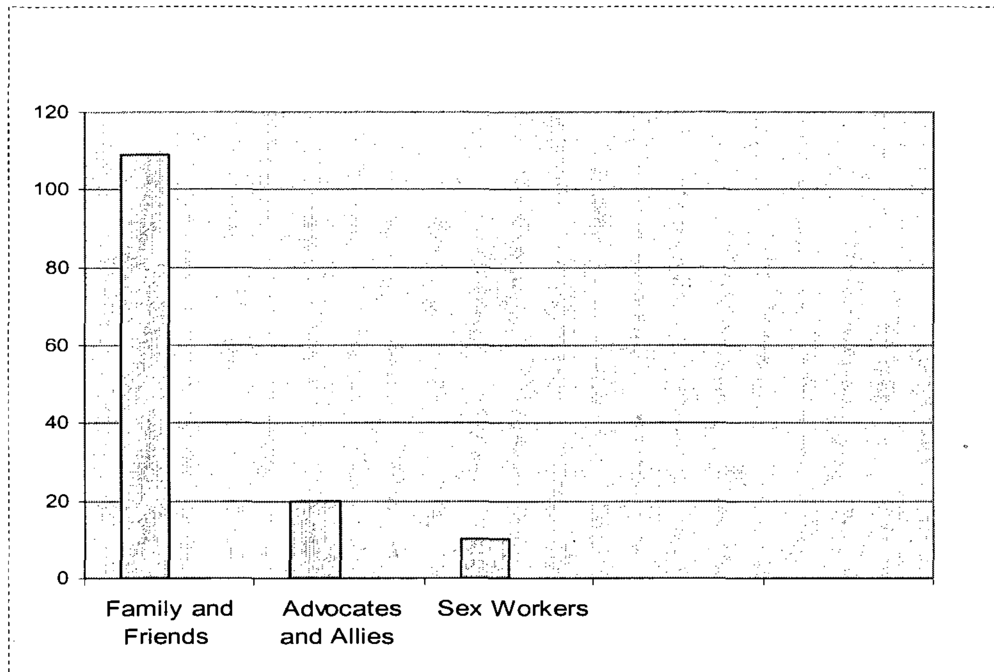
The present study provides compelling evidence of institutional over-representation. Authoritative claims from representatives of police departments, government bureaucracies, and various sites of established institutional power are an important feature of the coverage and serve as a key means of advancing particular narrations. In considering how the coverage has produced particular images of the 'prostitute,' however, such institutional "knowers" are hardly the most relevant contributors. Information about sex workers is largely drawn from three other sources: the families and friends of the missing and murdered women, advocates and allies of street-involved women, and sex workers themselves.

Yet in spite of this reduced reliance on institutional authority, we might still observe a distinct "hierarchy of credibility" between these source groups; their contributions provide distinct evidence of a sustained "over-accessing" of particular groups, albeit through different scales of power.[29] As figure 4.2 demonstrates, the family and friends of the missing and murdered women were quoted 109 times in the coverage, roughly five and half times more than advocates and allies of street involved women (quoted 20 times), and roughly eleven times more than sex workers themselves (quoted 10 times). In the analysis that follows, I argue that questions of how the image of the 'prostitute' is produced in the coverage must also be questions of who is authorized to contribute to that production. Accordingly, I consider the particular contributions of each source group and the themes that recur within them.

[28] Ericson, Baranek and Chan, *Visualizing Deviance*, 18.

[29] Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Robert, *Policing the Crisis*, 54-59.

Figure 4.2 Statements attributed, by quoted group



The representational authority of family and friends

Statements attributed to the family and friends of missing and murdered women provide the most comprehensive source of information about sex workers operating in the Downtown Eastside. They are central to the construction of the prevailing definitions of the 'prostitute' which emerge from the coverage. Taken together, these 109 quotations provide several core narrative functions. For example, they are employed to advance the 'story' of the investigation by demonstrating how their grief intersects with each procedural development. They are also frequently invoked to explain their frustration with the police handling of the case, as I explain in chapter 2. For the purposes of the present chapter, however, it is useful to focus on two other narrative contributions that this group provides. First, they provide information about how each woman 'ended up'

in the Downtown Eastside's street-level sex trade. Second, they provide personal and even idiosyncratic details about the individual victims, the anecdotal proof that the missing and murdered were "more than drug addicted prostitutes," as one prominent headline puts it.

Figure 4.3 Statements attributed to family and friends of the missing and murdered

Coverage period	Toronto Star	Globe and Mail	National Post
8-27 February, 2002	10	9	15
20-27 January, 2007	5	11	7
1-12 December, 2007	23	10	19
Total (109)	38	30	41

Family and friends are the primary source of biographical information about the missing and murdered women. Importantly, they are mobilized to explain each victim's apparent 'fall from grace,' the circumstances which explain her involvement in the sinister world of the inner-city street. While there is significant variation in the specific content of each story, there is also a common denominator between them. Each provides a personal tragedy narrative which renders the victim's presence in the Downtown Eastside understandable. A distinct pattern emerges from these explanations. Behind each of the murdered is a history of victimization, a series of individualized abuses that both precede and are said to have caused her turn to narcotic dependency and survival sex.

Biographical sketches of the victims are suffused with accounts of parental addiction, fetal alcohol syndrome, racism, sexual and physical abuse, predatory foster parents, and exploitative boyfriends. These early trauma are privileged as the decisive

foundations of a life of victimization. They render her presence in the Downtown Eastside understandable. Of the twenty articles that provide biographical sketches of the victims, twelve invoke family members and friends to attest to these foundational tragedy. Consider the following examples taken from each of the three sources:

(i) It was a sad existence that could be traced to her early childhood. Her father died in her arms when she was 3. Separated from her mother and seven other siblings, she was put in foster homes that, according to her brother, "left a lot to be desired."

The first foster home was "a nightmare" in which she was physically abused and subjected to sever mental torture.[30]

(ii) Ms. Papin had a troubled life growing up in Alberta, bouncing from foster homes to group homes to residential schools. She began experimenting with drugs at age 11, her brother Rick Papin said in an interview in 2001.[31]

(iii) The naïve teen ran away from a difficult childhood on Vancouver Island to Vancouver's Downtown Eastside to pursue her dream of finding a husband and having a baby.

"She found this guy and she fell in love with him," her grandfather Jack Cummer said.

"Eventually she phoned and let me know he was 15 or 20 years older than she was, so it gave her two things: A man she loved and a father figure. But she was put on the streets because he was a drug dealer."[32]

(iv) Sarah deVries was also troubled. Growing up as a black child in a white neighborhood in the 1970s, she was teased and subjected to racist taunts. At home, while her older siblings and parents could sympathize, they could not relate.

"It was really tough for her growing up with nobody who shared her experience on that fundamental level" said Maggie deVries, a children's book author and editor.

When Sarah was 9 her parents split up. As the youngest, she took it hard. By her teens, she was in with the wrong crowd, using drugs, running away and frequenting the streets. It's unclear whether she completed Grade 8. By age 17, she was gone for good.[33]

(v) He [Sereena Abotsway's foster father] said she was severely abused before she arrived at the Draayers, adding that he couldn't elaborate because the person who inflicted the harm

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[30] Jane Armstrong and Robert Matas, " More Than 'Drug Addicted Prostitutes'," *Globe and Mail*, 20 January, 2007, A12.

[31] National Post, "These are our Sisters, our Daughters, our Mothers," 23 January, 2007, A5.

[32] Ibid., A5.

[33] Daniel Girard, "The Little Sister Behind the Statistic," *Toronto Star*, 15 February, 2002, A7.

> is still alive. "Sereena was definitely damaged" he said. She lived with the Draayers until age 17 and called them Mom and Dad.[34]

These examples are representative of a larger narrative trend which establishes the missing and murdered as traumatized and damaged subjects, driven to addiction and survival sex by individualized patterns of abuse. Importantly, these stories help to memorialize the slain. They remind audiences that the victims were not merely the haphazardly chosen prey of a deranged individual, but persons who had experienced a continuum of brutal violence. This privileging of foundational abuse operates to individualize each tragedy. It privatizes suffering and obscures the role of larger structural forces in reproducing and sustaining the dangers that each women confronted.

Secondly, statements attributed to family members and friends are central to journalistic efforts to transcend the stigmas of 'prostitute' and 'addict.' They are central to the process of reinvesting the victims with a sense of conventional 'respectability.' They demonstrate, that is, that the women were 'more' than merely street-involved; that they were "real people with real stories."[35] Indeed, in each of the sources there is a conscious and stated effort to restore a certain degree of 'normalcy' to the victims. Central to this effort is an attempt to demonstrate that each of the victims cultivated conventional family relationships. Friends and family members are important here; as mourning loved ones, they provide potent proof of these conventional bonds. And as quoted sources they provide credible biographical information that confirms them. Beneath headlines like "Sister was a prostitute but so much more", "Little sister behind the statistic", "These are our sisters, our daughters, our mothers", friends and family are

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[34] Jane Armstrong, "The Short, Tragic Life of Sereena," *Globe and Mail*, 27 February, 2002, A4.

[35] Armstrong and Matas, "More Than Drug Addicted Prostitutes," A12.

invoked to demonstrate, as one *Toronto Star* correspondent would have it, that the victims were "not just drug addicts and whores but daughters, wives, mothers, human beings."[36]

Their statements are used to juxtapose the deviant practices of narcotic use and prostitution against the apparently 'real' and 'human' practices of being a mother, a daughter, or a wife. Numerous quotations attributed to Rick Frey, father of the murdered Marnie Frey, (perhaps) inadvertently establish this binary even as he attempts to restore the "public perception" of the victims. As he puts: "the Downtown Eastside women were portrayed as being prostitutes, hookers, drug addicts. They weren't – they were our daughters, our sisters, mothers."[37] And elsewhere: "[these] are our sisters, our daughters, our mothers – all human beings." Similarly, Maggie DeVries is repeatedly invoked insisting that the missing and murdered were "real people" with real family connections. The *Globe and Mail*'s Robert Matas writes:

> The family of one of Vancouver's missing prostitutes is concerned that the women will be perceived as one-dimensional caricatures similar to the characters in movies about prostitution and murder.
>
> Maggie deVries said yesterday that she wants the missing women remembered as people with lives and families.
>
> "It's for real," she said in an interview. "They were real people."[38]

Elsewhere in the coverage, Greg Garley, foster brother of Mona Wilson, memorializes his murdered sister in equally familial terms: "I remember what a great girl she was. She would have made a great mother."[39] Elsewhere again, in a set of victim profiles, and

[36] DiManno, "Lurid Trial Reinforces a Stigma," A14.

[37] National Post, "The Women He Killed," *National Post*, 10 December, 2007, A6.

[38] Robert Matas, "Sister was a Prostitute but so Much More," *Globe and Mail*, 27 February, 2002, A4.

[39] Toronto Star, "Sketches of Six Women Whose Lives Were Cut Short," *Toronto Star*, 10 December 2007, A14.

beneath the heading "tried to get clean", Brenda Wolfe is memorialized in similar terms. Here, a quotation attributed to a friend Wolfe met in a substance-abuse program reads: "I will always remember her smile and the beautiful son she had while in recovery."[40] In one sense, the examples above (and the numerous others like them) represent a genuine effort to restore dignity to a group of relentlessly stigmatized women. Yet in another sense, they operate to entrench a binary between, on the one hand, the presumed authenticity and innate humanness of traditional familial roles (mother, daughter, sister) and on the other, the 'sub-humanity' of street-involvement. They imply that the normalized practices of family life are what was 'real' and 'human' about each victim. I return to this theme again below.

The representational authority of advocates and Allies

What I refer to as the 'advocates and allies' of sex workers here, are those who either work directly with people in the Downtown Eastside - community organization service providers, for example - and others who, in their own capacity, advocate for policy reform or institutional change that would make the practices of street-level sex work less dangerous. As such, this group is uniquely positioned to provide two kinds of contributions to the coverage. Those who work with sex workers in the neighborhood were able to offer information about the experience of street-involvement. In contrast to the information provided by family members and friends, which is largely focused on each woman's life before she entered the industry, community workers are called upon to provide information about what is happening, or what had been happening, at the street

[40] Globe and Mail, "The Victims," *Globe and Mail*, 10 December, 2007, A1.

level itself. Moreover, those who advocate for changes to the regulatory status quo - critical academics and sympathetic politicians, for example- are primarily employed to bolster journalistic criticisms of the police or the state more generally.

With these considerations in mind, we might expect that the most potent critiques of the prevailing stigmatizations of the 'prostitute' might come from this group. As individuals who work closely with street-involved women, community workers are well positioned to challenge stereotypical characterizations. Similarly, as individuals who study prostitution or are involved in the construction of public policy, other allies are well positioned, and have the credentials necessary to be considered authorities by the mainstream press, to provide potent critiques of current conditions.

Indeed, it is from this group that some of the most potent critiques of the status quo are launched. Nevertheless, as figure 4.4 demonstrates, this group accounts for a very small number of quotations and contributions. In 156 articles examined, only 20 statements were attributed to this group and many appeared in the same article. As such, their significance must be weighed against the much broader themes which define the coverage. The placement and context of these iterations ensured that even contributions that might be called critical were primarily employed to bolster dominant definitions of the 'prostitute.'

