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Stripping Them of Legal Status: The Making and Unmaking of the Exotic Dancer Visa Program

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STRIPPING THEM OF LEGAL STATUS: THE MAKING AND UNMAKING
OF THE EXOTIC DANCER VISA PROGRAM

by

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A Major Research Paper
presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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STRIPPING THEM OF LEGAL STATUS: THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF THE EXOTIC DANCER VISA PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the factors which influenced the making and unmaking of this controversial and internationally unique temporary visa program. Through a review of literature, public documents, and media records I deconstruct this policy; analyze its rationalities, assumptions and mechanisms; and conclude with a discussion on the implications for foreign-born exotic dancers whose lives are marked by Canadian politics turmoil. I argue that the government's decision to discontinue the program has negatively impacted the human rights and quality of life of foreign-born exotic dancers who, quite possibly, made the dangerous transition to the existing group of undocumented workers in Canada. While the Exotic Dancer Visa Program was problematic in many ways these migrant women were protected by legal status, thus decreasing, but not eliminating, their vulnerability as women, as immigrants, and as workers.

Key Words:

An article on the impact of public policy on the experiences of foreign-born exotic dancers in Canada, used the key words: exotic dancers, strippers, adult entertainers, adult entertainment, strip clubs, women immigrants.

To all the courageous exotic dancers who were marginalization and excluded as immigrants, emigrants, and as members of their diasporas.

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Introduction

In late 2004 Canada's immigration system became the subject of extensive media coverage as a controversial temporary worker program for exotic dancers began to surface in the news (for example see Freeze and Jimenez 2004; Hines 2004; LifeSiteNews.com 2004). The Exotic Dancer Visa Program seemed the new staple of the Canadian immigration policy in the media with headlines like "Strippers put Ottawa program at centre stage" (Freeze and Jimenez 2004). The attention of the public was captivated by a gradually intensifying political scandal which exposed Judy Sgro, the Liberal Minister of Immigration at the time, who was pressured into forfeiting her Cabinet position by members of the Opposition (Hines 2004). It is the development of this scandal that frames this paper. In December 2004 Judy Sgro found herself at the centre of the story which alleged that the Minister personally ordered a work permit extension for Alina Balaican, a 25-year old temporary worker employed as an exotic dancer, in exchange for volunteer work on the Minister's election campaign (Freeze and Jimenez 2004; Hines 2004). The pressure exerted on Minister Sgro shattered the promises made to foreign born exotic dancers under the Exotic Dancer Visa Program (EDVP) with its subsequent cancellation instead of the induction of new provisions. The EDVP debuted and departed the Canadian politics scene such that, when examined closely, it demonstrates a sexist, racist, and classist society at its worse. "Strippergate", the humiliating term used in the media to identify this story signals gaps in contemporary Canadian social cohesion primarily based on gender, race, and class inequity. This paper provides an analytical framework of the making and unmaking of the EDVP.

In order to think through the effects that sensational media stories have on the people they target I ask: How can an immigrant woman's personal affairs be affected by and affect the Canadian political scene in such profound ways? What combination of factors made this particular media story intolerable for the Canadian public? The making and unmaking of the EDVP is a process which reveals a great deal about Canadian values and the political and moral comfort zone in which politicians and the public make up their minds. Political figures in favour of the EVDP, found themselves defending allegations of harbouring human traffickers and forced prostitution. In response, they began to take steps to resolve the situation that had attracted the attention of the international community and the anti-trafficking movement. More than two years after the "Sgro Scandal" and under the leadership of a newly elected government, human trafficking has not been reformed. Rather, it remains as much of a concern to Canadians. If the women have not been protected, which was the main thrust for the attack in the first place, then what has been protected?

The controversy of the EDVP continues today. At the core of this legislature is a story about race, gender, and women's sexuality. It builds from a social issue surrounded by conflicting theories and long-standing debates to which the concern with immigration adds further complication. In addition, a non-judgemental approach needs to be developed to provide a framework of analysis that incorporates the needs and voices of immigrant women engaged in sex work in light of several facets of globalization. Caution that moral regulation works as a way to 'legitimately' judge some and not others needs to be exercised as debates may *appear* to protect the disadvantaged when in fact it further disadvantages them. A gender, race, and class based analysis must be applied to

the examination and available information about how foreign born exotic dancers are constituted as deviant.

The objective of this study is both activist-based and policy driven. My aim is to develop an equitable and analytical framework on which to base policy recommendations in light of the Canadian government's decision to cancel the Exotic Dancer visa program more than two years ago. It is my hope that this framework will provide a new way to imagine policy by bringing to light the issues that foreign born exotic dancers face. This paper will begin by contextualizing the visa program in current and historical approaches to women in immigration and, identifying the specific issues of migrant sex workers. Then, it will examine the factors which influenced the quiet creation and turbulent cancellation of this controversial and internationally unique temporary visa program. The paper will conclude with a discussion about the implications of current approaches on foreign born exotic dancers whose lives are marked by tumultuous Canadian politics. I argue that the government's decision to discontinue the program has breached the human rights and reduced quality of life of foreign born exotic dancers who have possibly been forced to make the dangerous transition to the existing group of illegal immigrants in Canada. While the EDVP was problematic in many ways the women were protected by legal status thus decreasing, but not eliminating, their vulnerability as women, as immigrants, and as workers.

I. Understanding the Approach to Women in Canada's Immigration Policy –

A Literature Review

Immigration policy development and analysis is affected in great part by the state's attempt to maintain control over others (Cheng 1999). Relations between the autochthon state and foreign born migrants can be understood through processes of racialization. The continuous evolution of immigration policy and practice is in great part affected by social discourses in gender. I recognize that discrimination is multifaceted and its roots lay in a broad realm of social characteristics. That is, many intersecting factors contribute to men and women's encounters with immigration including race, religion, class, and sexual orientation. In this paper, gender is the primary focus in recognition that womanhood is an added social characteristic which further hinders the immigration experience of women (Arat-Koç 2006b). In immigration policy, Arat-Koç (1999) argues that women migrants are destined to occupy a "second class" citizen position in Canadian society. I will review the literature that will provide a context for gendered and socio-economic implications of immigrant women. This provides a background for considering the complex relationship between female sexuality and sex work.

The Making of the "Immigrant Woman":

The immigration discourse in Canada is built upon the objective of, and fixation with economic growth (Li 2003; Reitz 1998; Preston, Lo, and Wang 2003). As such, immigration policy has historically been developed within a framework of fiscal responsibility to the state where immigrants are firmly expected to contribute to, not take

away from the economy (Li 2003:39). This belief has resonated through history where carefully crafted immigration legacy granted entry to newcomers based on their potential to financially sustain themselves (Li 2003). The current “point system” provides alleged objective criteria for the selection of independent immigrants with the intent of preventing newcomers’ dependency on income assistance programs (Arat-Koç 1999). Thus, it is crucial for all potential immigrants, male or female, past or present, to demonstrate their worth in meeting the expectation of self-sufficiency through the neo-liberal thrust.

It is true that this prudent strategy maximizes the fiscal viability of immigration in Canada but it fails to consider that male and female immigrants’ potential is assessed against masculinist labour market conditions, currently and historically advantageous to the male migrant. The assumption that men and women have access to equal immigration opportunity in Canada is highly problematic. Vosko (2006:7) reminds us that the traditional expectation of males as “breadwinners” conducting work in the public sphere has placed females in the role of caregivers restrained in the private sphere, subject to protection, and primarily gaining access to the social network through their husbands. This gendered division of labour has historically created second-rate labour market opportunities for women in general. Immigrant women’s economic status is thus reduced to “second class” citizens. They generally enter as either sponsored individuals dependent on a male counterpart or poor workers stuck in low paying, underprivileged jobs in menial and service oriented types of employment.

Today, white, middle class, educated women are rarely associated with the term “immigrant woman” (Folson 2004). In the realm of immigration immigrant women by

and large occupy positions of lower social status than their male counterparts and undertake depreciated work. Thus, the term “immigrant woman” is an arbitrary symbol of inferiority attributed to women on the basis of gender, especially those who belong to non-white racial groups. Folsom (2004) finds that the term “immigrant woman” is a socially constructed category and is used to describe a woman in a particular labour-market position and whose first language is not one of Canada’s. However, historic records indicate that this has not always been the case. A brief historical assessment shows that many white women arrived in Canada as single, poor, domestic workers (Das Gupta 2000; Kelley and Trebilcock 1998:85). Their status in their home countries represents the value attached to their contributions to the Canadian labour market during the early settlement period. However, the notable trend is that white women may have received a warmer welcome to settle in Canada (Das Gupta 2000). Race is thus an important factor affecting the woman migrant’s ease into the receiving society. A flexible arrangement benefited western European white women in recognition of their reproductive abilities which were desired in the ideal of “white” nation building (Arat-Koç 1999). White women’s motherhood was desired in Canada’s transition to a settler society (Arat-Koç 2006a). Dworkin (1976:80) supports this argument in her claim that women were imported into the colonies to breed, making it apparent that selected women’s reproductive abilities were considered an asset in immigration decisions.

Although in the early 1900s white western European immigrant women were accepted in the private sphere as “mothers of the nation” (Arat-Koç 2006a) their contributions to the public labour market remained unrecognized. This important differentiation between the genders of first settlers confined women in households to

conduct unpaid work, despite the economic onus on the immigrant reinforced in early immigration policy. Unfortunately, the immigrant “dream” of hard work compensated by renewed opportunity for financial stability and even wealth was not extended to all, especially if they were women. This is the foundation which shapes the role of immigrant women in Canada today. In short, this limited way of defining “immigrant woman” reduces her opportunities as a result of the stereotypes associated with the role of the immigrant woman in the labour market. Her contribution to building a strong economy is diminished and it interferes with her agency.

