

Entitlement, Victimhood, and Hate:
A Digital Ethnography of the Canadian Right-Wing Social Media Landscape

by
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Abstract

This dissertation is, at its core, an interrogation of white masculinity in Canada’s right-wing spaces. While my interlocutors spent a great deal of time discussing *others*, namely immigrants, globalist elites, and feminists, through their discourse, they revealed a lot more about themselves and their perceived victimhood (Berbrier, 2000). This victimhood is derived from what Hage (2000) refers to as the white nation fantasy, wherein white people believe they have the right to rule, control, and dominate in their countries. They are entitled to this by virtue of their whiteness and its perceived superiority, and thus feel justified in their harmful behaviour (Essed & Muhr, 2018). Yet, as I show throughout each chapter, that right is challenged time and time again by immigration, feminism, and racial justice, which triggers a sense of aggrieved entitlement (Manne, 2019) and backlash (Boyd, 2004; Braithwaite, 2004). Moreover, I demonstrate that this is not only a *white* fantasy, but rather a white *male* fantasy.¹ While the white nation fantasy relies on white supremacy, the white male nation fantasy interweaves notions of male supremacism wherein not only are people of colour inferior, so too are women – including white ones who do not fall in line. I draw on bell hook’s conception of “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” to show how their discourse, while explicitly racist and nativist (Schrag, 2010), upholds and is in turn upheld by both capitalism and patriarchy. Thus, while chapters on hockey, promiscuous women, and a “Sad Keanu” meme may seem disparate and disjointed, they all connect back to these notions of supremacism, entitlement, and ultimately victimhood.

¹ This is not to say that white women do not play a pivotal role in upholding white supremacy. However, for my interlocutors, women were rarely afforded the right to rule. Thus, while white women certainly have privilege within the white nation fantasy and work to uphold white supremacy, it is secondary to white men. Moreover, as my interlocutors were not women, I cannot present their perspective in the same way.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Amy C. Mack. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “From Vikings Runes to Reddit Threads and Rallies”, No. Pro00085421, December 18, 2018.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction(s)

On the evening of August 11th, 2017, I was sitting on my parents' deck in southern Alberta. I was blissfully enjoying a cold beverage and the fading sunlight. We had a small gas-powered firepit in front of us to keep away the encroaching coolness of the night. In a few days, I was planning to relocate to Edmonton where I would start my doctoral program in anthropology, and I was relishing in the calm before what I assumed would be a storm. My initial plan was to study the digital divide in rural, remote, and northern communities. It was a project that emerged out of the work I had just finished in southern Alberta, which focused on digital literacy and storytelling with Blackfoot youth and Elders. It was good work and it brought me a lot of joy even when it was difficult. I felt at peace with my new adventure, despite the occasional tingle of anxiety.

Now, my dad is often the first one to get cold when we sit outside, which means he is usually the first to turn in for the night. He is also the keenest to watch the evening news, and that is exactly what happened that evening. Eventually, I decided the cool air had won and I too went inside. I have a distinct memory of walking in through the back door of my childhood home—the sound of the door, the feeling of cool night air meeting the warm air of the house—and, importantly, my dad motioning me to take a look at the television.

It was the Unite the Right rally.

Images of angry, white, polo shirt-clad young men carrying blazing torches through the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, filled the screen. There was an intensity to their march, and their animosity was palpable. The newscasters were saying that this was a far-right march, which had been met with resistance from counter protesters.

I did not understand the full spectrum of hate or violence until the next day as reports of violent altercations and the death of a counter protestor trickled through my social media newsfeeds. I suppose I did not really understand it even then, but I felt in my gut that this was an important moment. White liberals and leftists responded with shock, anger, and resistance. I was one of

them. We were, it seems, caught off guard by the ferociousness of the rally, as well as the right-wing's ability to mobilize and congregate. Despite my heavy involvement in international human rights activism, I was nonetheless ill-equipped to respond. As many marginalized folks pointed out in the days, weeks, and months after the rally, this hatred was nothing new. It was just that white folks were finally paying attention. *I* was paying attention to the global networks of hatred. By 'global' I mean American and European, at least.

The next week, I got into my car and drove up to Edmonton where I would put the Unite the Right rally to the back of my mind and try to make my original doctoral project work. Yet, the images of the blazing torches and the anger in the faces of people who looked like me and my kin lingered.

In early 2018, I received the disappointing news that my project had not received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). It was not the first time academia had disappointed me (nor would it be the last). Yet, I have developed the belief that failure is an opportunity for reflection. Was this project really what I wanted to do? Was I the right person to do it? Was there something else that I was called to instead? Maybe something that would benefit from my positionality as a white woman?

The memories of the Unite the Right rally, as well as the discourse that continued to ripple out almost a year later, stirred in my mind. There was also increasing news coverage of a group of far-right activists who were calling themselves Soldiers of Odin, and they had piqued my interest given my fascination with Norse mythology and Scandinavia. What if I looked at them? What if I, to borrow a phrase from a classmate of mine, "turned the gaze"? What if I looked at *white men*, who have long been an understudied subject of anthropological inquiry? I knew that this would be difficult in some ways, because anthropology has a hierarchy of purity when it comes to field sites and subjects (Chapter 5), and a *digital* project about white men was therefore a double bind, but the prospect of this new project was exciting.

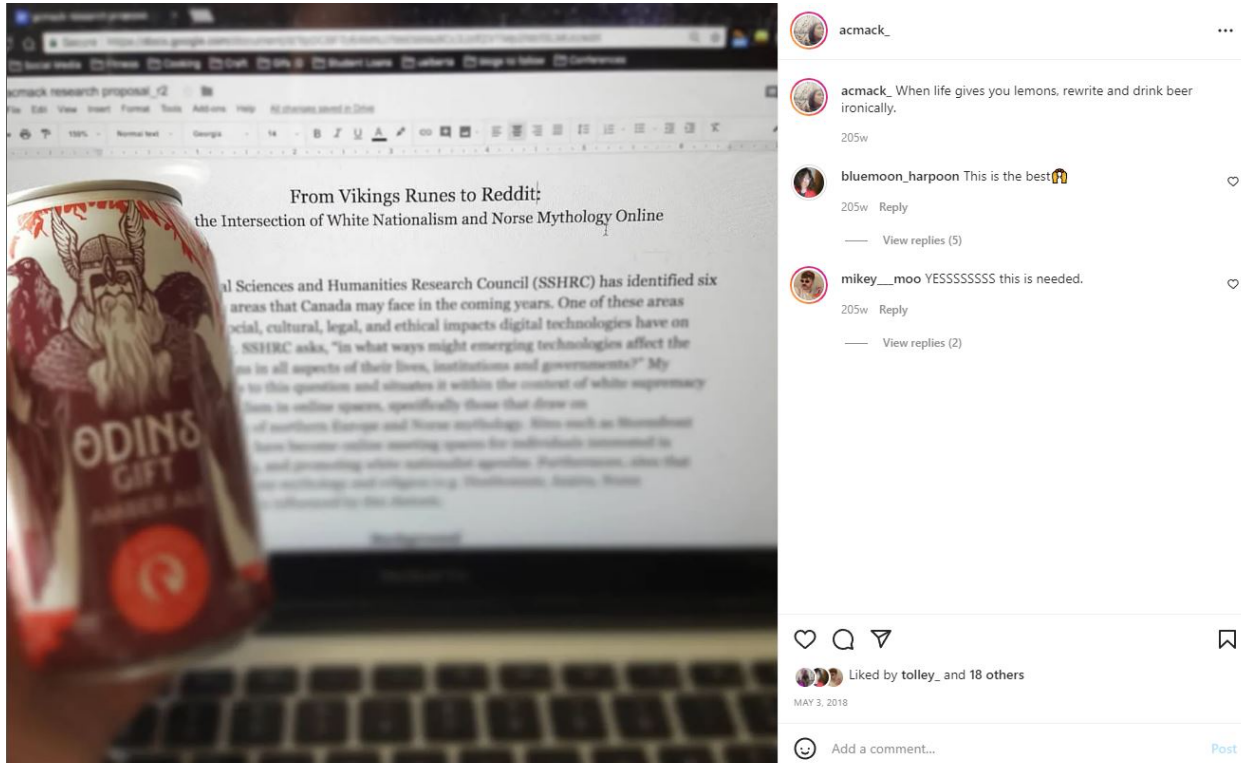


Figure 1. Screenshot of author’s Instagram post introducing new project alongside a beer can labeled “Odin’s Gift”

I spoke with my mentors about the possibility of a topic shift, and I was met with overwhelming support. This was *my* PhD, and the role of a mentor, committee member, and supervisor was to help me actualize it. I also spoke with my mentors in the Blackfoot community. It was important for me to talk to them as part of me felt like I was abandoning their community with the change. Instead, they told me this was important work and gave me teachings on how to protect and cleanse not only myself, but my computer as well. Something about this shift just felt right.

I began doing some preliminary observations online in fall 2018. Would this be a worthwhile site? I thought so. Following a robust and enlightening back and forth with the university’s ethics review board later that year, my journey began in earnest with Soldiers of Odin Edmonton and their Facebook presence. This would expand to include the far, folk, and alt-right of Gab, Voat, and Minds, as well as the mainstream right-wing found mostly on Twitter and Reddit (Chapters 3 and 4). It would encompass moments of extreme violence (see Epilogue), fatigue (Chapter 5),

and personal pain (Chapter 8). But it would also be intellectually stimulating and challenging to work through the problems presented in this work (see Conclusion on working with the right-wing). I found something approaching joy in talking about memes and hockey (Chapters 7 and 9), even if they were vehicles for bigotry directed at me and those I care about.

This work is ongoing, as the white supremacist capitalist (cishet)² patriarchy (hooks, 1995) continues to structure our world. However, a dissertation must, at some point, come to an end. As a result, I have artificially chosen to conclude this work with the so-called Freedom Convoy, which gripped the nation in January and February 2022. However, before I start this story about my time among the Canadian right-wing and their international peers, I want to set the stage, so to speak, and introduce the characters that my readers will encounter throughout this dissertation.

The Stage: Settler Colonialism and Techno-spaces

How do anthropologists explain where we do our work? In classic ethnographies, this was the role of maps, history chapters, and descriptions of the setting. These demarcated the boundaries of field sites, even as social relations stretched beyond them, and explained the contemporary manifestations of a culture within a historical context. As I explore at length in my chapters on methods, fieldwork, and field sites, disciplinary tropes do not always work for my research. It seems this extends to some of the writing conventions as well. I cannot provide a map of my field sites. The tendrils of my work are far reaching and catchup too many other people, places, and ideas. Similarly, it catches up many histories. This work is located in the history of Canada as a nation, one that is marked by racist and misogynistic violence and global Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. It is a story of globalization, nativism, and the north. It is beyond the scope of this work to address in detail each of these histories. What I can do, however, is provide my reader with an overview of two different histories: settler colonialism and the relationship between the right-wing and technology. These provide a baseline understanding for the uninitiated with regards to both Canada and the right-wing techno-landscape. The former provides a foundation for understanding a key argument in this dissertation, namely that much of the rhetoric I explore

² Cishet is shorthand for cis-gender and heteronormative. When used with “patriarchy” it includes expands the area of inquiry to include sexuality and trans issues.

is rooted in entitlement and victimhood. The latter provides context for why I chose to explore this subject through social media.

Settler Colonialism

One of the key arguments I make in this dissertation is that much of my interlocutors' discourse is rooted in the notion of entitlement. This, I argue pertains not only to the bodies of women, which is explored in great detail by the work of feminist and male supremacy scholars like Kate Manne (2019), Madifs (2014) and others, but to economic prosperity and socio-political power. When pressed on why they feel this way, my interlocutors (sometimes unprompted) argued that their entitlement is derived from the work of their ancestors who came to this wild and untamed land, settled it, and built the nation that we enjoy today. This is their lineage, their genealogy, and their justification.

This means that the stage for my work is the very land I walk on, and my line of inquiry is the white supremacist capitalist cishet-patriarchy that has taken root in its soil. So, it would be prudent to start this story off with the ongoing story of settler colonialism, that is, the theft of land from the Indigenous peoples who have been here since time immemorial. I also want to include this because, as I argue here and elsewhere (Mack, forthcoming), there is a tendency to assume that the Canadian right-wing is a near mirror of the American experience. This is in part due to our geographical proximity, shared history, and the advent of social media. Yet, Canada's unique legacy of settler colonialism must be reckoned with as it shapes the discourses, actions, and ideologies that take root here.

So, allow me to begin with a statement: Canada is, and has always been, a violent nation state built on the genocide of Indigenous peoples and the dispossession of land for imperialist gain. This genocide is on-going,³ and white Canadians continue to benefit from this process (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012).⁴

³ See the TRC on the child welfare system; see also Preston (2013) on resource extraction

⁴ This benefit is also experienced differentially by other non-Indigenous and non-white groups; however, they are not the focus of this discussion.

The study of this process, as well as settler colonialism in general, is a vast literature, and a full review of it is outside the scope of my work here. However, one aspect of settler colonialism that I want to highlight here is how it helps differentiate settlers from migrants.⁵ Veracini (2010) notes that,

Settlers are *founders* of political orders and carry their sovereignty with them (on the contrary, migrants can be seen as *appellants* facing a political order that is already constituted). Migrants can be individually co-opted within settler colonial political regimes, and indeed they often are. They do not, however, enjoy inherent rights and are characterised by a defining lack of sovereign entitlement (p. 3).

This is a point that my interlocutors would agree with, in fact, and it undergirds much of their rhetorical work around belonging and exclusion. They see themselves as a distinct sort of immigrant; indeed, many find the label uncomfortable, ill-fitting, and even offensive when applied to themselves. Their entitlement is rooted in their ancestors' founding work and in the creation of the political order that is now Canada by white men. In contrast, new immigrants, particularly those who are not white or Christian, must adapt to the hegemonic white male norms. However, as I explore below, this adaptation is rarely sufficient to become "real" Canadians. Additionally, any attempt by immigrants to change the existing political order is seen as an invasion and attack (e.g., Sharia family courts). This evinces my interlocutors' fear regarding the creation of a new settler and new political order as that would strip them of their inherent power and entitlement. In short, they want to be the conquerors and never the conquered.