Figure 4.4 Statements attributed to advocates and allies of street-involved women

Coverage period	Toronto Star	Globe and Mail	National Post
8-27 February, 2002	2	2	3
20-27 January, 2007	1	2	1
1-12 December, 2007	5	2	2
Total (20)	8	6	6

As individuals with daily exposure to street-involved women, community workers and allies are well positioned to provide needed context for journalistic accounts of street-involvement; their institutional affiliation marks them as credible sources. Not surprisingly then, their contributions tend to appear in the articles which attempt to provide some analysis of 'work conditions' in the Downtown Eastside. Numerous accounts draw on Elaine Allan – a coordinator with *Women in Need of a Safe House* (WISH), a Downtown Eastside drop-in center- to provide a sense of what life is like on the neighborhood's low-track strolls. Explanations attributed to her offer a portrait of the sex worker as an individual whose basic judgment has been catastrophically impaired by addiction. Allan describes a constant physical struggle frequently misunderstood by those outside of it. As she puts it in one article:

> These women are just so addicted. Maybe people from mainstream society think it's just a big party down there every night and these women should just pull themselves up by their bootstraps. Believe me it's no party.[41]

Elsewhere, she describes the experience of addiction in more detail:

> Elaine Allan, who once worked at a Vancouver drop-in centre for prostitutes, knew five of the six women. Ms. Allan said drug addiction, in its final stages, robs people of their personalities.
>
> "The reality of it is that addicted women are lonely and they're vulnerable and they're isolated and they're afraid and they get beaten up a lot. Once you're here, there's no way out."[42]

Another neighborhood advocate, Jamie Lee Hamilton, also emphasizes the power of addiction. As she puts it, "everyone out there is in survival mode…it's hard to focus on

[41] Rosie DiManno, "Women on Streets Still Terrified," *Toronto Star*, 2 December, 2007, A2.

[42] Armstrong and Matas, "More than 'Drug Addicted Prostitutes'," A6.

your safety when more pressing needs are getting the next fix, affording food, finding a place to stay and making sure a shameless pimp is paid off."[43]

Unlike other narratives about the missing women – which tend to consider addiction in less contextualized ways- the explanations provided by advocates and allies offer important considerations of the multiple oppressions that street-involved women often shoulder. Taken together, they offer compelling accounts of survival sex as an ongoing experience of victimization. Allan describes women who are not only burdened by powerful narcotic dependencies but also haunted by poverty, inadequate police protection and an ever-present threat of violence. Her contributions disrupt, to some degree, narratives that suggest street-involvement is a kind of self-selected deviance, an actively willed alternative lifestyle. As she puts it:

> I know that a lot of these women come from horrific situations at home, from foster care. They've been physically and sexually abused. But there's no haven on the streets. This is where the real abuse happens.[44]

Elsewhere, this sentiment is echoed by another WISH coordinator, Kate Gibson. Describing concerns that media narratives might reproduce certain stereotypical impressions, she notes:

> There's a huge stigma attached to being a sex-trade worker...We don't want them to be further stigmatized by the media. It's hard to tell their stories fairly because there are just so many reasons why they've ended up here. It's about poverty and isolation and abuse and addiction.[45]

These examples are representative of the larger role that advocates and allies play in representing the experience of street-involvement.

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[43] Girard, "Despair Stalks Hookers on Mean Streets," A1.

[44] DiManno, "Women on Streets Still Terrified," A2.

[45] DiManno, "For Eastside Girls, Nothing's Changed," A1.

Taken together, this group's contributions provide an important disruption of the generally facile interpretations of prostitution that the coverage provides. Nevertheless, they are limited in two key ways. First, in spite of their relatively unique attempts to consider prostitution as something more than a 'self-selected' lifestyle, they do, in many ways, contribute to a larger narrative pattern which individualizes the 'terror of the stroll.' They tend to emphasize, that is, the connection between personal histories of abuse and addiction and marginalization. While such contributions are important, and certainly not inaccurate, they have the inadvertent effect of obscuring, and in some cases even eliding, other oppressive forces in shaping particular kinds of marginality. Secondly, they are limited by their location in the coverage. All of these contributions appear as anomalous disruptions in articles which profoundly emphasize deviance, criminality, licentiousness, and crazed addiction. As such, their capacity to re-imagine the 'prostitute' is powerfully tempered by a more prominent textual and visual culture that aggressively inscribes simple understandings of this figure as a deviant other and a subject with dubious morality.

Importantly, however, other advocates and allies do provide some of the most potent criticisms of the sex worker's relationship with the police and the state more generally. Indeed, a few 'credentialed' researchers and politicians provide incisive critiques. The most significant of these 'authorized knowers' is Lowman, a renowned criminologist with a well-established history of challenging official approaches to sex work. He is invoked in five articles and in each of the data sources. Indeed, as the investigation began to unfold, Lowman provided the most scathing criticisms of the official response to the crisis. In one article, for example, he chastises the notion that sex

workers are the "authors of their own misfortune" and sharply denounces police for the selectivity of their protection.[46] Elsewhere he argues:

> If 50 women in any other category, whether housewives, women of a certain age or anyone else, went missing, believe me, the police reaction would have been entirely different.[47]

Others made similar statements.. Provincial Member of the Legislative Assembly Jenny Kwan, for example, told the *Toronto Star*: "You have to question why the investigation wasn't taken seriously earlier…these are real people who are somebody's daughter or granddaughter. We have to show their lives are worth something."[48]

To a much lesser degree, advocates and allies were able to broaden the notion of victimization by implicating the state in a critique that extended beyond a mere denunciation of police inaction. To take one unfortunately uncommon example, Harsha Walia, a coordinator with the *Downtown Eastside Women's Centre*, was able to connect victimization with growing poverty, declining social assistance and inadequate housing. In perhaps the most important critique in the entire body of coverage studied, Walia was able to provide a potent critique of some of the structural forces that have reproduced the marginality of street involved women. Hume's *Globe and Mail* article reads:

> Ms. Walia says the answer to making the streets safer for women lies in addressing the root causes. She notes, for example, that under provincial regulations a single mother who has been getting social assistance will lose that support once her child turns three.
>
> "That's why a lot of single moms who can't find work and can't afford child care end up turning tricks on the street.
>
> "It's good Pickton has been convicted, but all these things – housing, poverty, child apprehension, social assistance regulations – all of those issues are making it just a lot more dangerous for women," she said.[49]

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[46] Girard, "Relatives of Missing Demand Inquiry." A1.

[47] Matas, "B.C. Police Lashed Over Probe," A1.

[48] Girard, "Relatives of Missing Demand Inquiry," A1.

[49] Hume, "The Downtown Eastside: A Haunting Ground for Many, a Hunting Ground for One," A1.

Walia's contribution provides an unprecedented account of how structural forces have come to bear on street-involved women. It disrupts dominant renderings of the sex workers as a deviant addict and illuminates how structural inequality has, in fact, actively produced these subjects. Nevertheless, her critique is unique in the coverage. It is a rare contribution which disrupts the facile production of the 'prostitute' as a degenerate subject, a branding which otherwise saturates the coverage.

The self-representational work of sex workers

Current and former sex workers play a decidedly peripheral role in the coverage studied. As figure 4.5 demonstrates, they are quoted a mere ten times in the entirety of the coverage. Prostitutes themselves have little stake in the process of their own representation. They are not authorized in any substantive way to construct knowledge about their lives. This process is left to others.

Yet it is not merely the small number of quotations which ensure this erasure, it is also their content. Statements attributed to currently street-involved sex workers privilege a single and nearly univocal set of meanings. They consolidate the image of the 'prostitute' as a woman consumed by an oblivious and one-dimensional drive for narcotics. Consider the following examples:

(i) Josey is a 34 year-old prostitute with scabs all over face, the result, she said, of a bad batch of cocaine cut with Ajax. She saw the news about the farm on TV, but hadn't talked to anyone about it.

> "I just came out now," she explained, as she wandered over to a friend who supplies pipes. Crack pipes, that is, which Josey hawks on the corner for $2 a pop.
>
> Josey said she and a few girlfriends were sitting around last week, wondering what happened to the bodies of the missing women. "Fifty girls missing and no bodies. Kind of strange.

"When I heard on the news about the farm, man, it sent a cold chill down my spine.

Josey knew many of the missing, most of them casually, one intimately. "We had just started dating," Josey, who is bisexual, said. "She went out one night and never came back."[50]

(ii) Suarez who uses the street name "Brown Sugar," said she's been selling sex on Vancouver's streets since she was 14 and knew about half of the missing woman.

"I guess I'm lucky to be alive," she said before wandering down the street to buy a rock of crack cocaine, which will take the edge off for half an hour.[51]

(iii) Toronto native Shelley Creor, who has sold her body for 11 years on the area's streets to support a four-hit-per-day heroin habit, said she has little hope that an arrest in the case would help ease the violence faced by her and other prostitutes on a daily basis.

"Nobody cares for anybody but themselves," said Creor, 38, before wandering down an alleyway for a fix, injected into her throat by using the mirror of a parked van to locate the right spot. She was soon gone in search of a $40 trick to pay for the next hit.[52]

(iv) "Can't get any lower than this," snorts Pauline, a crack addict whose still pretty face belies the fact that she's worked as a prostitute for 21 years, sometimes uptown, sometimes downtown, from escort agency to curbside. "When all you care about is where your next toke is coming from, you'll do the sex for just the drugs, forget the money."[53]

(v) "Sure, I remember those women," says Pauline, 39.... "For years there was talk on the street of parties and pig roasts out at some farm. Some of us didn't like the idea of going so far out of the city. Or maybe I just wasn't desperate enough back then. Then the girls started disappearing.

"But the truth is, we never looked that hard at what was happening. When you're an addict, you don't care about other people's problems, you're not even aware of what's happening outside yourself. Down here, it's Independence Day, 24 hours a day.[54]

There is an arresting harmony between these quotations. Taken together, they create a singular portrait. The 'prostitute' is produced as an abject other; a one dimensional figure, incapable of inter-personal solidarity and concerned only with her next fix. She is never

[50] Gill, "Prostitutes, Addicts too Strung to Care," A5.

[51] Girard, "Despair Stalks Hookers on Mean Streets," A1.

[52] Ibid., A1.

[53] DiManno, "For Eastside Girls, Nothing's Changed," A1.

[54] Ibid., A1.

invited to comment on the conditions of her daily life. Neither is she offered the opportunity to consider what might make that life less dangerous, or just more tolerable. At worst it is assumed – and at best it is implied- that narcotic dependency is the causal condition of their presence on the stroll. Nowhere is it considered that addiction might well have emerged as a response to brutality, as a numbing agent to the horrors of marginality. Interestingly, however, the source of these quotations engenders them with a certain gravitas. Their undeniability is established precisely because they come from sex workers themselves. As Smart has observed, audiences are compelled by personal testimony, as she puts it, "personal testimony is given the status of truth."[55]

Figure 4.5 Statements attributed to street-involved sex workers (current and former)

Coverage period	Toronto Star	Globe and Mail	National Post
8-27 February, 2002	2	2	0
20-27 January, 2007	3	0	0
1-12 December, 2007	0	1	2
Total (10)	5	3	2

The Dominant Paradigm

When we consider what has been said about the 'prostitute' – and perhaps more importantly, who has been authorized to say it – we find that, taken together, these descriptions coalesce around a relatively coherent and unified image. They not only offer compelling ways to understand who the missing and murdered women were but also a framework for understanding the lives of street-involved women more generally, including those currently working the strolls of the Downtown Eastside.

[55] Elizabeth Smart quoted in Van Brunschot, Syide and Krull, "Images of Prostitution," 50.

Other studies that have considered how the crisis has been taken up by news discourses have also observed that the figure of the 'prostitute' was produced through a limited set of categories. For example, Jiwani and Young observe that news narratives operated to "frame" the missing and murdered women in ways that emphasized their status as addicts and prostitutes while highlighting the aboriginal heritage of some of the women.[56] Geraldine Pratt argues that in the "imaginative geographies" of popular representations of the spaces of prostitution, sex workers "continue to be represented almost exclusively as diseased, criminalized, impoverished and degenerate bodies."[57]

The present study yields compelling evidence of the persistence of these same characterizations. Yet perhaps sensitive to the charge that the mass media has been complicit in caricaturizing, stigmatizing, and even demonizing street-level sex workers in the past, the coverage studied here is marked by an effort to both memorialize and represent prostitutes less dismissively. One of the *Toronto Star*'s first reports on the case noted that "the women's loved ones are determined to attach names, faces and stories to people often ignored because they exist on society's fringe."[58] Importantly, coverage in each of the sources seems to reflect a similar determination. It attempts to provide background and biographical information about the six women whose murders were being prosecuted. Each paper's supposed commitment to respectful coverage is accented by the sustained barrage of sanctimonious reminders that the slain were "real people."[59]

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[56] Jiwani and Young, "Missing and Murdered Women," 902.

[57] Geraldine Pratt, "Abandoned Women and Spaces of the Exception," *Antipode* 37 (5), 2005, 1062.

[58] Daniel Girard, "All We Can do is Keep Waiting," *Toronto Star*, 9 February, 2002, A3.

[59] The National Post was undoubtedly aware of concerns about sensational journalism, when in the lead-up to the trial it reported that neighborhood activists were providing prostitutes with a "crash course in public relations" in an effort to prepare them to cope with aggressive or exploitative journalists.