Globalization and Undesirable Immigrant Women:

The occupation of exotic dancer draws heavily on societal constructions of femininity. Before the EDVP, femininity formed the context of immigration policies associated with foreign born caregivers in the new global economy. Despite wide depreciation faced by immigrant women on the basis of their assigned labour market position and combined with harsh considerations of race, globalization has increased the movement of women across national borders. This is commonly called the “feminization of migration” (Cheng 1999; Hochschild 2002; Maher 2004) and refers to an important growing trend in the current global economy to import care and love from poor countries to rich ones (Hochschild 2002:17). Maher (2004) argues that in the late twentieth century women in developed nations joined the formal economy in large numbers just as neo-liberal economic policies began to dismantle the welfare state, thus creating a labour market demand in care giving and domestic roles. Vacancies in domestic work created by the First World women’s movement into the labour force are currently being filled by

poor migrant women from the Third World, adding nationality and economic class to the struggles of immigrant women.

In the South, dismantled economies consolidated by globalization provide the “push factor” of women’s migration (Hochschild 2002:17). Many studies on gendered forced migration indicate that poor women are continuously uprooted by the urgent need to provide for themselves, their children and their family members for whom they are responsible. For example, Maltou (1999) examines the African women’s experience, Smith (1999) focuses specifically on the women from Tanzania, and Gómez (1999) reviews the case of Latina women. Today, half of the world’s migrants are women (Arat-Koç 2006b:77; Hochschild 2002:19). Researchers conclude that abundant empirical evidence of gendered forced migration signals a global trend for poor immigrant women, a process which has seen the emergence of “gender persecution” (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002; Gilad 1999; Macklin 1999).

Once in the country of destination, immigrant women find themselves, in the current global climate, with limited fiscal mobility. Reitz (1998:47), among others (Cheng 1999:43; Vosko 2006:3), argues that gender and race interact in the labour market. In the current context, the labour market is an environment where women’s economic interests are not served, but on the contrary, they are hindered by unjust and arbitrary prototypes of “white, educated man” as the preferred immigrant and ideal worker. Cheng asserts that “women’s experiences with migration have differed from those of male migrants as a result of their differential social locations that determine their distinct roles and particular contexts of employment” (Cheng 1999:40). Li (2003:111) points out that the interactions between race, gender, and immigrant status in the labour

market produce measurable negative effects on immigrant earnings. Reitz (1998:47) asserts that while immigrant men are compared to the dominant group (because men are the dominant in the workforce) immigrant women are doubly disadvantaged since they are compared to both the dominant group of men and the dominant group of women. Thus, visible minority immigrant women suffer the most income shortcomings although white immigrant women are affected only marginally less (Li 2003:111). While according to Li (2003), some white immigrant women do not suffer the income shortcomings, it is more important to understand how gender inequality affects all women. Gender oppression is a system that creates the conditions of possibility for any woman to be disadvantaged. Gender, race, and class combine to place immigrant women in vulnerable position. The next section will examine how Canadian immigrant policy fails to protect women from these structural disadvantages.

Gendering Canada's Immigration Policy:

Studies show that the immigration system in Canada fails to challenge women's issues in society (Côté, Kérisit, and Côté 2001; Dauvergne, Angeles, and Huang 2006; Philippine Women Centre of B.C. 2006; Status of Women Canada 1998). Absence of gender sensitive research has been identified as a key short falling in developing an equitable framework to analyze women's issues in immigration policy (Dauvergne et al. 2006:93; Philippine Women's Centre of B.C. 2000:72; Status of Women Canada 1998:76). Two major features, among others, emerge among critiques of the immigration system from a gender perspective: sponsorship and the "deskilling" of women's work. Sponsorship allows an individual to migrate to a new country under the condition that the

sponsor takes responsibility for any financial costs associated with the migrant in the first years of settlement. Because husbands generally sponsor their wives, and autochthon families sponsor caregivers, sponsorship constructs women as a category of immigrants dependent on others since government services can only be available to women through their sponsors. Many sponsored women already find themselves with little labour market mobility and limited options for social assistance among other restrictions (Cheng 1999:50; Maher 2004:134). Power imbalance between men and women facilitated through the sponsorship system, it is argued, leads to a second class citizenship category for sponsored women open to possibilities of emotional abuse and domestic violence (Côté et al. 2001). Thus, they become vulnerable dependents on their husbands or the employers with whom they must reside (Côté et al. 2001).

The differentiation between “skilled” and “unskilled” work is the second important recurrent feature in the literature and it further addresses immigration policy as a mechanism which favours men over women. As Abu-Laban and Gabriel (2002) explains, the Canadian government recently began to attract highly skilled workers from the global South, favouring class-advantaged immigrants from these areas of the world. This process is highly problematic as skills associated with women’s work are accorded little value in the current market place (Arat-Koç, 1999). Christina Gabriel (2004) questions the “skills discourse” and asserts that the particular approach to the term “skill” is gendered within the current changing global economy. According to Gabriel, “skill” is far from being an objective measure of human capital and is a socially constructed concept based on the gendered division of labour (Gabriel, 2004). Placing this dynamic in the context of immigration policy, those individuals constructed as “skilled” tend to be

men and are seen as universally desirable by developed countries (Gabriel, 2004). Furthermore, Indra (1999) has argued that the internationalization of professions fails to be represented by men and women equally as desired professions in the globalized economy favour male dominated occupations such as engineering and information technology, while professions traditionally dominated by women are devalued, albeit some more than others.

Despite this, the literature points out that there seems to be plenty of demand for women's work (Arat-Koç 2006a; Arat-Koç 2006b; Cheng 1999; Gabriel 2004) and the growing availability of employment in care giving, domestic, and sex work in developed countries force some special programs into the immigration legislation (Hochschild 2002; Macklin 2003; Maher 2004). Programs such as the Live-In Caregiver Program fill these labour market needs and are less likely to offer women the same incentives that immigrants in the economic class receive (Arat-Koç 2006b). Immigration programs which are developed to fill devalued labour market needs are generally associated with obstructed or no opportunity to stabilize landed immigration status. They are temporary in nature, and not eligible for public support programs such as language training and income assistance (Arat-Koç 2006a; Arat-Koç 2006b; Status of Women Canada 1998).

In summary, women migrate as dependents or in special temporary programs. The barriers created by these conditions mark the immigrant woman as an individual engaged in low paying, devalued work carried out in undesirable conditions and whose situation is threatened by its dependency or its temporary status. Despite this, women continue to migrate in large numbers driven away from their homelands by considerable economic difficulties triggered by the recent process of globalization. Many arrive in Canada from

impoverished areas of the world where they face a gendered immigration system which favours class advantaged, educated men. As a result they often find themselves in precarious employment situations in unfamiliar countries which tolerate them only as temporary workers or sponsored wives. The next section explores the theoretical framework which I will use to discuss foreign born exotic dancers whose immigration circumstances are determined by a very specific immigration law regulating their movements into Canada.

II. A Feminist Theoretical Framework to Understanding Exotic Dancers

While foreign born exotic dancers' obstacles and opportunities can be expected to be reminiscent of the experiences of other poor immigrant women whose migration is motivated by lack of economic opportunity in their homelands, issues of women's sexuality makes the case study of foreign born exotic dancers unique. Unlike domestic workers, women who are employed in the sex trade encounter added social stigma due to the nature of their profession in addition to living under the label of "immigrant woman". The experiences of migrant exotic dancers are situated at the intersection of the immigration hardships of poor women and the unsettled social debates surrounding women's sexuality. Thus, it is difficult to imagine how an immigration program which addresses a morally unaccepted profession can be implemented without considerable consequences on the migrant workers engaged in it. If migrants are perceived in terms of their potential in the labour market, then an exploration of the way the sex industry is perceived in society is in order.

Feminist Theories of Sexuality:

There is abundant academic discussion addressing female sexuality, patriarchy, gender inequality, and the morality surrounding sex work. In this section I will explore how feminists take issue with pornography to set a theoretical framework for the analysis of exotic dancing as a profession. I am including exotic dancing in the realm of pornography as it is often associated with erotic imaging. I do not include exotic dancing in the category of prostitution. Although some strippers engage in it additionally, the business contract between dancer and client does not include intercourse or sexual release

(Frank 2002). Furthermore, from a legal perspective stripping is a legal activity and a valid occupation unlike prostitution.

Sexuality has been a priority item for feminists from the beginning of the movement more than five decades ago. Activists and theorists such as Catherine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin, Jo Doezema, and Kamala Kempadoo have positioned themselves on both sides of the debates that seek to either validate pornography or not according to how it relates to gender equality (Attwood 2004; Boyle 2000; Daileader 1997; Downs 1989; Green 2000; Lumby 1997). Despite this, feminists are yet to agree on a common position on pornography. Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon are central advocates against pornography (Downs 1989:xii). According to them, pornography is defined as “the sexually explicit subordination of women, graphically or in words (Downs 1989:xi). They suggest that a social relationship between pornography and the systemic oppression of women exists (Downs 1989:xi) and believe pornography to be the chief means by which men secure their dominance over women (Lumby 1997:107). MacKinnon asserts that “pornography is the root cause of attitudes and behaviours of violence and discrimination that define the treatment and status of half the population” (MacKinnon 1987:147). Thus, for her pornography represents a form of forced sex, a practice of sexual politics which achieves a premeditated plan of men to dominate women (MacKinnon 1987:148).

In 1984 Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon united in a civil rights initiative to present their case before a committee and influence legal action against pornographic material in the US. Through heart wrenching testimonials of rape and physical abuse of female victims both activists attempted to influence the outlaw of

pornography. They needed to overcome the fundamental principle of a democratic society: the First Amendment, which stipulates that speech cannot be restricted due to its political and social implications (Downs 1989:xi). In the eyes of the law, pornography had been considered “obscenity” which was considered to offer no intellectual or social value and thus, it had been excluded from the First Amendment and offered protection through state neutrality (Downs 1989:xiv). After hearings, the commission did not recommend broadening the legal definition of obscenity or extending censorship beyond obscenity, instead, it urged more aggressive regulation. MacKinnon’s reaction was: “Pornography is socially decried but socially permitted. Obscenity is the legal device through which it is legally repudiated but legally permitted” (MacKinnon 1989:201).

