Public Women, Private Nightmares:

Surveillance, Sensationalism, and the Dystopian Politics of Exposure in Victorian News Media

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ABSTRACT

In puritanical Victorian society, sexuality was expected to remain bound within the institution of marriage, serving a procreative and moral function. Since the period produced a large range of legislations, police statistics, parliamentary reports, letters, articles, interview, religious tracts and medical investigations, intending to define prostitution and disseminate a body of 'knowledge' surrounding the notoriety of the profession; it could be considered a period of transition and transformation. Victorian prostitution, when situated within the larger socio-economic structure, facilitated by the Industrial Revolution, the advent of capitalism, and growing urbanization, offered an immensely stifling, constricting, and oppressive dystopian reality primarily for the working-class—impoverished, subaltern women in England during the Victorian reign. This paper seeks to explore the governmental attempts intending to establish and construct normative, legal and moral definitions of prostitution, as represented through political rhetoric, medico-moral perspectives and evangelical assumptions—all enmeshed within some disciplinary measures. However, their lack of statistical transparency and truthfulness demanded an alternative source of knowledge which was generated by British print media, reflected mostly through direct, autobiographical but anonymous accounts of prostitutes and their procurers; published in different periodicals in the latter

half of nineteenth-century. Their first-hand testimonies signified an act of resistance against the systematic structural violence where they used their bodies as capital, in terms of physical labour in the laissez-faire economy. Using Michel Foucault's concept of the politics of surveillance, this article argues how newspapers such as *The Times* (1858), and *The Pall Mall Gazette* (1885) garnered knowledge through an act of knowing and controlling the popular public perception on the discourse, sometimes conforming to the principles of 'sensationalism', but sometimes moving beyond it in order to influence the policy makers for social, administrative, and legal reforms.

KEY WORDS

Dystopian politics, Prostitution, Journalism, Surveillance, Sensationalism.

In the context of industrial advancement, capitalistic expansion and rapid urban growth, prostitution in Victorian England created a dystopian environment of exploitation, subjugation, constraint, and disenfranchisement, especially for the disproportionately burdened working-class and subaltern women. Economic necessity, phallocentric social structures, and despotic state-censorship fostered conditions which reflected the significant tenets of dystopian theory—confinement, moral absolutism, systematic violence, dehumanization, and the collapse of individual autonomy—all converged within the coercive frameworks of oppression. When capitalism reclaimed the urban landscape, the traditional means of survival and sustenance were remodeled; problem of migration resurfaced, with rural women shifting largely to the cities, being displaced into the industrial towns with restraining employment opportunities. They realized that the industrial works created disparity in wealth distribution leaving them underpaid, which also reflected gender bias. Moreover, domestic jobs

landed them in trouble, offering little security and subjecting them to abuse. For many, prostitution seemed to be the only feasible choice that should be adopted for survival where they had to conform to the nuances of market economy and that also pinned them down through moral manipulations. This contradictory situation produced the Victorian paradox where women were included in the industrial workforce, contributing to its economy yet they were socio-culturally vilified.

Nineteenth-century England witnessed an unprecedented growth and intensification of discursive elements; pertaining to female sexuality, body politics, various bodily potentialities, functions, pleasures, and sensations. The century gave birth to an abundance of sexual discourses which embedded the social construction of female sexuality within the contemporary system of knowledge production and power relations. This paper seeks to explore Victorian authority's obsessive preoccupation with the sexual maneuverings and its codification that differentiated 'Victorian sexuality' from the regulated sexual codes of the previous ages, as represented through the journalistic readings of two case studies. Marginalized sexualities and sexual aberrations became subject to intense moral and legal scrutiny, critical analysis and ethical contemplation by the puritanical and patriarchal hegemonic structure. No institution received as much attention, and state control as the profession of prostitution. Hence, using a feminist lens, this study aims to understand the profession in terms of a prostitute's failure to meet the socio-economic and political demands of the Age—to conform to the racial and class structure, and to surrender to the gendered ideals and identity, and how and why she posed a threat to the nation medically, morally, and sexually. In the *laissez-faire* economy, she was treated as a commodified object of male gaze, of inquiry; whereas she stood as a wage worker, a skilled labourer, selling her physical labour in terms of capital; blurring the categories of bourgeois economy as well as challenging the boundaries of bourgeois morality.

