

The white-painters of Cabbagetown: Neighborhood policing and sex worker resistance in Toronto, 1986–1987

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Abstract

Toronto in the 1980s was embroiled in intense debates about the place of sex work in society. The passing of new legislation in 1985 criminalizing communication for the purposes of prostitution led to increased police harassment of outdoor sex workers. Within a gentrifying urban neighborhood, homeowners created a neighborhood organization, the South of Carlton Association, with the express purpose of collaborating with Metro Police and City Council to remove sex workers from the downtown stroll. In turn, sex worker activists in the Canadian Organization for the Rights of Prostitutes practiced a range of strategies to challenge this oppression—including archiving their resistance.

Keywords

Sex work, archives, policing, neighborhood organizations, gentrification

Introduction

For a while, we put together an organization of non-sex-workers who supported sex workers, because the other big story in the media, in those days, too, was that sex workers were taking

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over the street. So we had home-owners in Parkdale and Cabbagetown who were ready to go out and publicly say “Yes, I’m a home-owner and I have no issue with prostitutes on my street” to just take a little bit of the wind out of the sails of the Residents Associations who were against us. And they would use anything they could against us (Scott, 2018: 9).

In the 1980s, Canada’s largest metropolis was the site of intensive debates over the regulation of sex work and sex workers. Within Toronto’s rapidly gentrifying core, the politics of gender, race, class, sexuality, and citizenship were meted out on neighborhood corners, in media publications, and in courtrooms. As sex worker and activist Valerie Scott explains above, the foundation of CORPL, the Citizens Organization to Remove Prostitution-Related Laws, was a sex worker-led strategy to assert, *vis a vis* socially well-positioned supporters, sex workers’ rights to space, place, “dignity, integrity and autonomy” (CORP, n.d.). The formation of CORPL emerged out of activism between sex workers and a small group of allies within a broader movement of sex worker resistance against oppressive anti-prostitution stigma, ideology, and laws in Canada (Cockerline, 1987a).

Sexuality studies inquiry in Canada lays bare the mechanisms through which the state asserts its governance over sexuality (Kinsman and Gentile, 2010). Using sexual inquiry to move between feminist cultural studies, queer theory, and feminist, urban, and labor history, this article joins recent scholarship on sex work to interrogate the ways in which the state, the police, and the public regulate sex work (Brents et al., 2009; Bruckert and Parent, 2018; Hill, 2017; Sullivan, 2010, Ross, 2010). In Canada and beyond, the sex worker rights movement has developed alongside other twentieth-century struggles for civil, women’s, anti-colonial, disability, queer, trans, and gay and lesbian rights (Gall, 2006; Kempadoo and Doezma, 1998). From leading the Stonewall Inn riot in 1969 New York (Chateauvert, 2013), to a 1975 labor strike in Paris (Aroney, 2020), to church occupations in London in 1980 (James, 2012) and Vancouver in 1984 (Van Loon, 1984), and even to two international Whores’ Conferences in Amsterdam and Brussels (Mac and Smith, 2018: 8), global histories of sex worker activism continue to be examined (Lebovitch and Ferris, 2019). As I will explore through a case study of Toronto’s Cabbagetown neighborhood between 1986 and 1987, sex workers have been marginalized within Canadian society through concerted efforts of criminalization and social exclusion. In the following, I establish that the carceral, political, and socio-economic marginalization of sex workers is not simply a consequence of state policy and policing, but rather is achieved through the active participation—and, in this case, the zealous leadership—of privileged citizen-subjects.

Like sexuality, the relegation of sex work to the social margins is a legal, material, and discursive process (Bill C-36, 2014; Butler, 1990; Khan, 2020). Gayle Rubin’s foundational work in sexuality studies is instructive here, in particular her model of a “sex hierarchy” to illustrate how sexual behaviors are designated as “good, natural, and normal” versus “bad, abnormal, or unnatural” (Rubin, 2012: 45). In her schema of a “charmed circle” and its “outer limits,” sex work is relegated to the outskirts of legibility through transgressing of the boundaries of the domestic, defying procreative injunctions, and making explicit the commercial value of sexual services. Rubin’s assessment binds sex workers with other sexual minorities in a move that later lesbian and gay claims

to “sexual citizenship” have been weary of engendering (Bell and Binnie, 2002: 444). An anti-racist queer approach to sexual citizenship, on the other hand, works toward “rethinking democratic citizenship...by imagining bodies, selves, and intimacies that are formed and organized in a non-normalizing social order” (Seidman, 2001: 327). Queerness is invariably bound to sex work, and queer theory and scholarship is therefore accountable to sex workers.

As queer historian Tom Hooper has argued, “the connections between the policing of queers and sex workers” have an intertwined history in Canada (Hooper, 2019: 269). Recent research into mid-twentieth-century criminal law reform on sexuality has honed in on the effects of the *Criminal Law Amendment Act* of 1969 (Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1968-1969; Sethna and Dummitt, 2020: 5). Known as the Omnibus Bill, the *Act* legislated a range of sexual and moral issues, in particular liberalizing laws concerning birth control, abortion, and homosexuality (3). These legislative changes were preceded by Prime Minister Pierre Elliot’s Trudeau infamous claim in 1967 that “[t]here’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation,” boasting of a sexual tolerance in ideology that was not demonstrated in actual practice (CBC Archives, 1967; Kinsman, 2020). While homosexuality itself was not illegal prior to the Omnibus Bill, sodomy, buggery, and gross indecency were; the Omnibus Bill removed only sodomy from the Criminal Code, leaving intact the latter as criminal acts (Sethna and Dummitt, 2020: 12–14). Furthermore, the 1969 amendments maintained bawdy-house laws, which were regularly enforced against gays and sex workers alike (Khan, 2020: 291). Thus, the state maintained an active interest in the corporeal politics of its citizens, in particular in criminalizing non-normative and non-procreative sexual acts, including sex work (Hooper, 2020: 106, 113–114). These changes emboldened new conversations about what forms of public sexuality were to be tolerated, in effect strengthening the divide between normative and non-normative sexual expressions in the public sphere.