Feminist critics of the anti-pornography movement find that the MacKinnon-Dworkin position is flawed in three ways. First, it contradicts liberal principles upon which the feminist movement itself is founded. Downs (1989:32) finds that the debate on pornography is part of a broader controversy concerning liberty and freedom in society. Downs (1989:29) points out that historically, liberalism and feminism go hand in hand, thus a censorship approach is problematic to the principles of feminist thought. Furthermore, Lumby (1997:108) points out that MacKinnon’s views have been used to fuel an alliance between conservatives and feminists, a fundamental contradiction. Downs proposes that before altering liberal principles all sides must engage in more thoughtful and responsible discussion (Downs 1989:xvi-xvii). He argues that freedom of speech compels the community to deal with uncomfortable but inescapable situations and it defers the threat to impulsive silencing of different points of view (Downs 1989:xviii). Lumby (1997:xix) also criticizes pro-censorship by utilizing Foucault’s criticism that

sexuality has come to be seen as a fixed aspect of our identity which tells us the truth about who we are. Silencing the debate gives voice to only one view which, according to Foucault's view, will become the absolute truth. Green (2000:76) presents De Sade's argument that sexual liberation alone does not lead to general liberation, thus censorship would create a precedent in further struggles for liberation. Green's sensible proposition is that "we want those who have experienced sexual exploitation to be able to speak, even if their stories may be read by some as pornography. We want those who experience sex in more positive ways to be able to speak as well" (Green 2000:79).

Second, MacKinnon and Dworkin's position on pornography is found problematic for its collective approach. Kantola (2006:32) and Downs (1989:29) find that women's agency does not depend on a shared identity as assumed in the anti-pornography movement. The danger of speaking in a unified, cohesive voice is in recreating historical circumstances where exclusion of those who did not neatly fit in the collective identity occurred (Kantola 2006:29-30). Kantola's assessment is validated by MacKinnon's remark that "the point is because we all identify as women, but also because, like all women, we inescapably are identified as women the values of pornography are the values that rule our lives" (MacKinnon 1987:133). In fact, Boyle (2000:187) finds that it has been well documented that the effects of pornography in the media are inconclusive. Green (2000:78) concludes that under a collective approach, women who do not experience sexuality as described by Dworkin and MacKinnon are inevitably blinded by the oppressor's power, thus reinforcing victimization of women as the norm.

Last, the anti-pornography movement attributes the quality of social relations and identities of men and women to male heterosexuality. Lumby (1997:107) finds this approach problematic because it voluntarily assigns enormous power to men. In her critique, Daileader (1997:74) remarks that such an approach restraints the sexual identity of a woman in pornographic culture. Daileader (1997:84) takes issue with the frightening way in which the phallus is described in pornography and remarks that it alone cannot hurt because, after all, it is flesh. Instead, she proposes that consideration is given to understanding what pornographic violence means to both men and women (Daileader 1997:84). Undoubtedly a link exists between the experiences of women with violence and pornography but this is insufficient to declare pornography the cause (Boyle 2000:193).

These debates have shaped social understandings of pornography and female sexuality. According to the theories of Dworkin and Mackinnon, the exotic dancing profession further entrenches women into the role of socially suppressed victims on the bases of their gender. Public and voluntary female nudity associated with exotic dancing is therefore highly problematic for Dworkin and MacKinnon and should be banned. On the other hand, critics disagree that censorship of pornography is the solution to gender inequality and point out a variety of complex and interconnected processes which sustain women's social subordination. While this debate continues the exotic dancing profession exists today as a legal activity in Canada, for both employees and consumers, despite the social stigma attached to it. In the next section I explore the exotic dancing profession and its association with the international traffic of women for the purposes of prostitution. This association has marked the gradual dismantlement of the EDVP.

Social Stigma and the Sex Industry:

Kari Lerum tells us that throughout history, humans have been fascinated with sex workers because they have a personal stake in the matter (Lerum 1999:9). Lerum's comment has a discreet underlying message about the importance of gender membership in the way men and women either feel about and/or experience the sex industry. In this section, the sex trade will be examined in order to understand the position of women who work in it.

The issues of sex work and sex workers embrace myriad forms of commercialized sexuality: prostitution, pornography, erotic dancing, phone sex, dominatrixes, and more" (Dank 1999:1). Although Dank's definition recognizes the complexity of sex work by including many forms, debates and rebuttals have primarily focused on prostitution. Given the widespread of commercial sexual services, persons in this field are often referred to as being part of the sex industry (Dank 1999:1). Kamala Kempadoo points out that while sex work is not limited to prostitution, or to women, it is generally understood in close proximity to these two categories (Kempadoo 1998:7). This association is also noted by Lerum who finds that sex work is now seen as a "women's issue" (Lerum 1999:31). The association of sex work with womanhood contributes to the prevalence of the social stigma associated with the assumption that men always have purchasing power over the integrity of women as a result of their economic and emotionally needy women. Female sexual acts that serve women's sexual or economic interests are perceived within the context of masculinity as dangerous, immoral, perverted, irresponsible and indecent (Kempadoo 1998:5; Lerum 1999). Sex work positions women in dominant discourse as social deviants and outcasts and gender

inequality and discrimination remain prevalent even with the increasing visibility of men and boys in this type of work (Kempadoo 1998:6).

The recent growth of the industry has fallen short of promoting the profession to social acceptance. Although it seems true that sexuality has become increasingly more visible in the media it remains taboo past interacting with it in the realm of entertainment, outside the line of work. Most of those who engage in exploring their own sexuality do so as amateurs in their own time. The women who work in the sex trade are often excluded from mainstream society and generally speaking they are seen as victims in need of intervention (Bindman 1998; Dank 1999:2; Doezema 1998; Gülçür & İlkaracan 2002; Kempadoo 1998; Lerum 1999:15; Murray 1998). In the current social context sex work is an occupation which raises questions about the degree to which the women involved in it make a conscious choice to enter the profession or are forced into it. This debate is prevalent in sex work literature (Doezema 1998; Kempadoo 1998) and in the pornography debates that relate to women's agency which I presented in the previous section. Although some feminist thought portrays the worker as an individual who is making a career choice like any other, it seems society is yet to embrace this idea past the abstract of written work. For the most part, sex work is a marginalized profession in which workers are reluctant to exchange business cards at cocktail parties. Activist movements have made some legal gains, but social change has been much slower. Women involved in sex work are generally aware of the prevailing attitudes towards prostitutes and protect that information about themselves (Wijers 1998:77). Kempadoo (1998) proposes to articulate a social and public space for sex workers as income earners

for themselves and their families while acknowledging that, like in any other profession, sex work has its own hazards:

In most cases, sex work is not for individual wealth but for family well-being and survival; for working class women to clothe, feed and educate their children; and for young women and men to sustain themselves when the family income is inadequate. For many, sex work means migration away from their hometown or country. For others, it is associated with drug use or debt-bondage. For the majority, participation in sex work entails a life in the margins. (Kempadoo, 1998:4).

Race and ethnicity contribute in part to the social stigma attached to sex workers and their profession. Kempadoo (1998:10) found that the Western eroticization of women from the South as highly attractive and fascinating is derived from a colonizer's sense of domination of the colonized. It positions the non-western woman as ignorant, poor, uneducated, and victimized; a construct which stands in opposition to that of the western women generally pictured in control of her income and body (Kempadoo 1998:11). Today, women from the South occupy a secondary place to white immigrant women from the North in the global sex industry (Kempadoo 1998:11) having, in past decades, predominantly occupied temporary caregiver positions supported by temporary immigration programs which have facilitated the liberation of western women from domestic roles. Due to economic pressures in their own countries women's choice of entering sex work often leaves them vulnerable to abuse in this line of work, especially as migrants. Whiteness continues to represent the ideal sexual desirability as western sex worker's interests have created safer conditions and higher pay for them (Kempadoo 1998:11). Kempadoo (1998:13) concludes that little research and theorizing is grounded in the lives and experiences of women from the South, therefore much of the writing is positioned according to First World women's struggles which are assumed universal.

Kempadoo (1998:14) proposes that the point of view of women from the South engaged in sex work must be presented as a “counterpoint to a North American – Western European hegemony within contemporary feminist and prostitute writings about the sex trade”.

Human Trafficking and Sex Work:

The link between economic forces fuelled by processes of globalization, and an increase of trafficking in women has been extensively discussed in literature (Bruckert, Parent and Robitaille 2003; Doezema 1999; Kempadoo 1998; Skrobanek, Boonpakdee, and Jantateero 1997). Increasing levels of poverty in certain regions of the world are most often considered causal for the rapid growth of the international sex trade industry and trafficking (Bruckert et al. 2003; Kempadoo 1998; Jiwani 1999). In the new industrialized era, migrant labour has supported economic growth and development and has seen the dislocation of large groups of people (Skrobanek et al. 1997:6). Thus, human trafficking is an aspect of migration (Skrobanek et al. 1997:7). Human trafficking in regions of low or inexistent employment opportunities has been exacerbated by the current climate where sex work offers income security (Jiwani 1999). According to Jiwani (1999) profits from human trafficking accumulate to more than \$7 billion in underground income generating strategy which, perhaps not surprisingly, handles approximately the same amount of capital as the gun and drug trades.

