

Producing the “Trafficked Woman”: Canadian Newspaper Reporting on Eastern European Exotic Dancers During the 1990s

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Abstract

This article explores the emergence of discourses of “human trafficking” in Canadian newspapers during the 1990s, focusing on the depiction of Central and East European migrant women. The period saw much debate over a work permit exemption in federal immigration policy that allowed for the migration of workers into the exotic dance sector. We argue that debates over the exemption were often framed through an ethnosexualizing discourse that enabled narratives of victimization and legitimated repressive border security and policing practices.

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Résumé

Cet article explore l'émergence des discours sur la « traite des personnes » dans les journaux canadiens durant les années 90, et se penche sur la représentation des femmes migrantes d'Europe de l'Est. Cette période a connu de nombreux débats au sujet d'une exemption de permis de

travail dans la politique fédérale sur l'immigration, qui permettait la migration des travailleuses dans le secteur de la danse exotique. Nous affirmons que les débats sur l'exemption étaient souvent imprégnés d'un discours de sexualisation ethnique qui permettait des récits de victimisation et légitimait des pratiques répressives de sécurité frontalière et de maintien de l'ordre.

One of the dominant discursive and legal paradigms through which migration has come to be conceptualized is that of “human trafficking.” While the notion of trafficking is applied to various forms of migration, it is primarily in relation to sex work that it has come to receive its emotional and political charge. Anti-trafficking NGOs, governments, and other organizations have mobilized the language of trafficking to push for a range of legislative and policy changes and such coalitions, especially in the United States, have often resulted in alliances between feminists seeking to abolish prostitution and right-wing Christians (Soderlund 2005; Bernstein 2010). This trend has also been evident in Canada, with human trafficking bound up in complex ways with conceptions of sex work and broader representations and regulations of borders and the movement of people. These conceptualizations have come to seem natural and self-evident, but in fact, “human trafficking” has only recently gained this level of prominence in Canada. Indeed, we can see a shift in discourse in the year 2000, with the adoption of the United Nation’s *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons* (also known as the *Trafficking Protocol*), which has had a profound impact in Canada and internationally. It not only codified a definition of trafficking, but also promoted law enforcement and border control provisions aimed at combatting it. The heightened focus on trafficking post-2000 can be seen perhaps most clearly in news reporting on the topic. A search for “human trafficking” in major Canadian newspapers in the 2000-2010 period, for example, yielded over 800 articles, whereas a similar search for the previous decade garnered only six.

In what follows, we trace the roots of the striking emergence of trafficking discourses by examining Canadian newspapers from 1990-2000. We found that one significant source of these discourses was located in shifting public and media discussions of what became known inaccurately as “the exotic dancer visa program” and specifically in how Eastern European migrant women were depicted in this context. “Human trafficking,” we discovered, has a history that is tied to broader national and global developments, becoming a key vehicle through which debates over labour migration, immigration policy, sex work, and border security were framed. We thus situate these discourses in a series of broader contexts: the collapse of the Soviet Union and

the geopolitical shifts that this entailed; the framing of former Soviet countries and Central and East European women through what we will theorize as an “ethnosexualized” lens; and the development of global and Canadian policy frameworks on human trafficking, in particular in relation to the negotiations of the UN *Trafficking Protocol* signed by Canada in 2000. In the essay, we use Central and East Europe (CEE) to refer to countries of the former Eastern Bloc and those previously under Soviet political dominance, recognizing that these terms have their own histories and limitations.

The ways in which major Canadian print media outlets constructed the migration of Eastern European women who came to work in Canada as exotic dancers offers a strong indication as to the issues at stake. Newspaper reports published throughout the 1990s suggested that the work permit provisions represented an outlandish special program designed specifically for exotic dancers. As one article put it rather provocatively, “Under Canadian law, strippers don’t need much help [migrating], though: they have their very own section in the country’s immigration laws” (Brent and Wong 1991). What this article was referring to was a set of regulations under the federal Temporary Foreign Worker Program that governed the entry of migrant workers into a wide range of industries. These provisions provided an exemption for various categories of workers, including exotic dancers, whose prospective employers were not required to obtain a labour market opinion that demonstrated that they were not displacing Canadian workers (Library of Parliament 2007, 5). The exemption for migrant exotic dancers was based on allowances made for a range of performing artists, with dancers’ work legitimized and seen as a form of performance art under labour regulations. However, as Audrey Macklin (2003) points out, work categories on the exemption list were skewed towards those in highly precarious, predominantly feminized sectors of the economy. Contrary to its frequent characterization in newspaper reporting, then, this exemption was not restricted solely to exotic dancers, but was very explicitly based on an understanding of dancing as one of a number of legitimate forms of labour in which movement is a common part of the job. The only provision that specifically addressed exotic dancers was an informal stripper exchange program between the United States and Canadian governments that had been in place since

1978; only after 1990, did non-American migrants use this exemption in significant numbers.

In part due to its persistent misrepresentation as a specific program for exotic dancers rather than a temporary work permit available to other workers as well, the exemption became the site of much heated debate and Canadian immigration faced serious pressure to amend the regulations. What our study suggests is that news reporting contributed to the delegitimization of dancing both as a form of labour and as an artistic performance, reframing it over time as akin to prostitution and, hence, as something other than work. Certainly, the work permit exemption was denounced in rather strong terms in the media especially by the mid to late 1990s. One *Montreal Gazette* article, for example, quoted an immigration counsellor who described Russian dancers as “being forced into prostitution” and used language that would become common in subsequent years: “being mistreated, virtually enslaved, by their employers” (quoted in *Trickey* 1995). These ways of framing migration were applied, in particular, to Central and East European women in this period, setting the stage for the emergence of discourses of “human trafficking” that would come to dominate later debates. The work permit exemption was increasingly delegitimized by such associations and, by 1998, the Immigration Minister was working to limit entry under the program.