The place of sex work in Canadian society was one such conversation that galvanized the nation in the decades that followed, invoking serious attention to sex work in jurisprudence, the feminist movement, and in urban neighborhoods transforming through gentrification. As I demonstrate in this article, an expansion of the Criminal Code through [Bill C-49 in 1985](#) increased the criminalization, surveillance, and harassment of sex workers. These regulatory effects continue to be a source of policy debate between criminal law reformers, researchers, and activists (Ferris, 2015; Kempadoo and McFayden, 2017; Van Der Meulen et al., 2013), and anti-prostitution feminists (Bourgeois, 2018; Farley, 2003; Lakeman et al., 2004). For instance, in 2007, Terri-Jean Bedford, Amy Lebovitch, and Valerie Scott, all of whom were or had been sex workers at some time, initiated a challenge to the Criminal Code on the basis that it infringed on their fundamental Charter rights, freedoms, and protections (Van Der Meulen and Durisin, 2018: 37). In 2013, the Supreme Court of Canada ([Canada \(Attorney General\) v. Bedford, 2013](#)) affirmed this challenge, asserting that the laws increased harms against sex workers and striking them down (Belak, 2020: 52–53). Despite these perceived strides toward decriminalization, the 2014 roll out of Bill C-36, the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA)*, intensified the legal framework within which sex work occurs, including criminalizing the purchasing of sexual services (Durisin et al., 2020: 4).

Sex worker activists and policy researchers continue to urge decriminalization, including demanding an overdue Parliamentary review of Bill C-36 (Butterfly, 2018; Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, 2017). Unlike the limited forms of sexual liberation gained by mainstream lesbian and gay, and feminist movements, sex workers continue to be criminalized and stigmatized (Khan, 2020: 284). In a contemporary moment rife with questioning the limits of the law in administering justice, coupled with popular debate about the role of policing in society, this history affirms the place of sex workers as leaders in the ongoing struggle for sexual minority rights.

Sex work archives, allies, and ambivalences

This article emerges out of my research on the second-wave feminist movement in Canada, where I have examined the intersections between feminism, violence against women, and a burgeoning sex worker rights movement (McKenna, forthcoming). As a feminist historian I acknowledge the incompleteness of archival returns, while I also recognize my desire to contribute to a generative account of this time period (Cameron, 2018; Eichorn, 2013; Hemmings, 2011; Hesford, 2013). The primary archive for this article consists of research conducted at the Canadian Women's Movement Archive (CWMA) in Ottawa, Canada, and is supplemented by digital feminist, gay and lesbian, and mainstream media archives.

The women's liberation movement in Canada produced a wealth of periodicals, newsletters, and pamphlets between the late 1970s and early 1990s (Godard, 2002; Jordan, 2010). Feminist media production reflects the range of conversations occurring locally, provincially, and nationally, as feminists sought to engage one another, society, and the state in reformist and transformative political maneuvers. Across Canada, particularly in urban centers like Toronto, sexuality, sexual and domestic violence, pornography, and to a lesser extent prostitution, emerged as significant issues of feminist thought, organizing, and publishing in the late 1970s (Clark and Lewis, 1982; Goodhand, 2017; Guberman and Wolfe, 1985; Janovicek, 2007; Lakeman, 2019; Valverde, 2018). Rebecca Sullivan describes the ensuing decade of feminist history as characterized by unveiling "the sexist values inherent in much pornography, including the stigmatization of homosexuality and the glamorization of sexual violence against women," sedimenting into a very public and state-sanctioned "debate between those who defined themselves as anti-pornography and those who defined themselves as anti-censorship" (Sullivan, 2014: 5; see also, Burstyn, 1985; Cole, 1993, 1995; Valverde, 1985). By the time the Progressive Conservatives introduced Bill C-54 in 1987—an anti-pornography bill prohibiting any sexual materials that could be deemed "dehumanizing and degrading" to women—feminists had become less polarized on the pornography issue, with many—including Victoria's Women Against Pornography—retreating from the pornography issue altogether (Blackstone, 1986: 25; Lacombe, 1994: 117–136).

The gay media was also preoccupied with the knotty relationship between sexuality, violence, pornography, and state censorship, again with less attention paid to prostitution. Gay and lesbian liberationist concerns around sexuality did not primarily stem from a sense of gender inequality and sexual exploitation, but rather from challenging systemic, cultural, and violent forms of homophobia (Pyryeskina, 2018; Rayside, 1988; Smith,

1998, 2014). Like feminists, gay and lesbian liberationists were also swayed by the pursuit of citizenship rights as protection from discrimination and violence (Hooper, 2014; Nash, 2006; Rayside, 1988; Smith, 1998). In Toronto, the 1978 raids of both *The Body Politic* and the Barracks Bathhouse revealed targeted efforts by police to persecute and control gay men (Brock, 2009: 41; Nash, 2006: 10). The formation of the Right to Privacy Committee (RTPC) that same year to combat police harassment of gay men proved instrumental in the years to come, as the 1981 sweep of four gay male bathhouses (known as “Operation Soap”) was a turning point in gay and lesbian community building in Toronto (Hooper, 2014; Nash, 2006). Broadening their agenda from sexual rights in private to sexuality as a human right, the RTPC joined The Coalition for Gay Rights in Ontario (CGRO) in lobbying for the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Ontario Human Rights Code, which successfully passed in 1987 (Rayside, 1988: 113). However, the increasing state censorship of gay and lesbian materials revealed a limit on the human rights framework when the Canadian Criminal Code maintained homophobic standards of “obscenity” (Cossman, 2014; Lacombe, 1994; Cossman et al., 1997).