As Veracini (2010) further notes, settlers are 'made' Indigenous by virtue of a numerical majority, which is reflected in my interlocutors' frequent claims that "we're the native people now." They no longer understand themselves to be colonizers, and while this process is

⁵ A note on the term 'migrants': it is used in the literature here, however, it is not an emic term. My interlocutors almost universally used the term immigrants instead. The only visible exception was in discussions of the so-called "migrant caravan" from South America in 2018. For consistency, I have adopted the emic term.

vehemently disputed by Indigenous peoples, it nonetheless amplifies feelings of entitlement to economic, political, and social power. Yet, the dependence on the numerical majority for this manufactured ‘indigenous’ status opens my interlocutors up to anxiety and uncertainty in the face of demographic shifts. What happens when white people are no longer the numerical majority in Canada? My interlocutors are grappling with this imagined scenario—a nightmare to them—at the same time that feminists and racial-justice activists are challenging their inherent right to power. For my interlocutors, the assumption that white men would continue to enjoy unencumbered access to jobs and homes is challenged by these movements. These men must now compete with an increasing number of people who do not look or think like them, and who might not hold the same vision for Canada defined along white masculinist lines. This process of unsettling white male assumptions began decades ago, and it has created a sense of uncertainty about their future and their power (see Messner, 1998). This anxiety is building, along with feelings of anger, resentment, and betrayal.

That my interlocutors are increasingly uncomfortable and anxious is not surprising given that their entitlement is rooted in conquest and land. The connection between anxiety and settler colonialism is explored in detail by Albert Memmi in his work on colonialism in Africa. This work, I argue, sheds light on the Canadian context. In his canonical text, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965), Memmi argues that for the colonizer “accepting the reality of being a colonizer means agreeing to be a nonlegitimate privileged person, that is, a usurper. To be sure, a usurper claims his place and, if need be, will defend it by every means at his disposal” (p. 96). This, I argue, is what my interlocutors are wrestling with online. The work of feminists and racial-justice activists has called their legitimacy into question and have reminded them of their usurper status, even as they attempt to establish themselves as “native” (Veracini, 2010). Their response, specifically their anti-immigrant and anti-feminist rhetoric, is an attempt to exonerate their settler-ness, substantiate their native-ness, and legitimize entitlement even as these categories contradict one another. It is the proverbial “have my cake and eat it too” in that my interlocutors want to glorify their founding work (the root of their legitimacy), without being reminded that they are usurpers and something other than native (a reminder of their illegitimacy). More than anything, I suspect, they want to go back to a time when they did not have to wrestle with this contradiction. Here, Memmi (1965) is again instructive,

to possess victory completely he needs to absolve himself of it and the conditions under which it was attained... He endeavors to falsify history, he rewrites laws, he would extinguish memories—anything to succeed in transforming his usurpation into legitimacy (p. 96).

This makes a great deal of sense given my interlocutors' use of collective (mis)remembering and nostalgia (Smeeke & Verkuyten, 2013; Wohl et al., 2020). As a nation, we emphasize moments of bravery and resiliency, like the efforts to settle the prairies and fight in both world wars. Yet, we downplay the violent dispossession that was necessary for settler expansion, and we gloss over the internment camps erected to house Japanese-Canadians suspected of disloyalty during the second world war. We remember Canada as we need it to be.

For my interlocutors, this need to remember Canada in a certain way is highlighted in their insistence on protecting the statues, imagery, and names of the men involved in the founding process. This parallels conversations around glorifying Christopher Columbus, yet in Canada it focuses on politicians, like John A. MacDonald and Frank Oliver, or religious figures, like Bishop Vital-Justin Grandin. All of these men have been labeled as instruments and architects of genocide. In recent years, statues of these men have been vandalized and toppled, while buildings and schools bearing their names have been given new ones. Yet, to my interlocutors, this is a history worth defending and preserving.



Figure 2. Screenshot of ID Canada’s Instagram page. Image is of a statue in Calgary that was cleaned by the group.

Memmi (1965) pointedly asks, how can the usurper even attempt to gain legitimacy? How can my interlocutors defend the work of men who committed such atrocities in the name of founding a new nation? In response to his own query, Memmi suggests that “one attempt can be made by demonstrating the usurper’s eminent merits, so eminent that they deserve such compensation” (p. 96). Here, white Canadians are able to bypass the atrocities of Canada’s formation by emphasizing the good that has come from the process. Indeed, civilization itself is deemed a goal worth any price, and those who brought it to fruition are therefore bestowed with legitimizing merits. They worked so hard, so diligently, so tirelessly to create Canada, and their resilience in the face of hardship—both work and environment—insulates them from criticism directed at a

usurper. They are, instead, builders. Take these unprompted proclamations from my time in the field,

“I think the land should also be turned back to how it was found before being turned over. It was settlers that built towns and other infrastructure. If they hate whites and other settlers being on their land then surely they hate the conveniences that brings!” (Reddit user).

“Europeans built this country, period. All others showed up later to welfare and high speed internet” (Reddit user).

“While our ancestors are not native to Canada, they did build it” (Reddit user).

“Why dont you think Canada is a white country? All of our infrastructure and pillars of society were built and designed by white people” (Reddit user).

“Why do you call them immigrants? Theyre settlers and pioneers, those are the people who built the country, and by no coincidence they also happen to be white” (Reddit user).⁶

While all the comments above evince the same notion, namely that white European men built Canada and that what they built was important, the last comment is interesting to my discussion here of merit. “And by no coincidence they also happen to be white” implies that there is something about white people that gives them the unique capacity to build a country like Canada; that there is something inherent in them that other races lack. It implies a superiority that invokes a meritorious legitimacy and entitlement.

When one considers this ongoing legacy, it is unsurprising that my interlocutors are uncomfortable with critiques of settler colonialism. In today’s society it is a breach of optics to

⁶ A note on direct quotes: Unless it is absolutely necessary for reading comprehension, I have included these quotes verbatim from the source.

say that white men deserve social, political, and economic power because of their whiteness or maleness. That is too easily censorable (see Chapter 2). However, this notion of the founder-ancestor and the process of “becoming” native has become a possible connection to legitimacy and entitlement. Yet, because of challenges from feminist and racial-justice movements, this too has been rendered uncertain in recent years, and this is reflected in their anti-immigrant rhetoric.

Techno-spaces & White, Male Supremacy

The land is not the only kind of space where my interlocutors have put down roots. Social media has, in recent years, become a vibrant space for many kinds of political organizing. Take for example the social justice movements like the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement (Juris, 2012; Subramani, 2013), the 2010 Arab Spring revolution (Allmann, 2014; Shereen Sakr, 2019), and the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. Recently among the right, the Yellow Vest, identitarian, and alt-right movements have similarly taken advantage of the international flows of information and ideas. Similarly, the men’s rights movement, which was formerly an offline movement that emerged in the 1970s as the “father’s rights” movement, has also found fertile ground online (see Cousineau, 2021a on men’s rights; Ging, 2019 on incels; Onuoha, 2021 on misogynoir). This has become a world-wide phenomenon across the political spectrum.

While I maintain that Canada has its own version of “right-wing” driven by nationalism that plays out clearly in their social media use, there has been a historical trend of importing American and European ideas, groups, and movements into the country. From the KKK to neo-Nazi skinhead movements, the 20th century was marked by an exchange of ideas across the Canadian American border (Toy, 2006). This exchange of ideas has been accelerated by the advent and widespread adoption of the internet and social media technologies, and it has been shaped by differing censorship practices by state agents.

In the years preceding the wide spread adoption of the internet, former Grand Wizard of the KKK Tom Metzger created a complex network of telephone and computer systems to produce an online bulletin board for white supremacists called Aryan Liberty Net. This supplemented his “white man’s talk show” Race and Reason, which brought the ideologies of white supremacists

into many American living rooms (Winter, 2019). This was also deemed a safer approach as it allowed new members and sympathizers to consume the ideologies without publicly identifying themselves (Christensen et al., 2015). Moreover, this approach allowed for the distribution of racist rhetoric globally. Unlike Metzger's show, which was only aired in limited locations, today's productions are aired everywhere there is an internet connection. This content was restricted in Canada due to hate speech laws, and the right saw digital technologies as a loophole in Canadian television censorship practices (Berlet & Mason, 2015).

This use of technology by Metzger, as well as others like David Duke and Rush Limbaugh, is the precursor to the widespread use of podcasts, blogs, and vlogs by white supremacist groups (Scrivens & Conway, 2019). Moreover, the spaces created by technological innovations have also increased. Sites such as Stormfront and Aryan Liberty Net serve as recruitment areas and facilitate the dissemination of white supremacist ideas, literature, and humour (Back, 2002; Back et al., 1996; Bowman-Grieve, 2009; Statzel, 2008). These spaces have become meeting places and spaces of free speech wherein individuals feel comfortable in their whiteness and in the consumption of white supremacist and nationalist media (Carter, 1998). Or at least, that is what my interlocutors and their predecessors had hoped.

More recent scholarship has grappled with the migration of far-right values into more mainstream spaces. As Scrivens and Amarasingam (2020) note, sites like Stormfront have remained the preferred space of the so-called "old-guard," while younger generations of right-wing actors have strategically taken up social media platforms like Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. These platforms also facilitate connections between groups at local and transnational levels. This is useful for far-right activists in Canada given the relatively dispersed population. Individuals who are drawn to extremism and other far-right groups often feel they have a stigmatized identity (Christensen et al., 2015), and the internet allows these individuals to come together in a shared space thereby reducing social distance.

In response to the right's adoption of telecommunication technologies, many social media platforms have instituted policies and detailed community standards designed to limit the spread of hate speech and extremist material. The platforms vary in terms of goals and norms related to

end-user experiences, such as free speech (e.g., Gab) or community-building (e.g., Facebook). However, most disallow graphic material that is pornographic or violent, constitutes hate speech, or incites violence. Another difference in censorship practices amongst platforms is who determines what is removed. Many platforms allow users to report content they suspect violates the community standards (Nurik, 2019). Others use third-party groups (Reeve, 2020), as well as machine learning tools to carryout content moderation (Gallacher, 2020; West, 2018). Just as approaches to content moderation vary, so to do the impacts of censorship policies and practices. This shapes, and reshapes, the sorts of spaces my interlocutors can inhabit in authentic ways. I explore this at greater length in my chapter on censorship, but it is important to keep in mind not only the settler colonial aspect of my research, but the techno aspects as well.

Characters or Caricatures?

The Author

During my undergraduate degree, a professor once described to me the crisis of representation in the 1980s (Clifford & Marcus, 2010; Marcus & Fischer, 1996), as the moment when anthropologists started navel gazing. This was meant in part as a warning about writing that was overly self-centered. Yet, this begs the question: How do we locate ourselves in our research without unnecessarily centering ourselves? This is, after all, *not* an auto-ethnography, but rather a (sometimes, mostly) digital ethnography. Such a query presents my discomfort with reflexivity that spends inordinate amounts of time on the researcher, yet it is important to address how my positionality (who I am) affects my ability to 1) do this research, 2) know my interlocutors, and 3) (re)present them (see Pillow, 2003). Despite my discomfort with this, my readers will undoubtedly find a great deal of “me” mixed in with my interlocutors in this narrative. As a result, I have somewhat begrudgingly characterized myself here as a character in my own right.

I want to begin this with a note that my offline and online selves present differently. This is not because I attempted to conceal aspects of my identity through performative behaviours, although my ethics review did suggest I use a gender-neutral pseudonym. Rather, it is because there is an assumption that in these spaces all other users are young-ish, white men. Boomers are thought to

be easily identifiable via their jargon and cringe memes, while women are “afraid” of the “untamed frontier” that is alt-tech and right-wing social media (yes, an interlocutor *actually* made this claim). As a result, when I interacted with other users, I was assumed to be a man and even referred to as “brother” on occasion. When I put my call out for interview participants, every commentor that referred to me used he/him pronouns. As I discuss in my chapter on methods, it would be interesting to know how making my gender explicitly known would have shaped my interactions. While all I can do is speculate, I suspect I would have been met with more misogyny and more silence. After all, women—even white ones—are always suspect because we can be corrupted by feminism (see Chapter 8).

Despite how I was perceived online, it *is* necessary to locate myself as a white woman in this research context because it influenced not only my research questions, practices, and ethics, but also how I write. I have always made the joke that my research participants could be my neighbour or perhaps a relative. I come from a working-class, rural background. My paternal side were homesteaders and settlers, while my maternal side is rooted in the trades. I ‘pass’ as Christian, despite never practicing. I speak with a prairie lilt that betrays much of this. I enjoy watching hockey, going camping, and wearing flannel—you know, the activities that a stereotypical white Canadian is supposed to enjoy. The point of all this is to say that I have a great deal in common with many of my interlocutors in terms of our history and culture. This did not insulate me from the impact of their misogynistic or homophobic vitriol, nor from repeated exposure to rhetoric and violence directed at people I care about who are also marginalized in different ways. However, it does give me a space of commonality from which to start, and I think this is part of the anthropological enterprise: seeking to understand how we are similar, even as we explore our differences. And there certainly are differences between myself and my interlocutors! Our politics were, for the most part, on opposite ends of the spectrum. I lean towards a Marxist-feminist orientation, which puts me at odds with many in my field sites. I saw myself reflected in much of their anti-feminist, anti-socialist, and anti-woman discourse even as I worked to recognize them as victims of capitalism and patriarchy in their own ways. Moreover, as I explore further in my conclusion, as an anthropologist, I was constantly struggling against disciplinary expectations to ‘like’ my interlocutors at the community, if not the individual, level. We typically care about the communities we study, do we not?

As I explore in greater detail in my chapter on hockey, I constantly found myself looped in as part of ‘us’ and simultaneously excluded because I was also ‘them’. I was part of the community by virtue of my personal history, but also rendered an outsider by my researcher status—a contradiction I explore further in my censorship chapter. This caused a great deal of psychological discomfort as I negotiated my proximity to the community I was studying even as it sought to undermine my rights as a human and even advocated for violence against women like me.

Because of who I am as a person, this work is a constant struggle. I have agonized over every quote—whether to include it, how to frame it, when to provide warnings or clarifying remarks. I am certain that my presentation here will upset many people. I am certain many of my interlocutors would read this work and feel that I have unfairly characterized them and their movements. Those among the Left may feel that I have not been critical enough. This dissertation is a complex, contradictory account of complex and contradictory people, told by an equally complex and contradictory anthropologist. Let me turn now to the people who I *do* center in this work.