Yet in spite of efforts to restore a degree of dignity to the murdered, the preceding analysis demonstrates that in its totality the coverage operates to perpetuate a limited set of dominant definitions. It re-inscribes many of the problematic characterizations described by Pratt, Jiwani, and Young. Indeed, by privileging narcotic dependency and foundational tragedy as the core explanations for the sex worker's presence on the low-track stroll, the coverage effectively occludes the possibility of interrogating the role of structural factors in reproducing marginality and driving women in to the precarious universe of survival sex. However, given the limited stake that sex workers are afforded in the construction of knowledge about their lives, such erasures are not entirely surprising. Brock has noted that at points where prostitution has been constituted as a "social problem," sex workers themselves have frequently been excluded from suggesting solutions for its resolution. Defining sex workers as "the problem" has had the effect of keeping them "outside of the debate, silenced by groupings that can claim a more legitimate interest." Yet as she insists: "without the contributions of those who work in prostitution, there can be no resolution."[60]

As I demonstrate above, however, the input of sex workers is not entirely absent from the coverage. Rather, they provide some limited information, contributions that are, it seems, constrained by either the questions asked or the story told. Importantly, however, these narrow contributions create the potent illusion of balanced journalism. They seem to evidence, that is, that reporters have done the hard work of consulting all relevant parties in the construction of their narratives. In fact, one journalist writes with a righteous insistence of the importance of speaking to sex workers; she condemns those

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[60] Brock, *Making Work, Making Trouble*, 11.

who would try to shield street-involved women from the hazards of exploitative journalism. *Toronto Star* correspondent Rosie DiManno argues:

> Advocates warned reporters not to exploit the sex workers on the Eastside, as if giving them the opportunity to talk about their lives was an untoward invasion of privacy. The language police scrutinize stories lest unacceptable descriptors be applied to the sad souls who lurch about Skid Row in drug-induced stupor. We're all admonished about "sensitivity" and value-neutral observations. But this isn't a morality play. It's harsh reality, the sleazy underbelly of a beautiful cosmopolitan city. It does no good to turn away or smooth out the rough, ugly details. In fact, it does harm – one more way of not looking, not seeing.[61]

DiManno makes a compelling claim. She suggests that engaging street-involved women is central to a process of making them visible. Indeed, as David Sibley has observed, drawing on bell hooks' notion of "repositioning," "engaging with the other…might lead to understanding, [and to] a rejection of a stereotype and a lesser concern with threats to the boundaries of the community." Yet for Sibley, any such engagement harbours an implicit danger. He writes:

> Any optimism about such a move should be tempered with the thought that limited engagement, a superficial encounter, might result in the presumption of knowledge which could be more damaging than ignorance…[62]

I argue that the dominant images of the 'prostitute' that emerge from the coverage provide precisely such a "superficial encounter." Through their reliance on particular kinds of sources, their preference for particular aspects of life in the Downtown Eastside, and their profound erasure of structural violence, journalistic representations of sex workers both presume and reproduce a knowledge that could well be more damaging than the ignorance that informs them. In this final section, I consider the ideological implications of some of the core themes that have emerged from the coverage's

[61] DiManno, "Lurid Trial Reinforces a Stigma," A14.

[62] David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 29.

production of the 'prostitute.' In particular, I consider the problematic ramifications of contrasting sex workers with the valorized feminine roles of the conventional family; I examine the limits of the 'personal tragedy narrative' as an explanation for street-involvement; and I consider the inherent dangers of the sustained reproduction of sex workers as a deviant and criminal population.

As I demonstrate above, the coverage is marked by a persistent contrasting of sex work with the conventional female roles of familial domesticity. This opposition has important ideological implications. In the first place, it imagines an unbridgeable binary gulf between two modes of subjectivity: the sex worker, on the one hand, and the mother, the daughter, the sister, and the wife, on the other. The former connotes corruption and immorality while the latter connotes a series of celebrated, morally sound subject positions. Accordingly, the coverage is marked by a profound effort to distance the murdered from the former by reminding audiences of their affinity to the latter. Crucially, it is the categories of domestic value that are the primary rhetorical weapons of the journalistic attempt to restore a certain dignity to the slain.

The (perhaps inadvertent) effects of these attempts at sympathetic portrayal are profound. First, they position the practices of prostitution on the nefarious side of a Manichean divide. The repeated reminders that, in spite of their presence in the Downtown Eastside, the victims were also valued members of families, reinforces a perceived distance between the morality of the family space and the immorality of the spaces of prostitution. Jiwani and Young argue that descriptions of the missing and murdered as members of families makes them more like 'us.' As they put it: "it rescues

them from a place of degeneracy to a zone of normality." Yet such positioning does more than merely redeem the stigmatized. For Jiwani and Young:

> ...it conforms to the dominant hegemonic values, in that the only women who can be rescued or are worth saving are mothers, daughters, and sisters – women like us. Making them like "us" is a discursive move designed to privilege their deservedness both in terms of police intervention and social recognition.[63]

Thus importantly, the sex worker's degree of belonging to conventional familial structures becomes a primary determinant of her value. The implication of such constructions, of course, is that those who cannot be seen as part of the imagined 'us' cannot be seen as worthy of redemption.

The coverage's privileging of personal tragedies narratives is also of central ideological importance. In one sense, it allows audiences to understand the street-involved as marginalized people, as the victims of profound personal tragedy. As Cohen has observed, "each society possesses a set of ideas about what causes deviation...and a set of images of who constitutes the typical deviant;" information, he contends, which arrives "already processed by the mass media."[64] For the purposes of the present study, it is useful to consider how ideas about what causes 'deviation' are reproduced and processed by the coverage. Here, individualized personal tragedies are mobilized as the core explanations for the deviant turn of the sex worker and a distinct "set of images" – predatory boyfriends, abusive parents, neglect, domestic instability – provide compelling evidence of their veracity. As such, their status as 'victims' is constrained by the particular boundaries of individualized devastation.

[63] Jiwani and Young, "Missing and Murdered Women," 904.

[64] Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 7.

Interestingly, the suggestion that foundational personal tragedy explains how individuals become involved in sex work jars against compelling comparative research that has contrasted media narratives about what 'drives' women to the strolls with the actual testimony of sex workers. For example, Benoit et al. note that media narratives have tended to privilege forms of entrapment as the primary explanation for entry in to prostitution. Yet their research with sex workers cited a diverse "variety of circumstances" that motivated entry. They observed that:

> ...just over one third [of respondents] said that they became involved in the industry because they were enticed by a presenting opportunity, such as having peers who were involved, seeing an employment ad, or having someone approach them with an offer of money for sex. For over one quarter of respondents, however, economic duress – described as being "unable to find a job," "on welfare with small children," living "on the streets with no income" or having "bills to pay."[65]

Benoit et al. did not merely consult with women working at the bottom of the street-level trade but there observations are nonetheless instructive here. They suggest that participation in prostitution is more complex than personal tragedy. Indeed, structural forces -including economic marginalization- have also frequently acted as the impetus behind industry participation. The point here is not to deny or minimize the foundational atrocities suffered by many of the missing and murdered. Rather, it is to challenge the narrative closure that the coverage's privileging of these stories accomplishes. As I argue above, such narrations individualize tragedy and extricate broader complicities in the reproduction of dangerous conditions and the marginalization of particular people.

There is a pronounced coherence between these simplistic individualizing narratives and the ideological core that animates the politics of neoliberalism. As I argue in chapter 1, neoliberal notions of self-reliance valorize a strident individualism and

[65] Hallgimsdottir, Phillips, and Benoit, "Fallen Women and Rescued Girls," 276.

position each individual subject as the master of her own well being. Bourdieu describes the proliferation of this logic, as the "imposition everywhere...of that sort of moral Darwinism that institutes the struggle of all against all and cynicism as the norm of all action and behaviour."[66] Indeed, individual devastation becomes eminently more understandable in a social and political milieu where the collective defenses against individual devastation have been powerfully undermined and dismantled. Thus for Baumann the rise of a hegemonic neoliberalism produces a context where "it is now left to individuals to seek, find and practice individual solutions to socially produced troubles...while being equipped with tools and resources that are blatantly inadequate to the task."[67] Following Baumann then, we might consider how the narrative characterization of survival sex as the product of an individual tragedy obscures the possibility of a broader analysis of marginalization. Of course, there *are* peripheral disruptions of this pattern in the coverage. On their own, however, they are hardly sufficient to undermine the prevailing tone of the whole which installs personal tragedy as a decisive explanation for the prostitute's 'descent.'

Finally, the persistent privileging of the relationship between sex work and criminal deviance reinforces the impression of a self-imposed (or even self-selected) marginality. The sustained deployment of images which signal the interconnection of prostitution with other 'threatening' practices naturalizes the sex worker's presence in the inner city. Narcotic dependency is installed as the first principle of the prostitute's existence. As such, she is produced as understandably present on the notorious spaces of

[66] Pierre Bourdieu, "Utopia of Endless Exploitation: the Essence of Neoliberalism" *Le Monde Diplomatique* (December), 1998.

[67] Zygmunt Baumann, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007),14.

the Downtown Eastside. Indeed, the criminal space and the criminal body are represented as interlocked in a mutually-affirming dialectic. By virtue of the space they inhabit, individuals are assumed to adhere to a certain set of deviant behaviors. As Van Brunschot et al argue, the "association of prostitution with the drug trade as an almost natural, if not inevitable association, provides fuel for the contention that prostitution epitomizes the filth of the streets" (a theme which I return to in the following chapter). Moreover, they argue that "media reports do not investigate the claims that the conditions of the prostitute's life predispose them to drug use. Rather, drug use marks the prostitute as deviant."[68] The coverage's striking emphasis on 'addiction' and its lurid textual and visual representations of women injecting, smoking, and exchanging drugs, stresses their relationship to criminality.

As Hall et al observe, popular representations of deviance are frequently marked by processes of signification which imply the "convergence" of deviant practices. In their lexicon, a "convergence" occurs when "two or more activities are linked in the process of signification so as to implicitly or explicitly draw parallels between them."[69] The conflation of prostitution with illicit drug use is paradigmatic of this phenomenon. For Hall et al, the representation of a "convergence" of practices which breach defined "thresholds" of public acceptance, escalate their unacceptability and make it easier for authorities to "mount legitimate campaigns of control against them."[70] Yet far more centrally, for the purposes of this study, they observe that the representation of converging deviant practices has had the structural tendency of "translating a *political*

[68] Van Brunschot, Sydie, and Krull, "Images of Prostitution," 56.

[69] Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Robert, *Policing the Crisis*, 223.

[70] Ibid., 226.

issue in to a *criminal* one," a process that frames the problem in terms of enforcement and defines appropriate response in "legal" rather than "political" terms. They contend that such processes simplify complex issues by "transposing" analytic frameworks that "depoliticise...[sic] an issue by *criminalising* [sic] it."[71] Building on this analysis, I argue that the persistent privileging of the relationship between the 'prostitute' and a broader criminality has the important ideological effect of depoliticizing the particular conditions of precarious sex work that exist in the Downtown Eastside. The violence of the stroll, in this schema, is easily framed as the inevitable outcome of an inter-mixing of dangerous individuals, a collective of which street-involved sex workers are a constituent part.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have argued that the coverage reproduces coherent ways of understanding the street-level prostitute. In particular, I examine how two well-established discourses – the prostitute as part of a 'dangerous' underworld and the prostitute and as an agent of moral corruption- persist in representations of both the missing and murdered and the women still working on Vancouver's low-track strolls. I argue that such representations are indispensable from the particular sources which are authorized to provide information about street-involved women. The relative absence of contributions from sex workers themselves, I contend, necessarily limits the definitions which emerge. Rarely are street-involved women invited to comment on the particular conditions of their lives or to suggest solutions to the precariousness of their work. As such, the coverage provides a limited consideration of the causes of endangerment. In

[71] Ibid., 224. (emphasis in original)

effect, it camouflages and elides larger forms of violence and reproduces the view that sex workers are in many ways the authors of their own misfortune.

Chapter 5: Producing Skid Row

We can't sanitize the area or convince people it's pristine. We're looking for a more youthful, risk-oblivious person....As soon as it's seen as the cool place to be they'll be crawling over the bodies to get there.

-John Stovell, Vancouver condo developer

they say 'we are swallowing up the Downtown Eastside
we will drive the low-life out
this is the day we wait for
to make our city a city for tourists and corporations
this is the day we work for
when we drive out the bad poor
and drive out their agencies
except for the good poor
who will live quietly and intimidated
in enclaves of social housing'
and our enemies gloat over how easy it is
to destroy our community
how easy it is
to divide our community
how easy it is

-Bud Osborn, *Lamentation for the Downtown Eastside*

The characterization of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside as a space of urban chaos suffuses the coverage studied. In each of the three sources, a sustained deployment of provocative text and image operates to establish the neighborhood as a zone of illicit activity, omnipresent danger and a generalized degeneracy. Such descriptions both infer and directly identify the area's disconnection from the relative safety of other city spaces. In effect, they produce the distinct impression of a bifurcated city centre composed of two distinct 'worlds': one of order and civility, the other of chaos.

Importantly, the emergence of the case of the missing and murdered women as a national media spectacle does not mark the first time that this imagined division has entered the 'media mill'. Since the 1980s, local and national news reports have covered a series of dramatic events that have produced and sustained the neighborhood's notorious reputation and reified its isolation from Vancouver's prosperous urban core. For example, Sommers and Blomley argue that after local health officials identified the Downtown Eastside as the 'ground zero' of an HIV epidemic in 1997, a moral panic erupted which fundamentally altered popular perceptions of the neighborhood. They contend that "the elision of boundaries between differing categories of phenomena and the blurring of causes and effects" which is typical of such panics, had the effect of conflating drug use and sickness with the poverty which was already widespread and well-known in the neighborhood. Media reports were instrumental, they argue, in provoking a "pathologization of the poor" which soon turned into a "pathologization of the entire neighborhood."[1] More recent national media interest in the neighborhood's politically contentious *InSite* clinic – North America's first legal supervised narcotic injection venue- has also contributed to the area's reputation as a space of concentrated deviant practices.