The period produced a wide range of legislations ('Disorderly House Act' 1751, 'Vagrancy Act' 1824, 'Metropolitan Police Act' 1839, 'Town Police Clauses Act' 1847, 'Contagious Disease Acts' 1864, 66, 69, 'Criminal Law Amendment Act' 1885), police statistics, parliamentary reports, letters, articles, interviews, religious tracts and medical studies, that attempted to reconstruct the definition of prostitution. Also, the wide circulation of 'knowledge' surrounding the stigmatized profession and its infamy positioned the era as one of profound transition. Victorian prostitution, if analyzed through a dystopian lens, unraveled the tropes of institutionalized bodily regulation and surveillance through the implementation of Contagious Diseases Acts, reiterating dystopian motif of 'biopolitics.'[1] Prostitutes, suspected of sexual contamination, were subject to forceful medical examinations and subsequent convictions, as they threatened the medical health of the soldiers of garrison towns who were crucial to the imperial strength. Thus, it exposed the state's oppressive role in controlling public morality under the guise of public health. Therefore, state machinery's deliberate control of Victorian social order aligned with the dystopian narratives where self-expression and agency were compromised. British news media responded to this practice in order to demonstrate how Victorian society had criminalized the profession through constricting legal measures but it inevitably had to accept them as an integral part of the system because the system itself relied on their existence for functioning.

This would partly be related to the concept of the 'Body Politic' as explained by Lucia Zedner in *Women, Crime and Custody in Victorian England* (1991) wherein men represented the head of the nation; women (the gentlewomen or 'angels in the house') symbolized the heart whilst prostitutes and wretched women reflected the various unmentionable and distasteful bodily functions. A prostitute was viewed as a necessary discursive tool for men; they offered an outlet for satisfaction of male sexual needs and desires, functioning as society's 'safety valve'; but irretrievably tainted by its consummation. She

was the ultimate projection of patriarchy's self-loathing, repulsion, distaste and abhorrence. But despite the disparate Victorian attitudes surrounding the discourse on prostitution, one factor, or one silence, unites them all—the imposed silence on the part of the male agents. Prostitution in late nineteenth-century flourished not as a 'problem' about women, but about men, their sexual demands, and collective masculine power to which prostitution seemed to be an unnatural response. So, with a feminist reading, this paper argues how some of the Victorian periodicals opened up dialogue on gendered spaces and also enabled a form of gendered resistance by bringing the suppressed voices of the anonymous prostitutes (and the brothel-keepers) to the forefront and by giving them a visibility, denied earlier. In doing so, the paper applies a journalistic approach, employing investigative techniques of nineteenth-century reportage where the case studies are used as primary textual evidences in order to offer a broader socio-political and cultural spectrum. The paper will refer to W. T. Stead's "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon", published in the evening issue of *The Pall Mall Gazette*, and relevant letters purportedly written by "One More Unfortunate" and "Another Unfortunate", published in *The Times* since these portrayed how Victorian print media both deconstructed (*Pall Mall Gazette*) and strengthened (*The Times*) the prevalent sexual and moral codes of the epoch.

