Their Spirits Live within Us: Aboriginal Women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver Emerging into Visibility

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WE ARE ABORIGINAL WOMEN. GIVERS OF LIFE. WE ARE MOTHERS, SISTERS, DAUGHTERS, AUNTIES AND GRANDMOTHERS. NOT JUST PROSTITUTES AND DRUG ADDICTS. NOT WELFARE CHEATS. WE STAND ON OUR MOTHER EARTH AND WE DEMAND RESPECT. WE ARE NOT THERE TO BE BEATEN, ABUSED, MURDERED, IGNORED.

From a flyer distributed at Downtown Eastside Women's Memorial March, February 14, 2001, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Anyone passing through inner-city Vancouver on foot, on a bus, or in a car cannot help but SEE, in a literal sense, the concentration of Aboriginal people here. For most urban Canadians, and visitors from elsewhere, this is an unusual and often surprising visual experience on which they feel compelled to remark. Even so, many representations of this and other inner-city neighborhoods in Western Canada are characterized by a marked *invisibility* of Aboriginal people, and women in particular.[1] This essay describes both the construction of this invisibility in public culture, and an event that symbolizes Aboriginal women's active resistance to these acts of erasure.

Academic, professional, public, and popular discourses deploy a plethora of identifying labels and categorizations that obscure and depoliticize the embodied nature of colonialism that evidences itself in inner-city Vancouver, Canada. The annual Valentine's Day Women's Memorial March gives political expression to a complex process through which Aboriginal women here are struggling to change the language, metaphors, and images through which they come to be (re)known as

they emerge into public visibility. The demand for recognition and respect articulated in the flyer quoted from above encompasses a critique and redefinition of dominant representations of Aboriginal women that are deeply embedded in Canadian colonial history and culture, as well as a claim for inclusion in the larger Aboriginal struggle for rights in place and to health, dignity, and justice.

The intersection of Main and Hastings streets—known locally as "Pain and Wastings"—marks the heart of Vancouver's inner-city neighborhood: the Downtown Eastside. Since 1997, when the City of Vancouver Health Department declared a public health emergency in response to reports that HIV infection rates among residents exceeded those anywhere else in the "developed" world, Downtown Eastside Vancouver has become a focal point in emerging local, national, and international debates about the causes of, and solutions to, widespread practices of intravenous injection of illicit drugs and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Public health and law enforcement authorities, in an effort to respond to these "twin epidemics" have treated the Downtown Eastside as a containment zone, rather than as an enforcement zone: few if any arrests are made for simple possession or trafficking of small quantities of illegal drugs, or for soliciting for the purposes of prostitution.[2] An open, publicly visible street market in illicit drugs and commercial sex has mushroomed.

Predictably, national and international media as well as a surfeit of both well-intentioned and/or brashly self-promoting artists, writers, and researchers have been drawn as moths to flames to document, analyze, represent, treat, and market the dramatic and photogenic spectacle of social suffering in this neighborhood. A favorite focus of the cameras and interviewers is the southwest corner of Main and Hastings streets: the entranceway to the Carnegie Community Centre. Television and video crews offer the virtual voyeur disturbing—or titillating—images of emaciated heroin, crack cocaine, and prescription drug users buying, selling, injecting, and smoking. Young women hurry back and forth between this corner and others, in and out of alleyways, cars, and parking lots. The money women make selling sexual services passes quickly through their fingers from "Johns" to drug dealers.

On one day of the year, though, for at least a few hours, the scene at Main and Hastings is dramatically altered. In 1991, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women's organizations in inner-city Vancouver declared February 14 a day of remembrance to honor neighborhood women who have

been murdered or who have disappeared. In the Downtown Eastside, Valentine's Day has been transformed into an occasion to protest against racism, poverty, and violence against women, and to celebrate resistance, solidarity, and survival. In this struggle, visibility and recognition are inseparable from the goals of material survival: these women are engaged in a struggle to stay alive and to change the material and symbolic conditions of existence for women who come after them.