The centrality of Central and East European women to these constructions of the exploited and trafficked woman is evident in the very different way in which American exotic dancers, who were the initial beneficiaries of the exemption, were treated. As Estanislao Ozievich (1991), the *Globe and Mail's* immigration reporter who covered the topic throughout the 1990s, argued, it was only when former Soviet and Eastern Bloc women began to migrate under the work permit exemption that “attention shifted to the little-known provision in immigration regulations that were initially passed to deal with the cross-border travel of strippers between Canada and the United States.” Newspapers focused on migrant women from CEE throughout the period, drawing on and contributing to a global discourse that ultimately produced the figure of the trafficked Central or East European woman, often described collectively as “Natashas” (Hughes 2000; Gülçür and İlkaracan 2002; Malarek 2003). It was this shift, we argue, that underlay a

complex discursive and policy context, which came to shape the regulation of sex work, labour migration, and the policing of borders.

Through an analysis of major Canadian newspapers reporting on exotic dancers and the work permit exemption in the 1990s, this article aims to historicize and contribute to critical perspectives on the emergence of the idea of human trafficking in the Canadian context. Our research focused specifically on Canada's four major English-language newspapers: *The Globe and Mail*, the only national newspaper prior to 1998; the *Toronto Star*, which while not national in scope, was and is the country's largest circulation newspaper; the *Montreal Gazette*, the main English-language newspaper in Canada's second largest city; and the *National Post*, which was founded in 1998 as Canada's second national newspaper. In addition to searching for “human trafficking,” a term that was rarely used, we accessed Factiva and ProQuest databases to locate articles using combinations of the following terms: Eastern European women; Eastern Europe; exotic dancer/stripper visa; temporary work permit; work permit exemption; exotic dancer/stripper; and migrant dancer/stripper. For the purposes of this article, we analyzed the relevant articles (N=24) printed between 1990-2000 that included these terms, nineteen of which were published in *The Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail* and five of which were featured in the *National Post* and the *Montreal Gazette*. The comparatively small number of articles we found suggests that there was much less media attention on these issues in the 1990s than in the following decade.

Overall, we did not observe a discernable systematic difference between the various newspapers. One key exception, however, was the four *National Post* articles in our sample, which took a harder line in denouncing federal policies, promoting human trafficking narratives, and calling for a greater focus on policing and border security. The *National Post* was specifically established in the late 1990s to provide a conservative voice to counter what its proprietors saw as a liberal media bias. The perspectives espoused in the *National Post* thus formed part of a broader conservative focus on human trafficking globally and in many individual countries, especially in the global North. Once the newspaper began publishing, however, we found that other newspapers also took a harder line. In this sense, conservative voices helped shift

the framing of migration as human trafficking, but research, including our own, suggests that this framing has gained support across the political spectrum (Soderlund 2005).

This article begins with a consideration of the dominant representations of Eastern Europe and Central and East European women in the Western European and North American imagination both in general and in the emerging discourses of human trafficking. We then shift to a detailed analysis of Canadian newspaper debates over the work permit exemption and the emergence, by the late 1990s, of ideas about human trafficking. Our approach to textual analysis is influenced by the methodology of critical discourse analysis, which holds that there is a dialectical relationship between narratives and the frameworks that give them meaning and that these create objects of knowledge in ways that reproduce and sustain dominant ways of understanding and attendant power relationships (Fairclough, Mulderig, and Wodak 2011, 357-58). In this respect, attending to the changing representations of migrant women offers insight into shifting global relationships that shaped the movement of people. Over the course of the 1990s, we argue, a number of overlapping and often contradictory tropes structured understandings of Eastern European migration and the work permit exemption. Migrant women were positioned as proto-criminals, undesirable workers, and victims of exploitation.¹ By the end of the period, criminality was increasingly associated with transnational organized crime and human trafficking appeared as a framework in which, in its most reductive form, Central and East European women were cast as victims in need of rescue from criminal and corrupt Eastern European men. In the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union, these new narratives enabled the extension of policing and security-based approaches to human migration that had damaging effects on migrants in general and on migrant women in the sex sector in particular. Our goal, then, is to provide an analysis that allows us to think outside of these constraining and dangerous discourses.

The Rise of the Natashas: Shifting Representations of Central and East European Migrant Women

Over the last ten years, excellent critical work has been produced that has challenged the appearance of consensus on ideas about human trafficking in both

public consciousness and policy formation (Kempadoo 2005; Andrijasevic 2007; Doezma 2010; Schaeffer-Grabiel 2011). There has, however, been relatively little work done on the Canadian context and, in particular, on the emergence of media consensus on the meaning of human trafficking. What is striking is the extent to which the meaning of trafficking has come to be seen as self-evident and stable, and as the primary way to describe migration into the sex sector, but not other forms of labour migration. Indeed, over time, trafficking has increasingly been applied to sex work as a whole, including to the movement or travel of sex workers within a single province or from one city to another. As our research indicates, the roots of these developments in Canada can be found in the debates over and media reporting on the work permit exemption and its use by women from CEE.

One of the earliest media reports that focused on Eastern European exotic dancers appeared in 1991, when 11 Soviet women were arrested by York Regional police in suburban Toronto for, as the headline of a *Toronto Star* article put it, “stripping without visas” (Conroy 1991).² Two men were also arrested on *Immigration Act* charges for hiring illegal workers. The case generated a flurry of media reports on what was frequently depicted as a new and dangerous problem: the migration of women from the former Eastern Bloc to work as exotic dancers. The nature of the “problem,” however, was not always clearly defined. As one *Globe and Mail* article suggested, the “issue about the ease with which strippers can enter Canada to work arose in the Toronto area in the wake of the arrest of 11 Soviet women for working illegally as table dancers in strip clubs, amid accusations that they had been forced into working as strippers through physical abuse and threats against their parents in the Soviet Union” (Oziewicz 1991). There were two issues at stake here, each of which positioned the migrant women in very different ways: the troubling ease with which the women could migrate, which implied that they were active agents engaged in nefarious activities; and allegations that they were being victimized and, hence, were passive. As demonstrated below, these conflicting concerns were also evident in later newspaper reporting, although the emphasis shifted over time from the former to the latter. The case of the eleven women sparked media interest in sex work and labour migration that continued through-

out the 1990s. Despite all this media interest, there has been relatively little academic research done on the migration of women from CEE who came to work as exotic dancers or as sex workers in Canada (for notable exceptions, see McDonald, Moore, and Timoshkina 2000; Macklin 2003; McDonald and Timoshkina 2007; Law 2012). Especially lacking has been a theorization of how these workers have been created as subjects in discourse or in material practices.