From a dystopian theoretical perspective, the figure of the prostitute became emblematic of a system that employed disciplinary measures to control her 'body', restricting dissenting voices, and reconstructed the image of the 'fallen woman' as both a scapegoat and symptom of social erosion. Though there was an abundance of narratives focusing on the legislative measures, parliamentary proceedings, religious treatises, medical discourses; the demand of statistical integrity and sincerity necessitated alternative forms of 'knowledge' which British news media sought to provide, specially through direct but anonymous testimonies of fallen women, prostitutes, harlots, street walkers, and pimps or procurers; published in different periodicals like

London City Mission Magazine (1840), *Westminster Review* (1850), *Morning Chronicle* (1851), *The Punch* (1857), *The Times* (1858), *The Athenaeum* (1858), *The Illustrated News* (1858), *The Star* (1868), *The Pall Mall Gazette* (1885), and *The Philanthropist* (1886). As the literacy rate grew higher among the Victorians in nineteenth-century, they had easy access to the periodicals and dailies which exerted a heavy influence on Victorian readers and that contributed to the construction of the public discourse. The journalistic representations of the unseen and nameless lives can also function as a rhetoric that addresses a larger audience, inspires a reimagining of reality, mobilizes public action, and conveys political awareness. Hence, the print media documents the ongoing debates and discussions on the endurance of prostitution over a period of time, shaping and refining public opinion.

William Tait's work *Magdalenism: An Inquiry into the Extent, Causes, and Consequences, of Prostitution in Edinburgh* (1840) re-defined the profession of prostitution as "merely an act; while prostitute is always employed to denote a person who habitually follows the course of conduct implied in successive acts" (Tait 1840, 01). Though a prostitute was still condemned for her 'licentiousness', Tait was more interested in their ways of lives and activities as 'streetwalkers'. Throughout the century, it was continuously recognized that the profession was under tremendous state surveillance and censorship which took different forms and shapes on different occasions at various times. While discussing about the surveillance through news media, this paper would like to take references from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* to develop the arguments on the modes, means and workings of surveillance as a tactics, as a political tool in order to make the discourse on sexuality permanently visible and pervasive. The phrase 'surveillance' was understood 'as a technology of power that divides, disciplines, observes and categorizes' (Foucault 1979, 144). Foucault's dealing with the idea of surveillance was explained through the 'technologies of observation' (Foucault 1979, 146) to

examine how disciplinary power was implemented in places like 'prisons, hospitals and psychiatric wards' (Foucault 1979, 146). He argued,

> "The examination was the basis of power, the form of knowledge-power that was to give rise to the human sciences—psychiatry, psychology, sociology . . . It was a power to know, power that could extract a knowledge from individuals and . . . extract a knowledge about those individuals who are subject to observation." (Foucault 1979, 150).

This chapter would like to argue how the politics of 'knowing' helped in framing and controlling the institution of prostitution through journalistic representations with a specific focus on *The Times and The Pall Mall Gazette.*

Journalism in the simplest terms is a textual space where authentic, accurate and verified public knowledge gets testified and contested and then printed in a newspaper which can mould public perception in its favour. Anonymity of the writers and the testimonies was ensured; the material of writing was of more importance than the question of authorship till 1860s when individual identity of the writer came to the forefront and was held accountable for their public opinion. Studying how the mechanisms and agents of surveillance get manifested and exhibited through 'sensational journalism' definitely takes us back to Foucault who stated that the system of surveillance 'aimed at knowing, mastering and using' (Foucault 1979, 149). Journalism too is an act of knowing, producing a certain kind of knowledge that creates a specific form of power over the subjects it deals with, as W. T. Stead discussed in two of his essays ("The Future of Journalism" and "Government by Journalism", 1886), "the particular station of the editor offers a position wherein one may purview all of society from high to low. Journalism acted as surveillance as it not only gathered a vision of the public and

subjects out there, but then offered this vision back to the public for its own consumption" (Stead 1886, 664). Stead who pioneered and engineered the concept of 'New Journalism', asked both the authors and the editors to undertake social and moral responsibility, recommended a thorough and unbiased investigation, and a direct association with the readers. Therefore, moving beyond the 'spectacle of the sensational' (ibid.), this paper aims to probe into the complex, nuanced, and multilayered narratives on the discourse that troubled the entire nation at that time.