Media spectacles of sex, drugs, crime, violence, murder, and disease have brought Downtown Eastside Vancouver into living rooms around the world.[3] Yet this overexposure is at the same time constitutive of a "regime of disappearance." I borrow this term from Goode and Maskovsky who have coined it to describe a neo-liberal mode of governance that selectively marginalizes and/or erases categories of people through strategies of representation that include silences, blind spots, and displacements that have both material and symbolic effects.[4]

In this densely woven veil—or regime of disappearance—behind and through which Aboriginal women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver wage their struggle for visibility—for self-representation in public culture—several key themes emerge. The first is a preference for exotic and spectacular representation of drugs, sex, violence, and crime rather than the ordinary and mundane brutality of everyday poverty. The second is the medicalization and/or pathologizing of poverty. The third is a relative lack of interest in resistance practiced and visions of change articulated by subjects of these discourses. The thread that ties these themes together in the specific context of Downtown Eastside Vancouver is a particular form of "race blindness." Recognition of the burden of social suffering carried by Aboriginal people in this neighborhood—and in Canada as a whole—elicits profound discomfort within a liberal, democratic nation-state like Canada, evidencing as it does the *continuing* effects of settler colonialism, its ideological and material foundations, and its ongoing reproduction.

The city of Vancouver was built on land owned and occupied by the Coast Salish peoples for at least 10,000 years. In 1923 the last Aboriginal village was relocated across Burrard Inlet to a reserve north of the new city. Aboriginal people from Coast Salish and many other First Nations have maintained a continual presence in what is now called the Downtown Eastside, and in recent years the numbers of Aboriginal people living here have increased significantly to current estimates of around 5,000,

representing about one-third of the total population of the neighborhood.[5] It is important to note that not all Aboriginal people in the City of Vancouver live in the Downtown Eastside.[6] However, while about 10 percent of the Canadian population as a whole is Aboriginal, they are disproportionately located in the poorest neighborhoods of Canadian cities, at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy.[7]

In the Downtown Eastside, as elsewhere, while much *public* space has been taken over by police, drug dealers and users, sex workers and pimps, pawn shops and street fences, the majority of residents of the neighborhood are none of the above.[8] The Downtown Eastside is one of the poorest neighborhoods in Canada, where average annual incomes hover far below the national poverty line at around $12,000 (Cdn).[9] Approximately 16,000 people now live in the Downtown Eastside and estimates are that around 6,000 are active drug users.[10] Some are people suffering from mental illness who have been "deinstitutionalized," but the majority are people too poor to live anywhere else in Canada's highest rent city.[11] While poverty is frequently noted as a characteristic of the inner city, it is most often presented in the form of a naturalized, inevitable backdrop against which exoticized practices of drug addiction and commercial sex are played out. Dominant explanatory discourses tend towards pathologizing or medicalizing poverty. That is, poverty is identified as the *outcome* of drug addiction which itself is increasingly explained as a "chronic relapsing mental illness." Poverty is rarely analyzed as a causal condition that gives illicit drug use and sex work their particular public character and devastating consequences in this place, at this time. Illicit drug use and the exchange of sex for material benefit are, after all, not limited to the Downtown Eastside and other impoverished inner-city locales. Rather, denizens of wealthier neighborhoods engage in these practices as well. They do so in private homes, brothels, and escort agencies. There, wealth serves to conceal and privatize what, here, poverty reveals to the public gaze.

A less publicized aspect of Vancouver's HIV/AIDS crisis is that infection rates are significantly higher among women than among men, and about twice as high among both male and female Aboriginal intravenous drug users than among non-Aboriginals.[12] Aboriginal women are seroconverting at higher rates than any other designated population in Canada in general, and in Vancouver in particular. Epidemiologists studying the epidemic represent research subjects as IDU's (intravenous drug users) and

carriers of HIV/AIDS, for whom "Aboriginality" is one of many "risk factors" along with age, education, marital status, and others.[13] While neither HIV/AIDS nor IV drug use are restricted to impoverished and marginalized communities, it is the case, across the globe, that the burden of these epidemics is disproportionately borne by those with the least economic and political power.[14]

In the case of Aboriginal peoples, debates about social and political versus biological etiologies of poverty, alcoholism, and despair have raged for decades. Current scholarly thinking on these questions is best represented by work such as that of Kirmayer, Tait, and Brass who analyze the effects of colonial policies and practices on individual and community well-being:

> The collective trauma, loss, and grief caused by . . . short-sighted and self-serving policies are reflected in the endemic mental health problems of many communities and populations across Canada.
>
> However, framing the problem purely in terms of mental health issues may deflect attention from the large scale, and, to some extent, continuing assault on the identity and continuity of whole peoples. To these organized efforts to destroy Aboriginal cultures are added the corrosive effects of poverty and economic marginalization.[15]

Social workers describe clients as "marginal," "poor," "socially excluded." Identifying "multi-generational poverty" as a unique characteristic of this neighborhood not as prevalent in adjacent communities, they avoid acknowledging both the kinship networks that characterize urban Aboriginal life, and a long history of colonial displacement. Youth workers identify their clientele as "street entrenched youth," while Province of British Columbia Ministry of Child and Family Services statistics record that 70 percent of "children in care" in the city of Vancouver are of Aboriginal descent.[16] Health care professionals speak of individual "patients" and "cases." The police pursue "criminals," "perpetrators," and "offenders." Advocates talk about "sex workers," "the poor," "the homeless," and "the missing women."

A study conducted in 2000 estimated that 70 percent of street prostitutes working in the most dangerous and lowest paying "tracks" in the Downtown Eastside were Aboriginal women under the age of twenty-six, and most are mothers.[17] In the racialized hierarchy of Vancouver's sex

trade, non-Aboriginal women who work on the street have access to somewhat safer and higher-earning areas of Downtown Centre, Downtown South, and the West End. Others work through escort agencies and massage parlors. Researchers, sex workers, and advocates alike agree that men who seek out women working the "low track," in Vancouver and elsewhere, are buying license to commit violence, to degrade, and to demean women considered disposable by "Johns" and by society as a whole. Few non-Aboriginal analysts or advocates, however, acknowledge the *specific* vulnerability and overexposure of Aboriginal women to sexual exploitation, violence, and murder that has historically, and continues contemporarily, to be a fact of Canadian life.

The most dramatic example of both the material and symbolic location of Aboriginal women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver and their representation in public culture is the story of the "Missing and Murdered Women." Since 1983 at least sixty-one women from Downtown Eastside Vancouver have been officially listed as "missing persons." When their relatives and friends began trying to alert police and other authorities to this, they were ignored. Then-mayor of Vancouver, Philip Owen, responded to the families' appeals to the police to investigate these disappearances by saying that public monies would not be spent running a "location service for prostitutes." As the numbers of missing women grew, and as academics, advocates, and journalists became involved and joined forces with women's families, "Vancouver's Missing Women" became a public issue, and the possibility that a serial killer was preying on the neighborhood captured widespread attention. On July 31, 1999, the reality television show, *America's Most Wanted,* aired a segment on Vancouver's Missing Women. Over half of the Downtown Eastside's "Missing Women" are Aboriginal women. Yet, when *America's Most Wanted* aired a segment on Vancouver's Missing Women, in the dramatic reenactment of a street sex worker climbing into a car driven by a possible serial killer, a blond, white woman was chosen for the part.[18]

In February 2002 Robert William Pickton, a pig farmer from suburban Port Coquitlam was arrested. He has since been charged with fifteen counts of first-degree murder, making this the largest serial killer investigation in Canadian history. International media has flocked to Vancouver to film court proceedings and the massive, multimillion-dollar search for evidence currently being conducted utilizing state-of-the-art technology at the Pickton farm. It has become a reality-based version of the popular

television dramatic series, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. Families of the missing and murdered women and their supporters maintain a vigil at the Pickton farm, standing as witnesses. Aboriginal women conduct healing ceremonies, insisting on inclusive—*not exclusive*—recognition that so many of the women whose body parts or DNA might be found were or are Aboriginal.