Media treatment of the missing and murdered women cannot be considered outside of these well established meanings. The reproduction of their stories does not occur in a geographical vacuum; each is indelibly marked by the traces of these previous iterations and the 'ways of seeing' that they promote. The disappeared are produced not

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[1] Sommers and Blomley, "The Worst Block in Vancouver," 20-21.

merely as sex workers, addicts, or the victims of a predatory misogynist, but as women who lived their lives amidst a generalized chaos.

In this chapter, I consider how accounts of urban chaos function as narrative vehicles of "territorial socialization."[2] In other words, I examine how press representations produce compelling ways to understand the crisis not merely in social and moral terms, but also in spatial terms. In the first part of this chapter, I trace some of the core material roots of this symbolic division. I demonstrate the profound linkages between the emergence of the Downtown Eastside as a space of concentrated 'chaos' and the practices that have secured the 'ordered peace' of the neighborhoods which surround it. I also consider how the 'chaos narrative' intersects with the material pressures of 'urban regeneration'/gentrification. Next, I examine how the coverage itself works to 'map' the Downtown Eastside in its considerations of the case of missing and murdered women. I argue that through a comprehensive diffusion of images of urban chaos the coverage not only operates to sustain the "pathologization of the entire neighborhood" described by Sommers and Blomley but also reproduces the imagined bifurcation of urban Vancouver. Throughout, I am again informed by Burk's notion of dispossession as an "ideological absence which is then made material" in considering how such narrations might well be employed (and, in fact, have already been employed) to rationalize and justify the eviction of marginalized peoples from the increasingly valuable spaces of Vancouver's inner city.[3]

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[2] David Newman, "The Resilience of Territorial Conflict in an Era of Globalization," in *Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization*, eds. Miles Kahler and Babara Walter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 87.

[3] Burk, "In Sight, Out of View," 50.

War is peace: two parts of the same city

Notions of an inner-city space called "skid row" emerged in North American urban discourse in the decades that followed the Second World War. As Sommers observes, the broad range of social observers that described these recently "discovered" enclaves of poverty and social dislocation, employed discursive strategies that mirrored earlier investigations of urban "slums". Accordingly, their characterizations tended to forge "a causal nexus between the evident decay of the built environment and the supposedly dissolute character of its inhabitants." In contrast to the spaces of ordered civility, accounts of "skid row" produced the impression of a space that was "fundamentally backward."[4]

Vancouver was among the urban agglomerations where this phenomenon was being observed. Here, the shifting geographies of industrial activity and warehousing which had long been centered in the city's Eastside facilitated a shifting of spatial identifications. As industry fled the urban core, the Eastside's association with productive labour gave way to another long-standing association: "morally dubious" activities such as gambling, alcohol consumption, and prostitution.[5] For generations, the area had been called "skid road", named for the long corduroy grooves designed to slide logs in to the water.[6] As the neighborhood became increasingly characterized as a space of contamination, moral transgression, and decline, its transition from "skid road" to "skid row" was eventually completed.

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[4] Jeff Sommers, "Men at the Margin: Masculinity and Space in Downtown Vancouver, 1950-1986," *Urban Geography* 19 (no. 4, 1998), 287-288.

[5] Sommers and Blomley, "The Worst Block in Vancouver," 33; Leslie Robertson and Dara Culhane, *In Plain Sight: Reflections on life in the Downtown Eastside*, (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2005), 17.

[6] Ibid., 17

By the 1970s, however, activists and area residents had begun to challenge this title and its attendant stigmatization. The name 'Downtown Eastside' was in fact born of these struggles, as advocates sought to erase the neighborhood's typecasting and "create new ways of imagining and representing the place."[7] Yet while renaming has restored a certain dignity to the area and served as a potent symbol of its residents' political vitality, much of this original stigmatization persists, albeit in different forms.

As I will demonstrate below, press accounts that map the Downtown Eastside as a space of generalized chaos reproduce the impression of a city spatially divided between order and disorder. This presumed separation is rendered 'natural' by patterns of omission and minimization that obscure vital historical and material connections between city spaces. Yet as Sommers and Blomley put it, "zones of darkness and despair and the zone of happy prosperity are parts of the same city."[8] But if we refuse to accept that spatial concentrations of poverty and prosperity are simply the product of a neutral and organic process of development, then we must ask what forces have contributed to the production of these stark divisions.[9]

In this section, I attempt to historicize and 'unmap' this imagined separation by demonstrating some of the core connections between the 'chaos' of the Downtown Eastside and the "ordered peace" of neighboring spaces. In so doing, I draw on Razack's contention that 'unmapping' naturalized geographies requires not only "asking how spaces came to be" but also interrogating the "the world views that rest upon [them]."[10] Building on this dual objective, the analysis that follows first demonstrates how patterns

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[7] Sommers, "Men at the Margin," 288.

[8] Sommers and Blomley, "The Worst Block in Vancouver," 53.

[9] Razack, *Race, Space, and the Law*, 5.

[10] Ibid., 5.

of capital disinvestment and reinvestment, political violence, and private and institutional strategies of containment have hastened and produced the stark socio-economic cleavages that exist between the neighborhoods of urban Vancouver then considers the particular ideological assumptions on which the 'naturalization' of these divisions depends.

The presumption that the Downtown Eastside has been 'taken over' by a criminal underclass which has both created and hastened the area's deterioration jars against the patterns of economic restructuring and capital disinvestment that facilitated its transition from a bustling hub of urban commerce to its (assumed) contemporary status as a zone of degeneracy. At the end of the second World War, the commercial core of what is now the Downtown Eastside was a thriving agglomeration of retail shops, places of employment, entertainment venues, and bustling city streets. But by the early 1960s, sweeping economic changes began to sap the neighborhood of its vitality. Remote industrial employers were relying less on seasonal workers and the large transient workforce that had once spent off-seasons in the neighborhood gradually began to dwindle.[11] Mills and manufacturers once centered in the urban core began to move out of the city in search of cheaper land and proximity to roadways.[12] At the same time, retail merchants faced the impacts of suburbanization which had begun to push shopping districts to the urban periphery. Limited parking and streets not intended for use by cars made the Downtown peninsula hazardous for drivers. Moreover, the built landscape and its stock of commercially zoned buildings were increasingly considered "unsuited to the needs of a modern downtown."[13]

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[11] Daniel Francis, *Red Light Neon: A History of Vancouver's Sex Trade* (Vancouver: Subway, 2006), 75,

[12] Sommers and Blomley, "The Worst Block in Vancouver," 34.

[13] Ibid., 34.

Yet the decisive blow to the Eastside's prosperity came with changes to transportation patterns. In the late 1950s, ferry service from North Vancouver was terminated just as a major steamship corporation (which had unloaded passengers in the area) ceased its operations. For decades these two services had ensured that "thousands of people arrived every day in the East End to shop, run errands, see friends, [and] go to the theatre."[14] Suddenly, that source of vitality was gone.

In the years that followed, the neighborhood's sagging real-estate values facilitated a wide availability of affordable housing and attracted increasing numbers of low-income people. The neighborhood's sprawling network of single-room-occupancy hotels (SROs) – which accounted for more than 13,000 units of housing in the 1970s- had once provided permanent homes for many on fixed incomes, particularly single men who had worked in the province's resource industries.[15] By the 1980s, however, the population of resource workers still living in the area was in sharp decline and new generations of low-income people had begun to move in and replace them. As housing prices had soared in districts all around it, the Downtown Eastside remained one of the few city spaces where affordable housing could still be secured. Yet by the late 1980s, things had begun to change. The pressures of an "overheated" property market coupled with the abundance of cheap Downtown Eastside land zoned for high densities began to attract a new wave of capital reinvestment in the area.[16]

The return of capital did not result in wholesale gentrification; it developed in spotty, uneven patterns. Certain pockets of the neighborhood were aggressively

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[14] Francis, *Red Light Neon*, 75.

[15] Sean Condon, "No Place for Home," *This* 40 (no. 5, 2007), 20; Nicholas Blomley, *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 34.

[16] Blomley, *Unsettling the City*, 34.

redeveloped and dramatically 'improved' while others languished or further declined. The district now known as Gastown, for example, was the target of considerable regeneration efforts in the 1980s and 1990s and now bears little resemblance to the urban decay to its immediate east. As Heather Smith observes, there is now a striking statistical divergence between Gastown and its surrounding areas.[17]

Planners had originally conceived the development to be a "site of inclusiveness" and contrasted their practices with established corporate and bureaucratic development strategies.[18] Gastown's designation as a "heritage" zone promised a different kind of development, one that planners hoped would simultaneously preserve some of the city's original building stock and be a catalyst to a broader revitalization. But heritage status required private property owners that were willing to bankroll the considerable costs of upgrades and preservations and rental and condominium prices reflected this necessity[19]. As Sommers and Blomley observe, "heritage preservation was...more than anything an...economic and property development strategy."[20] As Gastown developed as a corner of prosperity and conspicuous consumption - developments that heritage designation had directly afforded – the "undesignated" spaces of nearby Hastings Street sunk in to a pattern of accelerated decline which included "architectural deterioration, concentrated drug trade activity and commercial vacancy."[21] Tourism Vancouver's sanguine reminder to visitors to "be mindful that Gastown, while very safe, is partially located in a more graphic part of the city" understates the stark divisions which are laid bare at the area's

[17] Heather Smith, "Planning, Policy and Polarisation in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside," *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Social Geografie* 94 (no.4, 2003), 501.

[18] Sommers and Blomley, "The Worst Block in Vancouver," 39-41.

[19] H Smith, "Planning, Policy and Polarisation in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside," 501.

[20] Sommers and Blomley, "The Worst Block in Vancouver," 37-42.

[21] H Smith, "Planning, Policy and Polarisation in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside," 501.

borders.[22] The decline of Hastings Street has facilitated an explosion of storefront vacancies. Between Cambie and Main streets, for example, commercial vacancies on Hastings had been as low as 13% in 1986 but shot up to 36% by 1996; by 2001 the street's notorious 100 block had a vacancy rate of 50%, a level that would grow to 57% by 2007.[23]

Indeed, the Gastown/Hastings comparison offers an illustrative example of the growing polarization that has come to typify the neighborhood. As redeveloped districts have become increasingly occupied by a wealthy elite, a correlative scarcity of affordable housing has worked to concentrate low-income people in particular areas. Put differently, the simultaneous patterns of investment and disinvestment that have defined area development since the 1980s have facilitated a process that has seen the neighborhood increasingly divided by class. Importantly, these spaces of concentrated poverty have increasingly become the residuum of populations adversely affected by a host of structural forces. In some ways they have become a kind of "collection zone" for people dispossessed by the ongoing effects of colonialism, marginalized by retrenchments of the welfare state, released to the street by the widespread deinstitutionalizations of mental health facilities, and stricken by the exigencies of addiction.[24] Too often, however, these broader structural factors have been subsumed by narrations that label these spaces of the marginalized as spaces of self-selected degeneracy and a vile criminality.

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[22] Tourism Vancouver, *Vancouver Neighborhoods*, http://www.hellobc.com/en-CA/Neighbourhoods.htm.

[23] City of Vancouver, *Downtown Eastside Monitoring Report, 2005/2006* (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2006), 57; H Smith," Planning, Policy and Polarisation in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside," 500.

[24] Lowman, "Violence and the Outlaw Status of (Street) Prostitution," 993.

Patterns of capital investment and disinvestment are not themselves sufficient to explain how the Downtown Eastside has come to be stigmatized as a zone of urban chaos. As I argue previously, the presence of the low-track sex trade and of open drug markets have been central to the development of this reputation. Yet dominant accounts which suggest that the presence of these industries have acted as a "magnet" attracting criminality towards them, occlude the well-established history of geographical eviction and enforcement that has operated to concentrate these practices in the Downtown Eastside.

Historical accounts of prostitution in Vancouver have demonstrated that police and civic authorities have long tolerated prostitution in some city spaces while aggressively purging it from others. Deborah Nilsen's study of the city's pre-war industry, for example, demonstrates long standing tolerance so long as the industry remained confined to the more proletarian districts of the city's East.[25] Lowman's studies on prostitution in Vancouver from the 1970s to the present reveal a similar pattern of geographically-specific tolerance. He argues that outdoor strolls have operated with little interruption for generations on Vancouver's Eastside while various 'outbreaks' of prostitution in the city's more 'well-heeled' areas have elicited aggressive deployments of coercive state power. For example, Lowman points to the 1976 closure of two downtown cabaret clubs as one decisive moment when prostitution was constituted as a 'social problem' that merited intervention. The closures pushed indoor workers to the outdoor strolls and many began to operate in the West end. Media narratives both generated and consolidated popular outrage as business owners and area residents began

[25] Deborah Nilsen, "The 'social evil': prostitution in Vancouver, 1900-1920" in *In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in B.C.* (Victoria: Camosun College, 1986), 208.

to demand that officials launch a 'clean-up.' They contended that 'their' streets had been overtaken by a prostitution boom. Yet as Lowman points out, the industry had actually changed very little as a result of the closures. What had altered fundamentally was its visibility. Nevertheless, the perception of a prostitution 'explosion' gave rise to the formation of a series of local residents groups dedicated to securing the industry's eviction from certain spaces. Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, groups that were "conspicuously absent when street prostitution had been confined to the less salubrious areas of the downtown core" did battle with sex workers.[26]

The most effective of these was the Concerned Residents of the West End (CROWE) who demanded that their area be purged of prostitution "no matter where it might end up."[27] Over the course of several years, the group managed to win a series of significant concessions, including the installation of traffic diverting barriers, a short-lived civic by-law, and eventually a rare civil nuisance injunction issued by the provincial state. Yet as Lowman notes, what was particularly exceptional about the injunction was its geographic specificity. The order applied only to workers operating in a small, and particularly wealthy, group of west end city blocks.[28] And while, in the end, the measures were largely successful in evicting prostitutes from the area, their ultimate effect was to simply displace the industry to other places. Accordingly, new resident groups and business associations came together to challenge prostitution as it began to

[26] John Lowman, "Street Prostitution in Vancouver: Notes on the Gensis of a Social Problem," *Canadian Journal of Criminology* 28 (1), 1986, 13.