Human trafficking, although not reduced to transnational activity, has specific implications for migrant women because it is based on the presence of third parties coercing women into prostitution (Murray 1998:58). Recruitment agencies and

impresarios link the demand and supply in the international sex trade, “indicating a national parallel with transnational corporations in the formal global economy” (Bruckert et al. 2003:13; Kempadoo 1998:16). Extreme situations of trafficking in women include debt bondage, ranging from \$30,000 to \$50,000 which the women have to pay themselves in order to be released (Jiwani 1999). Some are reported confined and their passports are allegedly taken away by traffickers to prevent their escape (Jiwani 1999; McDonald, Moore, and Timoshkina. 2000). Canadian journalist Victor Malarek documented his travels throughout Eastern Europe in his book “The Natashas: The New Global Sex Trade” (Malarek 2003). His accounts expose in great detail the extent to which trafficking for the purposes of prostitution affected young women in this area during the decade following the end of the Cold War period which resulted in the dismantlement of socialist systems.

In 2000, three years prior to the release of Malarek’s book, Status of Women Canada conducted empirical research on the experiences of migrant sex workers from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union in Canada. In this study lack of legal information combined with a thirst for economic opportunity were considered key factors which ultimately led to deplorable working conditions, exploitation and even trafficking. Interestingly, according to this study nine women among 18 met the authors’ criteria of a “trafficked person” although none of the women considered themselves so (McDonald et al. 2000:vi). The prohibition of prostitution and restrictions on travel attract organized crime and create the possibilities for large profits and creates the need for protection and assistance (Murray 1998:60). Murray (1998:64) concludes that restrictive immigration policies contribute to the exploitation of migrants and should be reviewed. Protecting the

legal status of sex workers coupled with access to social programs maintains the transparency of the industry which prevents it from slipping in the dangerous territory of the underground market. Skrobanek et al. (1997:12) assert that immigration restrictions cause people to find new ways of crossing borders either legally or illegally. As illegal aliens, they have little recourse in obtaining assistance from authorities who criminalize and possibly deport them under the current laws (Jiwani 1999; Skrobanek et al. 1997:13). Jiwani (1999) asserts that women involved in the sex trade tend to be controlled by “pimps”, a practice which can only be exacerbated in a climate where governmental protection is not offered. Fear of being caught by police, being charged, and having a criminal record due to the social stigma attached to the sex trade forces women into underground operation where they are left with no choice but to look for advice from their trafficker (Jiwani 1999).

For undocumented workers their “alien” status makes them more vulnerable to abuse and impossible for them to report it (Jiwani 1999). Furthermore, lack of English language skills combined with the lack of knowledge about their rights makes them weary of disclosing violence and seeking help. Added to this, many women fear the judgemental attitudes of their own ethnic communities should they disclose sexual exploitation, thus “trapped and isolated, they are extremely vulnerable to a multitude of forms of violence” (Jiwani 1999:15).

Gender Analysis and Agency:

Many authors reject the tendency to approach sex workers exclusively as victims (Doezema 1998; Kempadoo 1998; Murray 1998; Dank 1999:2). In their view

contemporary efforts to stop trafficking are based on the ideal role of the vulnerable woman located in the household (Doezema 1998:41). Doezema (1998:42) suggests that associating women from former communist and third world nations with poverty and stressing the need to develop economic opportunities for them in these regions is an approach which is all too reminiscent of fears of women running wild and away from supervision. In her understanding, female migration is viewed in negative terms, as a way to escape intolerable situations, according no agency to the woman's initiative and courage (Doezema 1998:40). Doezema (1998) and Kempadoo (1998; 2005:xi) lead the way in stressing that sex work represents a way for women to achieve economic independence and should be regarded no different than any other income generating initiative used by migrant women to provide for themselves and their families. Murray argues that:

...abolitionists need to hear that sex workers...do the job willingly and do very well out of it relative to other occupations"; "they need to hear that clients of sex workers come from all walks of life (and include women), they are not monsters, and sex workers as a rule do not hate them. (Murray, 1998:58).

The traffic in women has received a great deal of attention over the past two decades (Gozdziak and Collett 2005:100). Scholars, advocates, and activists in this area of study have fundamentally different positions on how this issue can be resolved. This lack of consensus, I argue, influences public policy responses (or lack thereof). For example, Canada is yet to develop a comprehensive legislation specifically geared towards the prosecution of traffickers and the protection of victims (Gozdziak and Collett 2005:104; CIC 2007). In most cases, the trafficked women are considered illegal migrants and are subject to deportation. However, they may request to apply for refugee

status without the guarantee of a favourable response to their application (Gozdziak and Collett 2005:105). In addition, they are encouraged to testify in the prosecution cases of their traffickers (Gozdziak and Collett 2005:105). In short, women who participate in sex work are viewed as criminals and/or victims in need of assistance to rehabilitate. Their agency is undermined and they are expected to comply with societal norms of morality.

In this section I have examined women's sexuality in the context of morality. The experiences of women cannot be ignored, including women who are victims of abuse as well as sex workers who experience barriers to conducting their work and, implicitly, their lives. In the next section I will focus on understanding the lives and choices of exotic dancers within their profession.

III. The Occupation of Exotic Dancer

In previous sections I have explored the impact of gender on the immigrant experience as well as the stigma attached to those making a living in the sex trade. Although this occupation is surrounded by negative morally driven social perceptions an in depth review of the literature shows that this occupation is much more complex. A simple dismissal of stripping as immoral behaviour requires further interrogation. In this section, I move to investigate the exotic dancing profession in order to establish a framework for understanding its quotidian demands as well as its offerings. This approach allows for the deconstruction of the type of labour these women perform which, unlike Canadian-born dancers, becomes entangled with the “immigrant woman” status.

A Historical Perspective of Exotic Dancing:

The genealogy of striptease is richly textured by its marginalization from the mainstream society dictated by discourses of morality in patriarchy. An increase of academic material on the subject since the 1990s is also an indicator of the preoccupation with exotic dancing as a sociological field of study. This increase in the literature has brought about a certain glamorization of the exotic dance profession noted in Hollywood cinematography by movies such as “Striptease” and “Show Girls” (Bruckert 2002:12; Ross 2003: 146). In films such as these gendered representations of women as created by pop culture which conflict with images of femininity found public debates such as the “Sgro Scandal”. The glamorization of the exotic dancer profession has also produced original research methods: a number of female social scientists have studied the lived experiences of exotic dancers by taking on the profession themselves while conducting

their studies (Bruckert 2002; Frank 2002; Langley 1997). In the United States the number of major strip clubs almost doubled between 1987 and 1992 and an estimate in late 1998 puts the number of clubs at around three thousand with annual revenues ranging from \$500,000 to more than \$5 million (Frank 2002:xxi). In Canada, such statistics are difficult to find but what is recorded is the necessity to limit the number of strip clubs by municipal zoning by-laws (Bruckert 2002:54) and the creation of an immigration policy to import foreign exotic dancers to supplement the Canadian labour force.

The historical roots of exotic dancing are found in “burlesque” which began to emerge in the North American scene at the end of the 1930s. In a theatre setting young women moved to the sound of music in a sensual manner while gradually removing articles of already abbreviated and eroticized clothing. By 1937 such entertainment venues were subject to rejection from the popular understanding of moral citizenship and ironically, a leisure activity for men which showed signs of spectacular demand and growth. The early public hysteria in New York City is illustrated in the following excerpt: “Only by closing up these plague centres and keeping them closed can the city cure itself of the moral leprosy which they spread” (quoted in Alexander 1938:113). Apparently disinterested in such statements, men continued consumption of stripping: “burlesque shows seem to thrive despite negative publicity” (Alexander 1938:113).

Early accounts of burlesque entertainment have struggled with finding a clear definition for it (Alexander 1938). A reoccurring question which persists today is the ambiguity when categorizing this performance as an art form. The presence of a stage, music, and a seated audience is an easy criteria for considering it a form of entertainment in the realm of performing arts. But interestingly, even in the early days of disrobing on

stage in the gaze of a distanced auditorium this form of entertainment was dismissed from the category of theatrical performance. By the 1930s the Massachusetts Supreme Court characterized burlesque as “not an art, not acting, but among the lowest if not the lowest forms of production on the stage” (Foley 2005:43). Furthermore, the artistic potential of dancers was questioned since the early days of burlesque: “The teasers seldom have talent that carry them into other forms of entertainment...strippers know that they are not going any place but where they are” (Alexander 1938:46). An emphasis on the dancer’s business acumen and intuition begins to emerge instead: “A sense of timing is important. The stripper has to know when to take off what” (Alexander 1938:35).

More often than not the blatant objective of exotic dancing to sexually arouse the audience is what dismisses it from the category of theatrical performance. Its self-admitted sexual content is often downgraded as immoral performance. Nudity appears in other widely accepted forms of performing arts like ballet for example. Ballet dancers wear costumes which reveal much of their bodies. Translucent tights and unitards leave little to the imagination and although modestly covered by transparent or tight fabric, the dancer’s physiology is nonetheless exposed. Although many body movements and costumes in exotic dancing expose less body than other forms of dance, the performance is dismissed from belonging to the category of art because it openly announces the intention to stimulate the sexual arousal of the onlooker. The literature indicates that burlesque performance evolved from belly dancing, a genre which originates outside the white dominant culture. Belly dancing was introduced to the American public at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago and it immediately gained popularity despite concurrent and wide criticism as immoral performance (Foley 2005:21; Frank 2002:42;

Ross 2003:165). The circumstances of this emotionally charged response are embedded in the fact that the event attempted to bring anthropology to North America. This was an applaudable initiative, except for its assumptions of white supremacy and manhood (Frank 2003:42). Lucinda Jarrett, a historian of exotic dance, argues belly dancing reinforced and expanded the European vocabulary of the “exotic and erotic” and provided a catalyst for the birth of striptease in America (Frank 2002:43). After the Exposition closed, “Girlie Shows” had become main attractions of touring carnivals and circus companies across North America (Ross 2003:165). Where the eastern culture considers belly dancing an ancient art form, the same form of expression becomes contorted in the North American culture where it is gazed upon as spectacle and bundled together with comedy acts and animal stunts in tent shows which create an impression of exotic “otherness” (Ross 2003:165).