The upsurge in Canadian media interest in Eastern European migration emerged in the context of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc following the upheavals of 1989. This development led to profound geopolitical shifts, with new patterns of migration being one of the more significant outcomes. While often depicted in popular accounts as the dawning of a new era of “freedom” in which those who formerly lived under communist rule could now live and move with greater autonomy, the actual flow of migration from CEE was often perceived much less generously in Western Europe and North America. Migration did increase, but borders were by no means opened. Especially in Western Europe, perceptions of Eastern European migration were shaped by a deep and older set of understandings in which Eastern Europe symbolized an Other to Western Europe. Eastern Europe was associated with criminality and backwardness or barbarism (Todorova 1997, 3) in direct contradistinction to a law-abiding and progressive “West.”

Western European conceptualizations of Eastern Europe are important to understand, given the extent to which these ideas emerged in Canadian news coverage. In Western Europe, North America, and elsewhere, women migrants from CEE, in particular, bore the brunt of the reconceptualization of the relationship between “East” and “West” in the 1990s and, with it, the recalibration of symbolic and material practices of bordering that developed in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union. These shifts included a process of ethnosexualization (Hughes 2000; Marttila 2008; Penttinen 2008) by which Eastern European femininity became linked with sexual desirability, permissiveness, and often danger, and men from CEE were perceived as criminal actors who exercised often diabolical levels of control over women.

The ethnosexualization of Central and East European women and men in the Western Europe-

an context builds on a range of historical antecedents. Eastern Europe has been constructed as different and “backward” in relation to the rest of Europe for centuries, a perspective captured by the eighteenth-century French explorer Comte de Ségur’s designation of it as “*l’orient de l’Europe*” (Wolff 1994, 6). In this longer history, Eastern Europe occupied an ambivalent status in the racial and ethnic dynamics of the Western European imaginary, appearing as ethnically distinct and less “civilized,” but only intermittently read as racially distinct. These conceptualizations were taken up in Cold War discourses, with their differentiations between the First, Second, and Third Worlds. Western understandings of the Eastern Bloc continued to stress existential differences between West and East, or First and Second Worlds, with the “backwardness” of communist countries increasingly linked to the allegedly “criminogenic” nature of the state. The existence of a criminogenic state has, according to some scholars, been a major factor preventing post-communist societies from producing workable criminal justice systems (Rawlinson 1998, 352). As a consequence, the United States, in particular, began to focus its attention on transnational organized crime as a global threat emanating from former Eastern Bloc states (Woodiwiss 2003, 27), a threat deeply linked to human trafficking (Kempadoo 2005, xiii). In post-1989 readings of Central and East Europe, this criminogenic narrative became especially strong and was grounded in a profoundly gendered narrative of Eastern European “backwardness” in which migrant women and sex workers played an overdetermined role.

The ethnosexualization of Central and East European women is especially evident in the figure of “Natasha,” which was advanced in the Canadian context in Victor Malarek’s (2003) journalistic exposé, *The Nataschas: The New Global Sex Trade*. In it, Malarek positions “Natasha” as an innocent, passive victim of organized crime, which reflects broader stereotypes of women from CEE as less emancipated and as possessors of a more authentic, submissive femininity that Tuulia Law (2012) argues is present in the exotic dance sector in Canada. In examining these discourses in a global context, Jennifer Suchland (2013) contends that they signal a specifically postsocialist reading of Eastern Europe as “failed”: “due to the close association between the collapse of the USSR and the explosion of sex trafficking, the image of Natasha...has become a referent for the

failure of state socialism, or what I define as postsocialist abjection” (363). Through an analysis of the 2002 film *Lilya 4-Ever*, Suchland argues that this discourse of postsocialist abjection reinforces the dichotomization of East and West and collapses two cautionary tales: “an anti-prostitution message, and a warning against illegal labor migration” (364). Anti-trafficking discourse thus becomes the vehicle through which migrant labour can be re-read as dangerous and in need of policing, all the while effacing the agency of migrant women and constructing them simultaneously as innocents in need of rescue and as markers of an inherently Eastern European criminality.

The Natasha figure quickly gained a global reach after 1989, in part because of the presence of significant numbers of women from CEE and Russia engaged in sex work in Western European countries (Remennick 1999, 450-51; Hughes 2000, 3). Interestingly, one of the places where the Natashas first came to prominence was in Turkey, a country occupying an analogously liminal position in the Western European imaginary to that of Eastern Europe. Leyla Gülçür and Pinar İlkaracan (2002), for example, discuss a national “Natasha discourse” circulating in Turkey and point out that Eastern European migrant women are “portrayed as ‘hot, passionate, blond bombshells’ who [are] available and willing [to do] any sexual act required of them” (414). Anne-Maria Marttila’s (2008) research on Finnish clients and Russian sex workers revealed similar trends, with Eastern European women constructed in opposition to Finnish women and as “passionate, feminine, and sexy” (42).

In these discourses, Central and East European women are situated on the borders of a white European identity, positioned both as embodiments of idealized, white feminine sexuality, but also ethnicized. In contrast to racialized subjects, they are “acceptably” exotic because of their ethnicity (Law 2012, 139), but nevertheless incite both desire and revulsion (Marttila 2008, 43). This contradictory positioning is similar to that of sex workers, who are conceived of as desirable, yet are also highly stigmatized. It is notable that, while Canadian newspapers in the 1990s focused primarily on Central and East European women in discussions of migrant sex work, there were a number of news reports on migrants from other regions, in particular Latin America and Asia. This coverage emerged in 1997

when, under “Project Orphan,” the RCMP and other police units conducted massage parlour raids in Toronto, which were designed to “rescue” primarily Thai and Malaysian women. In most of the news reports, the women were explicitly objectified as “sex slaves,” the only exceptions being two *Toronto Star* columns where it was suggested that “on the evidence released so far, it seems these women came to Canada willingly...and that most knew exactly what they were getting into” (DiManno 1997; Landsberg 1998 who attributed much less agency to the women). The framing of Latin American and Asian women as “sex slaves” in need of rescue was intrinsic to their racialization. In the case of women from CEE, as we argue below, their liminal status in relation to a dominant white Canadian identity generated more complex representations.