Reflecting on these overlapping histories, lesbian activist Chris Bearhell saw the pornography debate as driving a “wedge” between gay and women’s liberation movements, in particular in Toronto (Smith, 2014: 260). For instance, while some gay liberationists were fighting for human rights protections based on sexual orientation, Susan G. Cole—lesbian feminist and founding member of Toronto’s Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW)—sought inclusion of pornography in the Ontario Human Rights Code as a kind of “sex discrimination against women” (Rodgers and Waldorf, 1985). The human rights of sex workers, however, were not at the forefront of either liberation movement. As Ross and Sullivan reflect, the alliance of feminists with sex workers’ was delimited by an “ambivalence toward, if not outright opposition to, the exchange of sexual services for money as they strove to sort out a range of moral, economic, and legal positions and practices” (2012: 605). Indeed, gay liberationists were similarly ambivalent in their willingness to ally with sex workers. For instance, the Barracks Raid in 1978 led to multiple charges of prostitution laid against customers of the bathhouse, and to charges against the club owners for keeping a bawdy-house (Nash, 2014: 83). Again in 1978, Toronto police invaded Toronto’s Truax bar, wielding machine guns and arresting 135 men, the majority of them charged with frequenting a common bawdy-house (*The Body Politic*, 1978). Yet, in recalibrating from these raids and the trauma of Operation Soap, the RPC recommended the removal of bawdy-house laws as a way to prevent men from being charged as found-ins (Hooper, 2014: 55). Despite the bawdy-house laws being used to criminalize both gay men and sex workers, the bathhouse raids did not result in gay activists fighting for the removal of bawdy-house laws in general; in failing to do so, a crucial opportunity to deepen alliances with sex workers was lost (Khan, 2020: 304). Rather, as this article demonstrates, sex workers—despite participating in both gay and lesbian and women’s liberation—forged their own way forward with little orchestrated support from other sexual minorities.

Despite these tensions around sex work within the period of Canadian feminist history when the CWMA was formed, the CWMA houses archival documents from at least eight sex worker organizations active between 1977 and 1993, in addition to hundreds of

feminist publications that query prostitution and pornography alongside feminist concerns over law, sexuality, and violence. This article draws in particular from archival documents from the CWMA Collection's file on the Canadian Organization for the Rights of Prostitutes (CORP). This file has yet to be digitized, and at present contains 40 items, dating from 1984 to 1988, ranging from parliamentary briefs, a constitution, organizational pamphlets, safe sex educational materials, and media clippings. While the CWMA's holdings of the CORP's archive should not be taken for granted, given this ambivalent history between sex workers and feminists, its existence nonetheless represents the possibility for renewed attention, methodologies, and alliances (Dever, 2017).

It is in this political context of the 1980s that Toronto's CORP was on the frontlines of sex workers' political engagement, founded in 1983 by sex workers and activists Peggie Lee, Danny Cockerline, Gwendolyn, Feather, and Chris Bearchell, and later joined by Valerie Scott and Ryan Hotchkiss in 1986 (Sorfleet, 1997). Organized by white, working-class activists of diverse sexualities and gender identities, CORP sought to address the criminalization of both indoor and outdoor sex workers in Toronto under criminal code provisions against communicating for prostitution or keeping a bawdy-house (Bearchell, 1996). Until disbanding in 1992 and later morphing into Sex Professionals of Canada (SPOC), CORP's priorities focused on advocating for the decriminalization of prostitution, community building, and later, education on AIDS/HIV. For instance, between 1990 and 1991, CORP produced a newsletter, *Stiletto*, with at least four issues that documented sex workers' politics, art, writing, and activism (Stiletto, 1990). A spin off of CORP, Cockerline also spearheaded the Safe Sex CORPS in 1986—which became the Prostitutes Safe Sex Project, and now Maggie's (Maggie's, 2019; Sorfleet, 1997). The Prostitutes Safe Sex Project was at the forefront of developing safe sex strategies later taken up by public health agencies, and distributed pamphlets, posters, and buttons on sex workers as “safe sex pros” (Cockerline and Redwood, 1987). Representatives of CORP worked hard to de-link HIV/AIDS with prostitution in the media and in the public, writing op-eds, letters, and articles. Adding new urgency to CORP's activism was the passing of Bill C-49 in December of 1985, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code*, which introduced communicating for the purposes of prostitution as a new criminal offense and drastically increased policing, criminalization, and violence against sex workers. From 1986 on, Scott, Cockerline, Bearchell, Hotchkiss, and Gwendolyn were at the helm of CORP's efforts for decriminalization, engaging in a range of activist tactics for sex workers' rights. One such strategy was the archiving of documents tracing the group's activities, ensuring its place in a dynamic history of sex worker organizing in Canada (BEAVER Papers (n.d.); Kinesis, 1977).¹

It is through CORP's archive that I encountered evidence of an anti-sex worker neighborhood organization, the South of Carlton Association, active in Toronto between 1986 and 1987. Poised in diametrical opposition to the civil rights-based organizing of CORP, these “white-painters” of Cabbagetown asserted bourgeois rights to property and citizenship (Brecht, 1987).² The South of Carlton Association (SCA) engaged what Greer and Orleans (1962) describe as a “parapolitical” agenda to meet their goals. The SCA relied on institutional processes of civic management that systematically disenfranchised poor and/or racialized and/or trans people, queers, women, and sex workers. To expel sex

workers from the neighborhood, SCA members drew on their relative class, race, and sexual privilege to assert themselves as “exalted subjects” deserving of citizenship and property rights (Thobani, 2007). Mary Louise McAllister observes this of urban Canada between the 1960s and 1980s:

It was becoming clear that citizens expected to be able to participate politically beyond the ballot box when decisions directly affected their interests. The notion of community or neighbourhood associations was popular with certain groups. Established in a number of places throughout Canada, these associations had little, if any, formal political authority. While these organizations were sometimes given official status, they lacked financial resources, voting powers, and information about internal decision making processes, and they did not fit well within the decision making hierarchy of local governments. They did not have much more direct political influence as part of the institutional structures (McAllister, 2004: 34).

McAllister’s comments are helpful to situate neighborhood associations within a broader urban context where local actors attempted to chart the course of the resolution of local issues. However, as evidenced by the SCA, “a basic assumption upon which these organizations are built, and on which they claim the right to make demands, is that they better *represent* their own neighborhoods than anyone else” (Regab et al., 1981: 63, emphasis in original). In gentrifying Cabbagetown, wealthy homeowners forcibly established their rights to space and place against sex workers. As this article will demonstrate, the SCA exerted *significant* political influence on Toronto’s infrastructure, leaving an indelible mark on the media, the police, and the criminal court. As a conservative, normative, and hegemonic citizen body, the SCA initiated a calculated assault on Toronto sex workers’ rights.