In comparison to depictions of illness and hopelessness, less attention is paid by media, politicians, and the public to the strength and courage of many people in the Downtown Eastside who struggle daily to maintain and create community, to initiate and support change, to survive. The Downtown Eastside is an active and activist neighborhood with a long tradition of labor and anti-poverty organizing. In the 1970s and 1980s feminist organizations whose work has focused on developing spaces for women such as drop-in centers, social housing, shelters, and transition houses that are safe from public and private violence, gained in numbers and influence. Aboriginal women have long been a part of leftist anti-poverty and feminist anti-violence political movements, but beginning in the early 1990s they began to take significant leadership as organized Aboriginal voices per se in the Downtown Eastside. Their numbers had increased locally, and the Aboriginal movement—and Aboriginal women's movement specifically—gained more prominence nationally and provincially.[19] Urban Aboriginal political recognition also advanced at this time in the form of inclusion of Aboriginal individuals and representatives on citizens' advisory and community participation panels. Aboriginal women, particularly older women no longer using drugs and/or alcohol, have emerged as community organizers, ritual specialists, spiritual icons, and political leaders in the neighborhood.

The feeling that the issues particular to women in the Downtown Eastside—specifically poverty, racism, violence against sex workers, HIV/AIDS, and addiction—are given insufficient attention by other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations is cited as a reason for holding the annual Valentine's Day marches. By organizing their own events on a specific day, Downtown Eastside women activists mark their difference from other feminist anti-violence groups, and from mainstream Aboriginal organizations.[20] The main social and political movements in the neighborhood—Aboriginal, Women's, Anti-Poverty, and community development movements for the most part, each including several highly politicized factions—coexist in uneasy coalitions fraught by conflict but moved

to collective action such as the Valentine's Day March by shared, though diverse, visions of social justice. I return now to Valentine's Day, turning the focus away from the regimes of disappearance to resistance, survival, and possibility.

The Valentine's Day March changes somewhat each year, but the particular event I will focus on is the 2001 March. The day began at noon with a gathering in the auditorium of the Carnegie Community Centre. The people gathered were mostly, but not exclusively, women of a variety of ages, dressed in fashions from trendy, to punk, to understated but very expensive leather, to pickings from donations from free clothing bins. Many, but not all, were Aboriginal. Gathered too were young Asian women, white women of all ages, a few African Canadian women, and a handful of men of different ages and races. Most of the dignitaries on stage and all of the singers, drummers, and speakers to come were Aboriginal women. The program at the Carnegie Centre began, as community gatherings usually do now, with an offer of thanks to the Coast Salish First Nations upon whose unceded land the ceremonies were about to take place. This was followed by prayers, drumming, and smudging led by elderly Aboriginal women. A round of speeches ensued. Most of the speakers were middle-aged or elderly Aboriginal women, many of whom were leading community activists. Some were employed in social service agencies, but most were self-described "Volunteer Queens" and women called "Street Moms" who simply live in the community. They talk. They help. They cook. They run AA and NA meetings. They look after children and old people. They conduct healing circles. They try to keep young people off the street.

A representative from an Aboriginal women's organization narrated how European patriarchal values and structures were superimposed on Indigenous societies, displacing women from the positions of respect they held traditionally. Another talked about the Indian Act and how registered Indian women who married non-Indian men were denied legal status and prohibited from living on reserves. Since 1985 most of these women and their children have been eligible for reinstatement, but conditions on reserves that include competition over distribution of scarce resources, and sometimes longstanding conflicts within and between families, have made returning to reserves more a disappointment than a reality for many. Homophobia, fear of HIV and those who are infected and lack of services for them, and high rates of domestic violence and abuse in some First

Nations communities, as well as employment and education opportunities and more possibilities for diverse lifestyles in the city also play a role in creating an urban population made up predominantly of women and youth. Not all the women who live in the Downtown Eastside are from reserves, though. There are Métis women, non-status women, people whose families have lived off-reserve for more than a generation or two, and many young people who grew up in the foster care system or were "adopted out" and have more questions than assumptions about their Aboriginal identity and their relationships to reserve-based communities.