Debates over the work permit exemption thus rendered Central and East European migrant woman as the overdetermined locus of anxieties over criminality and labour migration. These often contradictory discourses were prominent in the Canadian context, with discussions of the “exotic dancer work permit” tending to depict it as “both a conduit to the unlawful side of the sex trade for the women involved, as well as a chink in Canada’s border armor, a legal crevice permitting other forms of international organized crime to infiltrate. In either case, the women entered as proto-criminals, or as vectors of criminality” (Macklin 2003, 481). At the same time and reflecting the contradictory representation of sex workers and Central and East European women as both proto-criminal and innocent, Canadian discourses have also tended to focus on migrant women as victims. In the case of the eleven Soviet women arrested by Peel police in 1991, for example, there was an emphasis in the news reports on their victimization; the men arrested had allegedly misled the women by offering them modeling jobs and had threatened them and their families with violence. Here the “Natasha” discourse is especially evident: the arrested women were framed as passive victims in need of saving; the presumably Central and East European men were constructed as criminal manipulators; and the Canadian nation state was cast as the agent with the power to rectify the situation. Saving the women from whom and what remained ambivalent, given that the nation’s borders were simultaneously under threat from the women’s possible criminal transgressions.

These contradictory impulses were also evident in media discussions of the exotic dancer exemption. In 1998, for example, as the federal government was increasingly blocking women from CEE using the exemption, a *Toronto Star* article described the process as the closing of a “loophole.”³ While migration under the exemption was perfectly legal, the article implied otherwise, characterizing Citizenship and Immigration Canada’s policy shift as a response to the danger that “Prostitutes, posing as strippers, were free to abuse the loophole” (*Toronto Star* 1998) and thus depicting the women as duplicitous and engaged in criminal activity. However, the same article quoted Citizenship and Immigration spokesperson Anne Alcorn as saying: “The logic behind [the change in policy] is really to protect the women” (*Toronto Star* 1998). While this protectionist and victimization narrative became more pronounced by the late 1990s, as migration was increasingly conceptualized through the lens of human trafficking and sexual slavery, Central and East European migrants continued to be simultaneously depicted as vectors of criminality. Our study of newspaper coverage published in the 1990s explores these shifts and analyzes the ways in which women from CEE served as vehicles for the articulation of profound anxieties around borders, migration, and labour.

From Labour to Trafficking: News Reporting and Exotic Dancers

The rise to prominence of the exotic dancer work permit exemption in Canada during the 1990s was the result of a complex set of geopolitical and local factors. Based on the newspaper articles we analyzed, media attention in English-speaking Canada focused almost exclusively on strip clubs in Toronto and Niagara Falls; the former is Canada’s largest city and the latter is a major tourist destination located on the border with the United States. From the outset, the image produced of exotic dance was one that configured the strip club, both geographically and symbolically, as a repository for that which is abject and outside of normative life, such as crime, abuse, and violence. While these narratives featured prominently in the newspaper articles of the period, they also underwent some significant shifts in emphasis. In the early 1990s, for example, exotic dance was more frequently acknowledged as work or as an occupation, even though perspectives that presented

it as a desirable or even legitimate form of work were rare. That said, there was greater diversity in representations of dancing and the work exemption issue, in that a greater range of voices were featured in news articles, including those of club owners, managers, and agents. Because labour appeared as a significant dimension in these articles, reporters even turned to the workers themselves at times and, as a result, a certain limited space opened up in which they appear as agentic subjects even if often as illegitimate and proto-criminal. Over the course of the 1990s, as discussed below, this labour perspective diminished and there was a growing emphasis on constructing the workers as victims. This shift is especially evident in the increased reference to “exploitation” as a framework for understanding exotic dance and sex work, which reflected a turn to notions of human trafficking, and the use of terms like ‘sexual slavery’ to describe the work. To understand these shifts, we argue, it is necessary to examine the broader international and national policymaking context and the process whereby a policing and security-based approach to labour migration was cemented.

The regulations associated with the exotic dancer work permit exemption, as noted above, had been in place since 1978. This “free trade in exotic dancers” (Oziewicz 1991), as one *Globe and Mail* article put it when paraphrasing comments made by then Immigration Minister Barbara McDougall, only became a major issue when workers from outside the United States and, in particular, from Central and East Europe began to work in Canada. In the early 1990s, newspaper reports tended to frame this labour as both unfair and illegitimate, and the workers themselves were often depicted as exploiting the Canadian immigration system through unjustified “preferential” treatment. One *Toronto Star* article, for example, suggested that federal policy “spares them from a process that normally costs would-be immigrants waits of from three to five months...As an added bonus, the strippers can stay in Canada as long as they have work” (Brent and Wong 1991). Another *Toronto Star* article claimed, in rather provocative language, that “immigrant groups think Ottawa is nuts to give strippers special treatment while thousands of people wait years for visas to join relatives” (Watson 1991).

There was a strong moralizing assessment (strippers given preference over family) underlying

these arguments. The relative “value” of different types of labour was also stressed. The exotic dancer work permit exemption, for example, was seen as especially egregious because of “the unfairness of allowing virtually unfettered entry into Canada of foreign strippers while the process of bringing in skilled tradespeople and others in high demand is fraught with bureaucratic red tape” (Oziewicz 1991). Or, as Lewis Chan, then president of the Canadian Ethnocultural Council, was quoted as saying, the exemption was “not only an anomaly but also a misuse of priority because it allows quicker access and use of resources for exotic dancers when Canada needs skilled workers, whether they’re scientists or management people” (*Toronto Star* 1991b). Not only was the work constructed as of questionable legitimacy, but newspaper reports also repeatedly implied that dancers were somehow displacing other migrants, an unsubstantiated contention that does not reflect the way in which federal immigration and labour market policies actually work.