The Interlocutors

Discussions of the right and social media often privilege groups from the United States and Europe to the exclusion of countries such as Canada and Australia. Moreover, there is a tendency to assume manifestations of the right in Canada mirror those in the United States, which diminishes the unique historical and cultural facets of the right-wing in Canada (Perry & Scrivens, 2019). While overlap certainly exists, particularly when one considers the hegemonic power of social media, it would be erroneous to assume Canada is a carbon copy of its southern neighbour. Following Perry and Scrivens (2019) and their conceptualization of right-wing groups in Canada, I understand these groups and individuals as those that espouse a narrow vision of nationalism in Canada, defined and limited by gender, sexuality, religion, race, and ethnicity, which produces a normative image of the typical Canadian as a straight, white, Christian male.

This version of Canada and the “true” Canadian is threatened by increased immigration from non-white and non-Christian countries, as well as feminist policies and anti-racist advocacy work. As a result, I characterize the right-wing in this context as reactionary (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012); although, what each group or individual reacts to most strongly varies amongst groups and platforms. For example, the idea of the victimized Christian was taken up differently. On the Reddit community r/metacanada, Christians were invoked in opposition to Muslim immigrants, with some resistance from atheist and agnostic members. They were reacting to the supposed disempowerment of Christianity as a marker of Canadian identity, which serves as a convenient metric for exclusion. When I inquired as to what made Canadians Canadian, one of my interlocutors noted, “to be Canadian was to be Christian. Until the 1970s at least.” In contrast, Soldiers of Odin Edmonton rarely discussed the plight of Christians on their Facebook pages as they took on more Norse aesthetics in their posts and memes (Castle & Parsons, 2019). Similarly, the folk-right movement on Gab was explicitly anti-Christian in their rhetoric as they saw it as a function of globalism that was at odds with European ethnic heritage and history (Mack, 2021a).

I provide this simple example here in an attempt to illustrate just how broad the values, beliefs, and philosophies were amongst my interlocutors. Some were self-professed ethno-nationalists. Indeed, one of my interview participants identified as such. Others leaned more towards libertarianism, mainstream conservatism, or the populist movement championed by the People’s Party of Canada (PPC). They disagreed on whether they should condone racism. Some saw it as “common sense” while others used “race realism”⁷ to justify their racism. In contrast, others saw it as a backwards perspective, which made conservatives appear equally backwards. Of course, as I explore in my theory chapter (Chapter 2), there was little agreement on what actually constituted racism as well as misogyny. For example, in a post on the new r/metacanada site, OmegaCanada.win, one user remarked,

The only things “I” consider racist are comments that directly state that another race is inferior or not human or sub human.

⁷ Race realism is an emic term for “scientific racism,” which is a pseudo-scientific attempt to “prove” that white people are biologically superior to other races.

I honestly don't give 2 sweet fucks about the N-word but it's become a suicide bomb when used by white people these days.

We should be spending our time pointing the finger at Asian Racists, Arab Racists, Black Racists, East Indian Racists, and North American Indian Racists. They exist, are wretched examples of actual racism and getting a free pass. Those people are literally saying White people are ALL evil, stupid and vile. That White people are the root of all evil.

I don't intend on becoming a racist, proving their stances and losing to these pack of useless fucks.

Do you? (OmegaCanada user).

This was in response to a discussion of censorship and not condoning racism. Clearly there is disagreement amongst the right-wing as to what actually constitutes racism, and it was not just racism that they disagreed on. They disagreed on the degree to which immigration needed to be reformed. Should it be reduced to cover the labour shortages or completely eliminated so that white people could find jobs? This points to another contradiction which was ideas about the economy. Is capitalism good? Do we even have 'capitalism' these days or are we in a post-capitalist neoliberal hellscape? What about women? Do they belong in the workforce, and should they have the right to vote? Are they inherently inferior or is it just the corrupting force of feminism? What about Islam? Is it "right about women" or a complete affront to Canadian (read: Enlightenment) values? Is Jason Kenney a good conservative politician or a globalist cuck? Is Maxime Bernier a Canadian patriot who tells it like it is or a racist Francophone that no one should take seriously let alone vote for?

What I am trying to articulate here is that there were very few things that were agreed upon throughout my field sites. The hatred for Trudeau was, however, a near universal. Ideologically they are a heterogenous, complex mess of a community. I have attempted to sift through a tangled mass of ideas, memes, and emotions, and pull out a few strands that became thick

throughout my fieldwork. These have become chapters in their own right (censorship, nativism, women, and hockey), yet they are only a partial and incomplete story about my interlocutors.

But who *are* my interlocutors? This is a question I have been asked repeatedly throughout my research. The truth is, I do not know. This not knowing is perhaps unsettling to some anthropologists who are accustomed to seeing their participants ‘in the flesh’ and can validate identities. Yet, with digital work, it is extremely difficult to discern this sort of data. I cannot guess a person’s gender, race, cultural heritage, or age with certainty. I can, however, make educated guesses based on the sort of discourse that emerges in my field spaces, and this includes the sort of assumptions that other users make themselves. For example, the time I was called “brother” in a folk-right Gab community indexes to me that the user assumes the space is dominated by men. It is unlikely that this user had carried out a survey to justify this assumption, and instead reflects a cultural norm in that community. Similarly, when I was identified as a man in the call for participants on Reddit, this indexes another community-level assumption about male-ness. In fact, no one, ever, in the entire time I was in the field, assumed I was a woman. The closest I got to “woman” was a severely emasculated man. This says something to me about the idealized/imagined user, at least in terms of gender.

With regards to race, I would also say given the content explored, it is safe to assume many of the users were white. There were moments of explicit diversity, however. One of my interview participants identified as Asian. Others would begin their comments as “I’m an Indian immigrant” or “I’m Native,” but rather than convincing me of the diversity, it does the opposite. Why would someone feel the need to begin a discussion with “I’m X ethnicity” unless they felt it needed to be pointed out? In some instances, it was used to provide validity to a conservative talking point, which to me reflected internalized racism. Yet, there is something to this practice that feels like a need to say “I’m here too,” and again, this is because of the assumption of hegemonic whiteness. I think this process is also true for queerness, although I cannot recall a single instance of a user outing themselves in these spaces, which I think is also quite telling when it comes to the community.

The greatest diversity appeared to be around religion. There was an overwhelming sense that Canada was a Christian nation, but that again felt more like an anti-Muslim sentiment than a declaration of a user's personal practice. Some users were quite open about their atheism, which is not uncommon amongst the right-wing. A small minority were openly pagan (see Soldiers of Odin; Mack, 2021a on the folk-right), but the notion that Canada was culturally Christian was generally accepted.

Finally, a note on class, employment, and capitalism. Again, this was not something that was frequently or openly discussed. Indeed, jobs seemed to be invoked most often when people were lamenting their inability to get one, or their inability to buy a home in the city that employed them. That being said, there was a great deal of idealization around tradesmen. There was an enduring sense that real (white) men worked hard and got their hands dirty (see Chapter 9). In contrast, the liberals were effeminate office workers. Moreover, the leftists (described in the next section) were not actually a part of the "real" working class. Take, for example, this comic strip posted on r/metacanada



Figure 3. "I support the working class" post from Reddit

In the comic, a character identified as communist via his hammer and sickle shirt claims "I support the working class." In the next frame, a character identified as a working-class

conservative Christian says, “well shucks. Good to hear, friend” and stretches out his hand for a shake. He is identified as these things via the tools he is holding: his work clothes (which are stained, presumably from work because real work involves getting dirty), his pickup truck adorned with a Confederate flag, dead deer, and a shotgun, as well as the oil well in the background. He is everything I have identified here as the “idealized” and “imagined” interlocutor. In response to the outstretched hand, the communist reels back in disgust.

I found this comment tree in response to the post illuminating,

C1: I don't get it. He doesn't know how to shake hands?

C2: Leftists who claim to be speaking for the working class hate the working class and call them racists and nazis.

C3: it always makes me laugh that none of these people want to be a worker in the workers paradise they want to build.

C4: There's always going to be limitless employment for middle managers and supervisors and foremen and HR peeps in the socialist utopia. Some other guy...will...do the stuff..make things...CHINA!

C5: He doesn't want to get his hands dirty.

C6: Here's a question. When it's -20C outside, and you smell the exhaust of a diesel truck, what do you think and how does it make you feel?

While this says a lot about their perceptions of leftists, which I explore in depth below, this also says a lot about their image of themselves in contrast. The right-wing feels unfairly labeled as

“racists and nazis”⁸ simply for having conservative beliefs (the confederate flag and cross necklace). They are also the ones who “do” the work and “work hard” and “get dirty.” This evinces a narrow definition of both workers and masculinity, both of which heavily favour notions of ruggedness (see also Chapter 9 on hockey). Take for instance this comment from an interview I did after I mentioned that one of my first jobs was pushing a broom in a welding shop,

Welding is what they should teach in school instead of gender studies,. The propaganda my girlfriend gets is nonsensical at best. Like it's just words that don't make sense.

Here, the trades are also deemed as the sensible option, whereas “gender studies” and the associated feminist theory are “nonsensical at best.” My interlocutor cannot comprehend the subject material. This sort of sentiment was also encapsulated perfectly by Alberta Premier Jason Kenney’s comments about the “laptop class”,

⁸ The creator of the comic, Stonetoss, has been accused of “being a Nazi.” This was a subject brought up in the thread, to which one Redditor responded, “So?” and another noted that “Nazis are bad?”

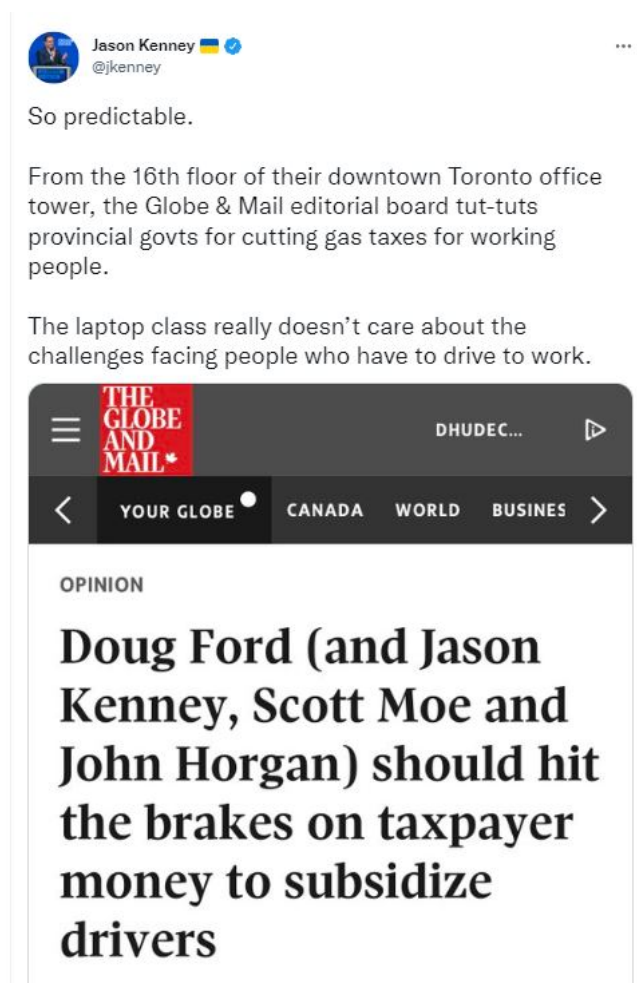


Figure 4. Screenshot of Jason Kenney's official Twitter account

Real men work hard in -20C and get dirty. Real men drive trucks to their worksite. Real men watch hockey, drink beer, and hunt. Real men do not work in downtown Toronto on laptops. Right?

However, the reality is that at least some (although I suspect many) of my interlocutors likely belonged to the so-called "laptop class" whether that be in tech, finance, management, or some other form of office work. They likely have jobs in "middle management" or HR. They likely live middle class lives. For example, in conversations around the housing prices and changing demographics in Toronto, some users suggested white people leave the "shithole city" for the prairies. Yet, other users pointed out that Toronto is where all the tech jobs are located. So, they

were stuck living their middle-class lives in a city they had come to despise doing work that looks nothing like the comic included above.

Some users were self-described students, while others spoke of their time at university. Often these conversations were negative and criticized the cultural Marxist indoctrination they had resisted. Yet, universities produce the laptop class who work in tech, finance, and management. As a result, to assume that my interlocutors are all “uneducated tradesmen”⁹ working in the Alberta oil field would be incorrect. However, they still participate in the construction of an idealized image of who they are as a collective.

This discourse about real work also conflicts somewhat with the new right’s interest in optics (Miller-Idriss, 2017; Zúquete, 2018). There is a real desire amongst some of my interlocutors to be taken seriously as conservatives and political philosophers (e.g., Jordan B. Peterson). They do not want to be lumped in with racist backwards hillbillies. And yet, there is still something appealing about this rugged masculine image of a working-class tradesman. It has become a sort of symbol, which is in opposition to the effeminate, greedy ‘globalist’ elite embodied by men like Trudeau, which I explore in greater detail below.¹⁰

There is a palpable moral component in this binary rhetoric wherein my interlocutors position themselves as morally superior because of their masculine work ethic. This is reminiscent of the Protestant work ethic which encourages the faithful to work hard in order to reach heaven with heaven being the utmost symbol of moral righteousness. As a result, a hard-working man is a morally righteous man. If my interlocutors are unable to uphold this version of work for themselves, they are able to access the moral validity by advocating for the trades and oil and gas while decrying the universities that gave them access to the jobs that pay their bills.

This leads me to capitalism, which is a thorny issue amongst my interlocutors. During a Discord conversation about whether or not r/metacanada was right-wing, one user remarked, “right wing

⁹ Referring here to the common trope that tradespeople did not finish high school let alone attend a post-secondary institution. Such tropes do ignore the different kinds of knowledge produced in the trades.