Another speaker criticized the existing Aboriginal health and social services and accused them of paying insufficient attention to the needs of Aboriginal people in the Downtown Eastside. As evidence of the inadequacy of existing services she cited lack of treatment facilities for drug and alcohol recovery, absence of follow-up care or resources for people coming out of treatment, lack of safe and secure housing, discriminatory child apprehension practices, and slow police responses to calls about domestic or street violence. She blamed lack of jobs and below-subsistence welfare rates for driving young women into the sex trade and young men into the drug trade. She concluded with a critique of those people she calls "poverty pimps" and demanded that staffing of neighborhood social services be culturally proportionate to clientele: "If half your clients are Native people," she said "Then I want to see half your staff Native too!"[21] Her speech was angry, emotional, and at times hard to follow. Reading the transcript carefully, however, revealed an anticolonial analysis, Indigenous explanations of addiction in Aboriginal women's lives, and a list of policy and treatment recommendations that have been repeated in more professional and restricted language in well-financed study after well-financed study.

The speeches continued. Multigenerational kinship groups stood together behind their speakers. Mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, and aunties related their own histories; lamented the loss of children to drugs and alcohol, and pointed proudly to those who have survived.

Daughters, granddaughters, sisters, and nieces mourned their predecessors who had died on the street and described their own struggles. A middle-aged woman cried when she talked about how disappointed she was that her daughter did not meet her here today as she had promised. "We mothers have to remember," she told the crowd, "that it isn't that our

daughters don't love us. It is just that they love their drugs more. Drugs take our children away from us."[22]

A young man, holding his toddler-aged daughter talked about how he never knew his parents or his grandparents, had never even seen pictures of them. He grew up in foster homes and became a street kid and drug user in Victoria. Then he cleaned up and began a search for his roots. This is what brought him to the Downtown Eastside, where he discovered that his mother and his grandmother had both died, violently. He promised that his generation would mark the change. His children would not grow up in foster homes and would not know the street. Some speakers made a point of saying that they worried not only about their own, but also about the children of all Nations who are dying.

For the last few years, the Valentine's Day Memorial March has focused on the "Missing and Murdered Women," now the subject of international media attention. The Carnegie Centre Auditorium was decorated with red hearts, each one bearing the name of a disappeared woman. Individuals, adopting a tactic made famous by the Madres of the Plaza dey Mayo in Argentina, carried pictures of their missing relatives.

The gathering in the auditorium drew to a close with a prayer and a two-minute silence in honor of the dead, and the crowd filed out of the Carnegie Centre led by Aboriginal women in button blankets and shawls singing songs and beating drums. Joining hands and linking arms they formed a circle anchored on each of the four corners of Main and Hastings, stopped traffic of all kinds, disrupted popular images, and demanded recognition. Contingents assembled around their various banners, and the annual Valentine's Day Women's Memorial march began.

The marchers wound their way down Hastings Street, detouring through alleys and parks. Women stopped to smudge outside notorious bars, strip clubs, in alleyways, in parking lots, and beside dumpsters where women's bodies have been found. They read the names of women who had died, told how they died, and listed their relations: mother of ____, sister of ____, daughter of ____, friend of ____. In this way they inscribed these women's lives on land, and in place. It is appropriate that there is so much focus on mourning and death. Perpetual, repetitive, relentless experiences of tragic loss permeate the lives of individuals and families in this community. The representational politics surrounding the missing women mark an important moment for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women. The strongest criticism of the police—and by proxy, of the pub-

lic—has been that they ignored early reports because the women were prostitutes, addicts, Aboriginal. And that this is wrong, that these women have equality rights of some sort, that they are as human as anyone else, and that *their* families' grief is as important as any other family's grief. "These women are MOTHERS, SISTERS, AUNTS. They are HUMAN BEINGS," a speaker proclaimed.

By politicizing the issue of the Missing and Murdered Women in particular, and rallying considerable support across class, gender, racial, and neighborhood divides, the families of the missing women and their supporters have claimed a space of dignity for the poorest and most marginalized women in Canada and have achieved some degree of victory in setting the terms and conditions under which a previously invisible population has entered into public discourse. The sad irony is, of course, that the recognition and respect now accorded the Missing and Murdered Women in death was often denied them in life.