Victorian Britain had two different segments, known as the 'dual society': West End, a projection of refinement, culture, and elitism; and East End, a picture of poverty, overtly crowded population, and dinginess which forced the working-class women to enter prostitution for survival. Henry Mayhew and Bracebridge Hemyng, in their book *London Labour and London Poor* (1862), categorized the London prostitutes into different segments: 'seclusives',[2] 'dollymops',[3] 'soldiers' women', or 'kept mistress'. Talking about the London prostitution, J.B. Talbot, the 'Secretary of the London Society for the Protection of Young Females and the Suppression of Juvenile Prostitution' observed: "no country, or city, or town, where the evil was so systematically, so openly, so extensively carried on, as in England and her chief city, London" (Talbot 1844, 168). The city police in the 1840s estimated the number of prostitutes in England to be 80,000 whereas London had around 7000 of them. An anonymous prostitute got offended by the numbers and responded with a letter, addressed to the editor of *The Times*, "hurling big figures at us, it is said that there are 80,000 of us in London alone—which is a monstrous falsehood" (*The Times* 24 Feb. 1858).

In 1835-36, Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, a French physician, was the first medical person to conduct a detailed historical investigation of the 'necessary social evil' in the streets of Paris and documented his socio-scientific analysis in a book titled *Prostitution in the City*

of Paris (1836). Following that observation, William Logan stated in *An Exposure, from personal observation, of female prostitution in London, Leeds, and Rochdale, and especially in city of Glasgow* (1843), among various reasons for women's entry into prostitution, one being their mothers' blackmailing and coercion to increase their family's earnings. William Acton in "Prostitution" (1857) listed 'the absolute neglect of children by parents' as one of the leading causes of prostitution in the city of London. Talbot also provided a statistical report, highlighting that 12000-14000 young maidens had to resort to prostitution for their 'parents' or guardians' neglect' (Talbot 1844, 169). Then William Stead, the supposed pioneer of 'sensationalism' and 'New Journalism', came out with a series of editorials and controversial articles in 1885, titled "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon", serialized in *The Pall Mall Gazette* where he unearthed the notoriety of child prostitution and juvenile pornography. With scandalous and provocative headlines like 'The Violations of Virgin' and 'Strapping Girls Down', 'The Confessions of a brothel-keeper', 'How Girls were Bought and Ruined', Stead's investigative journalism created uproar and ensured that the exposition led to the immediate enactment of the 'Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885' or alternatively called 'The Stead Act' ('An Act to make further provision for the Protection of Women and Girls, the suppression of brothels, and other purposes') which made changes in the parameter of Age of Consent, raising the bar from 13 to 16; and imposed penalty for sexual offences against minor girls. He suggested that adult behaviour based on mutual consent should be a private, ethical practice, not a site on which legislative measures would be enacted and contested. Instead he made a selective list of five burning issues which required legal interventions from the government:

a. "The sale and purchase and violation of children.
b. The procuration of virgins.

c. The entrapping and ruin of women.
d. The international slave trade in girls.
e. Atrocities, brutalities, and unnatural crimes." (Stead July 6 1885, n.pag)

Stead unraveled the darkest and filthiest aspect of the profession which involved the corruption of innocent souls that could possibly destroy their lives, abuse and torment them in the process. What was unfortunate, the unscrupulous British officials were unapologetically ignorant of the matter and they allowed such ghastly business to continue without taking any disciplinarian actions against the perpetrators. Much before Stead's investigation and social experimentation, a legal measure was undertaken; a law ('Metropolitan Police Act', 1839) was introduced in London that led to the suppression of the profession apparently with no visible results. It decreed, anyone sheltering procurers or running sanctioned brothels would be severely penalized under its jurisdiction. This act was implemented with the intention of regulating the immoral vices and perceivable sexual behaviours. So, in order to draw support from the British Parliament, Stead distinguished between 'sexual immorality' and 'sexual criminality' and also denounced those uncouth members of the Parliament who raised objections against its repeal citing personal biases. This sensational case landed Stead into prison for three months. Historian Lucy Brown in *Victorian News and Newspapers* (1985) applauded Stead's honest efforts stating, "Stead was an important figure in newspaper history because he fully understood how to use the instruments he conducted" (Brown 1985, 107).