¹⁰ Ironically, Kenney is also frequently accused of being a globalist elite, or at least one of their puppets.

is basically liking capitalism at this point” yet this was not necessarily born out throughout my work. But let me begin with a simple, and likely uncontested statement from my fieldwork: Capitalism is good because communism is bad. Like Christianity, the community rallied around capitalism not necessarily because they were staunch supporters of it in its current state, but because it was useful in opposition to something they did not like, namely communism.¹¹ Some of my interlocutors held that capitalism—when done right—was effective. However, it is undermined by government subsidies for corporations. Others argued that it worked if the labour pool was not flooded with women and immigrants, which is an example of my interlocutors’ nostalgic yearnings for a bygone era when society *worked* for straight white conservative men. Many pointed out that capitalism had been completely corrupted by neoliberalism and globalism. This was always an interesting point of discussion for me as I too critique neoliberalism, albeit from a different vantage point and to different ends.

With these ideas in mind, one can begin to piece together an image of the imagined and idealized right-wing social media user. The user is assumed to be a straight white man, who is probably Christian (culturally, if not religiously), definitely conservative (although where on the spectrum is unknown), is gainfully employed (in a job that is “difficult”), and strongly supports a capitalist approach to the economy. This image *becomes* the assumed user. In reality, my interlocutors were likely much more diverse across all categories of being. But what I am trying to articulate here is that this (possible) diversity matters less than the performance of homogeneity visible in their rhetoric. There was a sort of concealment of diversity, a silencing of difference, and an *assumption* of sameness.¹²

A note on reoccurring characters (users)

¹¹ There was great ambiguity when it came to the use of communism. It was often used interchangeably with both Marxism and socialism. Also, the critiques of “communism” also reflected more strongly critiques of authoritarianism.

¹² In almost every instance where someone confessed to diverging from this idealized and assumed user, it was done to justify a conservative stance. For example, comments like “I’m native and I think...” were used to justify anti-Indigenous rhetoric during the Wet’suwet’en protests, or to invalidate the supposed “benefits” that Indigenous people received (e.g., tax breaks, subsidies).

It is not uncommon for ethnographies to feature reoccurring interlocutors who are assigned pseudonyms. This was the case for my previous graduate research where I worked closely with a small group of gamers, and I was expected to protect their gamertags and online identities (Mack, 2015). However, in this ethnography, the spaces I inhabited were so vast that I did not establish the same repeated connection with users. I did notice frequent users in some spaces, like the folk-right groups on Gab, or even in r/metacanada for certain thematic topics. Yet, outside of my interviewees, I did not sustain the long-term back and forth present in most ethnographies. In fact, when interacting, it was common for other users to respond to my comments rather than the original poster. As a result, I have not used pseudonyms for the vast majority of my interactions or observations, and instead omit naming conventions entirely.

I have also elected not to number my interlocutors, as there are only a handful of repeated users quoted here out of the hundreds of individual users in my data set. Instead, I have indicated the platform the user occupied (e.g., “Reddit user”). In instances where greater specificity is needed, I have included the specific forum or group (e.g., r/metacanada). I have identified explicitly when quotes are derived from my interviews.

In the case of quotes with multiple commenters, I have used a C1, C2, C3 style system to show when new users enter the conversation, and when previous users comment again. However, this does not mean that “C2” in one chapter is the same user as a “C2” in another one. Rather the naming convention is limited to the discussion of the conversation. This system is visually structured to mirror the comment and reply style of Reddit, which was the primary field site for much of my work. This system looks as follows,

C1: Makes a statement about the topic introduced in the post

C2: Responds to C1’s comment

C3: Responds to C2’s response

C4: Also responds to C1’s comment (note that this is not a response to C3)

C5: Also responds to C1's comment (note that this is not a response to C3)

C1: Original commenter responds to C5's response (note that this is not a response to C2, C3, or C4)

This creates a multilinear conversation with multiple discussions nested under one original comment. Some lines become lengthy back-and-forth-style conversations between two people, while others involve multiple users. Some lines do not move beyond C1 or C2. I have only included the conversation tree where the back and forth is necessary to understand the context of a comment or the back and forth reveals more about the community than a single quote alone. In cases where a quotation is provided without a corresponding "(platform user)" the comment is a portrait paraphrase meant to capture often used language or sayings that are not attributed to a unique user but the community in general.

The So-Called Others

It is possible that my construction of the imagined and idealized user, not unlike the idealized Canadian that features prominently in this dissertation, leaves me open to criticism of making up a caricature of my interlocutors. However, I would argue in response that this is an idealized and imagined user that is upheld by the community itself based on the assumptions they make in their comments. I might be the one who dreams up this portrait, but it is not just my own imaginings that have contributed to it. Further, my interlocutors are also skilled portrait makers in their own right, and it is to these portraits of the "Others" that I turn next.

This work, like most studies involving nativism, populism, or nationalism in general, includes a great deal of discussion around inclusion and exclusion. Who belongs in the in-group? Who is excluded and pushed into the out-group? Who is the 'we' or the 'us,' and who is the 'them'? I come to this notion via the oft-cited and wildly influential *Orientalism* by Edward Said (1978), and the notion that the Orient and the Occident co-construct one another, and that descriptions and discussions of the Orient tell readers more about the Occident, has stayed with me. I

remember distinctly during my undergraduate ‘intro to Islam’ course, my professor created a chart with all the orientalist descriptions of the Middle East from a recent publication. The assignment was to think about what these descriptors imply about the West. If the Middle East is XYZ, what, then, is the West?

This is, of course, a simplification of a complex theory (and indeed a life’s work) that now spans an incredible body of scholarship. Yet, I think there is something useful in thinking through what is implied when my interlocutors say, “leftists are lazy bottom feeders.” And so, what I present here is an assemblage of ideas and comments about frequent ‘characters’ in my dissertation. This work will not only make reading the subsequent chapters easier, but it will prime my readers for my analysis.

Feminists & Leftists

Let me start with the portrait of a woman like me: A feminist and a Marxist. I say “like me” because as with most of this dissertation, the issues stem not from actual people (that is to say actual immigrants, actual Muslims, or actual women) but the imagined assemblages that come to stand for them. They are stereotypes, caricatures, and scapegoats. They (we?) become useful rhetorical symbols in my interlocutors’ arguments.

So, what does a feminist look like?

↑ 37 ↓
r/metacanada · Posted by u/RoutineSeat22 Metacanian 2 hours ago
Presenting The Angry, White, Feminist Female Faces... of Black Lives Matter - Vancouver BC

youtube.com/watch?...

TRIGGERED



17 Comments Give Award Share Save Hide Report

96% Upvoted

Figure 5. Screenshot of Reddit post entitled “Presenting The Angry, White, Feminist Female Faces... of Black Lives Matter – Vancouver BC” with an image of women protesting

This post is a good starting point. The women here, participants in a Black Lives Matter protests, are described as angry, which is not a new sentiment. Yet, the comments on the Reddit post are illuminating,

“Feminazis are always such gross looking people.”

“Lmao yeah they’re just angry cuz no one is grabbing them by their pussies.”

“These bitches really mean black dick matters.”

“White women are the most privileged and pampered group of all people history.”

“Glad these people don’t make babies.”

Feminists are angry, ugly, unable to find sexual partners—probably because they are angry and ugly—they are race traitors and race mixers, privileged, and unlikely to have children. They are the exact opposite of what a good white woman is supposed to be, namely submissive, family oriented, and caretakers for whiteness. In a conversation about leftist men, which I participated in, one Reddit user remarked,

When the women around your age that you hang out with are all corrupted feminists that don’t need no man, hate men and perpetuate a cancel culture of anti-men hatred that refuses to ever frame anything from a man’s perspective such that these leftist men can never truly be happy, it’s not surprising many are pedophiles. Young girls are easier for these leftist men to be themselves around and these young girls haven’t learned to hate men yet so these women actually seem attractive.

I would be willing to bet that most aren’t actually pedophiles but they don’t know where else to turn to find attractive women because leftist women are wholly unattractive man haters. Realistically, if these leftists embraced religion, developed good moral virtues for themselves and hung around quality women their age they probably wouldn’t be obsessed with young girls.

Again, feminists are man-hating, angry, and “wholly unattractive.” They (we) are women of low quality. In contrast, the same user noted that “right-wing women, even thirty year old ones, do still know how to love men” and are of higher quality.¹³ This quote also says a lot about leftist men.¹⁴ It paints a picture of sexually and emotionally unsatisfied men, whose lives are ruined by

¹³ Also, note the age expectations for relationships. Feminists in their thirties are “too late” when it comes to having a loving family, but for right-wing women they are still capable, apparently. As Marxist feminist in her early thirties, I have to say this was the most amusing exchange in my entire project.

¹⁴ Generally, women were described as feminists (the shrill harpy variety) while men were described as Leftists (the estrogen poisoned variety).

feminist women. This sort of rhetoric also indicates that leftist men are also, supposedly, atheist (embrace religion) and immoral (develop good morals).

It also paints them as sexually deviant, which is again immoral. This linkage between leftists and pedophilia has two connections in my work. The first is the child sex ring conspiracies that emerged during Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign known as Pizzagate (see Bleakley, 2021; Cosentino, 2020). The second is the long-standing and harmful trope that queer people, and in particular gay men, are child abusers. This rhetoric has re-emerged strongly in the US as states consider anti-LGBTQ legislation including the "Don't Say Gay" bill in Florida (The Associated Press, 2022). The rhetoric that has emboldened these law makers in the US is also prevalent amongst right-wing social media users.

Leftists are also lazy. As I noted above and explore in more detail in my chapter on hockey, there was a sense amongst my interlocutors that those on the right "worked hard, played hard" and there was a sense of moral superiority in this rhetoric. They contributed to society via their hard-earned tax dollars—the collection of which some saw as theft rather than a contribution towards society. In contrast, the left were "bottom feeders" who, because they went to university and got "useless fine arts degrees" or pursued the "soft sciences" like the humanities and social sciences, relied on government subsidies. Real men did not need these handouts, nor did they want them,

I wanted to work as a teenager, there's no jobs, nobody wants to work, cause being on welfare pays 150\$ less than minimum wage, pays you to have kids and be a burden on society and i didn't want that. So I moved out to Alberta and it's a land where there is always "something more"

Lived in NS,NB,SK,AB.

Worked in the NWT for a year

This is home, and it's a place where everyone has a chance if your willing to work for it (Reddit user).

This rhetoric about leftists was dominant during the pandemic when the federal government provided subsidies to those who lost employment.¹⁵ Here, my interlocutors once again rely on the Protestant work ethic-derived moral superiority. “I wanted to work” is a claim to moral superiority. Those who do not want to work, including those my interlocutors assume must not want to work because they got fine arts degrees, are morally inferior. This inferiority comes with a sort of emasculation, and the notion of an emasculated leftist man is a reoccurring trope,

For a long time, Sweden looked smart, prosperous, peaceful. Which they were. Somehow they lost their minds, imported 100 thousand of the worst degenerates and scum from the muslim world. And now allow them to rape and pillage their country with impunity. SWEDEN GETTING WHAT IT DESERVES. The men have all apparently been estrogen poisoned and the women ... well they may actually like being raped by those manly, swarthy imports who are perpetually horny (Gab user).

This quote has stuck with me over the years, and I have returned to it repeatedly during this writing process. It stuck with me in part because of the content, which I will turn to next, but also because much of the discourse I was interested in was going on without my intervention. Rarely did I have to prod at users to disclose their perspectives on immigrants, leftist, or feminists; rather, these spaces invited them to do so without me. This discourse will continue long after I have left the field.

Now, to return to the content of the comment. This quote shows a contradictory position about feminists. Are they the ugly women who cannot find a willing partner? Or are they the sexually promiscuous race-mixers? Another reoccurring theme about leftist men is evident here, namely that they were somehow emasculated (see Živković, 2006). Here, they are “estrogen poisoned,” meaning controlled by women. Elsewhere they are referred to as “betas” and “simps” for this submissive behaviour. They are “pussies,” “libtards,”¹⁶ incapable of debate, and pro-censorship.

¹⁵ Conversations around EI and other subsidies used by tradesmen during economic down turns, however, were never had during my fieldwork.

¹⁶ A combination of the word liberal and the derogatory term r*tard.

These values are also bound up in the frequently deployed “social justice warrior,” or SJW, label. According to Massanari and Chess (2018), a SJW is a “humorless shrill who takes pleasure in demonstrating their superiority by policing the behavior of others” (p. 526). However, SJW are understood to be illegitimate censors (see Chapter 6).

Another exemplary quote, which I think sums up how the categories of feminist and leftist are held together comes from Reddit,

He wasn't wrong. Go be gay in some other country. I'm sick of you little pussies ruining Canada. I'm not sure if you're some pencil neck centrist or an immigrant but either way fix your female brain.

Here, the leftist man¹⁷ was deemed effeminate and queer, the opposite of a right-wing man who is straight and masculine (Green, 2019). It is also interesting to note here that the user felt that the effeminate left has political and social control over the country, something they feel entitled to themselves and are aggrieved when denied. The last line, about being unsure if the person is a leftist or immigrant, also evinces the common theme that the two were almost indiscernible in their politics, behaviour, and rhetoric. Leftists are rendered “cucks” for immigrants who will put their own survival as white people at risk in order to be seen as “woke.” Further, there is an attack on the leftist’s intelligence. Their brain is “female” and therefore inferior. This trope of leftists as “idiots” plays into the “cultural myth of dupes who unwittingly further communist plots, a common tactic for othering protest during the Cold War” (Green, 2019, p. 83).

In sum, feminists are angry, man-hating, ugly, and “unfuckable” women, yet somehow also promiscuous race-traitor sluts. Leftists are effeminate, deviant, lazy, and immoral men. Both were accused of advocating for anti-white and anti-men policies like high levels of immigration and refugee resettlement. Feminists and leftists become catch-all symbols for everything my interlocutors despised about society and everything they wanted to distance themselves from.