[27] John Lowman, "Street Prostitution Control: Some Canadian Reflections on the Finsbury Park Experience," *British Journal of Criminology* 32 (1), 1992, 7.

[28] Ibid., 8.

operate in other city spaces. Yet none were quite as successful as CROWE in eliciting the coercion of the state.

Activists in less-affluent Mount Pleasant, where many evicted from the West End had ended up, demanded to know why the province would not enact a similar injunction on their behalf. Only after considerable effort, including a direct-action "shame the johns" campaign, were they successful in securing police cooperation in evicting the industry. Here again, evictions simply displaced the industry and most workers began operating in the Strathcona neighborhood of the Downtown Eastside where sex workers received a decidedly different response. As Lowman puts it, "residents of Strathcona must have wondered why a similar police effort was not made to deal with problems in their neighborhood" but "generally a very different approach was taken…in responding to street prostitution in this, the poorest area of Vancouver."[29]

While these particular developments coincide with a period of uncertainty about the legal enforcement of prostitution and thus cannot be considered independently of broader debates, they nevertheless seem to demonstrate a direct correlation between the economic power of complainants and the coercive effort of the state. Residents in the West End managed to secure rare and provocative state action while residents in Mount Pleasant struggled for a far less significant deployment of force. Enforcement in the Downtown Eastside/Strathcona, however, was minimal. In fact, as Lowman has argued, police intervention in Eastside street prostitution has had a tendency to peak only at moments when police have been interested in cracking down on narcotics crimes and have found it useful to "identify female addicts and create a pool of potential informers in

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[29] Ibid., 11-12.

the process of discovering heroin traffickers."[30] In much the same way, open drug markets – such as the one at the intersection of Main and Hastings – have been met with a degree of tolerance that would have been almost unimaginable had they been located in more affluent zones. Among the ruins of a disinvested and decaying landscape, illicit activity has received far less coercive attention than it has elsewhere.

Though seemingly disconnected, patterns of disinvestment in the Downtown Eastside and patterns of geographically-specific tolerance of illicit activity, offer potent ways to interrogate the hollowness of the claim that Vancouver's inner-city has been 'taken over' by a degenerate population. Taken together, these historical patterns not only demonstrate how the 'chaos' of the Downtown Eastside has been produced and sustained by political and structural forces, they also lay bare an acute relationship between power and space. This relationship hinges on certain ideological assumptions and particularly notions of ownership and entitlement. Importantly, Blomley contends that in liberal societies many have become accustomed to considering law and violence as antithetical. Indeed, liberal traditions have tended to situate violence as something "outside of the law" and as "that which contains and prevents an anomic anarchy."[31] Yet notions of private possession of territory are intimately woven into this world view and its legal codes; the assumed entitlements that ownership produces have frequently realized particular forms of violence. Thus as Blomley puts it, "at its core property entails the legitimate act of expulsion, devolved to the state."[32]

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[30] Lowman, "Street Prostitution in Vancouver," 13.

[31] Nicholas Blomley, "Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence: The Frontier, the Survey and the Grid" *Annals Association of American Geographers* 93 (1) 2003, 121.

[32] Ibid., 129.

The series of Vancouver stroll-evictions that I describe above, offer striking examples of a view of 'rights' that valorizes private ownership. Indeed, each of the residents groups who sought to purge the industry from 'their' streets were animated by the shared assumption that a private citizen should expect authorities to ensure its "civil right...to be protected from the nuisance said to be caused by street prostitution."[33] While previous anti-prostitution campaigns had focused on notions of moral contamination, "social hygiene", and even "white slavery", these modern efforts were driven by an assumed entitlement to 'peace' in private residential spaces. Lowman describes the logic of CROWE's demands for eviction:

> ...it was argued that prostitutes offended citizens by harassing them on the street and that the residents' right to peace and quiet was violated by the noise made by prostitutes, customers, and onlookers late at night. Customers, by indiscriminately requesting services, offended non-prostitutes by traveling through the strolls. Taken together, these nuisances were alleged to reduce property values and increase crime in a mutually reinforcing relationship that would ultimately destroy the residential communities in which the strolls were located.[34]

Notions of order and chaos are central here. The liberal view of rights and the centrality of its valorization of private ownership operate to legitimate and naturalize the expectation of 'order' in private spaces.

Henri Lefevbre's celebrated notion of a bureaucratized and commodified "abstract space" is particularly instructive here. For Eugene McCann, paraphrasing Lefebvre, such enclosures demand "a concerted attempt to define the appropriate meaning of, and suitable activities that can take place within" the boundaries of a privatized space.[35] As Lefebvre puts it:

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[33] Lowman, "Street Prostitution," in *Deviance: Conformity and Control in Canadian Society*, ed. Vincent Sacco (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 1992), 85.

[34] Ibid., 86

[35] Eugene McCann, "Race, Protest, and Public Space: Contextualizing Lefevbre in the U.S. City," Anitpode

> [abstract space] ...is a space...of growing homogeneity...a police space in which the state tolerates no resistance and no obstacles. [It] implies tacit agreement, a non-aggression pact, a contract, as it were, of non-violence...In the street, each individual is supposed not to attack those he meets; anyone who transgresses this law is deemed guilty of a criminal act...This economy valorizes certain relationships between people in particular places and thus gives rise to connotive discourses concerning these places; these in turn, generate "consensuses" or conventions according to which, for example, such and such a place is supposed to be trouble-free, a quiet area where people go peacefully to have a good time, and so forth.[36]

Interestingly, spaces of capital disinvestment -which in Vancouver tend to be spaces of racialized poverty- seem to be spaces where a certain 'chaos' is permitted by the state. They are zones which are, in some sense, deemed outside of the 'public' purview. As Razack points out, the representation of 'public' space as a "unity which must be protected from conflict," presents a "compelling example of how we might consider space as a social product by attending to [the] social hierarchies" that such representations reveal.[37] Indeed, the semiotics of enforcement patterns actively reproduce these hierarchies and reaffirm certain notions of legitimate and illegitimate occupancy. For example, barriers, civic by-laws, and nuisance injunctions designed to curb prostitution produce sex workers as illegitimate occupiers of space while its opponents – those who are supposedly 'peaceful'- are produced as the "legitimate users and natural owners of the public space."[38] This assumed entitlement justifies the violence of eviction.

Yet as Blomley has argued, the hegemony of a liberal view of rights in which the "ownership model" is central is not merely static and stable. By contrast, it requires a sustained enactment and reproduction in order to ensure its perpetuation. Importantly,

31, (2), 2002, 69.

[36] Lefebvre quoted in Ibid., 169.

[37] Razack, *Race, Space and the Law*, 9.

[38] Ibid., 10.

the persuasiveness of "the categories of the ownership model" is in part due to its realization in actual space.[39] Yet the sustained effectiveness of such persuasion demands "a continual active doing."[40] Taking Blomley's cue, we might consider narrations of chaos (which as I will demonstrate, are abundant in the coverage studies) are central vehicles through which the enactment and valorization of private property is accomplished. The 'chaos' of the Downtown Eastside is not itself distinct from the 'order' of other spaces. By contrast, the forces which have sustained the latter have also concentrated the former. Yet through a persistent contrasting of the 'peace' of neighborhoods where responsible private ownership prevails and the 'chaos' of spaces where private capital has largely fled (not withstanding the few 'fleabag' hotel owners, of course), the coverage tacitly valorizes and enacts the legitimacy of private spaces.

The mapping of Vancouver as divided between these apparently distinct spaces produces a "frontier" which both symbolically and materially delineates a sharp spatial divide between "contending constituencies."[41] Neil Smith's work on the 'redevelopment' of Manhattan's Lower East Side in the late 1980s, demonstrates how the language of "frontier" was employed to justify capital's conquest of the neighborhood. He argues that a "gentrification frontier" came to denote the fundamental divide between the civil spaces of ordered capital and the disordered chaos which festered on the other side of its material and moral line. He demonstrates how gentrification efforts produced a new manifestation of the courageous "pioneer" charged with the task of penetrating the dark spaces of disordered chaos and establishing the first bulwarks of civility. As Blomley has

[39] Blomley, *Unsettling the City*, 5

[40] Nicholas Blomley, *Unsettling the City,* 122.

[41] Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 96.

observed, Smith's formulation has demonstrated the relevance of the "frontier" image to the "moral and political terrain of gentrification."[42] In fact, the discursive formulation of the spaces on the outside of the gentrification frontier as an "urban wilderness [of] savagery and chaos, awaiting the urban homesteaders who can forge a renaissance of hope and civility" bear a haunting note of harmony with the description of the Downtown Eastside privileged by the coverage studied. If we consider the neighborhood, as reporter Rosie DiManno would have us do, as a space "where hope fades to black" than the new urban "pioneer" – those brave souls willing to purchase property in the neighborhood- is produced as less an "invader" who will hasten the eviction of the poor and more a courageous citizen who will begin to restore some order to the zone of chaos.

Interestingly, developers have already begun to seek out this new generation of "pioneers." In 1999, for example, developer John Stovell explained to the *Toronto Star* that successfully marketing the area would require attracting an adventuring new demographic. He remarked:

> We can't sanitize the area or convince people it's pristine. We're looking for a more youthful, risk-oblivious person....As soon as it's seen as the cool place to be they'll be crawling over the bodies to get there.[43]

Meanwhile, Vancouver's "king of the condo market", Bob Rennie, has targeted the neighborhood's "character" as its primary selling point, encouraging "brave" pioneers to capitalize on culture rather than settle for sterile suburban comfort. As he puts it:

> [the Downtown Eastside] is an authentic area, not a sanitized environment. Neighborhoods like this are rare and offer a creative mix of cutting-edge culture, heritage and character. This in the home of the future...be bold or move to suburbia.[44]

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[42] Blomley, *Unsettling the City,* 179

[43] Tim Carlson, "Condofest: Tim Carlson queues up for a Woodward's unit," Vancouver Review (2006), http://www.vancouverreview.com/past_articles/condofest.htm.

[44] Ibid.

Rennie's pitch is reminiscent of Smith's description of a new generation of artists and "creative professionals" who operated as the initial shock troops for the conquest of the Lower Eastside. Smith argues that "squalor, poverty, and the violence of eviction [were] constituted as exquisite ambience" for this first wave of gentrifiers. He notes how "rapid polarization" becomes "glorified for its excitement rather than condemned for its violence or understood for the rage it threatens."[45]

As Blomley observes, connections between the gentrification frontier and the historical frontier of colonial expansion, have a particular significance in Vancouver. Just as the occupied territories of British Columbia appeared as an empty territory ripe for settlement to colonial conquerors, so the Downtown Eastside has appeared as a "terra nullius to some developers." He writes:

> The similarities with the ideologies that undergirded the colonial dispossession of native peoples are striking. Deemed mobile, native peoples could not be seen as enjoying any legitimate entitlement given the supposed conjunction of permanence and possession.[46]

There are, of course, dramatic distinctions to be drawn between the scales of violence that occurred at the historical frontier and the contemporary 'frontiers' of gentrification. Nevertheless, both offer potent ways to considering how symbolic constructions, particularly constructions of an absence, can be employed to justify catastrophic violence.

Mapping chaos

The dominant narratives that emerge from the coverage are strikingly geographic. They both situate the crisis of Vancouver's missing and murdered women in actual space and provide compelling ways to understand that space. Their explanations of the crisis

[45] Smith, *The New Urban Frontier,* 27.

[46] Blomley, *Unsettling the City,* 90-92.

are inseparable from a particular branding of the 'mean streets' of the Downtown Eastside which functions as a constitutive backdrop to the coverage; it marks the core symbolic terrain on which the crisis itself is mapped.

Indeed, the metaphor of the "map" is instructive here; cartographic practices of signification share striking commonalities with the processes of "territorial socialization" that I describe in this chapter. Just as maps allow cartographers to impose an abstract coherence on the illimitable multiplicity of the physical landscape, so too do homogenizing representations of the Downtown Eastside impose a reductive narrative coherence on the heterogeneity of the neighborhood's social and political topography. In this section, I contend that the coverage examined operates to actively map the neighborhood as a space of chaos. First, I argue that a journalistic fixation on neighborhood spaces where disorder is most apparent reproduces a deceptively narrow view of the area. Next, I consider how two distinct but complimentary discourses contribute to and consolidate an impression of generalized chaos. The first produces the neighborhood as a space of general foulness; as an area consumed by a pervasive filth that contaminates both the bodies of residents and the built landscape that envelopes them. The second produces the neighborhood as enclosure consumed by criminality and physical endangerment. Lastly, I return to the ideological implications of this branding. I argue that it naturalizes marginality and reifies the imagined distance between city spaces that I have begun to explain above.[47]

Press narratives generated by the investigation and prosecution of Robert Pickton powerfully reinforce the neighborhood's notoriety. Indeed, the coverage that forms the

[47] Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 20.

basis of this study yields a powerful mix of visual and textual cues, which reinforce the distinct impression of a neighborhood consumed by degeneracy and disorder. In fact, the appellation 'skid row' re-appears frequently, a discursive move which not only harkens back to the neighborhood's previous characterization, but also taps the well-established chain of associations that this term has come to denote in the broader culture.