The march proceeded through "historic Gastown" with its high-end tourist shops and galleries displaying Northwest Coast and Inuit art in every window from exclusive galleries to tacky t-shirt and trinket carts. The march concluded with a feast at Oppenheimer Park where a totem pole was built five years ago: the most significant marker of the historical and continuous presence of Aboriginal people in the Downtown Eastside. At this feast Elders were served first. In keeping with life expectancy levels in this neighborhood, anyone over 45 is designated as an Elder. The feast closed with a prayer led by an elder Aboriginal woman, and the marchers dispersed to carry on with their lives, one way and another. Some stayed behind and joined—in various ways—drug dealers, users, shelterless people, and sex workers who take over the park after dark. Others returned to other homes, families, and jobs located elsewhere.

Material conditions for Aboriginal women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver have worsened considerably during the last two years. British Columbians elected an extreme right-wing party—ironically named the Liberals—to form the provincial government. Welfare reform policies adopted from the United States have been implemented that have reduced benefits and services to single mothers, unemployed youth, and disabled people. HIV infection rates continue to increase, with Aboriginal youth between the ages of 17 and 25 constituting the "highest risk group." Homelessness is increasing, and anecdotal reports, observations, and research data demonstrate that the numbers of young Aboriginal women arriving in the inner city is on the rise.

Nevertheless, Aboriginal women continue to resist and to envision change. A group called Breaking the Silence advocates for safe housing and health and social services for neighborhood women. They organize a weekly gathering at the totem pole in Oppenheimer Park. A community service organization donates space to a woman, Grace, who has initiated a drop-in center for Downtown Eastside women and children a few nights a month following the day welfare checks are issued. "The Place of Grace" provides shelter from violence that sometimes erupts during this period, protection from theft, and companionship and non-judgmental support for women in recovery who find the temptation to "slip" or "binge" harder to resist during this week than others. The Valentine's Day Women's Memorial March in 2003 was large, well attended, sorrowful, and celebratory.[23] A woman speaking on behalf of the Aboriginal Women's Action Network addressed the gathering and said: "We've shown the world that we won't stand by while our women are murdered and disappeared. We demand justice for the missing and murdered women of all nations. And we won't tolerate it that our young women are still pushed onto the street by poverty and racism. This is our land and we belong here. We have a right to justice and a decent life. We are not going anywhere."[24]

NOTES

1. For statistical overview of Aboriginal populations in Canadian inner cities see Carol LaPrairie, *Aboriginal Over-Representation in the Criminal Justice System: A Tale of Nine Cities* (Ottawa: Department of Justice, 2001). For a discussion of "invisibility" of urban Aboriginal people in mainstream Canadian culture, see Evelyn J. Peters, "Subversive Spaces: First Nations Women and the City," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 16 (1998): 665–85. For analysis of routinized violence against inner-city Aboriginal women in Canada, see Sherene Razack, "Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder of Pamela George," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 15:2 (2000): 91–130. For a case study of mental health and substance abuse issues among inner-city Aboriginal populations in Canada, see Kahá:wi Jacobs and Kathryn Gill, "Substance Abuse in an Urban Aboriginal Population: Social, Legal and Psychological Consequences," *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse* 1:1 (2002): 7–25.

2. In Canada, prostitution—that is, the exchange of sexual services for money—is not illegal. However, soliciting for the purposes of prostitution is illegal.

3. Beverly A. Pitman, "Re-mediating the Spaces of Reality Television: *America's*

Most Wanted and the case of Vancouver's missing women," *Environment and Planning A* 334 (2002): 167–84.

4. Judith Goode and Jeff Maskovsky, eds., *The New Poverty Studies: The Ethnography of Power, Politics, and Impoverished People in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

5. For a discussion of current census and other demographic data, and for a recently published article that signals the beginnings of a movement into academic visibility of Aboriginal women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver, see Celia Benoit, et al., "In Search of a Healing Place: Aboriginal Women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside," *Social Science and Medicine* 56:6 (2003): 821–33.