¹⁷ Assumed to be a man by all parties

Before I turn to the next category of ‘others’ I want to highlight a thread that emerged as part of this caricature work. During the writing process, I solicited feedback from my mentors and colleagues on this chapter. Did these categories make sense? Were the characters clear in your mind? Were they cohesive? One of the most frequent responses revealed a gendered division between leftist and feminist. “Are the leftists men and feminists women?” they asked. I sat back in my chair and thought about this for a moment. There were instances where men were referred to as feminists, but it was usually with a qualified (e.g., “feminist simp,” feminist soyboy,” and “male feminist”) that seemed to emphasize the gender and the emasculation of the target. I cannot think of a single instance when a woman was referred to as a leftist, although that could be a function of my data collection practices. Green’s (2019) work on the alt-right’s treatment of leftists is interesting to note here, however. He argues that,

By opposing the racist and misogynist discourse of the extreme right, the non-conforming straight white man can no longer be seen as a friend. But he can also not be positioned as an enemy, or other, for to do so would call into question the ontology of binaries that define insiders and outsiders. Instead, following Bauman (2007), he becomes a stranger, fitting no category... While the presence of the enemy provides a focal point for group unification and reifies the division between insider and outsider, the stranger creates anxiety through questioning the hegemony of white masculinity (p. 81).

Perhaps the category of leftist serves to give shape to the “stranger” who threatens white male hegemony and challenges the binaries set up by the right. This is certainly something future scholarship should attend to.

Immigrants

As my interlocutors spanned the political spectrum, immigrants as used here is an unevenly deployed term. Unlike feminist, Marxist, leftists, and communist, which were almost universally used a pejorative, the term “immigrant” was used strategically and even with caution. This points to Mondon and Winter’s (2020) assertion that the right-wing is cognizant of accusations of racism, and so they pivot their language to talk about culture and assimilation (see Chapter 2).

Will the immigrants “fit” in with Canadian culture? Will they adopt “our” customs? Will they try to change things? These questions are permissible, even in public, in Canada.

Yet, I think it is still fair to ask, “when they talk about immigrants, who are they referring to?”

In general, the term was used emically to refer to immigrants who are visibly marked by race, ethnicity, religion, language, and custom as something that deviates from the idealized white, English-speaking, Christian norm. While my interlocutors occasionally discussed white immigrants from European and Christian countries, these conversations often centered around the white immigrant’s perceived ability to assimilate due to the shared European traditions. Instances where white European immigrants were critiqued along the same lines as their Black, Brown, and Asian counterparts were rare. Importantly, these were not the immigrants invoked when my interlocutors discussed the unfair economic advantages given to immigrants (Chapter 7), nor were they the ones referred to in discussions of sexual assault (Chapter 8). White European immigrants were not perceived of as a threat to the cultural or ethnic legacy of Canada (Chapter 9).

This portrait, or rather caricature, also encompassed the children, and even grandchildren of immigrants, who are still identifiable via race, ethnicity, and religion. Canadians of Middle Eastern, Asian, or African descent were still included in discussions of immigrants in a way that my family, descendants of German immigrants, are not. These people were visibly marked as something “other” whereas my family moves through the country *unmarked*.

The discourse about immigrants varies depending on the other categories at play, namely race and religion. As I explore in my chapter on women, Muslim men were often portrayed as sexual threats to white women. Discussions of crime in Toronto played on longstanding tropes about Black violence and crime (J. Daniels, 1997), as immigrants from Somalia and Sudan were targeted. Those who were Black as well as Muslim faced a double burden. In contrast, Chinese immigrants were often seen as contributing to the housing crisis in Vancouver, which evinced the intersection of race and class, as well as my interlocutors’ entitlement to land (see Chapters 2 and 7). Discussions of Asian violence in urban centers were also common. During the Covid-19

pandemic, anti-Chinese rhetoric shifted towards discussions of disloyalty to Canada reminiscent of the Red Scare. This was exemplified by the commentary around Dr. Theresa Tam as a Chinese communist plant, and the anti-communist discourse was amplified by the government subsidies provided during the height of protective measures (see Conclusion).

It is important to note that this portrait of immigrants is built on longstanding tropes about undesirable outsiders. Historically, they have been seen as job stealers, welfare seekers, violent, prone to crime, and incapable of assimilation (Cohen, 2002; J. Daniels, 1997; Frayling, 2014; Schrag, 2010). They were seen as dirty, sources of contamination, and generally of inferior stock. As I discuss in my chapter on nativism, the undesirable has shifted throughout Canadian history. Eastern Europeans were in the early years considered unassimilable into the predominantly “Anglo-Saxon” culture. They were begrudgingly admitted during the settling of the prairies because they served an economic purpose. Of course, immigrants of colour and non-Christian faiths have always faced barriers when it came to immigrating to Canada, which I explore in greater detail in Chapter 7 on nativism.

While I argue that the term immigrant is primarily used as a pejorative and to make sense of the unwanted changes in their lives, some of my interlocutors saw immigration as a necessary part of the Canadian economy. This, again, shows the inconsistency of ideologies within the community. A reader might ask, “well, if this is a dissertation about anti-immigrant rhetoric, how can you include a community that is not always anti-immigration?” This is a fair question. In response, I would argue that this inconsistency holds up other beliefs within the community. Take for instance this comment from a Reddit user I interviewed,

I used to be 100% against immigration, but now I see how most of this generation back home [Nova Scotia] is addicted to speed, and won't work because welfare pays more so now I see why we let in so many.

This individual sees the merit that Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) have for the Canadian economy even as he laments that “so many” are “let in.” However, he couches this position in language that suggests *some* Canadians are lazy and morally suspect. As I have articulated

above, this is typically directed at leftists. This is why it is important to recognize that my fieldwork is a network of spaces, people, and *ideas*. There are disconnects within this network, which I call contradictions. How my interlocutors navigate these contradictions is worth exploring as this illuminates the complexity of the community. As a result, some of my interlocutors are in these spaces because the anti-immigrant rhetoric drew them in while others may be there because of their anti-feminist or anti-leftist perspectives.

Globalists

As I note above, my interlocutors have a complicated relationship with capitalism. Those who critique neoliberalism often invoked “globalism” and the “globalists.” Let me begin with a comment on globalism versus globalization:

It is useful to distinguish between *globalism* – a political ideology that endows globalization with certain norms, values, and meanings – and *globalization* – a multidimensional set of social processes that extend and intensify social connections across the globe (Steger, 2012, p. 1).

What this means is that when I say, “social media facilitates globalization” and my interlocutors say “Reddit is full of globalists” we are referring to two different things. They do not mean the Reddit is full of people who want to intensify social connections.

Steger (2012), notes that there are three types of globalism, namely justice, religious, and market globalism. These represent a shift from the national imaginary to a global one. For example, conversations shift from national social inequalities to the global systems that structure and produce social inequalities across the globe (e.g., capitalism, white supremacy, colonialism). The UN’s declarations concerning human rights and Indigenous rights, as well as the World Health Organization, would also be seen as part of justice globalism. European colonialism could likewise be seen as an early example of religious globalism, while my interlocutors are concerned with the rise of Islamic and secular globalisms. Market globalism, then, refers to the

increasingly global nature of our economic systems (e.g., the World Economic Forum, UN sanctions).

So, how did my interlocutors conceptualize globalists? The term is meant to refer to a group of people who facilitate international changes and events throughout the world. They have financial, social, and political power, and they are the people who reshape the national imaginary into a global one. Certainly, there are very powerful people in this world who do have a disproportionate amount of power. However, there are two important nuances to how this term is used in my fieldwork: 1) the belief that globalists are working against the interests of the nation, and specifically against white and Western nations; 2) a belief in a global collective of very powerful people that has roots in anti-Semitic beliefs in which Jewish elites were working towards the destruction of the white race (American Jewish Committee, n.d.). Because the network of people, places, and ideas I study includes those that are explicitly anti-Semitic, this connection cannot be overlooked. This was also evinced by the use of (((globalists))) and (((elites))) where the triple brackets are used to connote Jews. I did, however, have conversations with people during the “Freedom Convoy” who denied this connection. They argued that this term was meant to identify the political and economic elites—of all races, religions, and nationalities—that were undermining sovereignty.

This contradiction with regards to the anti-Semitic roots of the term is further exacerbated by the fact that not all globalists are Jewish. In fact, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Albertan Premier Jason Kenney were the two most frequently cited globalists (and globalist ‘puppets’) in my research. Consider these examples,

“Both the LPC and CPC are globalist parties. That’s not a surprise. Neocons and neolib are the same thing” (Reddit comment).

“Sheeple Scheer is nothing but a globalist traitor to Canadians” (YouTube comment).

“Personally I don’t think Canada will survive as a sovereign country under another 4 years of Globalist rule. The UN already dictates the way we are governed. When the

entire HoC, but ONE, is Globalist it's game over... unless @peoplespca" (Twitter comment).

Or take this recent tweet from Derek Sloan, who had aspirations for federal conservative leadership, but was expelled from the party after it was revealed he had financial connections to white supremacists (Levitz, 2021).



Figure 6. Tweet from Derek Sloan's twitter account (April 14, 2022)

What this implies is that Canadian politicians across the political spectrum have been corrupted or tainted by the globalists who do not have the best interest of Canadians in mind. With this corruption comes a corresponding sense of emasculation, and this is most evident with the term "globalist cuck." A cuck is derived from the word 'cuckold' which refers to a man who lets other men sleep with his wife or girlfriend, and who may get sexual pleasure from this infidelity.¹⁸

¹⁸ See Merriam-Webster for a definition: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cuckold?utm_campaign=sd&utm_medium=serp&utm_source=jsonld

This is, according to my interlocutors, a decidedly unmanly thing to do. After all, what kind of real man would let another man do such a thing to his partner?¹⁹ Such a man lacks confidence and self-respect. Moreover, it implies that the woman has some sort of control over him in that he cannot stop her infidelity, which is further emasculating.

So, what does it mean to combine globalist and cuck? To employ the original definition regarding sexual relations, a globalist cuck is a person with social, economic, or political power (the man) who allows globalists (the other man) to “fuck” Canada and Canadians (the wife or girlfriend). Thus, a “globalist cuck” is a man who is too spineless to stand up to his “globalist masters.”²⁰ That is, they allow an antagonistic actor to harm the nation rendering them traitors who are not manly enough to stop it. Or, more disturbingly, they experience pleasure in watching the globalists harm Canadians. Further, the cuck displays a willingness to bow to the will of the wife, which in this case is the feminists and leftists in Canada.²¹ A similar word was “cuckservatives,” which combines cuck and conservative to refer to politicians like Jason Kenney and Andrew Scheer who would, like the globalist cuck, not stand up for right-wing Canadians in the face of globalist, feminist, and leftist threats. It was similarly used to emasculate the men.

Now let me return to the notion of a globalist and the theme of globalists “fucking” Canada. It is important to note that a globalist is understood to be working towards the extinction of the white race and sovereignty. As a result, when my interlocutors speak about how Canada is “cucked and fucked” because of globalists, there is an implicit notion that it is white conservative males in particular who are fucked.²² This also partly explains why the ultra-wealthy American oligarchs are not implicated in globalist schemes (e.g., Elon Musk). They are still seen as on the side of

¹⁹ The concept of consensual non-monogamy is entirely absent in this discussion given the right-wing’s repeated preference for monogamy—at least on the part of women. Some men’s rights groups advocated for non-monogamy for men who are “biologically wired” for multiple partners. My interlocutors often pointed to the role of the church in curbing this supposed biological and evolutionary process.

²⁰ I have never seen the term used to describe a woman, nor do I think it would make sense to do so given the context and definition.

²¹ See discussion of hockey commentator Ron MacLean in Chapter ** for examples of how feminists and leftists are understood as the controlling wives and girlfriends in a Canadian context.

²² Again, not all of my interlocutors were explicitly white nationalist in their discourse. I do, however, think it is a fair statement to say that the majority of users were not primarily concerned with the plight of Black, Brown, Indigenous and Asian Canadians.

white people, whereas the globalists and their puppets are decidedly antagonistic. This belief is particularly evident in discussions of immigration:

This is the problem with mass immigration. You lose your common culture, common history, common purpose, and eventually, because no one has anything in common worth preserving or fighting for, you lose your country. Globalists use NGOs and cultural Marxist philosophies like Critical Theory to erode national identity until the highest shared purpose of society is survival as consumers running the rat race (Reddit user).

Here, this Reddit user explicitly tied “mass immigration” to the destruction of Canada. The trope that immigration is a globalist ‘plot’ was a recurring theme in my work. The basic argument was that if the globalists could “flood” Western countries with non-white and non-Christian immigrants, encourage these immigrants to have more babies than the white population, and allow for increased religious representation, the basic foundation of white society would crumble and white people themselves would disappear. Globalists are certainly economic actors as evinced by my interlocutor’s criticism of neoliberalism, but they are also cultural and social actors. Globalists are responsible for the increase in “race-mixing” and “LGBTQ shit” in media (see Chapter 9), both of which are seen as threats to the imagined and idealized Canadian nation state. More specifically, globalists push this discourse as a means of disempowering straight, white, conservative, and Christian men.

In sum, globalists are the shadowy, nebulous group of political and economic elites. Historically, these elites have been conceived of as Jewish, while contemporary globalists can also be non-Jewish politicians who have been corrupted and convinced to betray their nations, or simply cucked. These globalists undermine Canadian sovereignty and whiteness through economic, social, and cultural means with the purpose of destroying Canada and the white men who inhabit the nation.

[Imagined threats and how they manifest](#)

The final item I want to introduce here is not a person or a place, but rather a narrative tool that my interlocutors have made great use of, and to which I refer repeatedly in this dissertation. This is the imagined threat, which I also refer to as the anticipated transgression. The inspiration for this framing comes from Daniels (1997) in her work on race, gender, and class. She argued that for white supremacists, it was not the actual threat of Black violence in a specific moment that incited white supremacist rhetoric and action, but rather the imagined threat of it.

This dissertation is a story of these imagined threats and anticipated transgressions. It is a story about the anxiety and uncertainty my interlocutors experience when faced with changes both in terms of demographics and their entitlement. It is a story about anticipated loss.

I too experience anxiety when thinking about the changes in my country. Yet, our imagined threats and anticipated transgressions are different. The characters—or perhaps caricatures—in our stories are also different. My goal in this dissertation is to unpack why my interlocutors see threats and transgressions, how they imagine and anticipate them, and the sort of world they imagine Canada to be now and in the future. It is to explore the fuzzy line between real experiences of victimhood, those that are imagined, and those that are expected to become real. These stories are conflicting and complicated, but they are also worth unpacking if we hope to move forward as a nation.