These discussions of migration and labour were consistently shadowed by the spectre of the proto-criminal CEE migrant woman. The case of the eleven Soviet migrants discussed above provided the impetus for a push to change Canadian policy. As one *Toronto Star* headline warned ominously in 1991, this “Influx of Soviet strippers could be [the] start of [a] trend” (Brent and Wong 1991). The accompanying article drew heavily on the dominant criminogenic understanding of Central and East Europe, claiming that the flow of workers “could grow larger still if a proposed law is passed by the Soviet parliament allowing people to leave the country without first obtaining an exit visa.” It also included a quote by the Soviet press attaché in Ottawa who stated: “With more people travelling on private grounds there is always a possibility for criminal activity” (Brent and Wong 1991). What such articles exposed was the profoundly contradictory attitudes toward former communist countries, with new “freedoms” producing new criminal threats. As a consequence, the Soviet women arrested tended to be cast as proto-criminals, with greater state surveillance in the form of enforcement raids identified as an appropriate response (Brent and Wong 1991; Oziewicz 1991). In the end, although the then Immigration Minister cited the informal agreement with the United States as a complicating factor, she promised to re-

view the exotic dancer work permit rules (*Toronto Star* 1991a).

While these narratives of criminality constituted the primary lens through which the exotic dancer work permit issue and Central and East European migration were read, there was nonetheless a significant emphasis on the question of women’s exploitation in the newspaper coverage. One *Toronto Star* article, for example, explored this issue via an interview conducted with Andrew Cardozo, then executive director of the Canadian Ethnocultural Council. Echoing claims that later became central to human trafficking discourses, including reliance on highly emotive language and anecdotal or unsubstantiated evidence, Cardozo claimed: “My sense of strippers is that 90 per cent of them are exploited and they’re not doing it because that’s their first career choice” (Watson 1991). It is notable that Cardozo used the language of “career choice,” if perhaps ironically, in describing exploitation. When faced with a question about what business the state had in intervening if women chose to take their clothes off for money, then Immigration Minister Barbara McDougall responded by stating: “that’s always the dilemma, isn’t it? As a Minister, I have no interest in aiding and abetting them to do that” (Oziewicz 1991). In this instance, women’s choice and agency, albeit reluctantly, were being acknowledged; however, this perspective steadily disappeared from discussions of Central and East European women’s migration over the course of the 1990s.

This limited recognition of stripping as labour and workers as exercising agency meant that there was a greater diversity of perspectives included in the media coverage produced in the early part of the decade. For example, some news articles reported on the public relations efforts of individuals representing the clubs, who sought to legitimize the sector and to present a somewhat less stigmatizing understanding of the work. In some instances, this resulted in discussions about how exotic dancers made their money. The same *Toronto Star* article that quoted Andrew Cardozo, for example, also featured interviews with Toronto area strip club managers. One manager (Daniel Peroff) explained that, while strippers received only \$50 in wages each shift, table dancing provided a lucrative supplement: “You just can’t believe the money they make...If you hustle, there’s girls making \$300 to \$400 a day no problem” (Watson 1991). The article ended on a rather upbeat

note: “Women call every day asking for a stripping job to supplement their income, Peroff said” (Watson 1991). Other articles, published in the mid-1990s, profiled recruitment agency owner and businessman, John Bowcott, who arranged for primarily CEE migrant dancers to come to Ontario. He shared that the women’s accommodation (\$20/daily) offset the costs of carrying his real estate holdings in a weak market. He also explained the dancers’ shift pay (\$50) and management fees (\$125/weekly). In one article, an accompanying large photograph featured Bowcott surrounded by a group of smiling, attractive women referred to as “clients of his exotic dancer brokerage firm” (Oziewicz 1995c; see also *Globe and Mail* 1995).

The media coverage suggests that, especially in the mid-1990s, club owners, managers, and recruitment agents were engaged in a public relations push to rehabilitate the image of the sector. In doing so, the spokespeople for the strip clubs also drew on broader ethnosexualizing narratives. In a *Globe and Mail* article on the criminal nature of Central and East European women’s migration, lawyer Mendel Green, who regularly acted as legal counsel for strip club owners, argued: “My clients are extremely concerned that the industry will be ruined by sleazeball operators who do not respect it as a true business. This industry must be maintained in a clean and businesslike way” (Oziewicz 1995a). “Sleazeballs,” in this context, came from Central and East Europe. Green cemented his point by evoking another dichotomy, making a clear distinction between (legitimate) dancing and (illegitimate, abject) prostitution: “The worst thing that could happen for my clients is for their girls to be engaged in prostitution and illegal activities” (Oziewicz 1995a). Indeed, the article went on quote from interviews conducted with two Ontario agents who brokered relationships between migrant dancers and Canadian strip clubs and who claimed that they “keep their ‘girls on a very short leash and under very close control’ to stop them from engaging in prostitution” (Oziewicz 1995a).

Club owners thus sought to reject claims of exploitation and present their interests as dovetailing with federal policy and social norms. This reframing of the exotic dance sector as devoid of problematic labour conditions was, of course, questionable. As research has shown, there were legitimate concerns about poor working conditions in strip clubs where migrant ex-

otic dancers worked, which were not being adequately addressed by those attempting to manage the image of stripping (Diaz 2007; McDonald and Timoshkina 2007). The arguments made by Mendel Green and the recruitment agents noted above mirrored dominant perspectives, in that they rendered the workers largely invisible and represented them primarily as capricious and child-like and in need of control. This reflects a representational strategy that became central to anti-trafficking discourses, a depiction of the Eastern European trafficking “victim” as, in Rutvica Andrijasevic’s (2007) words, “passive objects of male violence” (26). Nevertheless, club owners did, at least, frame their arguments primarily in labour, as opposed to criminal, terms.