6. Reliable demographic data is hard to establish in this milieu, but estimates can provide an overview sketch. In 1998–99, hoping to obtain a more accurate estimate of the Aboriginal population of the city of Vancouver, the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board commissioned a "Capture/Recapture Study" based on Census Canada 1996 figures. This study, entitled *Healing Ways,* estimated a total population of 28,000 Aboriginal people living in the city of Vancouver. Of these, approximately 5,000 (17 percent) reside in the Downtown Eastside; 14,000 (50 percent) live in the adjacent neighborhoods of Northeast, East, and Southeast Vancouver; with the remaining 9,000 (33 percent) scattered throughout other neighborhoods. Over 50 percent of urban Aboriginal households in Vancouver are headed by women, and these are concentrated in the sectors of East Vancouver where the majority of Aboriginal people live. *Healing Ways: Aboriginal Health and Service Review* (Vancouver BC: Vancouver/Richmond Health Board, 1999), 102.

7. For analysis of the systemic nature of current poverty and economic marginalization among Aboriginal people in Canada, see Joan Kendall, "Circles of Disadvantage: Aboriginal Poverty and Underdevelopment in Canada," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 31:1/2 (2001): 43–59.

8. Phillipe Bourgois, "Understanding Inner-City Poverty: Resistance and Self-Destruction under U.S. Apartheid," in *Exotic No More: Anthropology on the Front Lines,* ed. Jeremy MacClancy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 15–32.

9. *Downtown Eastside Community Monitoring Report.* Population Statistics, Census Canada 1996, (City of Vancouver, 2000).

10. *Downtown Eastside Community Monitoring Report.*

11. Vancouver/Richmond Health Board, *Healing Ways.*

12. Patricia Spittal, et al., "Risk Factors for Elevated HIV Incidence Rates among Female Injection Drug Users in Vancouver," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 166:7 (2002): 894–99. See also Susan Ship and Laurel Norton, "'It's hard to be a woman': First Nations Women Living with HIV/AIDS," *Native Social Work Journal* 3:1 (2000): 69–85.

13. Spittal, "Risk Factors for Elevated HIV Incidence Rates."

14. Sally Zierler and Nancy Krieger, "Reframing Women's Risk: Social Inequalities and HIV Infection," *Annual Review of Public Health* 18 (1997): 401–36.

15. L. J. Kirmayer, G. M. Brass, and C. L. Tait, "The Mental Health of Aboriginal Peoples: Transformations of Identity and Community," *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 45:7 (2000): 607–16. See also Theresa D. O'Nell, *DISCIPLINED HEARTS: History, Identity and Depression in an American Indian Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

16. Vancouver/Richmond Health Board, *Healing Ways.*

17. Sue Currie, "Assessing the Violence Against Street Involved Women in the Downtown Eastside/Strathcona Community," Report for the Ministry of Women's Equality (Province of British Columbia, 2000).

18. Pitman, "Re-mediating the Spaces of Reality Television."

19. For analyses of the Aboriginal Women's Movement in Canada see Jo-Ann Fiske, "The Womb is to the Nation as the Heart is to the Body: Ethnopolitical Discourses of the Canadian Indigenous Women's Movement," *Studies in Political Economy* 51 (Fall 1996): 65–96; Native Women's Association of Canada, *Hear Their Stories: 40 Aboriginal Women Speak* (Ottawa: The Association, 1997); Winona Stevenson, "Colonialism and First Nations Women in Canada," in *Scratching the Surface: Canadian Anti-Racist Feminist Thought,* ed. Enakshi Dua and Angela Robertson (Toronto: Women's Press, 1999).

20. Since the "Montreal Massacre" of December 6, 1989, when a man burst into an Engineering class at L'Ecole Polytechnique at the Université de Montréal, in Montréal Québec, yelling that he "hated feminists" and gunned down fourteen female students, activists in the movement against violence against women mobilize on December 6 every year. The anti-rape movement holds "Take Back The Night" marches in October each year. Trade-union and left-wing affiliated women focus on International Women's Day on March 8.

21. Dara Culhane, Fieldnotes, February 14, 2001.

22. Culhane, Fieldnotes.

23. For discussion and examples of Aboriginal women's activities surrounding health and health care, see Connie Deiter and Linda Otway, "Sharing Our Stories on Promoting Health and Community Healing: An Aboriginal Women's Health Project," *Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence* (Winnipeg MB, 2001).

24. Culhane, Fieldnotes.