Criminalization: A brief history of the legal context of sex work in Canada

To comprehend the scope of the debate over sex work in Canada, and in particular in Toronto, between 1986 and 1987, it is useful to briefly unpack the country’s legislative history of prostitution. While the act of selling sex has never been illegal in Canada, the framework of regulating sex work continues to be one of criminalization, which makes illegal most of the acts associated with selling sex. The 1970s saw significant efforts to limit the civil rights of sexual and gender minorities (Ross, 1995; Sethna and Hewitt, 2018). For almost a century prior to 1972, prostitution had been criminalized through the Vagrancy Laws of the Canadian Criminal Code, Section 164.1, which disproportionately targeted women unable to provide “a good account” of their activities (Jeffrey, 2004: 85). The ideals of the 1960 Bill of Rights led to the 1972 dismantling of the Vagrancy Laws, when prostitution became prohibited under a new provision targeting public solicitation.

In order to clarify what counted as public solicitation for prostitution, on February 7, 1978, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled to amend the Criminal Code to criminalize solicitation if it could be found to be “pressing and persistent” (Brock, 2009: 45). The “Hutt decision”—referring to Deborah Hutt, the sex worker who brought the case forward for clarification of the legislation—brought the topic of street prostitution into public

discourse (Hutt (1978) Van Der Meulen and Durisin, 2018: 31). As Valerie Scott reflects, the Hutt decision “effectively gutted the Soliciting law,” as sex workers were not prone to harassing potential clients (Scott, 2018: 8). In order to avoid bawdy-house convictions for working from home and because “legally speaking the street was safer,” Scott and many other sex workers shifted from indoor to outdoor work instead. A more visible sex industry across Canada, combined with more difficulty for police in laying soliciting charges, amplified pressure by and within municipalities to find new measures to control sex work.

While the federal government restricts municipalities from enacting criminal laws, cities nonetheless have demonstrated broad powers to curtail the sex industry through zoning bylaws and business licensing (Van Der Meulen and Durisin, 2018: 38). For instance, in Vancouver, policing sex workers increased following the 1975 removal of all business licenses from bars admitting sex workers (Rudland, 1984). As Becki L. Ross’s research has revealed, by “1979, after decades of soliciting clients indoors [...] a heterogeneous, racially diverse community of sex workers—some of whom were queer themselves—was forcibly pushed by the police department’s Vice Squad onto the streets of Vancouver’s West End” (2010: 199). This concerted attack on sex workers was part of a nation-wide crackdown in the mid-1970s on places where sex work took place, including parks, strolls, hotels, massage parlors, and escort services (Brock, 2009: 4).

In Toronto, the 1977 murder of 12-year old Emanuel Jacques adjacent to a Yonge Street massage parlor led to a media frenzy about the inherent danger of both prostitutes and homosexuals, and their connection to one another (Brock, 2009: 37). Meanwhile, the press routinely dismissed the widespread phenomena of sexual and gender-based violence that feminists were theorizing. While the gay and feminist media reported on the subsequent attacks on *The Body Politic* and bath houses, the policing and raids of approximately 40 massage parlors led to their complete closure by the end of 1978 (Ibid., 38). Without places to work indoors, and without a broader community of allied support to draw on, many massage parlor workers were left to fend for themselves and form their own strategies of resistance. For many workers, this meant a shift to street-based prostitution, moving east of Yonge Street to Cabbagetown, a residential area with a long-standing stroll (Ibid., 61). This move increased indoor sex workers’ visibility and vulnerability to criminalization, while at the same time enabled their protection through an already established community of outdoor workers.

Cities have shaped prostitution policy through leveraging claims to public space and public safety, in particular through the use of bylaws (Van Der Meulen and Durisin, 2018: 38). One such example is Calgary, Alberta’s 1982 attempt to further criminalize sex work through a bylaw to classify prostitution as a “public nuisance” forbidden on the streets (Sayers, 2018: 58). The Supreme Court of Canada declared Calgary’s injunction against street-based prostitution unconstitutional, defining it as an encroachment of municipal powers on federal jurisdiction (59). Yet in Vancouver, a similar injunction was already underway by 1983, largely at the behest of a neighborhood organization—Concerned Citizens of the West End—that had plenty of sympathizers on City Council (Ross and Sullivan, 2012: 608–609). Vancouver gained the support of the Attorney General of British Columbia and issued an injunction against sex workers in Vancouver’s West End in 1984 (Rupps, 1984). This led to police pushing sex workers from their homes into

a deserted industrial area (Hamilton, 2014: 30). Similarly, in Halifax in 1984, the tourism officials and concerned tenants in the waterfront area lobbied for a municipal injunction, leading to a provincial decision to publicly name 47 local women as suspected prostitutes (Brock, 2009: 56–57).

Toronto Metro Police and City Council also sought to expand their powers to limit street prostitution, rejecting the suggestion of CORP's co-founder Peggie Miller to consider licensing prostitutes (The Globe and Mail, 1983; York, 1983). Emphasizing his opposition to a licensing scheme, Toronto Mayor Arthur Eggleton set up a pan-Toronto Council committee to hear concerns from sex workers on perpetrator and police violence (Baker, 1983). Yet as multiple Committee members anticipated, Toronto Council overwhelmingly supported introducing bylaws to increase the power of the police in laying criminal charges against soliciting (Morgan, 1983).³ It is precisely these relationships between civic representatives, law enforcement, and propertied citizens that has not only sustained, but also legitimized, the criminalization of sex work in Canada.

As the question of sex work entered the public sphere in these unprecedented ways, the Federal Justice Minister responded to municipal and provincial pressure by instating the Fraser Committee on Pornography and Prostitution in 1983 (Minister of Supply and Services, 1985). From late 1983 to early 1985, the Fraser Committee visited 22 Canadian cities and heard from hundreds of organizations. Despite this range of organizations, sex workers' perspectives were underrepresented in the hearings (Van Der Meulen et al., 2013: 9). One exception to this was Miller, representing CORP, who presented a six-page brief on decriminalization to the Toronto hearing in January 1984 (Miller, 1984). The public release of the Fraser Report on April 24, 1985, sought to move prostitution indoors through creating a specific law against street prostitution, enabling the state regulation of brothels, allowing sex workers to work from home, and striking down the "living off the avails" of prostitution clause (Kinesis, 1985).