To this end, I have structured my dissertation in two parts. The first includes the sort of chapters one might expect to find in a dissertation: theory, methods, field sites, and fieldwork chapters. In my theoretical chapter, I “think-through” the scholars who I am now “thinking-with” in this work. In this process, I resist an overarching grand theory in favour of a patchwork approach that responds to the data and material I have amassed. In my methods chapter, I work through what it means to “do” ethnography, and how this is shaped, altered, and affirmed in a digital context. This digital context is what I tackle in my field sites chapter as I attempt to explain for the uninitiated how social media became my field sites, what it felt like to explore these spaces, and how they shaped the communities I was interested in. The final chapter in Part One is an exploration of what fieldwork means for anthropologists, and how my work challenged assumptions of this work even as it sought validity through them. These chapters in many ways

parallel Part Two in that they tell the story of my anxiety, uncertainty, and hostility towards my place within the shifting and changing discipline of anthropology. It is a space for me to work through what I have imagined about the field, what I have experienced through fieldwork, and what I anticipate might come.

Part Two, then, is about my interlocutors' fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. In chapter six, I explore my interlocutors' perceptions of censorship and silencing. I ask, what are the imagined threats? Who are the anticipated transgressors evinced by their folk theories? In chapter seven, I turn my attention to the city as a site and symbol of demographic change. Using a nativist meme as a guiding frame, I delve into my interlocutors' feelings of dislocation, alienation, and resentment. In chapter seven, I work to unpack my interlocutors' conflicting feelings about women, particularly white women. Divided into two parts, this chapter investigates how white women are simultaneously a precious resource to be protected from immigrant men and traitorous feminist sluts to be discarded and abandoned. In my final chapter of Part Two, I try to find a space of common curiosity with my interlocutors through the vehicle of hockey, which is arguably an important site of national pride and identity. I ask, when my interlocutors talk about hockey, what are they saying about women and immigrants?

I conclude this dissertation with two final chapters. The first is a discussion in lieu of a conclusion as this work is on-going. I ground this discussion in the so-called Freedom Convoy that gripped the nation in early 2022, and I use it as a way of locating global conversations about the far-right, like those I opened this chapter with, in the Canadian context. The convoy was a chaotic and contradictory culmination of everything I have discussed in this dissertation. It is also an opportunity to explore what my work tells me about the messiness of being human, and why this is an important area of anthropological inquiry. The final chapter of this dissertation is an epilogue of sorts. It is a collection of short essays that emerged out of the writing process. They are reflections that did not fit comfortably in the previous chapters but are worth highlighting, nonetheless. They include cathartic writings on the impossibility of this work and the inherent bruising that those of us who do this work inevitably sustain. I provide them here in part as a sort of therapy for me, as well as a gentle warning for those who might wish to travel a similar path.

I want to end this introduction with a note that the data in this dissertation is violently racist, sexist, homophobic, Islamophobic, and anti-Semitic.

Please take care during your reading,

Amy

Chapter 2 - Thinking-Through, Thinking-With

I have never been particularly drawn to theory as an area of expertise. Rather, I have focused on methodological and ethical issues. I have typically taken the approach that if I go out into the world, do good work (methodologically speaking) in a good way (ethically speaking), the theoretical musings will sort themselves out after the fact (in a good way). I suppose this is why when pressed on what drives my analytical work, I prefer to fall back on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). The cyclical nature of research and coding makes sense to me as it allows ideas to come to the surface in interesting and unexpected ways. I like the idea of seeing what sort of themes emerge as I reflect on my data in the moment, at the end of the day, after a few weeks or months have passed, and when the project has (mostly) concluded. I like the cyclical approach of coding, re-coding, tossing codes out the window, and then retrieving those codes later when it turns out they were interesting lines of inquiry after all. It is an unruly sort of process, one that requires careful and thorough note taking, but it works. However, this process is slow, and it takes time to figure out what scholars and theoretical frameworks help me to better understand these themes.

Early on during my writing, one of my mentors asked me, “what is the thing that holds your dissertation together?” She is, unlike myself, a self-professed theory person and was prodding me to think more critically about the theoretical underpinning for the dissertation as a whole. I had dabbled with theories up until this point with white supremacy, male supremacy, globalization (via Appadurai, 2006), populism (Taggart, 2000), the white nation fantasy (Hage, 2000) and male victimhood ideology (Berbrier, 2000) among them. But nothing had, up until that point, woven tightly the pieces of my dissertation. Each chapter draft relied heavily on one, maybe two, of the theories, and it felt as though they spoke weakly to one another. Now that it has been many months since I have (mostly) left the field, I can see how those codes, themes, and theoretical frameworks I dabbled with have come together with the thread of *entitlement*.

What I hope my readers take away from this process is an understanding that my interlocutors are frustrated and anxious with the material realities they face. This is not particularly surprising to me in part because I suspect there are few individuals in Canada at this moment who can say

they feel entirely secure and hopeful for the future of our nation and the world in general given the global pandemic, financial precarity, and looming climate crisis. I too feel entitled to having my basic needs met, which includes having a home, food in my fridge, and a family should I choose to have one. In a nation as affluent as Canada, why should people be without food, clean water, adequate shelter, and the ability to build families and communities?

Yet, there is something different about how my interlocutors express their frustration. I would like to propose two differences, which I highlight throughout this chapter and the rest of my dissertation. I bring about these differences not in an attempt at virtue signaling, but rather because these differences lead to the interesting questions I address in this dissertation.

The first difference is the recipient of their anger and the cause of their aggrievement, which are often the same nebulous group. As Kate Manne (2019) argues in her discussion of aggrieved male entitlement, it is women who refuse men what they (men) feel entitled to, and it is also women who face the violent repercussions of this refusal. So, the question for my research is “who stands in the way of my interlocutors in accessing what they are entitled to?”

Luckily, my interlocutors have been fairly clear and consistent with identifying those who they feel stand in their way and who qualify as targets for their violent rhetoric. My interlocutors spent a great deal of time squabbling over which minority groups received the most supposedly undeserved benefits. Was it women (including white women)? Men of colour? Muslims? Indigenous people? Queer folks? The unemployed? While the order was never firmly determined, what was clear to my interlocutors was that people who were white, male, Christian, straight and conservative were more likely to be at the bottom of the list, especially if a person was more than one of those categories of identity. Ironically, my interlocutors were working through intersectionality in a distorted sort of way despite their hatred of the framework. In doing so, they index that as straight, white, Christian, and conservative men, they are actually the most victimized because they receive the least handouts (e.g., child support), are less likely to receive job offers (e.g., affirmative action), and are most likely to be censored (e.g., social media). Yet, this perceived victimhood (Berbrier, 2000) is infuriating (to them) when held in tandem with their firm belief that they are the most entitled to power.

In my nativism chapter (Chapter 7), I demonstrate how immigrants, especially those who are also Muslim and Black, are blamed for the perceived decline of urban centers as well as the housing crisis. In my chapter on women (Chapter 8), I demonstrate how women are purportedly responsible for the declining birth rate of white babies and the disempowerment of white men due to feminism. In my chapter on censorship (Chapter 6), I demonstrate how the right feels silenced by leftists and mainstream media, which reduces their perceived political power and agency. These groups are responsible for disrupting my interlocutors' narratives for themselves and Canada.

This aggrievement shown by my interlocutors—the overt anger and even rage—is worth examining. After all, not everyone who feels shortchanged in this country takes up xenophobic and misogynistic rhetoric in their quest for what they are owed, and not everyone lays the blame at the feet of women and immigrants. It is also important to examine as these emotions, whether or not they are valid, cannot be cleaved off from the very real harm these ideologies impart on others when put into action both on- and offline. It is also important to note here that despite the victimhood narratives, the social, political, and economic power in this country still overwhelmingly resides in the hands of straight, white, Christian and/or conservative men with white women coming a close second (Daniels, 1997).

Thus, the entitlement turns into aggrieved entitlement wherein the individual is denied what they feel they are rightly owed. This explains the source and target of the aggrievement, but let us zoom out even further and ask, “what of the source of the entitlement itself?” This brings me to the second difference, which is the underlying logic of why we feel entitled to certain rights and privileges as Canadians in the first place. My sense of entitlement is based on global justice philosophies of basic human rights. But what is the root of entitlement for my interlocutors?

And so, for the remainder of this chapter, I turn to what entitlement looks like within my ethnographic context, as well as how it relies on the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy to function (hooks, 1995). In doing so, I connect this entitlement to white supremacy (and nativism, racism, and colonialism), male supremacism (and masculinity and violence), as well as economic

anxiety. These structures are simultaneously the sources of their entitlement and the causes for their aggrievement. I posit, somewhat despairingly, that the entitlement-derived violence will not cease until these systems of oppression are dismantled.

A note before thinking further

Before I turn to what I have come to see as a ‘thinking-through’ approach to theory, I want to begin with a note on my ideological position. The white supremacist capitalist (cis)hetero patriarchy, a term I borrow from hooks (1995), is the multi-faceted framework of oppression through which I see and interpret my entire world, and it is the framework I use to understand my interlocutors and their discourse. Ultimately, it is from the white supremacist cis)hetero capitalist patriarchy that my interlocutors derive their entitlement. Importantly, this framework is a lens I simply cannot remove in the aim of some sort of distanced objectivity or in the interest of privileging one antagonism or oppression to the exclusion of others (see Bhambra, 2017 for a discussion of class analyses that lack crucial attention to race). My framework combines colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism in a way that I find particularly useful. It allows me to see my data and experiences as emergent out of an interlocking system of oppression and power and to highlight or bring forward one aspect without disregarding the others. It illuminates why my interlocutors can, at times, seem contradictory. For example, why do they often disregard white women who have historically been crucial supporters of white nationalist movements (Belew, 2018; Blee, 2003)? Why do they disregard men of colour who engage in acts of misogynistic violence, and particularly misogynoir (Onuoha, 2021) and the fetishization of Asian women? Importantly, under what conditions are these groups invited into the in-group dominated by straight white men, and how is this related to the notion of entitlement?

White Supremacy, Racism, and Nativist Entitlement

“Are you just trying to do a project where you call us all a bunch of racists?”

This was a question I was asked by the moderators of one of my field sites when I approached them for permission to interview members of the site. It was a fair one, and one that I fully

expected. It was also something I had considered throughout my work. What *was* the point of this project? I knew the point was not to paint all my interlocutors with the same brush and call them all a bunch of racists. It would be analytically inadequate to simply state that each and every interlocutor was “basically a Nazi” and, frankly, that would make for a very boring albeit quickly-written dissertation. Yet, some of my interlocutors *did* say things that were overtly racist and white supremacist, just as they said things that were violently misogynistic. One cannot call someone a sand n-word or a cumdumpster and then decry accusations of racism and misogyny. Moreover, those who did not actively participate in fascist rhetoric were not outspoken in their desire to censor said discourse. On mainstream sites like Reddit, it was silently permitted or met with a note that such “edgy” rhetoric could bring about the site moderators and get the users or community banned. In other words, they were more concerned with censorship than the real harm such language can and does inflict. On Gab, this discourse was often encouraged. Some of my interlocutors were proud of their illiberal stance and used the labels themselves; they *were* white supremacists, ethno-nationalists, Red pillers, Black pillers, and “men going their own way” without women. However, many framed this not as an ideology grounded in hatred of other races, but rather a love and preference for their own race and gender, which is a thread I pick up later in this chapter.

What I am trying to impress upon my reader here is the idea that while my interlocutors were politically complex and diverse, these spaces were inextricably linked with white supremacist thinking. It was not actively resisted and so it was permitted to exist. This is not surprising, not because I assumed all my interlocutors would be white supremacists, but rather because I understand the entire nation state of Canada to function within a white supremacist and settler colonial system (as well as one that is also a capitalist patriarchy).

There are a number of theoretical frames that I am knitting together here to make sense of what my interlocutors are saying, as well as why they are saying them at this point in time. It would be easy to blame much of the rhetoric on former US President Donald Trump and the way the alt-right formed and mobilized around him during his campaign (Hawley, 2017). However, this is not only simplistic, but it also ignores the ways in which our current state of affairs has been building for decades. It ignores much of the violence enacted on people of colour, Muslims,

women, and queer folks (and particularly those who are marginalized in multiple ways). It ignores the historic legacy of colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy as oppressive structures that organize nation states like Canada.

The aim of this project is to tease out the contradictory and complex nature of anti-immigrant racism (and anti-feminist misogyny, but more on that in another section) and how white supremacy and other antagonisms are interwoven into a complex process that produces a particular kind of anti-immigrant sentiment in Canada that is rooted in entitlement. Thus, it is perhaps important to begin with a discussion of what I mean by white supremacy, as well as nativism and racism. These terms have a rich and contested history within the academic canon, and I rely on them throughout my dissertation. As a result, I see this section as a precursor to my more data-heavy sections that frames and guides my analysis.

White Supremacy

One of the ways that I conceptualize theory is as a framework that helps me structure my analysis. It is not only how I think about my data in a particular way, but also why I think about it in that way (and, indeed, why I even began this project). And so, I want to start with white supremacy, not because I think it is somehow the primary mode of oppression in my research—although perhaps an argument can be made along these lines—but because of the work of Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre (2020) on anthropology and white supremacy. Their calls for anthropologists to take seriously white supremacy left an indelible mark on my theoretical positioning and I want to honour this as part of my thinking through practice.

In their introduction to a special selection on white supremacy in *American Anthropologist*, Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre (2020) argue that white supremacy is the “modality through which many social and political relationships are lived” (p. 65). In staking this claim, they make clear the ways in which race mediates other experiences of oppression. For example, white women and Black women experience both patriarchy and class differently because of white supremacy.

While I resist the notion that white supremacy is somehow the heaviest of all oppressive systems (see the public scholarship of Black feminist Wagatwe Wanjuki on this), it does seem an appropriate choice to begin with when talking about anti-immigrant rhetoric in Canada.