The sexuality associated with belly dancing in the West draws on a long standing eroticization of supposedly primitive female “others” (Frank 2002:42). The racist, colonial gaze upon dancing females wearing revealing costumes who execute gyrating hip moves, shimmies, and shakes which no white woman was ever been seen doing, would eventually define belly dancing as the source of foreign and exotic pleasure delivered by supposedly inferior cultures (Frank 2002:46; Ross 2003:165). It is interesting to note that the central argument used by bar owners in their pursuit to defend the EDVP refers to the claim that “Canadian women do not wish to be employed in this occupation any longer. This racialized approach is suggestive of the dichotomy between male white supremacy and sexualized foreign female performance. I propose that such forms of entertainment are not consumed in the same way as Eurocentric art forms,

rather, they are accepted into the mainstream so long as they remain exotic and ready to offer themselves up for objectification and consumption, a marker of social inferiority. Despite the impression that stripping took the North American public by surprise studies reflect on the fact that it already existed, only away from the public eye and certainly not in theatres or night clubs (Alexander 1938; Bruckert 2002; Foley 2005; Frank 2002; Ross 2003).

Despite the demand for their form of entertainment, strippers benefited from little or no social recognition associated with their occupation. This trend began in the late 1930s when strippers were perceived as unattached wage-earning women and sometimes unwed mothers. They were often associated with illicit drug consumption, prostitution, and homosexuality was an added dimension of criminality. As a result the women were at times incarcerated which pushed them further towards the margins of society (Alexander 1939:54; Ross 2003:158). A gross hypocrisy is apparent in the social exclusion of this group of women whose services were sought out as female dancers and service providers but dismissed from society when not on stage. This was as true in the 1930s as it is today. According to pop culture representations strippers are well-paid, glamorous entertainers; according to the law and morality they are participants in criminal and immoral behaviour which pushes them outside the area of social engagement (Ross 2003:171). Their disadvantaged status is further reinforced by religious, civic and moral movements which labels them as presiding to “sexual vice that inflame men’s passion and propel them to seek adulterous encounters” which alienates them from their role as providers for their families (Ross 2003:150). Further stigma was brought to these women by the second wave feminism movement that categorized sex trade workers as victims of

patriarchy duped into objectification. Exotic dancers continue to do their job in isolation lacking support and social recognition as they struggle with alienation and marginalization.

Ironically, Ross (2003:172) finds that today in North America strip clubs generate more revenue than theatre, opera, ballet, jazz and classical music performances combined. It is therefore apparent that the stigmatization of exotic dancing unjustly places the immoral blame for social practice tacitly accepted solely on the women who carry out the duties of this profession, not the consumer and certainly not the tax collector.

Exotic Dancing Today:

Modern strip clubs have little in common with the burlesque shows of the 1950s (Frank 2002:26). The gradual descent of exotic dancers from the stage within the reach of men marks the transition of this form of entertainment from theatre performance to night club activity. During the 60s and 70s, strippers in Canada were artists who were employed by clubs and earned a fixed salary of \$300-\$600 per week in exchange for five strip tease sets lasting four songs each during a six-hour shift (Bruckert et al. 2003:30). Where in the 60s and 70s strip clubs featured a few dancers, today clubs have multiple stages with new dancers appearing at the end of each set and a sea of naked women mingling with customers (Frank 2002: 26). This depiction of the modern strip club is associated with the emergence of the “commodification of intimacy”, a term Frank uses to explain the rapid change of the stripping industry from a form of entertainment to a service provision sector.

During the 1990s Canada experienced a period of recession with very high rates of unemployment (Bruckert 2002:19; Bruckert et al. 2003:30; Frank 2002:49). The steady erosion of the Canadian standard of living during the 1980s and 1990s pushed many women into the stripping profession which offered a way to provide for themselves and their families (Bruckert 2002:20). These difficult economic circumstances were followed by fundamental changes to the stripping profession in Ontario. The 1980s are marked by the proliferation of strip clubs (Bruckert 2002:36). For the first time the phenomenon of “table dancing” emerged which established the clear rupture of this profession from the realm of entertainment and into the service provision sector. Although socially perceived as suspect of its sexual intentions, stage dancing maintained a clear physical boundary between the dancer and her audience. In this sense, her performance was clearly safe from unwanted contact, physical or otherwise. The table dance literally lowered the dancer within arm’s reach of her consumers and indirectly closer to prostitution through her ability to accelerate men’s sexual release through her close proximity, conversation and touch. This fundamental change distorted the dancers’ pay in that bar owners reduced wages to \$40 per shift based on the assumption that tips from table dances had become a reliable source for the dancer’s income (Bruckert 2002:31). Furthermore, shifts were increased to eight hours and a bar fee and a DJ fee of \$10-\$15 was introduced (Bruckert 2002:31). In essence, exotic dancing night clubs have become a site where the provider/consumer gap shrunk and women began to provide sexual services to men for a fee. Exotic Dancing is an occupation subject to further stigmatization due to its gradual but increased proximity to prostitution. In terms of labour arrangements; exotic dancers began to work for tips instead of wages, an

arrangement which sealed their transition from employed workers to freelancers fully responsible for their own financial stability. This shift has important meaning to the workers as the new framework of their occupation implies a stern competition to provide clients with enhanced services to ensure a steady cash flow

During the 1990s the new business parameters of the live adult entertainment industry emerged with the introduction of “champagne rooms” and “lap dances”. Different from a “table dance”, during a lap dance the dancer straddles the thighs of a seated client and performs movements simulating sexual intercourse to music. The lap dance occupies a gray area legally and socially. Section 167 of the Canadian Criminal Code prohibits indecent performances (Macklin 2003). The emergence of this practice was followed by a number of court cases which proved little consistency. In 1997 lap dancing was made illegal in *R. v. Mara* by the Supreme Court (Bruckert 2002:52). Using the tolerance of the community to determine the appropriateness of touching during a lap dance, the final ruling established that even if the touching is consensual it is still degrading to the dancer and other onlookers (Macklin 2003). In response, bar owners resorted to rearranging the physical space of their venues to provide private space, hence the invention of the “champagne room” or private cubicles (Macklin 2003). Two years before that, municipal by-laws began to prohibit lap dances on grounds other than morality, which is a federal matter (Bruckert 2002:55; Macklin 2003). By 1996 municipalities including Toronto, with the support of the Ontario’s provincial government, had illegalized lap dancing on grounds of health concerns whereby dancers could be exposed to fatal diseases through contact with bodily fluids (Bruckert 2002:55). Although the Ontario Adult Entertainment Bar Association had appealed the ruling, the

Supreme Court of Canada protected the initial decision (Macklin 2003). However, in 1999 the Supreme Court of Canada complicated the case by ruling in the Pelletier case that touching between patrons and exotic dancers in private cubicles does not contravene community standards of tolerance (Bruckert 2002:52).

This decision gave way to the re-legalization of the lap dance into the current day which comes with a number of implications. Given that the lap dance is a service widely preferred by men in strip clubs it can be viewed as an advantageous addition from the stand point of the economic viability of the industry. In this perspective, all parties concerned benefit: dancers increase their tips, bars increase their revenue, and all in all the Canadian economy strengthens. On the other hand, the requirement of performing a lap dance in a private cubicle places the dancer in complete isolation with a male client where his voluntary compliance to her limits is the only insurance for her safety. Macklin (2003) argues that this arrangement places the dancer in a highly vulnerable position and makes her subject to violent behaviour, verbal abuse, and degradation. Although lap dancing provides the dancer with the opportunity to increase her financial gain, this type of work involves risk to her health and safety (Macklin 2003). Finally, the lap dance leaves few barriers against sexual release due to physical contact with a dancer, which leaves fewer arguments to differentiate exotic dancing from prostitution (Bruckert 2002:56). If exotic dancing is a stigmatized profession, prostitution is even more so.

In this section I have discussed the exotic dancing profession from a historical perspective. This journey through time indicates that exotic dancers have consistently experienced social stigma as a result of their profession. Despite demand for their services in society, exotic dancers enjoy very little support, recognition and protection.

In the next section I explore the impact of marginalization and lack of social engagement on exotic dancers.

The Impact of the Exotic Dancing Profession on its Workers:

A number of studies reveal the nature of the exotic dancing profession from the worker's perspective (Bradley 2007; Bruckert et al. 2003; Deshotels and Forsyth 2005; Egan 2005; Egan 2006; Pasko 2002; Philaretou 2006; Wesley 2003a; Wesley 2003b; Wesley 2006). Generally, the literature indicates that while there are aspects of this job which are similar to others, the popular belief is that exotic dancing is an occupation apart from what is widely understood as "work". The questionable ethics associated with exotic dancing set this profession on the margins of labour discourses (Bruckert 2002; Bruckert et al. 2003; Frank 2002; Wesley 2003a; Wesley 2003b; Wesley 2006). Thus, stripping is disregarded as a valid way of making a living, worse yet it is often associated with criminal activity (Bruckert 2002; Bruckert et al. 2003). Regardless of the strong social rejection women continue to enter the profession and many others hold long tenure as exotic dancers and an abundance of studies document the views of strippers, clients, bar owners, and disk jockeys (Bruckert 2002; Bruckert et al. 2003; Frank 2002; Wesley 2003a; Wesley 2003b; Wesley 2006). In this section I will present some of the findings of such studies which give voice to the women who work as nightclub strippers. My objective is to present the variety of ways in which the women are personally affected by the demands of their occupation in the context of powerful social stigma they experience. Exotic dancing has concomitantly positive and negative impacts on these women and it involves both significant sacrifices as well as worthwhile rewards.