Dozens of references to the neighborhood appear in the coverage, most as casual mentions in narratives concerned with case developments. Nevertheless, many of these peripheral references are instrumental in reinforcing the themes of the skid-row categorization; the words 'Downtown Eastside' are routinely coupled with pejorative adjectives. The neighborhood is described variously as "seamy", "seedy", "squalid", "lurid", "wretched", as a "scar of a place", and even "terrible", to note just a few examples.

Yet while these depictions are important, the series of articles which take the neighborhood itself as their subject and attempt a more thorough consideration of it, accomplish the most substantial reinforcements of this stigmatization. Six articles in the coverage examined offer such direct reflections and attempt to contextualize the broader case by providing thorough accounts of the spaces where the missing and murdered lived and worked. There is little variation between these definitional accounts. Each provides a startling portrait of open narcotic transaction and consumption, deranged and dazed individuals, and a decayed and dirtied urban landscape. Most are first-person accounts of a 'daring' journalistic foray into the dark urban recesses. They create the distinct impression that few from 'mainstream' society would dare to meander into these spaces intentionally. It is imagined as a "mean enclave" with little to offer people from the

straight world, its dark invitation is said to invite only particular kinds of "newcomer[s]", those "lost souls…lured by the promise of easy drugs."[48] Rosie DiManno tells her readers that "nobody comes here just to watch, as in famous tenderloin districts elsewhere."[49] Evidently, her assertion excludes the throng of journalists "drawn as moths to flames to document, analyze [and] represent…the dramatic and photogenic spectacle of social suffering in this neighborhood."[50]

The Downtown Eastside spans a network of 21 city blocks but press interest in the area is largely restricted to the spaces where social disorder and criminality are plainly visible. Of the six texts which focus on the neighborhood, five refer directly to the chaotic 'scene' unfolding on notorious Hastings Street, while the others' allusions to "open drug markets" and vivid imagery of "junkies shooting up in alleyways…prostitutes openly having sex behind buildings…drunks puking on sidewalks" largely accomplishes the same effect. These articles reveal a pronounced journalistic interest in producing the neighborhood in a particular way. Indeed, in the effort to locate the grim epicenter of the crisis – the spaces where Pickton is said to have 'preyed'- reporters have unfolded a pattern of representation which over-privileges certain aspects of the area while erasing others entirely. The result is the impression of an area consumed by 'chaos.'

This characterization is sharply illustrated by the three articles which describe events at the corner of Main and Hastings streets. The intersection, often described as the area's central hub of illicit activity, has been a perennial target for shock-seeking journalists interested in lurid displays of public criminality, including those covering the

[48] Mason, "Business as Usual in the Wretched District."

[49] DiManno, "For Eastside Girls, Nothing's Changed" A1.

[50] Culhane, "Their Spirits Live Within Us," 594.

trial of Robert Pickton. In one *Toronto Star* article, Girard describes the area as a wasteland of illicit activity where degeneracy swirls at a "dizzying pace." His observations are accented by a provocative photograph of a woman using a car mirror to inject heroin into her neck. Describing the intersection, he writes:

> A parade of men and women thrust crumpled bills at a man dolling out vials of crack cocaine.
>
> Some go down alleyways or into nearby public washrooms to smoke it, while others flick on their lighters and inhale, oblivious to the traffic whizzing by.
>
> One transvestite in a pink miniskirt holds court while a barefoot woman wearing a once-elegant purple dress wanders down the sidewalk. A man with two bicycles, one for him, the other for his partner selling crack at $10 a gram, chews on a used syringe and talks to himself while dancing to a song playing in his head.[51]

In a similar *Globe and Mail* story, published the previous day, reporter Alexandra Gill describes the same corner. Her report is accented by a large photograph of a woman smoking crack in filth-strewn alleyway and a line-up of closely cropped images of the missing and murdered which connects her portrait to the broader case. In the left corner, a map labeled the "seedy side of town" situates her story relative to other city spaces. She writes:

> At the corner of Main and Hastings Streets, many of the addicts, pushers and prostitutes swarming on the streets yesterday at noon hadn't heard about the breakthrough in the case of the 50 women who have disappeared from the neighborhood.
>
> At the down-an-out epicenter of Vancouver's seamy Downtown Eastside, most had more urgent matters to attend to. Like the woman down on her knees trying to inject heroin into her friend's neck as people walked by.
>
> The second woman, sprawled on her back, certainly wasn't in any mood to chat. "Ahh," she screamed, bolting upright as her partner missed her jugular vein, again.[52]

Similarly, in a front page story that ran in the first week of the trial, the *Toronto Star*'s Rosie DiManno returns to this very corner:

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[51] Girard, "Despair Stalks Hookers on Mean Streets," A7.

[52] Gill, "Prostitutes, Addicts, Too Strung Out to Care," A5.

> At the corner of Hastings and Main, an open market for heroin and cocaine, a man punches a woman in the mouth. She shrieks and lunges at his face, nails clawing. Few among the dozens milling outside the Carnegie Community Centre take notice of the episode.
>
> Around the corner, in a laneway where a health clinic hands out clean syringes and condoms, sickly teenage girls are smoking crack behind a skip, the brief buzz just numbing enough to send them back out for the next ten-dollar-trick.
>
> It all happens brazenly, kitty corner from a police station, patrol cars moving slowly through the phalanx of bodies, narrowed eyes looking into vacant eyes.[53]

These representations are significant not merely as an index of recurring place. They also demonstrate, through an exclusive privileging of those neighborhood spaces where "criminality" is plainly observed, the coverage's more general univocality.

Eclipsed by these narrations (which are themselves paradigmatic of the pattern of spatial descriptions which suffuse the coverage) are the 16,000 residents who have little connection to illicit activity. As Culhane notes, many are simply "too poor to live anywhere else in Canada's highest rent city."[54] Yet this population is consigned to the margins; they are rendered invisible by a culture of journalism more interested in the dramatic spectacle of criminal transaction than interrogating less visible forms of social and economic dislocation. Indeed, the neighborhood's well-established history of vibrant interpersonal solidarity, political mobilization, and grassroots activism is silenced by images which imply a generalized break of social cohesion. The part comes to represent

[53] DiManno, "For Eastside Girls, Nothing's Changed," A1.

[54] Culhane, "Their Spirits Live Within Us," 594.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL • SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2002 — THE MISSING WOMEN | CANADA • A5

Seedy side of town

A woman smokes crack in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside yesterday. A few people in the area were talking about the missing-prostitutes case, but, said one, 'If you're down here, you got other things on your mind.'

Prostitutes, addicts too strung out to care

The Eastside

BY ALEXANDRA GILL, VANCOUVER

"What pig farm?"

At the corner of Main and Hastings Streets, many of the drug addicts, pushers and prostitutes swarming on the streets yesterday at noon hadn't heard about the breakthrough in the case of the 50 women who have disappeared from the neighbourhood.

At the down-and-out epicentre of Vancouver's seamy Downtown Eastside, most had more urgent matters to attend to. Like the woman down on her knees trying to inject heroin into her friend's neck as people walked by.

The second woman, sprawled on her back, certainly wasn't in any mood to chat. "Ahh," she screamed, bolting upright, as her partner missed the jugular vein, again.

A middle-aged man who introduced himself only as George suddenly made the connection.

"Oh, that pig farm," he said, swaying back and forth unsteadily as his eyelids started to droop.

"There's nothing to talk about," he said, spitting a fat gob of phlegm onto a sidewalk already awash in needle wrappers, ketchup packages and cigarette butts. "It's all been blocked out by the police."

Myles Mestnos, a security guard with the Carnegie Community Centre, looked over at a young man sucking on a crack pipe a few steps in the other direction and shook his head.

There had been a few people at the drop-in centre talking about whether there was a connection between the missing women of the Downtown Eastside and a farm in Port Coquitlam, he said. But not many. "If you're down here, you got other things on your mind."

Josey is a 34-year-old prostitute with scabs all over her face, the result, she said, of a bad batch of cocaine cut with Ajax. She saw the news about the farm on TV, but hadn't talked to anyone about it yet.

"I just came out now," she explained, as she wandered over to a friend who supplies pipes. Crack pipes, that is, which Josey hawks on the corner for $2 a pop.

Josey said she and a few girlfriends were sitting around last week, wondering what happened to the bodies of the missing women. "Fifty girls missing and no bodies? Kind of strange."

"When I heard on the news about that farm, man, it sent a cold chill down my spine."

Josey knew many of the missing, most of them casually; one intimately. "We had just started dating," Josey, who is bisexual, said. "She went out one night and never came back."

Yes, it does scare Josey to think that she could easily have been one of those missing women. Two years ago, she went out on a bad date. Just as she was reaching for the car door, the man grabbed the money back out of her hand and slashed her across the forehead.

She lifted her bangs to display a long deep scar.

Like many prostitutes in the area, Josey didn't report the incident to the police. "I'm just another East Hastings ho' to them. What do they care?"

Nor did she hold out much hope for the investigation. "I hope they find some of the women on that farm," she said, shaking her head sadly.

"But all 50? I bet there are copycats."

We rounded the corner, past the Contact Centre, an outreach program that helps people get into detox programs. A young man was stabbed there a few days ago. A few steps into the alleyway, a different young man was sitting on a garbage bin fingering a yellow flyer.

Was it a warning about the "bunk?" Bunk is the street name for fake drugs. Lately, a lot of crack made out of wax has been sold on the streets.

"I don't know," the man said. "I can't read." He handed down the flyer. "Heroin users beware!" it read. "Strong powder around. Don't accidentally overdose."

Who was victim of the 1997 knife attack?

BY PETER KENNEDY
VANCOUVER

None of her friends or family know where Wendy Lynn Eistetter is.

But her whereabouts is a subject of broad speculation in the news media and on the rougher streets of Vancouver because of an attack she suffered three years ago.

Fellow prostitutes said their friend, who was stabbed and left bleeding near the Port Coquitlam farm that is being scoured for clues in the disappearance of 50 women, has been taken into protective custody by police.

Three years ago, working as a prostitute in Vancouver's downtown core, Ms. Eistetter was saved by a couple who found her bleeding heavily on a roadside near the farm co-owned by Robert Pickton.

Mr. Pickton's whereabouts are unknown and he has not been charged in the disappearances of the women, most of whom lived much as Ms. Eistetter did, turning tricks in exchange for money to support their drug habits.

In April, 1997, he was briefly in police custody after being charged with one count of attempting to murder Ms. Eistetter by repeatedly stabbing her with a knife. He was also charged with assaulting her with a kitchen knife, unlawful confinement and aggravated assault. Almost a year later, the charges were stayed.

Ms. Eistetter was so badly injured that she remained in hospital for several weeks. But she later returned to the life on the Downtown Eastside and had been living in the low-rent hotel until just before she disappeared two days ago.

Her family does not know where she is, although they have been in regular contact with her.

IN A CLASS BY ITSELF
THE JOINT KELLOGG SCHULICH EXECUTIVE MBA

Figure 5.1 – "Prostitutes, addicts, too strung out to care," the *Globe and Mail*, 9 February 2002.

the whole as the repeated and nearly exclusive invocation of deviant spaces operates to stigmatize the entire neighborhood.

The coverage studied overwhelmingly produces the Downtown Eastside as a place of ubiquitous filth. The quotations above offer a few potent indications of this characterization but are merely parts of what amounts to a widespread representational pattern. Themes of impurity saturate the coverage as a whole. Imagery of a built landscape in a state of wretched deterioration and terminal decline fuse almost seamlessly with images of diseased and dirty individuals. They connect with a well established tradition of representing the neighborhood as a space of filth and contagion.

Sommers and Blomley point to particular panics over narcotics and HIV as central to this construction. They contend that these and other decisive 'events' have been at the core of a "rhetoric of pathology" which has fused the "body of the urban outcast" with the "body of the city" in three central ways.[55] First, the neighborhood itself was defined as an "insidious zone" of contaminated spaces which has engendered and reproduced its own set of problems. Second, the "poor and drug addicted" were defined as agents of contamination directly responsible for urban decay and widespread disinvestment. Third, residents themselves were imagined as "morally isolated from the rest of the city" as the assumed interconnection of destitution, addiction, and disease operated to situate the neighborhood "as a place radically different from anywhere else in Vancouver."[56]

These patterns are powerfully reproduced in the coverage in a number of ways. For example, particular signifiers of filth and contagion recur with marked frequency.

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[55] Sommers and Blomley, "The Worst Block in Vancouver," 22-25.

[56] Ibid., 22-25.

Images of crack pipes, used syringes, and fast food packaging, to name just a few, appear repeatedly in descriptions of the neighborhood. Neighborhood filth- such imagery suggests- is produced by filthy occupants; individual disregard for neighborhood spaces is constructed as the core causal condition of there foulness. Gill's investigation of the neighborhood's "down-and-out epicenter" offers a potent example of how this impression is produced. Her interview with "George", a neighborhood resident, demonstrates the connection between human practices and omnipresent filth. She writes:

> "There's nothing to talk about" he said, spitting a fat glob of phlegm on to a sidewalk already awash in needle wrappers, ketchup packages and cigarette butts.[57]

Undoubtedly chosen for their capacity to repulse, such images are common to a series of narrative accounts which mark residents not only as consistent with the decay that surrounds them but also as its partial authors.