Stead decided to expose two addicted families who in order to collect money to buy alcohol, sold their daughters into brothels. He chose to make a deal with a former prostitute known to him, named Rebecca Jarrett, who in disguise of a pimp was supposed to find out young virginal girls. Stead deliberately took up this social project in

order to prove to the authority how easily accessible these innocent, 'pure' maidens were who could be disposed of in the sex market, unnoticed. The experiment was so shocking and disturbing that it proved disconcerting to the bourgeoisie. What Stead intended to do was to influence the policy makers. So, Jerrett procured a 14-year-old young maid who lost her father and abandoned by her mother; hence stayed with her sister in the 'house of ill fame' around Marylebone in London. The compelling dealing was almost complete in exchange of five pounds but one of her sisters intervened timely and rescued her from being fallen a prey to the monstrosity. Immediately after, Jarrett got hold of another such naïve girl named Eliza Armstrong or Lily in the same vicinity who was sold off by her own drunken mother, with a confirmation of her sexual purity, also certified by a mid-wife. She was drugged, left unconscious in a brothel; then trafficked to France, and forcibly pushed into the flesh trade—all just for five pounds. Stead narrated a startling experience of an anonymous brothel-keeper who was his acquaintance (mentioned in "The Confessions of a brothel-keeper"):

> The woman was poor, dissolute. The father, who was also a drunken man, was told his daughter was going to a situation. He received the news with indifference, without even inquiring where she was going to . . . The little girl, all unsuspecting the purpose for which she was destined, was told that she must go with this strange woman to a situation. The procuress, who was well up to her work, took her away, washed her, dressed her up neatly, and sent her to bid her parents good-bye. The mother was so drunk she hardly recognized her daughter (Stead July 6 1885, n.pag).

It was believed that daughters who used to live with their biological mothers in the same brothels would likely to follow the latter's path, becoming prostitutes themselves. Stead's informant confirmed that

these young girls used to work as maids initially before becoming sexually ripe at a certain age and then they were absorbed into the business, sometimes without their consent. There were even pimps who used to nurture and feed these girls until they reached twelve or thirteen, and once they were marketable, they had to cater to the male sexual demands, thus establishing the mercantile framework of the time. Michael Ryan in his book *Prostitution in London* (1839) elaborated on this subject taking cues from LSPYF's 1837 report ('Committee of London Society for the Protection of Young Females and Prevention of Juvenile Prostitution') that enlisted a few unique cases where parents mindlessly forced their children into prostitution. The report detailed a case of Leah Davis, a brothel-keeper who mothered thirteen daughters altogether—all prostituted themselves in different parts of the city. Their cowardly father, Ormond was totally indifferent to the situation and readily lived off his daughter's money. The committee exposed many such other cases; in two of them, the death of the paternal figures caused their daughters' ruin. In another instance, a 15-year-old girl was abandoned by her step mother in the streets after her father's untimely demise. The Committee interacted with the said girl in the hospital where she was admitted after being assaulted. The editor of the *London City Mission Magazine* in 1843 noted,

> We heard, on undoubted evidence, of the case of a woman who, when expostulated with for her sin in keeping a bad house, and the feelings of a parent referred to as a motive to induce her to abandon her evil practices replied, 'But all the parents do not feel as you do, for a mother came to me the other day, and asked me to take her three girls into my house. Their ages were 9, 11, and 13' (Logan 1843, 96).