By the mid-1990s, newspaper narratives were becoming much narrower. The criminogenic “nature” of the industry and its inherently exploitative character in relation to vulnerable women workers were foregrounded. In 1995, both organized crime (for example, Toronto area motorcycle gangs) and prostitution began to be mentioned in relation to Central and East European exotic dancers. This perspective mirrored policy shifts as Canadian embassies abroad started to refuse to give employment validations to women from Central and East European countries seeking work as exotic dancers because of the alleged presence of organized criminals and “strong indicators” that women were being exploited (Trickey 1995). While violence, abuse, and “virtual enslavement”—depictions that later became central features of the human trafficking narrative—were increasingly highlighted, it is notable that many of the forms of exploitation discussed in news articles in the early and mid-1990s could still rightfully be classified as labour rights violations. These included withholding passports, overcharging travel fees, taking a commission on the women’s earnings (Oziewicz 1995a), as well as being forced to dance seven days per week (Trickey 1995). However, discussions of these labour violations increasingly appeared alongside allegations of “forced prostitution” and “enslavement,” which effectively reconfigured such labour abuses as constitutive of the inherently exploitative nature of sex work, as opposed to identifying them as manifestations of problematic workplace conditions that required labour rights and protections as afforded to other workers.

In mid-1990s newspaper coverage, too, the processes of ethnosexualization, as applied to gendered de-

pictions of both Central and East European male and female subjects, hardened and these constructions drew on conceptions of Eastern Europe's supposed criminogenic nature. While exotic dancers were still being written about as illegal workers and possible criminals, they were also increasingly positioned as naïve, victimized, and passive feminine subjects controlled by Central and East European criminal men. For example, one *Montreal Gazette* article quoted an interview conducted with an immigration consultant who discussed the purported naïveté of women from CEE in relation to the exemption process: "We're processing [the applications for work permits and exemptions] with great care, with extreme caution... We'll want to interview each dancer, make sure they fully understand the nature of the contract with their employer, that they are, in fact, dancers and not some young women who have been lured out of ballet school with the promise of big money" (Trickey 1995). Another article published in the *Globe and Mail*, which discussed extortion charges laid against two recruitment agents, presented a similar trope. The agents, the article claimed, preferred to recruit "Romanian, Ukrainian, and Russian women because they need the money and because they [do] not object to the control" (Oziewicz 1995a). This statement drew on the ethnosexualizing assumption that women from Central and East Europe women are passive and thus easily exploited. Relying on stereotypes, it cast them as subjects who do not act but are only acted upon, setting them apart from, and thus behind, so-called "Canadian" women who presumably would object to this form of control.

If the Central and East European woman was increasingly positioned as a passive victim, the Central and East European male subject was constructed as particularly dangerous and violent. This is reflected in the following *Globe and Mail* description of the agents charged with extortion:

Two strip club agents—one of them an Eastern European on a visitor's visa and the other a Canadian citizen with family ties to the same country—have been charged with extorting money from an Eastern European stripper working in the Metro area. The two agents are accused of forcing the woman to pay them about \$5,000 by threatening to cut-off her legs or have her killed. The man on the visitor's visa is also accused of threatening to kill the stripper and of sexually assaulting her. (Oziewicz 1995b)

Here the extreme violence of the Eastern European man was explicitly foregrounded and the assumed reader (the Canadian national subject) was positioned as the shocked observer of this foreign scene. Although the second man named was identified as a Canadian citizen, his connection to East Europe was highlighted and this appeared to serve as an explanation for his criminal behaviour. He was cast as at once inside and outside the Canadian nation, a provisional citizen whose ethnicization reflected the framing of Central and East European subject discussed above. As Sunera Thobani (2007) has argued, the Canadian national subject is represented as law-abiding, whereas the outsider is marked by inherent criminality.

Consider the very different representation of the non-ethnicized Canadian recruitment agent, John Bowcott, discussed above, who was quoted as saying that his relationships with his exotic dancing clients were completely professional and that he was "not chasing 16 year old girls" (Oziewicz 1995c). His office was not filled with "half naked-bodies or bikers," the article noted, but rather with employees dealing with visa applications, government paperwork, and insurance forms (Oziewicz 1995c). Violence and exploitation, then, was being externalized as a product of CEE masculinity. This construction positioned Central and East European men as a threat and simultaneously produced the Central and East European woman in need of rescue. A benevolent, supportive Canadian masculinity and national community was thus legitimized.

Human Trafficking: Canadian Media Representations and Global Policy Changes

The aforementioned representational shifts in the early and mid-1990s laid the groundwork for the emergence of human trafficking as the primary way of understanding migration from CEE, particularly as it pertained to exotic dancing. These national developments were also potentially shaped by intensifying global concerns about transnational organized crime and human trafficking that began to circulate in United Nations organizations in 1997 (Gallagher 2001). In 1998, the year when the Canadian government sought to severely limit the number of exotic dancer work permits and exemptions granted to Central and East European women, the Ad-hoc Committee on the Elaboration of a Convention against Transnational Organized

Crime was established by the United Nations General Assembly. Canada played a significant role in these UN discussions, which foregrounded human rights as the context in which trafficking was to be understood. However, this was, in part, a rhetorical commitment given that, as Anne Gallagher (2010) has noted, human trafficking was removed from the United Nations' human rights system and situated in the arena that dealt with drugs and crime. She further pointed out that, "sovereignty and security issues surrounding trafficking and migrant smuggling [were] the true driving force behind such efforts" (976), as opposed to concerns about human rights. She stated:

Wealthy states [were] increasingly concerned that the actions of traffickers and migrant smugglers interfere with orderly migration and facilitate the circumvention of national immigration restrictions. Opportunities for lawful migration to the preferred destination have dramatically diminished at the same time as individuals are moving further, faster, and in far greater numbers than ever before. A growing demand for third-party assistance in the migration process is a direct consequence of this reality. (2001, 976-977)

This is not to suggest that human rights concerns resulting from third-party assisted migration were non-existent. However, while appearing as the primary policy objective, human rights concerns became subordinated to state interests in increasing the regulation of labour flows through the "hardening" of borders and the deployment of policing and security mechanisms. Indeed, these perspectives were reflected in Canadian news reports on these issues.