Nightclub interactions between clients and dancers provide a general framework in which a stripper's job description can be understood. In this context, dancers constantly negotiate limits with themselves, their clients, nightclub management, and laws and regulations at municipal, provincial and federal level, all the while finding themselves on the margins of societal approval (Bruckert 2002; Bruckert et al. 2003; Frank 2002; Wesley 2003a; Wesley 2003b; Wesley 2006). Furthermore, a dancer's control over her opportunities are to a great extent affected by societal categorizations based on gender, race, class (Bruckert 2002:12; Bruckert 2002:34), and immigration status as is the case for all individuals regardless of whether or not they are involved in the sex trade. In short, these women are brave risk takers who have decided to enter a profession that clearly requires them to fend for themselves in lieu of social support networks. In the case of foreign-born dancers the lack of social engagement as a result of their occupation is exacerbated by their immigration status which further impedes opportunity and quality of life.

The demands of the exotic dancing profession place the worker under significant strain characterized by continuous negotiation and compromise with the self (Bradley 2007; Bruckert 2002; Bruckert et al. 2003; Deshotels and Forsyth 2005; Egan 2005; Egan 2006; Pasko, 2002; Philaretou, 2006; Wesley 2003a; Wesley 2003b; Wesley 2006) and the literature lists threats to their physical well-being, emotional and mental health, and social engagement limitations. Exotic dancing involves a number of physical health hazards as clearly indicated in the study conducted by the Sex Trade Advocacy and Research (STAR 2004). The physical safety concerns of this profession vary from the poor maintenance of the establishment which present tripping or falling hazards,

contracting of infectious diseases, assault and battery caused by aggressive or demanding clients, to harmful body technologies used to achieve an image of ideal beauty.

Perhaps more damaging due to longer term effects on the individual, the emotional well being of exotic dancers is another occupational hazard (Bradley 2007; Bruckert 2002; Bruckert et al. 2003; Deshotels and Forsyth 2005; Egan, 2005; Egan 2006; Pasko 2002; Philaretou 2006; Wesley 2003a; Wesley 2003b; Wesley 2006). A number of authors have specifically focused on identity issues associated with the exotic dancing profession (Bruckert 2002; Bruckert et al. 2003; Frank 2002; Pasko 2002; Philaretou 2006; Wesley 2003a; Wesley 2003b; Wesley 2006). Authors consistently find that dancers report difficulty in separating the personas they adopt while working from their real selves, although they believe this to be a necessary defence mechanism against negative implications on emotional health (Bruckert 2002; Bruckert et al. 2003; Pasko 2002; Philaretou 2006; Wesley 2003a; Wesley 2003b; Wesley 2006). For the most part, strippers recognize that their profession is stigmatized (Bruckert 2002:126) thus, they are faced with whether or not to reveal their profession outside work hours, a decision which they must make. Bruckert (2002:129; 2002: 152) asserts that dancers must be successful in making sense of their work in ways that do not threaten the self. Therefore, the difficulties associated with the popular reaction towards strippers require the women to constantly reassess their own perceptions towards their way of earning a living. It becomes problematic when the job description is despised by the dancer herself though no alternative exists to provide for herself and those for whom she is responsible (Bruckert 2002). Wesley (2003a) finds that the identity of dancers is placed under growing pressure when they allow increasingly permissive access to their bodies.

Wesley concludes that sanctioning the objectification of their own bodies to male clients, and gradually removing limits with the purpose of earning more, is correlated with increasingly harmful effects on their identities. Because the dancers' income rises with their willingness to compromise access to their bodies, over time they self admittedly tend to relax the limits (Wesley 2003a:497). Dancers attempt to disconnect their bodies from their identities as a defence mechanism (Bruckert, 2002:94; Wesley 2003a:497). One woman states: "I think of the body as an outer, just a shell, it's just material, it's not part of who you are" (Wesley 2003a:497). Exotic dancers struggle with the desire to achieve a hyperbolized attractive version for their work persona but admit they suffer from it outside the club. In this context, strippers may find that their occupation is rewarded exclusively within the club environment. In summary, the job strippers take on seems to draw on their emotional well-being in exchange for its worthwhile monetary rewards. Although difficult and emotionally draining, the work/non-work separation has been identified as the main strategy to maintain some control over the amount and frequency of objectification strippers allow in their professional encounters, a measure which indicates the extent to which the true identity has been preserved or not.

Although often superficially understood, the occupation of exotic dancers has been classified as emotional labour, a demanding type of work associated with human services fields such as nursing, aircraft hospitality, restaurant hospitality and serving, as well as the sale of real estate (Bruckert 2002; Deshotels and Forsyth 2006; Egan 2005; Frank 2002; Pasko 2002:50; Wesley 2003a; Wesley 2003b; Wesley 2006). Exotic dancers' income relies heavily on their ability to provoke a euphoric state of mind in their clients. In her study of males who attend strip clubs regularly, Frank (2002:155) finds

that their experiences and encounters are generally used for self reassurance, comfort, and relaxation. Thus, a stripper's objective is to identify the specific need and fill it as best she can in exchange of monetary compensation. Frank asserts: "many sex workers also frequently joke about really being "therapists" and understand their jobs to be about a man's ego by convincing him that he is desirable, masculine and successful" (Frank 2002:119). Exotic dancers know that feeling attracted to a customer, whether naturally or as a self-imposed act, maximizes their income because "enjoying" their job is in fact part of their job (Frank 2002:199).

Beyond considerable exposure to physical hazards exposure to a whole host of circumstances related to emotional health and well being stripping has a high price tag on the everyday opportunities of the women involved in this trade. Exotic dancers encounter a great deal of disengagement and marginalization through the specific obstacles they encounter as members of a structured society who perform a depreciated market need. Exotic dancers find themselves in a space where discourses of morality, legality, and labour intersect (Bruckert 2002:16). The recognition that the services of exotic dancers are sought out and therefore have a place in society and the economy yields a contradiction with the large extent to which they are alienated from social networks.

Patriarchy constructs female sexuality within the dichotomy between "Madonna" and "Whore" where women working in strip clubs are considered whores (Bruckert 2002:39). It is through this realization that women's sexuality becomes the main force driving the deviance attributed to exotic dancers. The division between "pure" and "fallen" women is necessary for the maintenance of status quo where male supremacy is the sought after outcome (Bruckert 2002:138). This dichotomy is further reinforced by

the political stance on exotic dancing. Bruckert (2002:141) finds that “the regulation of morality through the criminal justice system intervention is perhaps the most telling way that the state legitimizes the whore stigma”. Although clubs operate in a grey area of the law, managers and owners somehow seem to remain better protected against judgement on grounds of morality than do exotic dancers. They mobilize effectively to take action against threats to their well being and are able to shift the attention from issues of morality to business interests. The harshest condemnation of the stripping industry seems to fall most heavily on the shoulders of the women who agree to perform the job demanded of them. According to standards of morality, it is less acceptable for a woman to reveal her body to men in exchange for money than it is for her to be unemployed and financially dependent on others or the state.

The stigma experienced by exotic dancers places them in a vulnerable position. First, their labour marginalization allows their employers to exploit them as workers due to little interest on the part of governments to develop and enforce rules to protect their work conditions. For example, exotic dancers work without salary or benefits and face a number of club imposed fees and fines. Second, they often encounter great difficulty in functioning as full members of society when the stigma attached to their profession interferes with their efforts to organize their private lives. For instance, they encounter great difficulties when obtaining necessities like housing and taking advantage of bank credit (Bruckert 2002:128). Thus, the experience of working as a stripper extends into the wider world where “being” a stripper takes new, damaging meanings.

Authors consistently find that women continue to enter the exotic dancing profession primarily because of its financial opportunities (Bruckert 2002; Frank 2002;

Langley 1997; Wesley 2003a; Wesley 2003b; Wesley 2006). In most cases, an acute economic crisis was cited as the precedent to employment as an exotic dancer. Therefore, stripping can be a momentarily rewarding occupation (Bruckert 2002:138). Flexible hours and the independence of freelance work is another feature which has been identified by women as one of the perks of the business (Bruckert 2002; Frank 2002; Langley 1997; Wesley 2003a; Wesley 2003b; Wesley 2006). Although strippers exotic dancers recognize that their profession is emotionally demanding, they are able to articulate the many ways in which it allows them to maintain agency over the services they provide (Bruckert 2002; Frank 2002; Langley 1997). For example, they establish interactions and determine the pace of the encounter (Bruckert 2002:72). Customers are required to follow the dancer's instructions in regards to his access to her body. The ability to set limits during interactions has been identified as the key way in which strippers maintain agency and negotiate their own emotional involvement in their careers.

Exotic dancing allows women to develop a number of skills which help them develop their business acumen in a way that is often exclusively offered to male dominated fields. They possess excellent insight which enables them to identify the sexual fantasy sought out by their customer and deliver on it (Bruckert 2002:76; Bruckert et al. 2003:26). They also develop interpersonal and communication skills to effectively manage disturbing encounters (Bruckert 2002:72). Most dancers use a great deal of intuition to concomitantly interpret the needs of their client as well as stay safe (Bruckert 2002:87). Furthermore, selling and negotiation of skills are developed and maintained as strategies which exotic dancers employ in order to maximize their income (Bruckert et al. 2003:27).

Discussions I have presented in this section demonstrate that exotic dancers are far from the group of victims society perceives them to be. Many successfully use commodified representations of sexuality for personal gain (Bruckert 2002:121). They perform their job with limited resources and act as their own support network. Exotic dancing, although socially stigmatized and depreciated, is a difficult job which requires aptitudes and qualities sought out in leadership positions in recognized fields like business and sales. Women who take on this job do so with great bravery; they are savvy entrepreneurs who rely on their own resources to earn and maximize their income. Foreign-born women find themselves in a position further complicated by their less than legal immigrant status, language barriers, lack of information and access to laws and regulations, and general assumptions associated with what is understood by the term “immigrant woman”.