These families belonged to the lowest strata of society and experienced difficulties making their livings in shabby and extremely populated,

unhygienic spaces like Whitechapel and Lambeth in the East End. Mayhew in 1851 wrote a letter to the editor of the *Morning Chronicle* about the unsanitary living conditions of the working-class families: "there were—twenty-three inhabited houses for an acre and seven individuals to each house in the London Dock, which represented 55,500 inhabitants for 8000 inhabited houses in 1841" (Mayhew 1862, 27). The Royal Commission also emphasized that shadowy alleys and the dingy crowded lodging houses functioned as a dystopian setting where survival demanded a continuous negotiation with power and gendered violence which was the major cause for the growth of 'early sexual gestures and vices' (Mayhew 1862, 29). All these social investigations tried to justify that overcrowded dwellings in London slums were one of the significant factors contributing to the rise of prostitution in Victoria period.

Furthermore, Stead was horrified when he realized that the minor children could not even resist the physical assault, being unconscious for most of the times, they could not protest or scream or restrain the perpetrator. Sometimes after being drugged, the young women were coercively given choices of either accepting her fate or being rendered homeless later as their families have already disowned them. While interviewing an anonymous brothel-keeper, she confessed:

> I engaged her to be my little maid at the lodgings where I was staying. The very next day I took her off with me to London and her mother never saw her again . . . If she objects, I scold her and tell her she has lost her character, no one will take her in; I will have to turn her out on the streets as a bad and ungrateful girl. The result is that in nine cases out of ten, or ninety-nine out of a hundred, the child, who is usually under fifteen, frightened and friendless, her head aching with the effect of the drowse and full of pain and horror, gives up all hope, and in a week she is one of the attractions of the house (Stead July 6 1885, n.pag).

If Stead's investigation was taken into serious considerations, the above mentioned description illustrated the most excruciating form of sexual exploitation that a Victorian child had to endure. Again, Stead in his journalistic piece, "A Dreadful Profession", published in "The Maiden Tribute" discussed the tricky role played by the 'mid-wives' in sex-trafficking. Unlike the 'touters',[4]4 the 'mid-wives' used to medically examine the trapped girl, brought by the pimp to assert her virginal purity. They were also asked to abort any illegitimate pregnancy in exchange of lump sum money. Stead scornfully remarked: "this repairer of damaged virgins [was] not a procuress . . . What she [did was] to minimize pain and repair as effectively as possible the ravages of the lust which she did not create, and which she [could not] control" (Stead July 8 1885, n.pag).

Due to lack of sufficient testimonies, research works on Victorian child prostitution and pornography were of scarcity. Stead was often accused of writing triggering, sensational pot-boilers, probably to push the sale of *The Pall Mall Gazette*; or whether he was genuinely concerned with the underworld nuisances of the Age and wanted to contain its spread to some extent was a matter of contention. Since nobody dared take up this controversial subject before or after Stead, his meticulous analysis on juvenile prostitution must be studied with great care, as justifiably, his critical inquiry marked the advent of early 'sensationalist journalism' in Britain.

On the other hand, *The Times* (1858) brought the voices of the marginalized from the streets to public readership, and helped the prostitutes channelize their frustrations and anger through a textual terrain. Another compelling yet cautionary case study comprising two anonymous letters ("One More Unfortunate" and "Another Unfortunate") sent to the editor John Delane of *The Times* would be discussed and analyzed next. A supposed 'fallen woman' in the disguise of "One More Unfortunate" drafted a letter dated 4th February, narrating her disgraceful condition and brought allegations against the governmental authorities. It was reverted by "Amicus"

who requested her to send in her residential details so that she could be rescued from her fallen state, though it was later found out that her fate remained uncertain. In response, she again wrote back to the editor on 11th February sharing her grueling journey from 'fallenness' to redemption. This communication did not end here, as one more anonymous letter from "Another Unfortunate" arrived on 24th February which refuted the earlier narrative asserting her pride and vanity associated with her fall. She claimed to be a successful courtesan just like Catherine Walters or Skittles who was at the peak of her profession that time, and enjoyed all the male attention; exploiting the system as well as being exploited. This illustration redefined the sentimental and romantic delusion surrounding a suffering prostitute—she might not lament her fall, she might very well enjoy the wealth and fame that came along. She did not endorse any elusive, melodramatic approach to life because of her working-class upbringing. She confessed, "My parents did not give me any education; they did not instill in my mind virtuous percepts nor set me a good example. They were drunk and labourers, who offered me nothing except the freedom to become prostitute" (*The Times*, 24 Feb. 1858, n.pag). She never had any moral qualms, and owned up to her amorality with poise and dignity; she continued:

> I lost—what? not my virtue, for I never had any. That which is commonly, but untruly called virtue, I gave away. You reverend Mr. Philanthropist—what call you virtue? Is it not the principle, the essence, which keeps watch and ward over the conduct, over the substance, the materiality? No such principle ever kept watch and ward over me, and I repeat that I never lost that which I never had—my virtue (*The Times*, 24 Feb. 1858, n.pag).

On the contrary, "One More Unfortunate" did fit in the stereotype of a 'fallen woman', detailing the reasons of her fall through series of

letters. She revealed that she used to work as a governess for an elite upper-class family and was eventually seduced and deserted by her employer which made her feel alienated. Her case could be used as a good moral example of how young adolescent women should not behave. She was so remorseful that she wrote in the 'post script': "I cannot give you my name, having so disgraced it, nor my address, as it is disreputable" (*The Times*, 24 Feb. 1858, n.pag). Her story was a tale of kindness, of Christian atonement for sins by rescuing a fallen woman. However, there were serious concerns regarding the credibility and accuracy of these letters, so, to win over the readers and critics, editor Delane himself clarified on 25th February, "we are not endeavouring to palm off a cunningly executed literary imposter upon our readers" (Wendelin 2012, 97). Interestingly, Charles Dickens, on behalf of his close associate, Angela Burdett-Coutts enquired about the well-being of the woman in question and pleaded with the people to have mercy on her; which again proved the authenticity of these accounts and testaments: "Miss Coutts has asked me to try to find out for her, who wrote the one more unfortunate letter in Times of yesterday. Of course she proceeds on the assumption that it is really written, or prompted by such a person as it purports to originate with" (Storey and Tillotson 1995, 525).

Contrary to Stead and Delane's study, Hemyng and Mayhew documented the confession of a 'common prostitute' in her cockney English dialect, who frequented the East End of the metropolis:

> I was a servant gal away down in Birmingham, I got tired of workin' and slavin' to make a living, and getting a-------- -- bad one at that; what o' five pun' a year and yer grub, I'd sooner starve, I would. After a bit I went to Coventry, cut brummagem, as we calls it in those parts, and took up with soldiers as was quartered there. Soldiers is good, but they don't pay; cos why they ain't got no money; so I says to myself,

> I'll go to Lunnon and I did. I soon found my level there. (Mayhew 1862, 223)[5]

In the above autobiographical account, the typically illiterate 'wicked woman' reflected her narrative voice and prowess so effectively, and also demonstrated her economical understanding of the market. She resisted any socio-sexual stereotypical analysis of her 'fallenness' that was quite prevalent in the literature and artistic representations of the time, embedded in works of Dickens, Gaskell, Hardy, or D. G. Rossetti, Holman Hunt, Richard Redgrave, Ford Madox Brown, for instances. She was neither a 'kept mistress'; nor a well-dressed streetwalker roaming around Haymarket; nor a miserable, degraded, depraved, and hapless woman, contemplating death by suicide in the Thames. Instead she seemed to be a brave-heart, navigating her path on her own terms, without the melodramatic or sentimental flair of a debased and disgraced temptress who was featured frequently in a negative light in numerous religious tracts of the time. She was not even a fallen victim of male seduction and abandonment, nor an innocent girl drugged and enslaved against her will. Her descent into the profession was conscious and gradual. For her, prostitution was not a question of 'middle-class demand and working-class supply' (Walkowitz 1980, 13) but forging a heterosexual, man-woman relationship of the similar social class. Therefore, her voluntary choice of entering the profession raised eyebrows and defied all the conventional presumptions regarding the discourse that had been prevalent since the early nineteenth century.