To begin, Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre (2020) provide five calls for an anthropology of white supremacy, which my thinking through work seeks to address at least in part:

- (1) take the history of European expansion and the political, intellectual, cultural, and ideological sedimentation of presumed white superiority as given;
- (2) understand that, whether or not it is acknowledged, this history informs the social practices of all the communities within which we work;
- (3) shift from an overreliance on the deployment of white supremacy as identity (i.e., the “white supremacist”) to deal with the structural embeddedness of white supremacy in the world;
- (4) situate the intersectional layers that understand white supremacy as constituent of patriarchy, heteronormativity, settler colonialism, mass incarceration, police violence, and other global and imperial violences in and between societies structured in racial dominance; and
- (5) have a commitment to dismantling global structures of race and whiteness, structures within which the discipline of anthropology remains deeply implicated (p. 72).

With regards to the first two calls, Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre (2020) point to the expansion of colonial Europe into the Americas, which involved the enslavement of Africans as well as the displacement and genocide of Indigenous peoples in the Americas. It is impossible to understand the current manifestations of racism in the Americas (and indeed in Europe) without keeping this historical and global process in mind. Canada and its history are certainly wrapped up in this process, as the genocide of Indigenous peoples and the ongoing acts of colonialism provide

fertile ground for anti-Indigenous racism (c.f., Wet'suwet'en, Indigenous incarceration, child welfare system). As a result, it would be insufficient to say that white supremacists believe they deserve power simply because they are white and white is the superior race. Such a perspective, while certainly part of the equation, ignores the unique history of settler colonialism in Canada. Such a perspective is also susceptible to the belief that white supremacy is imported to Canada from the US and Europe, rather than a product of our own legacy of oppression. I argue that this legacy, and its historical precedent, is also important to consider within the context of entitlement because it is the tradition of white people controlling land and government that feeds contemporary notions of entitlement (see Introduction on settler colonialism). Put another way, if my dad, grandpa, and great grandpa had something, whether it be land, political power, or cultural dominance, I deserve it as well by virtue of being their heir. Their “work” is my reward.

Calls three and four are also key to the framing of this dissertation. While I understand Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre's frustration with the use of identity-based language to talk about white supremacy, as this does dislocate the individual from the broader society and thereby shield societal structures from analysis, it is important to acknowledge that at times identity-based language is necessary in my work. When I point to a particular utterance as white supremacist or white nationalist, I am doing so to link the discourse to established and self-proclaimed white supremacist movements and not the overall structure that undergirds Canadian society. Thus, I use the words white supremacist and white nationalist with intention. This is also why I typically refer to my interlocutors as right-wingers who are working within white supremacist spaces and ideological frameworks. This allows for a more nuanced discussion of their discourse and actions without the analytical laziness of simply categorizing them all as white supremacists, which again distracts from the overarching logics of oppression in Canada. The fourth call is also readily taken up in this dissertation as I work with hooks' (1995) conception of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy which inherently attends to the 'intersectional layers' of oppression. As I argue throughout my dissertation, it is impossible to understand anti-immigration and demographic replacement rhetoric without understanding gender, sexuality, and class.²³

²³ One area of oppression I have not attended to here, although white supremacy certainly functions through, is ableism.

Finally, with regards to this last call, it is my hope that this dissertation provides my readers with a primer on a specific facet of white supremacy in Canada, and that this knowledge leads to action. On a personal level, the decision to take up this research was prompted by a need to contribute to the dismantling of white supremacy and other forms of oppression.

So far, I have outlined the calls Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre make with regards to white supremacy and the ways in which anthropologists can and should engage with it, and I take this engagement seriously. I treat these as a sort of ideological positioning that structures my theory, methods, scope, and dissemination. My readers should understand that as I move forward with the other scholars with whom I am in dialogue, my theory-thinking exists within the space staked out by these calls. Moreover, who I choose to be in dialogue with—whether it is about racism, nativism, violent misogyny, or economic anxiety—is similarly shaped by them. It is as if the set of calls is my ideological home and the theory conversations that I have with other scholars exist within its walls. However, it should be noted that some conversations may still spill out through open windows while others might push strongly against the walls and cause cracks in bricks or shake shingles loose.

On Nativism: Creating and Maintaining an Idealized Canadian Nation State

Allow me to continue with my house metaphor in part because I quite like it, but also because I think it suits my discussion of the nation. The idea of the nation as a home makes me think of the work of both Benedict Anderson (2006) on imagined communities and Peter Schrag (2010) on nativism, and I would like to spend some time exploring why I think these two suit the home I have built as well as the one I inhabit as a Canadian.

One of the things I find useful about Anderson's work is his assertion that nationalism is always the work the powerful few made to seem like it reflects the image of the many, and the many in turn buy into this image and thus the national identity is born. This identity is an idealized and narrowly defined version of the Canadian, one that fits uncomfortably for many in the nation (see also Robidoux, 2002 here). What is important to me, however, is not just the construction of this

idealized Canada, but its maintenance. After all, why would we as Canadians put so much effort into keeping something that felt so uncomfortable? This is where the work of Schrag (2010) becomes useful.

In the introduction to his *Not Fit for our Society*, Schrag (2010) writes that America has long been referred to as a nation of immigrants. More precisely, it is a nation with a long history of immigration policies and restrictions. Here, I want to take the notion of Canada as a nation of ‘immigration restriction’ seriously as it lays the groundwork for much of the nativist sentiment I encountered throughout my research. Moreover, following such a line of inquiry aligns with Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre’s (2020) calls to take seriously the historical context of European imperialism in the Americas and to acknowledge the historical precedents of white supremacy. In other words, it fits within my theoretical house. Additionally, it tells us something about the sort of nation the powerful in Canada were building. Schrag notes that,

In almost every generation, nativists portrayed new immigrants as not fit to become real Americans: they were too infected by Catholicism, monarchism, anarchism, Islam, criminal tendencies, defective genes, mongrel bloodlines, or some other alien virus to become free men and women in our democratic society (Schrag, 2010, p. 4).

Furthermore,

The nation is being “flooded”—another old metaphor—by people from backward places that make them culturally or politically unfit for assimilation. They are people (mostly men) who come here only to make money to send back to the old country, have dimly low levels of education, bring leprosy and other dangerous diseases, drive up crime rates, and never have much interest in becoming Americans. (Schrag, 2010, p. 11).

While Schrag (2010) is talking here about Americans, it is quite easy to map this idea onto Canada’s historical immigration restrictions and my contemporary interlocutors’ nativist beliefs. But let me begin first with the historical restriction discourse as it lays the foundations for both

the nation home and my theory home, and they reflect many of the sentiments discussed by Schrag.

In the late 19th century, early Canadian nationalism rhetoric was concerned with the creation of a new and distinct Canadian identity. According to writers of the Canada First nationalist movement, that ethnicity would emerge first out of the blending of many northern elements—the British, Celtic, Teutonic, Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon peoples—and would be shaped by the environment itself. This discourse took on the language of social Darwinism, which gave a sense of scientific credibility to the emergent Canadian identity. This was also used to explain the differences between Canadians and Americans. The latter had a higher percentage of immigrants from southern Europe, and this was attributed to the milder climate of the US. As Massey (1948) notes, “Our racial composition—and this is partly because of our climate—is different too. A small percentage of our people comes from central or southeastern Europe. The vast majority spring either from the British Isles or Northern France, a good many, too, from Scandinavia and Germany, and it is in northwestern Europe that one finds the elements of human stability highly developed” (p. 30). Here, ethnicity, race, and values were closely linked.

The Norse were also invoked by Canadian writers in a manner similar to their contemporaries the German romanticist and nationalist writers. The north and its ‘ancient warriors’ were called upon as ancestors and through that lineage, the new nationalists derived strength and validity. William Foster, a co-founder of the Canada First movement, remarked: “The old Norse mythology, with its Thor hammers and true out-crop of human nature, more manly, more real, than the weak marrow-bones superstition of an effeminate South” (quoted in Berger, 1966, p. 7). The ‘Nordic man,’ social Darwinists explained, used this geographically derived racial superiority to conquer much of Europe. This preference for the north is interesting given the historical treatment of the north as a place of savagery and otherness (Grace, 2001). Yet, in the Canadian context, the north was seen as desirable. Indeed, Canada’s national identity was defined by the north; it was made north across a multitude of platforms and media – from politics to art and literature. These early Canadians were deeply invested in the *idea* of the north in Canada and, as Grace (2001) argues, it became a fundamental component of our imagined

community a la Anderson (2006). It also shows a clear historic precedent for white Canadians' sense of racially-derived entitlement.

As a result, it was argued that future immigration should come from similarly winter-hardened northern stock, namely the British, Germans, and Scandinavians as the climate would preclude 'weaker' races—who had lost their virility and vitality. Canadian imperialists like George Parkin hoped that “Canada [would] belong to the sturdy races of the North-Saxon, and Celt, Scandinavian, Dane and Northern German” (quoted in Berger, 1966, p. 9). This rhetoric encouraged the Canadian government to implement immigration policies that would “induce more of the hardy German and Norwegian races to remain here” (Berger, 1966, p. 17). Within this context, a specific kind of white people were considered superior, and Canadians would be the heirs of this superiority and therefore entitled to govern the new nation.

This desire to control immigration manifested in several immigration policies in Canada's early years. While the late 19th century was characterized by an 'open door' policy, this gave way to policies that discriminated based on race, ethnicity, and nationality. In 1885, The Chinese Immigration Act sought to exclude immigrants of Chinese ethnicity. It included a \$50 tax meant to deter immigration; this amount increased to \$100 in 1900 and \$500 in 1903. This was further restricted in 1923 when immigration was limited to diplomats, government representatives, merchants, and children born in Canada who had gone abroad. Chinese immigrants were not the only Asian ethnicity discriminated against. In response to rising anti-Asian sentiments, the Government of Canada passed the Gentlemen's Agreement, which limited Japanese immigration. This was achieved in partnership with Japan, which stemmed the flow of citizens leaving their country for Canada.

In 1906, Frank Oliver sought to restrict the cultural and ethnic makeup of immigrants sent to settle the prairies. While previous politicians had viewed immigrants based on economic potential, Oliver was more concerned with how well immigrants could assimilate to Anglo-Saxon values and norms. This rhetoric of assimilation is still prevalent in far-right discourse. Despite this preference for the Anglo-Saxon, immigrants from undesirable countries such as Poland, Ukraine, Italy, and Russia continued to immigrate, and many settled in Alberta,

including my paternal family. The government also instituted the Continuous Journey Regulation (1908) which stipulated that immigrants had to make one continuous journey from their home country to Canada, which effectively eliminated immigration from India.

One of the most pertinent policies was the 1910 Immigration Act, which gave the governor-in-council the authority to “prohibit for a stated period, or permanently, the landing in Canada, or the landing at any specified port of entry in Canada, of immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirement of Canada.”²⁴ The following year, an Order-in-Council was passed stating that “for a period of one year from and after the date hereof the landing in Canada shall be and the same is prohibited of any immigrants belonging to the Negro race, which race is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada.”²⁵ This was once again restricted in 1919 following political unrest due to economic downturns and the growing fear of foreign radicals and enemy aliens following World War I. The Immigration Act Amendment (1919) prohibited the landing of immigrants

belonging to any nationality or race or of by reason of any economic, industrial or other condition temporarily existing in Canada or because such immigrants are deemed unsuitable having regard to the climatic, industrial, social, educational, labour or other conditions or requirements of Canada or because such immigrants are deemed undesirable owing to their peculiar customs, habits, modes of life and methods of holding property, and because of their probable inability to become readily assimilated or to assume the duties and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship.²⁶

In essence, this restriction-based discourse was about constructing and maintaining an idealized (and imagined) community that reflected the identity of the few, namely straight, white Christian men with economic and political power. As I explore in greater depth in both my chapters on

²⁴ See Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 for scans of primary source (p. 14, section 38c): <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/immigration-act-1910>

²⁵ See Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 for scans of primary source (para. 1): <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/order-in-council-pc-1911-1324>

²⁶ See Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 for scans of primary source (p. 7, section 13): <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/immigration-act-amendment-1919#:~:text=The%20government%20amended%20the%20Immigration,of%20political%20dissidents%20were%20expanded.>

nativism (Chapter 7) and hockey (Chapter 9), this framing of some groups as undesirable is still very much in vogue. The new undesirable immigrants are those “too infected” by Islam, “barbaric cultural practices” (see Barber, 2015 for comments by former Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s government), criminal tendencies and laziness (e.g., abusing subsidies and government handouts), and low IQ. The latter evinces the continued reliance on racist theories like scientific racism and eugenics. Both my interlocutors and their predecessors were committed to the maintenance of a particular kind of Canada that exists only if restrictive and exclusionary practices are legislated and mobilized.

Yet, the new undesirable immigrants continue to make their way to Canada despite the threat they pose to my interlocutors’ imaginings of an idealized Canada as a white European nation. Further horrifying to my interlocutors, and to the historical populations Schrag (2010) considers, these immigrants vote and run for political positions. This leads me to a key component of nativism that was a central concern to my nativist interlocutors: the loss of power as immigrants (as well as women and people of colour) make claims to power via political action. Here it seems appropriate to bring up the notion of entitlement, which I claimed above was a unifying thread throughout my dissertation. A sort of mortar for the bricks of my theory-house if you will.

As Essed and Hoving (2014) argue, some in the majority are frustrated, annoyed, and irritated by minorities who have the gall to claim the equal rights they are afforded by the state – and they are annoyed while also using this equal status to claim that minorities should not complain about all the “isms” and “phobias” (see also Bonilla-Silva’s colour-blind racism discussed below). There is a sense of regret that the country (read: white people) has been “too tolerant” and are now being fleeced by immigrants backed by political power once only afforded to white men (p. 15). Yet, Essed and Hoving also note that the prevailing discourse about immigrants (as well as women and people of colour) does not match the empirical reality we live in (see also Bhabra, 2017). They note:

The discourse that minorities would be pampered was starkly at odds with their experiences of everyday racism, including underestimation in schools, undervaluation of professional competence, glass ceilings in jobs, false accusations of theft in shops, and

constant negative comments about ethnic minorities reminding them everyday that they did not belong (Essed & Hoving, 2014, p. 17).