IV. The Canadian Exotic Dancer Visa Program

As I noted at the beginning of this paper, the EDVP has received extensive media attention over the years. Journalists have kept a good account of the controversy of the EDVP by following its turbulent developments and bringing further attention to the social stigma attached to exotic dancing. The extent to which the media hype has maintained the issues of the EDVP “front and centre” collides with the almost non-existent availability of official records from government sources such as Canadian Immigration and Citizenship (CIC), Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), and Statistics Canada. The lack of statistical data seems to have limited the scope of analysis of this industry in Canada. Qualitative research has brought to light the struggles of the women involved in this profession and have consistently identified social stigma and lack of state protection through regulations as the two main factors which affect the quality of life of exotic dancers (for Canadian examples see, Bruckert 2002; Bruckert et al. 2003; Ross 2003; STAR 2004). The curious fact is that such research completely overlooks the special circumstances dictated by the immigration status of foreign-born exotic dancers. Thus, this group of women remains surrounded by many unanswered and unasked questions. For example, the circumstances surrounding the women’s arrival in Canada is not documented. Also, their needs for making a smooth transition into the Canadian labour market remain unexplored. In the gaze of popular culture exacerbated by extensive media coverage foreign born exotic dancers have earned their place at the margins of Canadian society.

In addition, extensive literature on the lives and profession of exotic dancers has greatly contributed to locating them within society, showing the moral grounds on which

they are judged. However, little contribution is made to improving their lives. One of the reasons is that there is a divide between literature and policy analysis. The issues of foreign-born exotic dancers remain limited to one academic article written by Audrey Macklin (2003). In this article, written more than four years ago, Macklin provides a critique of the then existing EDVP. Following Macklin's footsteps, in this section I will address this gap in academic research. I will first give a summary the events leading to the creation of the EDVP, the special features of this policy, its dismantlement and the new legislation which attempts to undo the initial EDVP. An analysis of the latter will reveal how it has resulted in leaving foreign born exotic dancers to fend for themselves in a marginalized profession only now with less than legal status.

A Chronological Account of Events:

In 1997 the media began to cover the Exotic Dancer Visa Program under which women applied for and received temporary work visas at any port of entry upon presenting an employment letter from any Canadian strip club. Historically, Canadian employers were required to obtain a labour market opinion from HRSDC which determined the need to outsource recruitment outside Canada's borders. In the case of foreign born exotic dancers, this requirement was removed based on the industry's report that Canadian women no longer wished to enter the profession creating an abrupt and sudden shortage of exotic dancers. The program was immediately criticized for two reasons. First, it fast tracked exotic dancers through the temporary visa procedure which required other foreign workers such as live-in caregivers and agricultural workers to apply for and process their permits at a local mission office. Second, trafficking in

women was described as a global endemic at the time and allegations began to emerge from anti-trafficking advocates that the Canadian government was harbouring the illegal trade of humans across borders.

Amid these accusations, in the same year, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) announced its intention to revoke the labour validation exemption for exotic dancer visas. In response, adult entertainment bar owners engaged in a lobbying campaign arguing that due to serious labour shortages the industry was in great danger, an undesirable situation for Canada's economy. The group submitted the recommendation to keep the visa procedures unchanged. Next, HRSDC issued a letter stating that the employment opportunities of Canadian citizens and permanent residents would not be negatively affected by foreign exotic dancers, thus validating the labour shortage crisis and the current procedures and practices of the EDVP. In contradiction to this tacit support of the industry in 2000, as a result a joint effort between police officers, immigration, social work, and licensing bodies known as Project Almonzo, 650 charges related to sex slave trade were laid as a result of 16 night club raids in Toronto (McDonald et al 2000; Jimenez and Bell 2000). However, in 2001 job postings for female exotic dancers in Toronto strip clubs appeared on the HRSDC web site (Ross 2003:173) but CIC began to reduce the number of temporary visas based on what were perceived as fabricated reasons, such as lack of experience as an exotic dancer and uncertainty that the migrant would return home when her visa expired.

Over the next few years, and with the support of the Liberal Government, according to press reports, an alleged 500-600 exotic dancer visas were issued yearly, most to women from Romania (Dobrota 2007; Hines 2004; LifeSiteNews.com 2004;

Panetta 2007). During this time government representation found itself in need to defend EDVP as a result of increasing accusations that the policy facilitated the profit of third party individuals or organizations who benefited from the exploitation and humiliation of migrant women through forced prostitution and debt bondage (for example see Macklin 2003b:474). Furthermore, Freeze and Jimenez (2004) found that women were using the EDVP as a back door into the country by marrying Canadian men in order to obtain immigration status. The official government responses focused on its obligation to meet the needs of employers who contributed to Canada's economy. As already stated, the issue ended with the Minster Sgro scandal in December 2004 which resulted in her resignation and eventual cancellation of the program. Currently, Canadian employers need to request a labour market opinion from HRSDC if they wish to hire foreign exotic dancers and abide to a number of regulations which facilitates the travel needs and employment conditions of the foreign worker (HRSDC 2006). Unofficial media reports show that the number of new work permits issued had been reduced to single digits in 2005 and visa extensions had seen an 84 per cent fall in 2004 as a result (Gordon 2006).

The issue of exotic dancers continues to receive attention. In June 2007, hearings of Bill C-57 have advanced from the House of Commons to the Senate. The Bill, prepared by the newly elected Conservative Party, proposes a major change in the policies and procedures immigration officers will apply to prevent the entry of victims of human trafficking (CIC 2007). If approved, a new law would give immigration officers discretionary power to deny the authorization of work permits to foreign nationals whom they believe are at risk of exploitation and humiliation. Although not included in the Bill, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, the Hon. Diane Finley, has stated that the

initiative specifically targets foreign born exotic dancers in pursuit of employment opportunities in Canada (Parliamentary Information and Research Service 2007:5).

The Shortfalls of the Exotic Dancer Visa Program:

The Exotic Dancer Visa Program had three major short fallings. First, the alleged labour shortage seemed to gain the government's acceptance without further inquiry, a less than prudent move especially in light of explosive accusations of harbouring trafficking in women for the purpose of prostitution at the time. By the time the Canadian government began "handing out" visas to strippers, many may have already penetrated the industry as illegal migrants. Macklin (2003) argues that the migration of financially stranded young women from Eastern Europe had caused sudden competition in the exotic dancing industry. As a result, Canadian dancers abandoned the trade outraged by the transformation of the job description and conditions. Eastern European women, under enormous economic pressure, were willing to provide riskier sexual experiences for patrons in strip clubs. The availability of other labour market options to Canadian women in the renewed economy of the mid to late 1990s may have caused an exodus from the profession rather than a coincidental mass career change as described by bar owners (Macklin 2003). Macklin (2003) notes that the sudden migration of women from Eastern Europe coincides with the descent of exotic dancers from the stage onto the laps of men. One is only left to imagine that the alleged labour shortage is, in fact, the result of pressures to realize the fantasy of white men for foreign sexuality at a time when the commodification of goods and services was becoming characteristic of the process of globalization (Macklin 2003).

Second, it appears that applicants to the Exotic Dancer Visa Program were overwhelmingly Eastern European, specifically from Romania, according to the media. This pattern does not appear to have been interrogated by policy analysts. It seems that the government failed to take action on the discrepancy between the high number of women entering under the EDVP and continued reports of high incidents in women's trafficking across borders. The oversight facilitated the anti-trafficking movement to hijack the interpretation into one which placed the EDVP and indirectly the Canadian government at the core of the controversy.

Last, and perhaps most important, the official position was not a transparent one. Instead of immediately investigating the outcomes of the EDVP amid accusations of harbouring human traffickers the government chose to remove itself from the controversy and as a result women were left to fend for themselves. The situation remains unclear today. No statistical data is available to determine if the EDVP facilitated the entry of trafficked women. The limited access to data is the most important factor which impedes the effective review of this policy left in limbo. The bizarre fluctuation from the extremely permissive EDVP to Bill C-57 specifically instated to "undo" the initial policy is in itself indicative of highly competing political interests which requires further exploration. The media speculates that at stake is an old feud between the new political party in power which at the time of the EDVP was the vociferous Conservative Opposition which did not support the policy. Should this be the case, the rights of migrant women should be protected not sacrificed for the sake of politicians' interests and thirst for competition.

I argue that the government made a conscious decision to simply step away that is not justified by any data or policy review. There is a curious absence of official records of any systematic tracking mechanism to monitor the work, travel patterns, and the overall quality of life of foreign born exotic dancers. This seems to indicate that after arriving in Canada, the women seemed to have been lost without a trace. Despite evidence of trafficking in women; rapid maturation of the commodification of sexual services; and unprecedented global economic imbalance causing growing gaps between rich and poor countries, policy makers and enforcers failed to recognize the need to continuously evaluate the EDVP for human rights protection. By the time the decision was made to cancel the program, a great number of women had already entered Canada. One is left to wonder about the options available to foreign exotic dancers whose work visas expired. Did they return to their homelands or did they begin a dangerous journey as illegal sex workers? What are the government responsibilities for temporary visas both to the country and to the workers admitted under this program?

Conclusions:

The women involved in the EDVP were caught in the middle of historical contexts, circumstantial events of the post-communist era, and the private interests of the bar owners and politicians. Migrating involves courage and initiative to better one's life and that of those who are dependents (Wijers 1998:70). Their decision to migrate is motivated by the hope to unlock opportunities. Circumstances of desperation rarely offer the advantage of assessing a system with clarity of mind, it is perhaps more important that the system exists and it is perceived to offer a solution. In their own countries these

women may have been more concerned with accessibility to migration before knowing about the EDVP and much less about its integrity. But once fragments of information were available it is easy to imagine the temptation to ask for help from a third party individual who appeared to have the right connections. It is not difficult to envision the emergence of fraudulent agents who facilitated the transactions of the EDVP and the striking consistency of the countries of origin may be indicative of a well established network. It is also reasonable to conclude that these agents controlled the flow of information especially in rural regions where access to Canadian consular services are far removed, if indeed known about at all. While I am not suggesting that the women who migrated under the EDVP were necessarily trafficked and exploited, I am suggesting that the combination of restricted options for economic independence and lack of information has left them open to exploitation.