But in the wake of the 1984 federal election, the Fraser Report's recommendations were undermined by the newly elected Conservative government's disdain for sexual minorities and sex workers (Van Der Meulen and Durisin, 2018: 33). Key to their agenda was the introduction of Bill C-49 in 1985, which became entrenched in the Criminal Code as section 195.1 (later section 213) (Van Der Meulen et al., 2013: 9). The intention of the legislation was to enable law enforcement to lay charges against any and all forms of public communication related to sex work. As Section 195.1 also extended the notion of a public place to include vehicles, the power of police to enforce criminal charges against sex work was broadened (The Globe and Mail, 1985). It is in this context that Toronto's Cabbagetown became a site of civil unrest as wealthy property owners took it upon themselves to expunge sex workers from the neighborhood, drawing on Toronto City Council, the Metro Police services, and the media in their quest.

History and development of Cabbagetown

This conflict over citizenship rights emerged in the neighborhood of Cabbagetown, which had been "rapidly gentrifying" since the 1970s (Walks and August, 2008: 2603). Historically a large working-class community in the vicinity of Toronto's "central business

district (CBD),” Cabbagetown was the site of targeted urban renewal schemes throughout the 21st century (Lombardo, 2014: 6). During the 1930s, concerns over the deteriorating conditions of Cabbagetown and other areas led to the Ontario Lieutenant-Governor’s Committee on Housing Conditions, which resulted in “slum clearing” and Canada’s first Standard of Housing By-law (Brushett, 1999: 46). Responding to the Federal-Provincial Urban Renewal Program (1944) seeking to transform urban slums like Cabbagetown into more reputable enclaves, the poorest and southernmost part of the area was torn down in 1947 and replaced with Toronto’s first public housing site, Regent Park (Rosa, 2018: 29). Despite its intended “revitalization” through the City’s rent-geared-to income intervention, Regent Park remains an impoverished and low-income community (Purdy, 2003: 46, 67). Since the 1960s, Regent Park has been defined by increasing racial diversity, circulated into classist, racist, and moralistic claims about the “poverty, behavioral problems, and crime” produced by the city’s innermost slum (87–88).

These designations, as well as an array of run-down Victorian homes in the area just north of the housing project, set the stage for a booming retail market in Cabbagetown north. By the early 1970s, Toronto was in its third phase of post-war urban redevelopment (Filion, 1988: 18). Both a municipally funded Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Plan and a development program in collaboration with the federal government and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation were underway in 1974. While the South of Carlton area was named on a list of 11 areas for potential intervention, neighborhood residents rejected the proposal, in effect securing development on their own terms (20). Cabbagetown had undergone post-war revitalization as semi-skilled laborers in the 1950s were bought out by white-collar professionals in the late 1960s and early 1970s, many of who were also gay men (Bouthillette, 1994: 74). White, middle-class gay men have had a “conspicuous involvement in gentrification” of urban cities where gay commercial venues occupy space adjacent to historically white and ethnic working-class residential areas (Knopp, 1990: 338–339). These adjacent residential spaces are key to the “dominant role that gay men (mainly white and middle class) played in the development and growth of gay villages” (Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2015: 87).

While conveniently located near Toronto’s bustling Yonge Street, the CBD, and the gay and lesbian community space of Church Street, the relative privacy and sought-after Victorian architecture of Cabbagetown’s residential streets provided a unique sense of intimacy for recent waves of urban homeowners (Holden, 1987a). The influx of professionals in the 1970s and 1980s drastically reduced and changed the population of the area, replacing multi-unit rentals with single dwelling private homes (CBC Archives, 2019; Rosa, 2018: 29). Anne-Marie Bouthillette’s foundational research into gay gentrification in Cabbagetown yields this observation in 1991: “Residents celebrate the neighbourhood’s varied character, and households and families, straight and gay, co-exist in a very friendly atmosphere. In fact, most residents agree that their neighbourhood resembles a small village in many ways, where ‘villagers’ share not only a common space and a common heritage, but also each other’s lives: neighbours here are also friends” (Bouthillette, 1994: 76).

In close proximity to the impoverished and racialized community of Regent Park, the gentrification of Cabbagetown redefined the parameters of normative urban sexuality to

include gay men whose status was underpinned by wealth and whiteness. Yet, as other sexuality studies scholars have observed, proximity to gay and lesbian community has not necessarily meant the inclusion of other sexual minorities, in particular sex workers (Hanhardt, 2013; Page, 2018; Ross, 2018). Rather, as Deborah Brock argues, the very “constitution” of urban middle-class spaces has often relied upon the exclusion of sex workers (Brock, 2009: 61). As was the case of Cabbagetown, the harmonious normativity that bridged divides across liberal articulations of sexual citizenship was achieved precisely through a growing community objective to expel outdoor sex workers from the area.

Policing the stroll: social and state surveillance of Cabbagetown, 1986–1987

In *Toronto, 1986* ushered in targeted police sweeps seeking to enforce section 195.1’s prohibition on communicating for the purposes of prostitution (*Toronto Star, 1986a*). At the end of January, 116 outdoor sex workers and 42 clients had been charged with communicating, with sentencing ranging from 35 dollars for a first offense, or a conviction of 6 months coupled with a two-thousand dollar fine (*Tesher, 1986*). By April, Metro Police’s morality squad boasted of sweeping 50% of the previous 600–700 street workers out of the downtown area through laying 197 charges against male clients and 355 charges against women sex workers (*Todd, 1986*). Estimating that approximately 2500 sex workers were active at any time in Toronto, police reported that 100 of those workers were engaged in a legal business: escorts who made appointments by telephone and did not take clients in their own homes. On the other hand, police estimated that an additional 100 escort agencies were illegally operating, contravening the laws against procurement, profiting from sex workers’ incomes, and operating bawdy-houses. As Sergeant Richard Brier, known as an “escort expert” claimed in a *Toronto Star* interview, the investigation of an agency could run anywhere from 2 weeks to 3 months, versus the immediacy of criminalization—and arrest statistics—granted by charging street workers under section 195.1. While indoor sex workers were not immune to the new legislation, outdoor sex workers were disproportionately targeted (*Toronto Star, 1986b*). As some street-based workers moved indoors to avoid arrest, access to class-based resources like a private dwelling, telephone line, imaging and advertising, or agency representation, were unattainable for many workers.