Descriptions of filthy streets frequently appear alongside images of area residents 'intimately' integrated with their polluted surroundings. Photographs of women using drugs fuse with textual descriptions that find people "sprawled out" on their backs, hunched over on industrial loading bays, and "squatted" dazed on a sidewalk, generally as they smoke crack or inject heroin. Those who live in the neighborhood are produced as 'creatures' rather than residents of its housing stock.

This 'creature' motif connects to representations of decay in the built landscape. Accounts which privilege the contamination of physical spaces - for example, Girard's impression of a "grim collection of filthy alleyways, derelict buildings and shattered dreams"- mirror descriptions which privilege contaminated physical bodies.[58] Indeed,

[57] Gill, "Prostitutes, Addicts, Too Strung Out to Care," A5.

[58] Girard, "Despair Stalks Hookers on Mean Streets," A1.

there is a representational harmony between the characterization of individuals as the wanton producers of filth and infection and the characterization of a built landscape that has been treated with an analogous disregard or disinterest. So imagined, physical deterioration can be explained by the very presence of a 'foul underclass' and not, for example, housing regulation schemes that encourage landlords to leave residential hotels in disrepair or the particular exigencies of a market logic that has facilitated widespread capital disinvestment in the area.

Perhaps most centrally, however, the conflation of images of foul bodies and images of a foul landscape reproduce the impression of a neighborhood radically dislocated from other city spaces. Images of the dilapidated network of residential hotels or "garbage strewn" alleyways are contrasted against the "treelined streets and open spaces" of other Vancouver neighborhoods.[59] Girard, for example, demonstrates palpable shock that "all this" (referring to a lurid scene he's just described) can unfold just "a short walk" from places where "tourists wander" beneath "the spectacular snow capped mountains of Vancouver's north shore tower a few kilometers – and a world-away."[60] Such images reinforce and directly identify a "monumental divide."[61] For example, a constant invocation of the urban alleyway, taps a series of well established nefarious associations. In popular culture, such spaces have long been employed as zones of danger. Removed from the relative safety of the main thoroughfare, the alleyway has not only come to signify a space of illicit transaction and dubious dealing, but also the scavenging ground of vagrant and vermin alike. News narratives which situate street-

[59] Girard, "The Little Sister Behind the Statistic," A7.

[60] Girard, "Despair Stalks Hookers on Mean Streets," A1.

[61] Girard, "The Little Sister Behind the Statistic," A7.

involved people in these spaces - accounts, for example, which locate residents "shooting up in alleyways" or loitering around "back-alley" entrances usually "staked out by hookers"- inevitably evoke these well established meanings. Indeed, the image of the alley is but one constitutive part of a widespread representational pattern which reinforces the impression of a space of enclosed foulness.

Constant references to physical violence also produce the Downtown Eastside as a space of danger. The neighborhood is produced as a space of constant physical aggression, a horrifying *Hobbesian* enclosure where the war of *all against all* is waged with unyielding fury. Such accounts establish interpersonal solidarity and cooperation as aberrant and brutality as the norm. Reports from the neighborhood draw on first person accounts which describe beatings, stabbings, unprovoked attacks, physical disputes over drugs or territory and crazed predation as part of a daily pattern of violence in the area. Street-involved people, including sex workers, are described as at the constant mercy of predatory landlords, "poverty pimps", violent customers and dealers. As one *Toronto Star* report bluntly puts it: "there is, in fact, no refuge."[62] Another *National Post* report draws on an interview with a former sex worker to illustrate this impression of a constant terror:

> The people who work here know they may be attacked at any time, says [former sex worker] Ms. Allan.
>
> "They are always on edge, 24 hours a day. They are in fight or flight mode. The next guy to come along might just want her company. Or he could be [convicted rapist and serial killer] Ted Bundy.

And shortly below, it continues:

> We pause beside a bridge about a block from Ms. Allan's former "spot" where she used to stand and wait for customers. A woman she knew was brazenly beaten here three

[62] DiManno, "For Eastside Girls, Nothing's Changed," A1.

> years ago, left for dead atop some busy railroad tracks; it wasn't the first incident of its kind.[63]

Yet reports suggest that it is not merely the grim figures of underworld authority – pimps, dangerous customers, and extortionist landlords- who denizens of the neighborhood must be weary of. Street-involved people, they contend, must also be cautious of each other in this space where self-preservation is the only law and no other can be trusted. As one statement attributed to a street-involved woman puts it "nobody cares for anybody but themselves."[64]

This vision of an unending Darwinian struggle is consolidated by images which suggest a general desensitization to violence in the neighborhood. In one of the accounts quoted above, for example, a man brazenly punches a woman in the mouth while few among the dozens congregated "take notice of the episode."[65] Moreover, the above descriptions of congregated people at the corner of Main and Hastings (and many similar portrayals), create the impression of a population too consumed by addictions to take basic personal precautions. Girard's descriptions of people so oblivious that they chew on used syringes or walk barefoot among a "snowdrift" of discarded ones, gives the impression of a population that is indeed "too strung out to care." Interpersonal cooperation, such descriptions suggest, is constantly thwarted by the fiendish imperatives of those suffering from all-consuming addictions. Indeed, they create the impression of a radical divide between the self-interested space of the addict, where assault and abuse can occur "brazenly" and without notice, and the ordered spaces where such transgressions

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[63] Hutchinson, Brian. "Not Much Has Changed in the Downtown Eastside." *National Post*, 1 December, 2007, A10.

[64] Girard, "Despair Stalks Hookers on Mean Streets," A1.

[65] DiManno, "For Eastside Girls, Nothing's Changed," A1.

would be met with significant consequence. The space of the addicted is presented as a space where human civility is subordinated to animal desire. The frequent use of animalian language to describe the addicted, only consolidates these impression. Take, for example, the descriptions of the Main and Hastings cited above. Here, we find "pushers and prostitutes" who "swarm" together, a woman who "shrieks and lunges" with "nails clawing", and men and women who "thrust" crumpled bills with a fiendish urgency. Such descriptions have a distancing effect; they demonstrate the radical alterity of the inner city, where any sense of a common 'peace' seems to have broken down.

Yet in spite of its assumed status as a space of danger and degeneracy, reporters repeatedly suggest that the Downtown Eastside functions as a "magnet" drawing ever greater numbers into its dark orbit. Mason observes in the *Globe and Mail*:

> [the neighborhood] has become a delirious lure for the drug-addled … It would be easier to get drugs there, they figured, than on the streets of Campbell River or Vernon or Cache Creek. So they fled their communities to assume mostly tragic existences in the Downtown Eastside, existences that quickly included dirty needles and dirty tricks, rat-infested hotel rooms and often an early death.[66]

So conceived, access to illicit markets is marked as a primary force driving new waves of migration to the neighborhood. New recruits are thought to favour residence here for its proximity to narcotics and the sex industry. As such, the neighborhood becomes mapped not only as a space of degeneracy, but as a place of self-selected degeneracy.

So conceived, political intervention aimed at alleviating some of the area's problems takes on an air of futility. Thus for Mason: "despite the best intentions of police and politicians over the years" the area "remains as miserable and depressing a place as there is in North America."[67] Or for Girard "governments at all levels have

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[66] Mason, "Business as Usual in the Wretched District."
[67] Ibid.

developed various programs aimed at improving life for area residents... but...at the epicenter of the downtown eastside [sic]...it appears...that those attempts have met with little success."[68] The state can do little, according to this logic, for people more interested in feeding their addictions than restorative or ameliorative social schemes. While undoubtedly proactive government efforts have achieved important gains in the neighborhood and the power of addiction to some degree has drawn people to the neighborhood, these observations overstate the reach of both.

The prevailing pessimism that such descriptions engender connects with the broader contention that the neighborhood has become a drain on the public purse and that 'public' has seen little result for the investment. As DiManno puts it "millions of dollars have been poured into the poverty sinkhole that is the Downtown Eastside...with no one quite knowing where that money is going." Meanwhile, she observes, "poverty pimps" and even "poverty empires" have "taken root".[69] And while she does go on to acknowledge that a lack of detoxification facilities has exacerbated problems, her initial observations support a more pernicious view. Analyses which define the neighborhood as a space where a self-selected class of deviants willingly congregate, have the effect of rendering that class responsible for the danger and decline that they are said to be immersed in. Crucially, such narrations offer a limited and dehistoricized impression of the forces which have contributed to the neighborhood's concentration of illicit activity, poverty, and physical decline. They mask the contradictions in public policy and private development which have, in effect, actively contributed to the material production of this space. As such, they offer an important ideological rationale for 'cleaning up' the

[68] Girard, "Despair Stalks Hookers on Mean Streets," A7.

[69] DiManno, "Women on Streets Still Terrified," A2.

neighborhood. Indeed, coercive intervention, in this view, might be conceived as a necessary step in the restoration of the order which has been uprooted by this illegitimate occupation of city spaces.

The despised practices of public deviance mark the occupants of the Downtown Eastside as fundamentally other. As Blomley observes, the reproduction of images which suggest a space devoid of productive ends and productive people lends itself to the view that this urban space, a core part of Vancouver's "historical entitlement," has been left to ruin by a disinterested "urban underclass" that has hastened its seep into the spiral of terminal decline.[70] For Sommers and Blomley, "commuters speed[ing] down Hastings Street…are invited to reflect that it is no longer "our" neighborhood." So conceived, the only way that the "valued landscape" of the area can be saved is "with the removal of that which threatens it – the poor- and its replacement by citizens who are better equipped to reclaim its potential."[71]

Such characterizations have several important consequences. In the first place, they obscure the symbiotic material interconnection of seemingly distinct city spaces (described above). Secondly, they valorize particular kinds of urban occupancy through a negative representation of its presumed opposite. In this view, what the Downtown Eastside lacks is positive kinds of occupancy, neighborhood dwellers who are invested in its renewal. Indeed, there is something of this view in Mason's assessment of the neighborhood's "problems." He writes:

> The Downtown Eastside is unhealthy not just because there are drugs, prostitution and homelessness concentrated. It's unhealthy because so many problems are concentrated

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[70] Sommers and Blomley,"The Worst Block in Vancouver," 50.

[71] Ibid., 49.

> there. Every unhealthy person who goes there sees only someone like himself. There is no "normal" to which to aspire.[72]

In this view, what the 'low-Other' of the Downtown Eastside lacks, is a prosperous role model, the middle-class exemplar of appropriate behavior and neighborhood stewardship.

More generally, however, we might consider how the space of the Downtown Eastside, and the impressions of particular kinds of subjectivity that it creates, might serve as a potent symbol of a spatialized moral ordering. As Walkowitz observes in her consideration of the "imagined divide" between spaces of prosperity and destitution in Victorian London, even if a low-order of society (typified by its "foul practices") is repudiated by the "top", the underclass nevertheless becomes marked by a "heightened symbolic importance" in the imagined universe of the privileged.[73] As Stallybrass and White observe:

> ...what is socially peripheral is so frequently symbolically central...the low-Other [and the spaces they occupy] is despised at the level of political organization and social being whilst it is instrumentally constitutive of the shared imaginary repertoire of the dominant culture.[74]

Put differently, the space of chaos serves as an important symbol for the space of order. It provides the vital backdrop against which the legitimacy of the ordered space is weighed. Thus the conflation of poverty with deviance, impurity with criminality, serves the interests of a spatial and moral ordering which naturalizes destitution as the outcome of personal inadequacy or tragedy and obscures the role of interlocking structural forces of domination. In such constructions, spaces of poverty and marginalization become mapped as spaces of degeneracy.

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[72] Mason, "Business as Usual in the Wretched District."

[73] Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful of Delight*, 19.

[74] Quoted in Ibid., 20.

Conclusions

Press narratives which produce the Downtown Eastside as a space of 'chaos' have potent symbolic and material effects. In the first place, narratives which privilege an omnipresent foulness and a constant physical danger stigmatize the people who live and work in the neighborhood and conflate the physical and economic deterioration of the area with the criminal practices they are presumed to reproduce; they reproduce the "pathologization of the entire neighborhood." As I argue above, this 'responsibilization' has had the important effect of obscuring the key ways that movements of capital have operated to concentrate certain people in certain places. At the same time, policing patterns and state strategies of eviction have operated to concentrate the visible manifestations of a criminality (generally too disempowered to be practiced indoors) in these same spaces.

It is not merely the symbolic cost of this stigmatization that residents of the neighborhood have been forced to contend with, however. The 'chaos' narratives also reproduce and consolidate the view that neighborhood has been effectively 'stolen' from its legitimate users, potentially a compelling pretext for a 'clean-up' of the neighborhood. Such an eventuality is already being stimulated by the neighborhood's status as one of the last spaces not yet consumed with capital accumulation on Vancouver's downtown peninsula. Indeed, a number of factors have made a widespread gentrification all but inevitable. First, since the 1980s, governments have moved away from reliance on the province's "productive" industrial sector in favour of an economy which privileges the service and hospitality industries, real estate, and construction; the state has placed a new

emphasis on property development as a means of attracting international capital.[75] Also, as I argue in Chapter 2, a succession of provincial governments have showed a marked hostility towards the poor. Neoliberal retrenchments of the social guarantees are but one aspect of the state's decreasing interest in addressing issues of social dislocation. Lastly, the pressures of hosting the 2010 Winter Olympics, will almost certainly provide authorities with a pretext to remove "graphic" city enclaves before international visitors and media descend upon the city.