Virulent public debates among transnational feminist organizations over the definition of trafficking played an important role in both international policymaking and conceptualizations of sex work. One group, led by CATW (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women), supported the notion that prostitution is a form of sexual violence devoid of consent. At the centre of CATW's anti-prostitution arguments was the victim of trafficking and the injured body of the prostitute (Doezema 2010), which served as a trope for gender inequality and gender-based violence. The other group, called the Human Rights Caucus, included GAATW (Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women) and other

organizations that understood prostitution as form of labour (Doezema 2010). Jo Doezema (2010) has argued that there was a deep "ideological divide [concerning] the relationship between 'trafficking in women' and 'consent'" (27). As Elizabeth Bernstein (2010) explains, in the 1990s, the issue of human trafficking became a site where fierce feminist debates over the meaning of prostitution resurfaced and these, in turn, moved into a "humanitarian terrain" where anti-sex work perspectives could become more powerful. Both globally and in Canada, these debates appeared to crystalize into a security-based approach that framed trafficking and prostitution as a form of sexual violence (Soderlund 2005).

By 1997, these shifts and the definitive closing down of possible narrative and explanatory options were evident in Canadian newspaper coverage. Oziewicz's articles published in *The Globe and Mail* provide insight into the nature of these changes. In a 1997 article, he discussed federal government debates over the closing of the exotic dancer visa "loophole." In doing so, he framed the issue as one of human trafficking, beginning the article by describing exotic dancer migration as a "burgeoning traffic" (Oziewicz 1997). His use of trafficking language echoed that of federal government officials. For example, he paraphrased an interdepartmental letter that stated that the "entry of foreign strippers is incompatible with Canada's highly publicized international opposition to the trafficking of women for the purposes of sexual exploitation" (Oziewicz 1997). Oziewicz also highlighted Canada's new international commitments by citing a speech by then Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations, Robert Fowler. In it, Fowler stressed both the human rights and border security basis of Canada's new approach. "The protection of the human rights of women is a centerpiece of Canada's domestic and foreign policy," he proclaimed, but he also argued that one objective of Canada's *Immigration Act* was to "promote international order and justice by denying use of Canadian territory to persons who are likely to engage in criminal activity" (Oziewicz 1997). Thus, the victimization of women in the human trafficking process was conceptually linked to organized crime. The positioning of Eastern European dancers as victims of human trafficking produced them as one potential target of securitized policy interventions couched in the language of human rights.

In December 2000, Canada signed the United Nations General Assembly's Palermo Convention, which included the *Trafficking Protocol*. In subsequent years, the federal government began to introduce policies that were consistent with the requirements of international law, which was to prevent, suppress, and prosecute human trafficking. Newspaper articles that focused on CEE migrant exotic dancers published in 2000 indicated two interconnected and noteworthy shifts that seemed to cement the changes that had been taking place over the previous ten years: first, human trafficking began to be framed primarily as "sexual slavery" (see, for example, LaFleche 2000); and second, police were constructed as authorities on trafficking (although interestingly, it was often implied that law enforcement was "helpless" when it came to preventing this particular crime). These two trends were especially evident in Marina Jimenez and Stewart Bell's (2000) article published in the *National Post*. It was part of a series entitled the "Global Sex Slave Industry," which dealt with global trafficking and in which Eastern Europe was featured as only part of the story. (Central and East European migrant women were also discussed in a growing body of academic literature, which defined human trafficking as sexual slavery. See Leidholdt 1999; Kara 2009.) The *National Post*, where Jimenez and Bell's article appeared, had been launched two years earlier with a mandate to push political discourse to the right. Indeed, the article is notable for its strong rhetoric. Even though the authors indicated that the federal government had little concrete data on the actual scope of human trafficking, Canada was identified as a "hub" for international traffickers. Trafficking was presented as a large-scale industry where "poverty-stricken" women and children were "traded like consumer goods" to "traffickers who buy and sell them to pimps and drug lords" (Jimenez and Bell 2000). While the *National Post* pushed this perspective particularly hard, even Oziewicz (2000), whose earlier articles in *The Globe and Mail* tended to conceptualize exotic dance in labour terms, began at this time to talk of "a sex-slave ring." This emotive language lent support to the idea of a large and highly coordinated sex industry, operated by organized criminals.

The positioning of Central and East European exotic dancers in the articles published in 2000 reflected the trafficking paradigm. There was a decided shift in

emphasis to victimization where prostitution constituted the key problem. One *National Post* article describes what allegedly happened:

Niagara Regional Police say women from Eastern Europe are being brought to the Niagara region believing they will be working in the strip-club circuit, only to be snared into a life of prostitution. 'It's very prevalent. They are sponsored and brought into the country thinking they will work as strippers,' said Detective Sergeant Tom MacLean of the [Niagara Regional Police] morality unit. 'Then their visas are taken away...and they are trapped.' (LaFleche 2000)

Comparing this description to those found in earlier articles, we can see how the construction of the agents and the language of deception had shifted to reflect the new dominant approach. In 1991, the stories of the arrest of eleven Soviet women depicted them as deceived; it was the promise of modeling work that had lured them into stripping. By 2000, the stakes had been raised, with prostitution becoming the overriding danger. Of equal significance, in the early 1990s, CEE women *themselves* were often seen as the ones who *tricked* the immigration system, exploiting a loophole. By 2000, women were no longer in control, but were configured primarily as deceived victims.

The growing prevalence of the language of sexual slavery resulted in very distinct descriptions of migrant women's situation. Of particular significance, these included physical descriptions of the women's circumstances; they were "trapped" and "snared" (terms that imputed an animalistic quality to the women), rendered immobile, and implicitly positioned in a way that set them apart from Canadian-born women. Indeed, Jimenez and Bell (2000) described how Eastern European women's activities were "monitored and controlled [by agents] in a way that Canadian strippers would never tolerate." This ethnosexualized passivity and docility was further cemented by a tendency in many of the articles reviewed to group women and children together in accounts of trafficking (see also Oziewicz 2000).

Central and East European men also continue to be constructed in ways that presented them as particularly violent subjects with links to organized crime.