Contrary to the boasting of Toronto Metro Police on the efficacy of the new legislation in quashing prostitution, Valerie Scott condemned the communication law’s assault on sex workers in an interview with the Toronto independent weekly *NOW Magazine* in August of 1986 (*Wheeler, 1986: 5*). She argued that outdoor sex workers were in reality moving to quieter areas to evade arrest—in particular, she noted the rise in workers at Ontario and Seaton Street in Cabbagetown that would later concern the SCA. As Scott described, the increased presence of police officers, both undercover and in uniform, presented deleterious threats to sex workers’ business and bodily autonomy. Officers posing as sex workers or clients enhanced fears of arrest and eroded trust in the transaction (*Thomas, 1986*). Sex workers’ safety strategies were further undermined as the new law forbade them from congregating with one another, making it more difficult to network, share

information, and record license plates; these changes increased sex workers' vulnerability to risks of aggression and violence from clients.

An anti-prostitution police "blitz" later that month led to the arrest of 25 women, many of them minors (Donovan and Duffy, 1986). Metro Police's Juvenile Task Force teamed up with the morality squad and laid charges for 48 offenses, "including weapons charges, attempts to obstruct justice, and procuring." While two of the women charged pled guilty, Scott, on behalf of CORP, urged others to plead "not guilty, and back up the courts" (Scott, quoted in Monsebraaten, 1986). Dismayed by the extra-legal police tactics used against sex workers—including holding the workers overnight and releasing them on the condition of a 9 p.m. curfew—Scott and CORP organized a poster campaign to educate workers and civilians on the legislation and the attendant police harassment. Designed with flashy slogans like "Stop Whorebashing!" CORP aimed to distribute 500 posters across the downtown area. However, the signs quickly drew the ire of local politicians, in particular Aldermen Chris Korwyn-Kuczynski and Mike Walters, with Korwyn-Kuczynski instructing Toronto police to fine sex workers' two-thousand dollars if they were caught putting up the posters (The Toronto Sun, 1986). Following the arrest and violent assault of two CORP members for doing just that, CORP released a statement, "Whorebashing is a Woman's Issue!" in an appeal to feminists on the basis of violence against women (CORP, 1986b). In addition to the news of their own assaults, the poster listed the 25 recent arrests alongside the murders of two sex workers; it blatantly stated, "We are asking women to help women working Toronto's streets." CORP's statement lay bare the intersectional oppression sex workers faced, and the concerted efforts by municipal government and police to prevent sex workers from politically organizing.

Although I could find no evidence of any feminist organization explicitly supporting CORP's poster campaign, CORP continued to seek support from feminists in other ways. As Scott has reflected, alliance building with the women's movement "was really difficult" as "some of them were very good, but others... viewed us as... 'Well, they're women, but they're our dirty cousins'" (Scott, 2018: 8). Indeed, feminists since the late 1970s were grappling with how to theorize sex work, weighing their belief in women's rights to choose sexual liberation against an overarching ideology of prostitution and pornography as both cause and effect of violent patriarchy (Lewis, 1978a, 1978b). This heated debate was the driving force behind *Challenging Our Images*, a large conference on feminism and sexuality hosted by the Ontario Institute for the Studies in Education November 22–24, 1985 (Bell, 1987: 11). The Toronto conference emerged out of a conflict surrounding feminist ideology on pornography and prostitution, with CORP discouraging the Toronto International Women's Day Coalition from picketing pornography video rental shops on Yonge Street. As a common tactic of anti-pornography feminism in the 1980s, picketing was a public expression of feminisms' exclusion of sex workers, labeling them as patriarchal dupes or victims who required saving (McKenna, forthcoming). Valerie Scott reflects that this feminist perspective pervaded the conference organizing, making it difficult for sex workers to share in the agenda, an observation shared by a feminist reporter in *Broadside* the following month (Scott, 2018: 4; Stephen, 1986). When Scott, amongst other sex workers, was eventually invited to present at the conference, she took the opportunity to advance a sex workers' rights framework (Scott,

1987a). Like the infamous Barnard conference on sexuality 3 years prior, the conference's attempt to bridge the gap between sex workers and feminists—and those who were both—exposed rather than remedied the differences between those women present (Corbman, 2015).

There were some victories for CORP, most notably their membership in the National Action Committee for the Status of Women (NAC) in 1985. At the time, NAC was a highly influential, federally funded umbrella organization advocating for the adoption of all recommendations from the 1970 Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. In 1985, CORP became the first sex worker rights group to attain membership in the national organization (Scott, 2018: 8). NAC was undergoing historic changes, in particular a reckoning with white hegemony, and CORP's demands for feminist action against Bill C-49 led to the development of a sex worker-led prostitution subcommittee in 1986 (Brock, 2009: 197n86; Nadeau, 2009: 42). Prior to the formation of the committee, CORP representatives Miller and Scott delivered an emergency resolution to the 1986 annual general meeting of NAC (CORP, 1986a). The resolution declared that “the passing of Bill C-49 and the recent targeting of prostitutes around the A.I.D.S. issue have created a hostile climate” requiring the dismantling of all legislation prohibiting sex work, and solidarity with sex workers as workers. Despite the statement that NAC “recognize the crucial role of prostitutes in establishing and carrying out their priorities as they struggle for empowerment in their working environment,” the actual process of passing the resolution was both unenthusiastic and controversial. Vancouver-based anti-pornography and anti-violence activist Megan Ellis described its reception as reflective of “ambivalence in the women's movement, around the issue of prostitution, which we have been reluctant to confront” (Ellis, 1986). Many feminists within the NAC membership did not see prostitution as a legitimate profession, and still others maintained a view of prostitutes as victims of predatory men (Brock and Stephens, 1988; Wheeler, 1986). CORP activists took to the pages of the NAC Newsletter to argue that it was not pimps but the laws criminalizing prostitution, and the police enforcing them, that were the real dangers facing sex workers (Hotchkiss, 1986; Scott and Hotchkiss, 1986).