The renowned Toronto strip night club “Brass Rail” delivers public messages via its electronic billboard indicating that this a great time for consumption of night club services. The red flashing lettering carries messages on repeating cue like: “160 World Class Nude Showgirls” and “Very Satisfying Lap Dances”. The choice of expression “World Class” is interesting in that its interpretation is open to many meanings and most definitely suggests the women’s international precedence. Although according to the media fewer than 10 visas are currently granted per year, with such wide ranging promises it seems that night clubs have a clear need to provide their consumers with international women. If the new recruits are Canadian-born or Canadian residents, then the EDVP was never needed. If the new recruits are foreign born and newly arrived in the country, then the reinstatement of the EDVP is urgently need.

The EDVP is embedded in the historical context of gender and immigration policy. It needs to be considered in relation to the early Canadian immigration trends which gradually shaped the current immigration system into a highly gendered process widely criticized for its practices of placing women in a position of dependency on a male sponsor or a guaranteeing employer. This policy has limited women's agency since the early settlement period in Canada imposing on them the ideals of being a "good woman". There seems to have been little historic interest by male policy makers to empower women to immigrate independently and settle in Canada. The EDVP permitted single women to pursue financial independence under the responsibility of a male employer while practicing a profession in which socially defined practices made impossible to fulfill the ideals of "good woman" embedded in immigration policies. These historical trends contextualize the degree of difficulty the EDVP experienced in gaining acceptance in the Canadian society. Hence, the EDVP is not an immigration program, rather, a strategy to fill an alleged labour market need filled through the temporary work permit system. These women were invited to stay in a temporary character because society moralistic view of itself could not assume the permanent presence of this practice in its midst. Although the EDVP provided the minimum protection which comes with legal status, it did not perceive the women as worthy permanent citizens of Canada. This status proved problematic because the removal of one single level of immigration, which occurred with the dismantling of the EDVP, placed the women in the shady category of illegal migrants liable to deportation and exploitation.

The second historical context which defines the EDVP is the age-old assumption that female sexuality is not the private matter of individual women; rather, it is the possession of a male counterpart. The EDVP was a breakthrough in this regard whereby the right of capitalizing on the moral regulation of sexuality for personal gain was openly acknowledged, perhaps for the first time by Canadian policy. The very existence of the EDVP embraced the idea that sex work could be a valid way of making a living, a value not shared by Canadian culture, which proved difficult for the government to adopt. But because exotic dancing is legal in Canada the stage was appropriately set for the creation EDVP. Clearly, legality of this profession does not automatically result in social acceptance. Further complication arose from challenging Canadian values related to female sexuality in the context of immigration, an already highly sensitive topic. Canada continues to struggle with the ideals of multiculturalism which are opposed by the recurrent and loaded question of “How many immigrants is too many?” Thus, the EDVP sits at the intersection of two highly sensitive social topics: female sexuality and immigration policy, a position affected in great part by societal values based on historical contexts.

The EDVP is further dependent on discourses of Canadian immigration policy in the new global world. The EDVP arrived at a time when global population movement was at a peak due to fundamental changes in global. During this period, the public opinion as well as the official position was determined to maintain control of who passes Canada’s borders. The EDVP arrived contrary to all efforts made to keep unwanted migrants out of the country. The lack of opportunity in the former communist bloc, specifically experienced by women, had become an international trend whereby large

numbers of people from that area resorted to migration. On the other hand, the commodification of intimate relationships was the perfect circumstance to contribute to the evolution of the EDVP. As soon as bar owners discovered the profitable returns associated with the work of foreign-born dancers the EDVP seemed to be the needed ingredient in accommodating the growth of this industry. The bar owners mobilized and lobbied the successful launch of the EDVP.

Finally, the very last circumstance which played a key role in the unpredictable progression of the EDVP was the issue of trafficking in women which was reaching its peak around the time of mass Eastern European migration in the post communist era. Given that most women who took advantage of this policy arrived from that geographical area gave way to questions around Canadian government's implication in the traffic of women. These historical and circumstantial factors all contributed to the line of events associated with the making and unmaking of the EDVP. The foreign workers caught in the entanglement of politics and morality need and deserve basic protection from the state. The recommendations of this paper are the first steps towards addressing this situation.

Recommendations:

1. Objective research and data transparency:

Lack of information is clearly the important component which raises considerable barriers in conducting an objective analysis of the issues of foreign born exotic dancers. Statistical information should be made available by CIC and HRSDC with respect to the number of women accepted into Canada through the EDVP. Immigration records should

be revealed to determine how many women have left Canada upon expiration of their temporary visa. The voices of women who stayed in Canada after their visa expiry should be heard through qualitative studies which would generate an account of their experiences, identify their needs, and recommend ways in which programs and services can be created to support them.

2. Legal Status:

Clearly, the EDVP was problematic in many ways but it provided women with the basic protection assigned to citizens which comes with legal status. Appealing to the assistance of authorities without threats of deportation is a much better perceived option if the safety of an individual is in danger especially if she happens to be employed in an industry where she is continuously vulnerable. The most obvious fact is that the EDVP protected women with legal status, a position that assigned agency to them and a better tracking mechanism for the State in its accountability duties to the public. It seems obvious that this is a win-win situation. If advocates recommend increased regulation to protect safety in the profession (Bruckert 2002; STAR 2004), then it only seems rational for legal status to be included with this movement.

3. Tracking and Monitoring:

The reinstatement of the EDVP must be accompanied by a thorough and transparent review of the past program with the intention of developing a monitoring plan which takes into consideration the complexities of the exotic dancing industry as well the current circumstances in global migration. It appears that the conception of the EDVP made no associations with the benefit of ongoing monitoring. Policy assessment may be

the strategy needed to maintain the integrity of the EDVP. Undoubtedly, this requires the development of tracking systems, regulations, and the appropriate human resources associated with the enforcement of preventative measures. Although more effort is involved with this option, the outcomes are incontestably worth the endeavour. When the complexity of the EDVP became apparent, the official response was the dismantling of the policy but not before partisan interests were served, hence the Sgro scandal ending in the Minister's resignation. The development of a system for tracking and monitoring should represent all involved in the industry, including the women. Wijers (1998:70) argues that understanding the point of view of the victims of human trafficking, or those who are threatened, is a sound strategy to offer them protection.

The first step in supporting victims of trafficking is to gain at least some understanding of their position, their needs dilemmas, motivations, and the problems they face in the process of trafficking (Wijers, 1998:70).

Wijer's recommendation supports a dialogue between policy makers and the women involved which would have ameliorated the issue of the women's lack of information. McDonald et al. (2000) found that a common feature among trafficked women is their obscured understanding of the legislature in the host country which enables the traffickers to mislead them and capitalize at their expense. McDonald et al. (2000) recommend that a crucial step in preventing trafficking in women is the availability of information in the language of the migrant both in their countries and at the Canadian port of entry.

4. Reconsider Bill C-57

Bill C-57 needs to be revisited to ensure that it is applied to serve the best interests of victims of trafficking rather than to police the borders to keep them out.

Doezema also finds that policy intending to keep the trafficked out of Canada is inefficient:

Repressive immigration measures enacted to stop “trafficking” include limiting the number of visas issued to women from “origin” countries, increased policing of borders and high penalties for illegal migrants and those who facilitate their entry or stay (Doezema, 2000:44).

Academics and advocates have warned of the counterproductive results of the latter policy. For example, Jiwani (1999) finds that the restrictive immigration practices of Western nations are one of the factors which facilitate the trafficking of women into Canada. Trafficked women are considered, above all, undesirable aliens (Wijers 1998:72) which contributes to drive them underground. Repressive strategies, such as Bill C-57, have a strong tendency to work against women by restricting freedom of movement yet they seem the most attractive solutions to governments (Wijers 1998:78).

5. Utilize the Bar Industry:

The bar industry, as the workplace this legislation is addressing, needs to be recognized as another focus for action in order to maintain the integrity of the EDVP. Bars can be an instrumental source of regulation for state driven initiatives to monitor the EDVP. Employment records can be procured and compared with immigration records to assess the veracity and effectiveness of the visa program. Furthermore, it needs to be recognized that bars are concerned with their own profit growth and the responsibility for foreign worker’s safety rests with the government enforcement of regulations as in any other workplace environment. This means that the bars should be forced into a position of partnership with the public sector rather than taking the “driver seat” in developing and implementing the policy which is what seems to have happened in the creation of the

EDVP. Profit interests seemed at the top of the agenda but the human rights of women at a time of human trafficking of endemic proportions were not considered just as important. The leadership motives of the bar network were not questioned and therefore, the concern with profit became the driving mandate of the EDVP while the rights and interests of the workers were for the most part overlooked.

6. Work with sex work advocates and organizations:

Sex work advocates and organizations should be considered valuable sources of information and guidance in protecting the rights of foreign born exotic dancers. Policy development ought to seek out the insightful expertise and feedback of the non-profit sector and academic community. In the case of the EDVP, numerous agencies which directly support exotic dancers as well as academics would have had valuable input in the development and maintenance of this policy. Instead, the creation of the EDVP seems to have been monopolized by the lobbying activities of organized bar owners resulting in unmistakable conflict of interest which in the end saw foreign born exotic dancers stripped of their legal immigrant status and placed in a more vulnerable position.

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