What was ironic, men as prospective clients contributed indirectly but significantly to the perpetuation of prostitution as they were complicit participants in the system as consumers. William Acton considered it a vicious cycle of supply and demand where one catered to the other: "Supply, as we all know, is regulated by demand, and demand is the practical expression of an ascertained want. [. . .] The

want of prostitutes grows with the use of them. [. . .] the supply is active, so that we may almost say the supply rather than the want creates the demand" (Acton 1870, 35). Victorians mostly approve of prostitution as 'necessity' and normalized it in order to satiate male sexual libido, and Governmental authority's indifference and lack of administrative intervention also confirmed their passive acceptance. *Westminster Review* (1850) reiterated this observation exposing the negligence of the administration in terms of its prohibition:

> . . . the legislative and executive authorities, seeing it, deploring it, yet confess by their inaction their inability to check it, and their unwillingness to prohibit it, and virtually say to the unfortunate prostitutes and their frequenters—'As long as you create no public scandal, but throw a decent veil over your proceedings, we shall not interfere with you, but shall regard you as an inevitable evil' . . . (Acton 1857, 14)[6]

The profession of prostitution continued to exist in order to mask the economic inequality in wealth distribution system of England, because of which working-class women viewed this profession as a source of alternative revenue. Michael Ryan argued why a profitable and beneficial business like prostitution was 'necessary and unavoidable':

> Prostitution exists, and will always exist in large cities, and elsewhere, because, like mendicity and play, it is a most profitable calling, and a resource against starvation . . . If notwithstanding laws, punishments, public contempt, even gross brutality, and frightful disease, the inevitable consequences of prostitution, prostitutes still exist, is not this an evident proof that they cannot be put down, and that they are unavoidable in society? Remove them from mankind if you can, and all will become profligately licentious (Ryan 1839, 84).

Therefore, it is understandable why prostitution emerged as an ideologically driven narrative and also as a political rhetoric throughout the nineteenth century which ultimately strengthened Victorian glorification of the definitions of womanhood—virtue, moral purity and respectability; when set against the eternalized cultural portrayal of the prostitute. As this paper illustrates, those engaged in the practice have rarely had the authority to define it within public discourse. It was the everyday production of 'knowledge' in British newspapers that played a crucial role in constructing the figure of the prostitute—a woman primarily fashioned through language. The periodicals tried to show how a prostitute's life unearthed a nether world where the individual was confined within such an exploitative structure that enabled her to be simultaneously 'hyper–visible' (as an object of spectacle and surveillance) and 'invisible' (as a subject without autonomy and agency). This 'abject visibility' represented a dystopian existence—always watched, always judged, yet never acknowledged as fully human. Thus, the Victorian discourse redefined the image of a prostitute, not merely as an object of moral scrutiny but as a dystopian subject, both a product and critique of the consumerist economy, as explained persuasively by the periodical narratives.

NOTES

1 Biopolitics is a concept that originates from the work of Michel Foucault (discussed initially in his lecture series, "Society Must Be Defended", 1975-76) which refers to the ways in which the modern state regulates the population through the control of life and the body-through statistics, public health policies, surveillance, and medical discourses.

2 'Seclusives' were divided either into 'Prima Donnas or kept mistresses'; both used to live a life of luxury and navigated the upper strata of society; they were different only on one ground, the former worked independently and the latter had to depend completely on their male suitors/clients for earning.

3 'Dollops' were part-time prostitutes, doing other menial works as well to run families.
4 Known as 'dress-lodgers', they were prostitutes earlier, now old and out of service, they struggle to have a livelihood; they were the young prostitutes' chaperons, they used to solicit customers for them as well.
5 Named, 'Swindling Sal', it was quoted in Hemyng's essay, "Prostitution in London", published in *London Labour and the London Poor,* edited by Henry Mayhew, New York, 1968. IV, p. 223.
6 From *Westminster Review*, "Prostitution", July 1850, quoted by William Acton, ed. 1857, p.14.

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