Reporting for the newly formed Prostitution Committee in NAC's October Newsletter, Lorraine Greaves asserted that, “the formation of the Committee is an obvious *first* step in NAC's attempt to build bridges” between feminists and sex workers (Greaves, 1986, emphasis added). By January 1987, Greaves felt that the Committee's goals of legal advocacy were overshadowed by the “need to...facilitate discussion on all aspects of prostitution,” making changing the culture “within NAC and the women's movement at large” the “major work” of the Committee (Greaves, 1987). The Committee did make progress within NAC, preparing two more resolutions for the 1987 AGM, both opposing sex workers' forced testing of sexually transmitted diseases, and the criminalization of sex workers' partners through the “living off the avails” charge (Brock, 2009: 198n86). While these moves on behalf of the NAC Prostitution Committee members drew NAC in line with a formal position on decriminalization, efforts to decriminalize prostitution remained the primary effort of sex work activists and a limited circle of feminist and gay supporters (NAC, 1990; Zarzour, 1987). As Deborah Brock and Jennifer Stephen expressed in *Broadside* later that year, “We still have a long way to go toward articulating our

differences, as feminists, around prostitution. Moreover, there's been very little action around prostitution on the part of feminists, while the cops, have been having a field day" (Brock and Stephen, 1988).

Indeed, the increased criminalization of street-based sex workers in Toronto in 1986 and 1987 was also legitimized by a heightened moral panic over sex workers as vectors of disease, in particular HIV/AIDS (Donovan 1987; Scott, 2018: 1; Wilkes, 1986). As sex work activists Anna-Louise Crago and Jenn Clamen describe, "sex workers, much like other communities considered at risk, faced discrimination linked to their perceived role in causing and spreading the virus" (2013: 151). The arrest of 53 women for communicating on March 19, 1987, and the administration of a curfew as a condition of their release, inspired CORP's press conference at City Hall on March 26 denouncing the arrests and demanding decriminalization (Rodgerson and Cockerline, 1987). The subsequent ruling of Toronto Provincial Court Judge Sydney Harris that the communication law was unconstitutional and used to "harass" sex workers might have been a turning point for CORP's campaign to decriminalize prostitution (Claridge, 1987). Instead, police continued their targeted neighborhood sweeps into the early summer (Millar, 1987; Thomas, 1987a).

The ramping up of arrests of sexual and gender minorities revealed an explicit discourse that linked sex workers and gay men as potential carriers of HIV/AIDS in the mainstream press (Shaw, 1987; Toronto Star, 1987b, 1987c). This panic was reflected in an increase in arrests of male sex workers and male clients (Thomas, 1987b; Toronto Star, 1987e). Despite mounting evidence that sex workers were in fact experts on safe sex, on 3 July, a ruling by Ontario Provincial Court Judge William Ross demanded that two women charged with communicating take mandatory HIV tests as a pre-condition of their judgment (Cockerline, 1987a: 44; Toronto Star, 1987d). On behalf of CORP, Cockerline lobbied government officials to recognize mandatory testing as a human rights violation and to stop spreading misinformation about the disease (1987b). Asserting itself as a leader in safe sex education and resources, CORP members shifted even more energy toward HIV/AIDS activism that fall, all the while leading the fight for decriminalization.

The white-painters of Cabbagetown

It is in this context that the South of Carlton Neighbourhood Association formed with the sole intent of driving sex workers from Cabbagetown. An emergent public discourse pitted sex workers against neighborhood residents, claiming that sex workers "forced" residents "to turn their homes into fortresses" in order to protect themselves from filth, danger, and violence (Toronto Star, 1987a). The "fear" that street-based sex work would lower property values was front and center in the minds of local residents, despite the fact that sex workers had been "doing business long before the white-painters moved into these areas" (Brecht, 1987). Yet from the perspective of Cabbagetown ratepayers, sex workers were not the only "victims" of the sex industry: urban neighborhoods were, too (Edwards, 1987). This view of sex workers as vectors of disease and as victims of violent patriarchy is used to justify the difference between sex workers (undeserving of rights) and citizens (deserving of rights). Through their mere presence as sexual outsiders within

the borders of private and municipal property lines, normative citizens perceive sex workers as a threat.

A sense of entitlement to space, place, and property crystallized into an exalted expression of citizenship by white, wealthy homeowners. Bolstered by anti-prostitution policing tactics—including increasing the number of arrests of male clients and demanding higher fines by the Courts—the public call to “get rid of the demand” found credibility in Cabbagetown (O’Neill, 1987; *Toronto Star*, 1987f). Spearheaded by local ratepayer Sandra Jackson—an up and coming realtor with Royal LePage—the SCA began a neighborhood patrol to harass sex workers and their clients (Scrivener, 1987b).⁴ In their effort to control undesirable sexual practices, the SCA operationalized citizen patrols—also known as morality squads—a tactic utilized against sex workers by gay men and wealthy residents in Vancouver in the 1980s and, paradoxically, against gay men cruising in the early 1970s in Toronto (Hube, 1971; Ross, 2018). At first glance, the Cabbagetown patrol practiced a “short-term strategy” to prohibit sex work in the neighborhood: incur media attention with matching anti-sex work swag and banners; stage noisy protests against sex workers and their clients; and threaten and humiliate clients through photographing their faces and license plates (Temple, 1987a). Determined to make the neighborhood a “no-go” area for prostitutes, pimps, and johns,” the SCA overtly demonstrated their utter disregard for the “people who were there first,” signified by two SCA men forcibly dragging a woman down the street and out of the area (Sweet, 1987).