In the process, the whole exotic dance sector was implicated. Oziewicz (2000) wrote:

There is a deadly side to the stripper lifestyle too. One of Svitlana's [an exotic dancer] handlers, an immigrant from Siberia named Mikhail Kopysov, was under police investigation on allegations that he ordered a gangland hit in Moscow. He was found with his throat slit outside a Toronto-area Russian restaurant. One of his compatriots has been charged with murder.

The casting of CEE men ("an immigrant from Siberia" with no indication of his status in Canada) in this way reinforced stereotypes about Central and East Europeans as particularly depraved, criminal, and "barbaric." In recounting Svitlana's story, the article reinforced notions of CEE male subjects as highly criminogenic, as "sex-trade brokers," abusers, thieves, and individuals who encouraged women to use drugs in order to control them. They too were portrayed as animalistic, but in a very different way than Central and East European women. In the news articles published in 2000, men consistently appeared as pimps, drug lords, and traffickers who forced women into prostitution. Tellingly, stripping in the passage above had become a "lifestyle" rather than a job.

By ethnicizing and naturalizing conceptions of Eastern European feminine passivity and masculine criminality, the role of immigration and policing policy in producing abuse and exploitation was rendered entirely invisible. As Gallagher's (2001) argument that wealthy states were and are primarily concerned about sovereignty over their territories and traffickers' and smugglers' potential to interfere with "orderly migration" suggests, the state is deeply involved in limiting migration and producing a hierarchy of migration practices that identify particular groups of migrants as desirable and manageable populations.⁴ The positioning of CEE women as victims, as Jacqueline Berman (2010) notes, enables this form of biopolitical management. Police were increasingly presented in the news articles as the experts on such ethnic characteristics: "You got Romanians, Polish, Yugoslavians," a police officer explained in one *National Post* article and, after paying for an encounter with one of the dancers, "anything goes" (LaFleche 2000).

By 2000, it was the law enforcement that was presented as the primary agents "protecting" the Canadian nation state. Many of the old tropes remained and, in some cases, were reinforced. Oziewicz (2000), for example, cited a statistic put out by the Immigration and Human Resources Department that claimed that "dancers coming to Canada under the [exotic dancer] exemption 'have a rate of criminality which is higher than the rate for the general female population of Canada—more than 10 times higher in 1994.'" Given the criminalization of migrant workers and sex workers, this was not a surprising statistic. While increasingly repressive and targeted policing arguably produces these kinds of skewed figures, the statistic was used in the article to justify the need for enhanced policing. In fact, by 2000, it is not the work permit exemption itself that was seen as the primary problem, but more commonly the alleged lack of power police had to enforce a range of laws. One *National Post* article, for example, featured a police officer who explained that his "hands are tied" because of changes to lap dancing legislation in Ontario, making it more difficult for police to "crack down" on prostitution (LaFleche 2000). Another article suggested that the "global sex slave industry" had taken root in Canada, yet the government lacked the necessary policy to deal with the situation. It noted that the "government is creating new legislation to give police new powers to tackle the problem" (Jimenez and Bell 2000).

Conclusion

In this article, we have attempted to shed light on an under-theorized area of inquiry, showing how understandings of human trafficking are constructed in relation to existing discursive frameworks—in this case, those associated with Central and East Europe. Over the course of the 1990s, CEE migrant women were used as the vehicle through which a range of anxieties over Canadian labour policy, border security, and national sovereignty were articulated. They played this role for a variety of reasons, most notably because of their liminal status on the borders of a Western European imaginary that, in many respects, shaped understandings that circulated in Canada as well. Processes of ethnicization tied to long histories of Western European and North American exceptionalism, including those of the Cold War, produced Central and East European subjects as a particular threat to the borders of the liberal democratic

and capitalist nation state. The nature of these perceived threats changed over time and encompassed a whole range of migrant subjects. The debates over the exotic dancer work permit exception, though, crystallized a number of these discourses in a highly potent way. The configuration of the Central and East European woman as proto-criminal, as illegitimate labourer, and as victim enabled the reworking of Canadian labour and immigration policy in ways that foregrounded ideas of human trafficking and strengthened the securitization and policing of migration. It was ethnosexualizing narratives surrounding Eastern European femininity and masculinity that comprised the framework through which these reconfigurations were enabled.

The shifts we have outlined above are often associated with the post-September 11, 2001 period and, indeed, we do see that human trafficking was increasingly associated with international terrorism after 2001 (Beare 2003, xii). However, it is our contention that this securitization has a broader basis and that the emergence of discourses of human trafficking has had a significant impact on these policy shifts. In the fifteen years since the passing of the *Trafficking Protocol* and especially with the election of Stephen Harper's Conservative government, the Canadian state has adopted numerous policies, programs, and criminal laws aimed at preventing human trafficking, including new provisions in the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, a substantial financial and political commitment to anti-human trafficking initiatives (Public Safety Canada 2012; see also De Shalit, Heynen, and van der Meulen 2014), and, most recently, the criminalization of the purchase of sexual services through the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* (Department of Justice 2014). Understanding the roots of these changes helps us to think critically about their implications and the ways in which we might develop alternative ways of conceptualizing sex work, migration, and labour.

Endnotes

¹ Here we build on categories identified by Macklin (2003), particularly her identification of discourses that positioned Eastern European exotic dancers as proto-criminals.

² An interesting follow-up report on the arrested women explained that one of them married a Canadian man, which the article suggested was a way to obtain permanent status in Canada. She then left him to return to working as a dancer because she needed the

money (Duffy 1991).

³ Obtaining temporary work permits for exotic dancers became increasingly difficult owing to unofficial decisions to reject applications (Library of Parliament 2007, 5). It was not until 2012, however, with the enactment of the Conservative Government's *Safe Streets and Communities Act*, that Citizenship and Immigration issued ministerial instructions to deny all applications for employment in businesses where workers were considered to be at risk of sexual exploitation, with strip clubs, escort services, and massages parlours named directly (Canada Gazette 2012).

⁴ It is important to note that there is also a growing body of literature that explores new forms of migrant activism, citizenship, and political subjectivity that are emerging in the context of restricted mobility and restricted access to citizenship (see Andrijasevic et al. 2012; Nyers and Rygiel 2012).

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