Notably, the largest single string of Downtown Eastside SRO evictions (some 500-850 hotel tenants lost accommodations) occurred in the lead-up to Vancouver's hosting of Expo 86.[76] In spite of promises that the games will provide a renewed commitment to low-income housing, SRO hotels continue to come down like "dominoes" in the area.[77] In 2008 alone, five low-cost rental buildings have issued eviction notices or closed and an additional 180 units of affordable housing have been lost. Pivot Legal has argued that even if the governments followed through on commitments and started new projects immediately, they would likely not be ready in time for 2010.[78] Yet importantly, narratives which stigmatize the neighborhood's population play a central role in legitimating this likely takeover. As Sommers and Blomley put it, "drugs and miscreants" are produced as that which stands in the way of a "shinning future."[79] The symbolic mapping of the Downtown Eastside as a space of "chaos" thus signals a potent

[75] Jeff Derksen and Neil Smith, "Urban Regeneration: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy," in *Stan Douglas: Every Building on 100 West Hastings* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, Contemporary Art Gallery of Vancouver, 2002), 75-77.

[76] Blomley, *Unsettling the City*, 51

[77] Condon, "No Place For Home," 18-22.

[78] David Eby,*The Olympics, Housing and Homelessness in Vancouver*, (Vancouver: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2008).

[79] Sommers and Blomley, "The Worst Block in Vancouver," 52.

danger to those who would be displaced if the neighborhood were to be thoroughly conquered by a new class of pioneering settlers. Importantly, the neighborhood has had a long history of resisting such violence and there is reason to expect that no wholesale displacement could occur without a fight.

General conclusions

The findings of this study lead to a single and overwhelming conclusion: the extensive coverage of the investigation and prosecution of Robert Pickton published in the *Toronto Star*, the *National Post* and the *Globe and Mail* establish explain the crisis of the missing and murdered women in ways that elide, conceal, and minimize the complicity of a range of material and symbolic instruments of domination. As I observe in the preceding chapters, the coverage operates to camouflage particular culpabilities of the state, stigmatize street-involved women as deviant, licentious, and sub-moral others, and pathologize the spaces of the Downtown Eastside by branding it as a sinister den of criminality, filth, unproductive persons, and a drain on the 'public purse.' In sum, the coverage provides a series of 'definitions' that inadequately consider the extent and nature of the violence that street-involved women continue to shoulder in this country. Moreover, they misdiagnose the 'problem' and thus provide support for solutions that are themselves inadequate.

Given the findings, we might conclude that these three newspapers have fundamentally failed their readership. It seems to me that this particular crisis offered a vital opportunity to inform particular 'publics' about the existence and persistence of certain modes of domination in this country. For example, by asking tough questions about the striking over-representation of aboriginal peoples in the grim list of missing and murdered women, journalists might have provoked a wider 'conversation' and a greater awareness about the effects of colonial violence in this country. By vigorously interrogating the efficacy of the criminalization of prostitution, journalists might have engendered a genuinely public debate about their desirability. By demonstrating the

human cost of the ruggedly individualistic politics of neoliberalism, public 'consent' for its particular brand of radicalism might have been further called into question. By looking beyond the lurid displays of visible criminality so easily observed in the Downtown Eastside, journalists might have provided the opportunity to re-imagine the neighborhood as more than a site of concentrated deviance. Unfortunately, none of these key pedagogical opportunities were seized. On the contrary, the core explanations that emerge from the coverage lend themselves to a series of what I consider to be false assumptions about the nature of Canadian society. In spite of the glaring evidence to the contrary that the case of the missing and murdered women provides, at best they offer meager challenges to the view that Canada is essentially a tolerant, egalitarian, and decent society, that who in street-level prostitution are either 'damaged' by an individualized set of devastating circumstances or are there of their own volition, that colonial violence – though brutal- is something that occurred in a distant historical past, and that the concentrated presence of morally dubious individuals can explain the filth and criminality of certain city spaces.

I have suggested that the dominant explanations are 'ideological' in that they have provide readers with a distinct set of categories with which they might make sense of the crisis and the series of social phenomena which give it its particular character. Following Hall, I argue that ideologies – as fields of articulation or 'chains of signification' – are complex 'frameworks' through which individuals make sense of their world. As Larrain has pointed out, Hall's definition might be considered 'neutral' in that it brands all discourses – by virtue of their essential partiality- as ideological. What distinguishes the particular discourses that I describe here, is that the 'frameworks' which they provide

explicitly operate to reproduce the legitimacy of certain modes of domination. They provide, that is, a series of definitions which naturalize – produce as 'commonsense'- violence. They are engaged in a process of ideological domination in that they render the legitimacy of a prevailing order natural.

Tragically, the coverage on which this study is based – and likely coverage of the case more generally- has done little to provoke a 'public' conversation about how the core causes of this crisis might be countered if not eliminated altogether. It is my own view that a series of public policy shifts would be an obvious and important first step in this process. For example, federal legislators could revise or eliminate the Criminal Code provisions which explicitly imperil sex workers and outlaw collective work. State actors at all levels could embark on a genuine process of social transformation by committing to a comprehensive public policy framework aimed at eliminating precarious housing (including homelessness), providing individuals with the resources to defeat addiction, and countering the pernicious effects of colonial dispossession, and aggressively attacking poverty. Admittedly, such efforts seem a relative long-shot given the current constellation of political leadership in this country. But in a country as prosperous as this one, the most important impediment to their enactment remains political will.

Finally, if there is to be any amelioration of the pernicious forms of oppression and domination that define this particular crisis, they are far more likely to succeed if they are defined and formed by those who understand them best. It is my view that those who are affected by these particularly forms of violence should be at the centre of any effort to eliminate them. Only if street-involved women themselves are offered the

opportunity to define the problems they face as well as define the solutions that will counter them, can we move beyond these patterns of violence.

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Appendix A: Sections 210-213 of the Canadian Criminal Code

210: Keeping common bawdy-house

(1) Every one who keeps a common bawdy-house is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years.

(2) Every one who

(a) is an inmate of a common bawdy-house,

(b) is found, without lawful excuse, in a common bawdy-house, or

(c) as owner, landlord, lessor, tenant, occupier, agent or otherwise having charge or control of any place, knowingly permits the place or any part thereof to be let or used for the purposes of a common bawdy-house,

is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.

(3) Where a person is convicted of an offence under subsection (1), the court shall cause a notice of the conviction to be served on the owner, landlord or lessor of the place in respect of which the person is convicted or his agent, and the notice shall contain a statement to the effect that it is being served pursuant to this section.

(4) Where a person on whom a notice is served under subsection (3) fails forthwith to exercise any right he may have to determine the tenancy or right of occupation of the person so convicted, and thereafter any person is convicted of an offence under subsection (1) in respect of the same premises, the person on whom the notice was served shall be deemed to have committed an offence under subsection (1) unless he proves that he has taken all reasonable steps to prevent the recurrence of the offence.

211: Transporting person to bawdy-house

Every one who knowingly takes, transports, directs, or offers to take, transport or direct, any other person to a common bawdy-house is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.

212: Procuring

(1) every one who

(a) procures, attempts to procure or solicits a person to have illicit sexual intercourse with another person, whether in or out of Canada,

(b) inveigles or entices a person who is not a prostitute to a common bawdy-house for the purpose of illicit sexual intercourse or prostitution,

(c) knowingly conceals a person in a common bawdy-house,

(d) procures or attempts to procure a person to become, whether in or out of Canada, a prostitute,

(e) procures or attempts to procure a person to leave the usual place of abode of that person in Canada, if that place is not a common bawdy-house, with intent that the person may become an inmate or frequenter of a common bawdy-house, whether in or out of Canada,

(f) on the arrival of a person in Canada, directs or causes that person to be directed or takes or causes that person to be taken, to a common bawdy-house,

(g) procures a person to enter or leave Canada, for the purpose of prostitution,

(h) for the purposes of gain, exercises control, direction or influence over the movements of a person in such manner as to show that he is aiding, abetting or compelling that person to engage in or carry on prostitution with any person or generally,

(i) applies or administers to a person or causes that person to take any drug, intoxicating liquor, matter or thing with intent to stupefy or overpower that person in order thereby to enable any person to have illicit sexual intercourse with that person, or

(j) lives wholly or in part on the avails of prostitution of another person,

is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years.

(2) Despite paragraph (1)(j), every person who lives wholly or in part on the avails of prostitution of another person who is under the age of eighteen years is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding fourteen years and to a minimum punishment of imprisonment for a term of two years.

Aggravated offence in relation to living on the avails of prostitution of a person under the age of eighteen years

(2.1) Notwithstanding paragraph (1)(j) and subsection (2), every person who lives wholly or in part on the avails of prostitution of another person under the age of eighteen years, and who

(a) for the purposes of profit, aids, abets, counsels or compels the person under that age to engage in or carry on prostitution with any person or generally, and

(b) uses, threatens to use or attempts to use violence, intimidation or coercion in relation to the person under that age,

is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding fourteen years but not less than five years.

(3) Evidence that a person lives with or is habitually in the company of a prostitute or lives in a common bawdy-house is, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, proof that the person lives on the avails of prostitution, for the purposes of paragraph (1)(j) and subsections (2) and (2.1).

(4) Every person who, in any place, obtains for consideration, or communicates with anyone for the purpose of obtaining for consideration, the sexual services of a person who is under the age of eighteen years is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years and to a minimum punishment of imprisonment for a term of six months.

213: Offence in relation to prostitution

(1) Every person who in a public place or in any place open to public view

(a) stops or attempts to stop any motor vehicle,

(b) impedes the free flow of pedestrian or vehicular traffic or ingress to or egress from premises adjacent to that place, or

(c) stops or attempts to stop any person or in any manner communicates or attempts to communicate with any person

for the purpose of engaging in prostitution or of obtaining the sexual services of a prostitute is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.

(2) In this section, "public place" includes any place to which the public have access as of right or by invitation, express or implied, and any motor vehicle located in a public place or in any place open to public view.

Appendix B: Timeline of relevant events (1978-2007)

1978	Lillian Jean O'Dare disappears from the Downtown Eastside. Decades later she would have the dubious distinction of being the first name on Vancouver's official list of missing women.
1983-1985	Five women disappear from the Downtown Eastside
1986.1991	Five women disappear from the Downtown Eastside.
1991	14 February: Activists hold first annual memorial demonstration to honour missing and murdered neighborhood women.
1992	Two women disappear from the Downtown Eastside.
1993-1995	Ten women disappear from the Downtown East
1996	Three women disappear from the Downtown Eastside.
1997	Fourteen women disappear from the Downtown Eastside.
1998	Ten women disappear from the Downtown Eastside. 3 July: Police report they are working on 16 active missing women files, assign second detective to the case. July: Police told that a sex trade worker that visited Robert Pickton's trailer noticed bags of bloodly clothing. 18 September: Vancouver police announce that a "team" of officers will begin reviewing files of missing women dating back to 1971.
1999	Five women disappear from the Downtown Eastside. January-April: Vancouver police offer two unprecedented $100,000 rewards for information leading to the arrest of individuals involved in a series of home invasions and a string of garage robberies, supporters of the missing women are outraged by the slight.

April: Vancouver Sun reports that a single detective is handling all 21 missing women files.

6 April: Under public pressure Premier Ujal Dosanjh says the province is willing to contribute to a $100,000 reward for information about the disappearances if upon request from municipal officials.

28 April: Mayor Phillip Owen reverses previous concerns about using tax payer's money to fund a "location service" for prostitutes and agrees to contribute to a $100,000 award for information in the case.

12 May: Hundreds attend a solidarity rally in the Downtown Eastside, demanding that the mayor launch an investigation into the disappearances.

13 May: Vancouver Sun reports that the police department has assigned three additional officers to the case.

31 July: *America's Most Wanted* airs a six minute segment on the missing women.

2000

Four women disappear from the Downtown Eastside.

9 August: Vancouver police announce they are scaling back their Missing Women Review team from 9 to 6 officers.

2001

Four women disappear from the Downtown Eastside.

September: RCMP and Vancouver police strike a joint task force to investigate the disappearances, new unit will operate out of the federal "major crimes office" in Surrey.

2002

January: Joint Task Force add five names to the official list of missing women, total now at fifty.

5 February: Police raid a farm in suburban Pot Coquitlam; Robert Pickton is detained on a series of weapons charges.

22 February: Pickton charged with two counts of first degree murder in deaths of Mona Wilson and Sereena Abotsway.

2 April: Pickton charged with three additional counts of first-degree murder.

9 April: Pickton charged with an additional count of first-degree murder.

6 June, 2002: Police enlist archeologists to assist in the excavation of the Pickton property.

19 September, 2002 Pickton charged with an additional four counts of first-degree murder as the official list of missing women grows to 63.

2 October, 2002 Pickton charged with an additional four counts of first-degree murder.

2003 — 13 January, 2003: Preliminary hearing begins in Port Coquitlam

23 July: Court rules Pickton will stand trial for 15 counts of first-degree murder.

2005 — May: Pre-trial hearings being in New Westminster under strict publication ban.

2006 — 30 January: *Voir-dire* phase of the trial begins in New Westminster.

2 March: Justice James Williams rejects one count of first-degree murder, cites a lack of evidence.

12 December: Jury selection completed.

2007 — 22 January: Trial phase opens in Port Coquitlam.

9 December: Jury returns a verdict on not guilty on six counts of first-degree murder and a verdict of guilty on six counts of second-degree murder.

11 December: Pickton sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of parole for 25 years.

2008 — 7 January: British Columbia's Attorney General files an appeal with the BC Court of Appeals against Pickton's acquittal of first-degree murder.

26 February: One of the victim's relative tells the media she has learned that the Crown may not proceed with the additional 20 charges against Pickton.