Behind the scenes, the SCA was more than a concerned neighborhood association, engaging in calculated efforts to gain parapolitical power. The SCA made it a priority to “lobby the city, police, and federal officials” to increase fines, arrests, and laws against sex workers and their clients (Scrivener, 1987a). Brandishing their status as wealthy taxpayers, the SCA explicitly criticized the city and law enforcement for not heeding their requests for the increased criminalization of prostitution, even threatening to stage a theatrical performance of “prostitutes” and “johns” in the more prestigious Rosedale and Forest Hill neighborhoods (Reid, 1987). By the end of November, Toronto Mayor Art Eggleton’s vocal support of the SCA legitimized a record three-night police sweep of Cabbagetown, baiting and entrapping hundreds of male clients (Spears, 1987a). As one member of the SCA confessed after the raid, “The police let us know it was coming so that our patrols wouldn’t get in their way” (McTaggart et al., 1987). Pleased with this successful collaboration with the city and law enforcement, the SCA pressed for maximum penalties for those charged and vowed to “monitor” their convictions (Holden, 1987b).

The SCA vigilante tactics not only influenced heightened police enforcement, but also persuaded Criminal Court judgments against clients (Watson, 1987). As Staff-Inspector Jim Clark, head of the Metro Police morality squad, stated: “We’re getting so much heat from the residents in Cabbagetown that we decided to step up enforcement” (A5). Indeed, by November 1987, 2649 charges had been laid against sex workers and their clients, compared to 1178 charges in 1986. Occupying two spectator benches in the Provincial Court room in December of 1987, the SCA was rewarded for their vigilante efforts as Judge Lorenzo DiCecco made an unprecedented order: convicted clients could either donate money to the SCA, or do community service for SCA under the supervision of Jackson (Spears, 1987b). With thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours of indentured

labor at the SCA's disposal, Jackson gloated that DiCecco's recommendations were "exactly how justice should be meted out" (Jackson, 1987b). And yet, as the SCA used their judge-appointed funds to purchase new shovels and lawnmowers, repair porches and laneways, add fresh paint to their houses, and even set up a hot-line for other residents to report sex workers in their neighborhood—the group continued to press for harsher fines and laws against sex workers and their clients (Temple, 1987b). Reflecting on her decision to purchase a house in an area long known as a red light district, Jackson stated bluntly: "It's not like buying beside a glue factory. It's a moveable problem" (Jackson, 1987a).

Conclusion: Resisting the SCA's agenda of social forgetting

Sex workers have been subjected to criminalization and social exclusion through regulatory acts of intimidation, surveillance, and violence, coordinated efforts by the state, law enforcement, and citizen-subjects. Key to legitimizing the ongoing criminalization of sex work and the withholding of social resources to sex workers is an organized forgetting that sex workers are laborers deserving of dignity, rights, and justice. State, municipal, and neighborhood actions to remove sex workers from Cabbagetown between 1986 and 1987 resurface here as material, discursive, and political acts of violence against a particular group of sexual minorities relegated to the outskirts of society's "charmed circle." Caricatured as victims of patriarchy and vectors of disease, sex workers are seen as moveable and disposable within municipal "clean up" campaigns. As the targets of a vicious gentrifying campaign in Cabbagetown that went unremarked upon in either the queer or feminist press, sex workers were ill matched against the Canadian legislative frameworks that advanced sexual citizenship according to normative modes of inclusion.

Despite small victories at the grassroots level to establish solidarity with both queer and feminist organizations, neither group explicitly prioritized sex workers' rights. Nonetheless it is crucial to remember the ongoing resistance waged by sex workers and their small circle of allies, including members of the gay, lesbian, and women's liberation movements. The SCA may have pushed their anti-prostitution message on the streets, to the media, and in the courts, but other Toronto residents allied with sex workers and denounced the SCA and their tactics (Rodgerson, 1987; Shapcott, 1987; Smith, 1987). Sex worker activists, meanwhile, established a vast record of resistance as activists, lobbyists, writers, and archivists, creating a discourse through which their demand for decriminalization continues to be articulated in the present (Hotchkiss, 1987; Scott, 1987c). Scott's speech to the Police Commission on November 5, 1987, demonstrates the courage of sex worker activists in the face of state, police, and civic oppression. She declared,

Police control of prostitution is an absolute waste of money; all it does is give you guys a cushy job, at the expense of prostitutes' and human rights. We're made to suffer. And for what? A law that doesn't work. If people want less street soliciting then stop expecting the cops to help you. They can't. The only way to effect street soliciting is to let prostitutes work indoors, like any other business people, and without police interference. Decriminalize prostitution (Scott, 1987b: 2).

As the NAC Prostitution Committee recounted a few months later, “The difficulties surrounding police enforcement and neighbourhood vigilante groups have created a near-intolerable situation for women working in prostitution” (Stephen, 1988).

The surveillance of sex workers by the mainstream media, the SCA, and the Metro Police between 1986 and 1987 led to the successful convictions of thousands of sex workers and their clients. In November of 1987 alone, 442 clients were charged with violating section 195.1 of the Criminal Code (Goodman, 1987). The entrance of Metro Police into contract negotiations in November of 1986, demanding higher pay and pension contributions, haunts the background of this history (Clark, 1987). Raking in almost a quarter of the city’s overall budget in 1986, the Metro Police demanded an additional 5.4% for 1987, bringing the total policing budget to \$367, 898, 200. With section 195.1 charges yielding a nearly one hundred percent arrest rate, policing sex workers was a clear strategy to prove the efficacy—and utility—of the police force (Scott, 1987b: 2). This tense history between policing, wealthy homeowners, the urban poor and/or racialized, and sex workers remains a pressing issue today, begging the question—which forms of citizenship are deserving of justice?

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Notes

1. BEAVER was the first sex worker organization in Canada. It formed in November 1977 in response to the police crackdown on massage parlors that followed the murder of Emanuel Jacques. See Brock, 2009: 43.
2. “White-painters” was a colloquial phrase used in the 1970s and 1980s to describe gentrification.
3. Notable exceptions were Aldermen Jack Layton and John Sewell, recommending the legalization of brothels and a revamping of police tactics.
4. Other vocal members of the SCA included Roger Davies, Dennis Magill, David McTaggart, Rollo Myers, Linda Shulz, Barry Smith, Susan Watts, and E. E. Wilson. While four of these members were in two heterosexual marriages, there is not clear evidence of other sexual orientations within SCA. There is also no documentation that any of the women were involved in the feminist movement.

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