Yet the Dutch to which Essed and Hoving refer, not unlike my interlocutors, had reimagined themselves as the victims who now find themselves in a precarious position. This brings to mind the work of Arjun Appadurai (1998, 2006). He argues that globalization increases feelings of uncertainty around social identity, cultural and social values, and other forms of power, which produce what he calls a fear of small numbers. This fear emerges when a numerical minority – in the context of Canada, this refers to non-white and non-Christian immigrants – reminds the numerical majority that the country is not an ethnically whole or pure country. What is interesting here, is that Appadurai posits that the smaller the numerical minority, the more power they have to, for lack of a better word, frustrate the majority into anti-immigrant rhetorics and even violence. It is because the majority is just *so close* to an idealized and imagined national purity. This makes sense within Bhabra's (2017) critique of scholarship that validates white *feelings* of decline despite empirical evidence to the contrary. Indeed, Appadurai argues that it is precisely the strategic (and perhaps dishonest) manipulation of census data and the deployment of this cultural abstraction that causes majorities to think they are at risk of becoming minorities or are already on that path. Thus, when my interlocutors lament demographic replacement and cultural shifts within Canada away from the straight white male norm, the lack of empirical data (i.e., big numbers, employment, education, and health outcomes), it is actually not an issue but rather a contributing factor in feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and incompleteness. The slightest perception of decline, the reminder of change, or threat of loss is sufficient to increase the friction between “us” and “them,” and this friction is a threat to the state.

While Appadurai (1998; 2006) is focused on ethnic minorities and ethnocide, he notes that in previous historical iterations of this process, it is not just particular ethnicities that must be eradicated in the name of preserving or restoring a national ethnic whole. In the case of Nazi Germany, the Roma, elderly, disabled, and queer were targeted in addition to the Jews. These minorities also reminded the Nazis of the aberrations in their sacred nation. I wonder, now, if Nazi Germany had occurred post-1970s, would feminists have been included? White anti-racists? Appadurai notes that minorities are often recast as “special interest” in contrast to the

“general interest” of the majority with the latter understood as the key to collective wellbeing. Feminist and anti-racist movements are certainly labeled by politicians as “special interest” despite feminism fighting for half the country, and, well, really the whole country as patriarchy harms men as well (de Coning & Ebin, 2022).

With all these threads gathered up together in my thinking through, I see the perfect storm of entitlement and nativist thinking within an imagined community built within the logics of white supremacy. There is entitlement based on white superiority, but also the legacy of settler colonialism that posits certain people are entitled to land, power, and capital (Memmi, 1965; Veracini, 2010). I take this assemblage of ideas within me into the following chapters in an attempt to not only situate my interlocutors within a historical and cultural context of white supremacy, but also to make sense of how and why they react the way they do to challenges to their imagined community and Canada’s demographics. After all, much of my work is about my interlocutors’ *feelings* of victimhood and entitlement. Yet, while I have the thread of how my interlocutors react when faced with challenges to their entitlement, I want to outline briefly how I conceptualize racism. I do this because, while I have made the commitment to myself (and to my interlocutors) to do something more nuanced than simply calling them all a bunch of racists, I do have to attend to racism as an aspect of their discourse.

“We’ve overcome racism”: On the Forms of Racism

My title for this section might draw some questions from my readers. Yet, those were the words uttered by Premier of Alberta Jason Kenney during a Facebook livestream event on March 29, 2021. It came in response to severe criticism over the new draft curriculum in Alberta from kindergarten through grade six, and Kenney evidently felt confident in deflecting critiques of racism by simply saying racism was over. Less than a month later, a Black boy was brutally assaulted by white classmates who hurled punches and racist slurs at him (Konguavi, 2021). In response to the attack, many Albertans took to social media to decry the violent assault and in doing so argued “this isn’t *my* Alberta” and “this has no place in *our* Alberta.” They too felt that racism was, or at least should be, over in Alberta.

This points to the difficulty in defining racism. Like white supremacy, it is a term that requires nuance if it is to be of any analytical value. To this end, I turn to the work of Mondon and Winter (2020) and their differentiation of traditional, illiberal and liberal racism. The boundaries between these three forms of racism are fuzzy, and discourse and people cross between them, yet they provide a mechanism for me to discuss how some utterances are different (and differently violent), yet they work together to uphold and maintain white supremacist structures from which they are derived.

Traditional racism is both straightforward and easily misunderstood. It is widely considered the “canonical” form of racism, like Klan rallies and lynch mobs (Mondon & Winter, 2020, p. 11). Yet it is important to note that just because it is traditional, it is not inherently natural or inevitable. Rather, it emerged from the racist structuring of society during European expansion at which time races were arrayed based on European understandings of superiority rooted in both theology and so-called scientific theories. In other words, it is a socially constructed phenomenon, which has had real-world impacts (e.g., Indigenous genocide, segregation, and Nazi Germany). Perhaps it was traditional racism that Kenney was speaking about when he (falsely) said it had been overcome, yet it is from this foundation that illiberal and liberal racism emerge.

Let me turn next to illiberal racism, which is understood by Mondon and Winter (2020) to be that which is “grounded in the present but is often identified and defined with reference to the past” and is “in conflict with the contemporary liberal social and political order” (p. 16). This type of racism is conceptualized as a relic of the past and something that society as a whole has moved beyond. Therefore, any instance of illiberal racism is deemed to be an individual, rather than societal, issue. The brutal assault of the Black child referenced above, and the use of the n-word throughout the assault, is not seen as a systematic issue, but rather an issue of individual parenting or educational failures. This perspective was echoed by the impassioned responses from Albertans that the assault was the product of misguided individuals (white children) rather than an example of a society that promotes racism and violence. In *their* Alberta, this does not happen, but they admit that it did happen in a previous version of Alberta. Thus, someone who expresses illiberal racism, whether through discourse or physical violence, is not reflective of the

society they live in. They are somehow separate, cleaved off, and explained away as a relic of the past or perhaps mentally unwell. This discourse is all too common in the aftermath of extremist violence wherein perpetrators are described as lone wolves (Strømme & Stormark, 2015).

Yet, as Mondon and Winter (2020) note, this form of racism still positions white people as inherently superior to all the Others, who are “monolithic and innately inferior to ‘pure’ white Europeans, who constitute the normative standard in this construction... and assimilation into white societies or a loyalty test to gain acceptance is not possible” (p. 17). This description sits comfortably with much of the discourse I encountered throughout my research. It was explicitly articulated and covertly implied. Moreover, they note that illiberal racism “may even take the form of nostalgia or support for re-establishing traditional racist practices that have become unacceptable, such as slavery, colonialism, genocide, segregation, bans on miscegenation” (p. 17). As I argue throughout my dissertation in the chapters that follow, nostalgia for a time before immigration is a key component of nativist sentiment within the Canadian context. Thus, *illiberal* racism is a useful term for much of my data, yet it does not cover all of my work.

If illiberal racism is a lingering relic of the past or a one-off instance, liberal racism is a product of the present day and the insistence that we have, indeed, overcome racism. It, as well as the everyday and banal forms of racism (see Campana & Tanner, 2019), hinges on the notion that that in liberal Western democracies we are all equal and that we all share the Enlightenment values. Within this context, no one wants to believe that *they* are racist, or that the people they associate with are racist. They want to see it as a thing of the past (traditional racism) or an *individual* flaw or aberration that brings traditional racism into the present (illiberal racism). Thus, liberal racism is in part the denial of racism, or what Afro Puerto Rican political sociologist Bonilla-Silva (2015) calls colour-blind racism. He proposes a robust framework for understanding this phenomenon and divides it into four categories:

1. *Abstract liberalism* posits that all people are free and equal within liberal Western democracies. Individual successes are generalized to the wider population and as universal (e.g., Obama’s presidency).

2. *Naturalization* argues that racism is a natural process and that people simply prefer to be around people who look, think, and act like them. It is exemplified by calls for ethnic enclaves and white flight.
3. *Cultural racism* shifts critiques and violence from race to culture as the latter is deemed incompatible with the “native” culture and values.
4. *Minimization of racism* denies the structural nature of racism and failures are individual and not structural discrimination. Inversely, when white people succeed, it’s not because they were privileged (that’s a thing of the past) but because they worked hard (see also Mondon & Winter, 2020)

Of course, liberalism has never actually been about equality for all, so it should come as little surprise that those espousing liberal racism really do not care about women or queer folks. Instead, it has been about what benefits a select few, namely the elites who often evince a sense of nostalgic longing to return to a bygone era when they did not have to share power along racial, gender, and class lines. This parallels discussions of Canadian national identity as a product produced by the elites for a particular kind of Canadian and their frustration with having to share that identity with those who are not straight white men.

Liberal racism also carries with it a sense of collective forgetting or downplaying of the darker parts of history. This facilitates a particular kind of nation building myth and identity, which is reflected in the calls of “this is not my Alberta” when the province, and indeed the country, has a dark history of settler-colonialism, genocide, and violence that continues today. This is exemplified in the work of Wohl et al. (2020) on collective memory and malleability wherein they noted that “group history is not remembered as it was, but as group members need it to be” (p. 2). Within liberal Western democracies, individuals need to believe that the country is equal and that the darkest parts of their shared history are either overstated or firmly in the past.

Essed and Hoving (2014) similarly argue that hegemonic and “dominant discourses miss historical explanations and dismiss the connection between present ethnic humiliations and the brutality of colonization, slavery, and antisemitism” (p. 11). In their study of entitlement racism within Dutch society, they point to the difficulty in the Dutch context for acknowledging the

systemic nature of racism. They argue that the US, while still very much grappling with violent racism of all forms, at least acknowledges that it is an issue and that people “should not get away with it” (p. 11). The Dutch, in contrast, are in deep denial. I posit here that Canada follows the Dutch example, as my interlocutors frequently contest claims of anti-Black racism with stories of the Underground Railroad and the absence of slavery in Canada.²⁷ Similarly, when the subject of Indigenous people arises, their grievances are minimized, and any wrongdoing is firmly located in the past. This ignores their ongoing struggles under ongoing settler-colonialism and extractive colonialism (Greer, 2019; Preston, 2013).²⁸

What is key to understand here, especially within relation to my discussion of white supremacy above, is that liberal and colour-blind racism facilitate a process whereby whiteness is naturalized as the unspoken standard (Mondon & Winter, 2020). While liberal racism may not openly claim that whiteness is inherently superior as traditional and illiberal racism do, the process nonetheless produces a society wherein whiteness is the default. This normalization is continually and consistently reinforced through everyday practices, such as jokes, generalizations, and stereotypes (Essed & Muhr, 2018; Sundén & Paasonen, 2018; Udupa, 2021). These are shrugged off as insignificant, or at least not as damaging as something like traditional racism (Mondon & Winter, 2020), yet when they are constantly reiterated, they become normalized and this continues to oppress the marginalized and uphold the power of the majorities. These behaviours are subtle and accepted by the wider society. Again, they are hegemonic and uncritically accepted. Moreover, unlike illiberal racism which targets people because of the category they are assigned (e.g., race, ethnicity, nationality), liberal racism targets people who are not in “our” liberal group and who do not have “our” values. Thus, they are *entitled* to critique other cultures, races, and ethnicities on the grounds of *perceived* deficiencies in comparison to our liberal Western democracy.

Within my research context, it was clear that my interlocutors had broadly taken up Bonilla-Silva’s (2015) abstract liberalism, which renders Canada a free and equal space after years of

²⁷ They make the case that because slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1834, 33 years before Canada was founded as a nation, “Canada” does not have a history of slavery.

²⁸ I take the position here that the foster care continues the legacy of Indian Residential Schools.

feminist and racial justice work. To them, we are post-feminist and colour-blind and have therefore achieved the goals of liberalism and the Enlightenment. As a result, whenever critiques of discourse, whether they are leveled at individual social media posts, Hollywood, or politicians, are made along race or gender lines, there is a backlash. Those making the critiques are too sensitive, unable to forget the past, or want special treatment beyond their supposed equality.

In my work, liberal and entitlement racism most frequently manifested in discourse surrounding Islam and women, and it reflects Bonilla-Silva's conception of cultural racism (see also Essed & Muhr, 2018 on entitlement racism). As I discuss further in my chapter on women and demographic replacement (Chapter 8), my interlocutors strategically appropriated feminism and women's rights to validate their anti-Muslim rhetoric. They argued that Islam was backwards and violent towards women and therefore incongruent with Canadian (liberal) values. Occasionally, a similar argument was made in relation to LGBTQ rights and Islam, however, the safety of (white) women was given priority. In their discussion of liberal Islamophobia and queer rights, Mondon and Winter (2020) note that "Only when the LGBTQ+ communities were allegedly threatened by the Muslim spectre would the liberal racist come out to defend their rights" (p. 75) and I argue that the same pattern of behaviour manifested for women and their rights. Again, liberalism is not about equality for all, but rather the strategic use of liberal racism to further the goals of those who have traditionally held the power in Canadian society. It is about maintaining the nation-house at the expense of those who are already here.

I recognize I have already covered a great deal of ground (and ignored even more), but white supremacy is, after all, a large part of the picture. However, it is not the only part nor the only supremacy. True to my appreciation for hooks' (1995) conception of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, I want to turn now to how male supremacy and misogyny are incorporated into the perfect storm of entitlement.

Male Supremacism

The term intersectionality has been taken up broadly and perhaps problematically or ineffectually throughout academic and activist spaces. Yet, I cannot talk about the intersections of identity—as sources of compounding marginalization and privilege—without acknowledging the Black feminist scholars who have fashioned these bricks that I now use to make my home.

In 1989, Black feminist Kimberle Crenshaw proposed the term intersectionality to address the shortcomings of not only the legal realm, but feminism more broadly, when it came to the experiences of women of colour and particularly Black women. Their experiences differed from those of their white counterparts, and it was clear that the categories of gender and woman were insufficient to explain these experiences. Beyond discrimination in the workforce and legal system, these women were often excluded from other forms of advocacy work in issues such as reproductive justice and violence against women. Such exclusion and erasure were amplified for women who experienced other forms of marginalization such as immigration status (Carbado et al., 2013). This demonstrated the shortcomings of a feminism that only considers gender and not the other intersections of identity.

It is these intersections that interest me here as they illuminate the selective inclusion and exclusion of different groups. In particular, I am curious as to the status of white women and men of colour. Both are selectively included and benefit from the discourse at times, yet they are also subjected to violence and denigration. As I argue throughout my dissertation, the anti-immigrant and anti-feminist rhetoric is reflective of both whiteness and heterosexual maleness, and how these have historically been woven together to produce an idealized and imagined Canadian. This attention to the interwoven nature of power and identity sits well with hooks' (1995) conception of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy and allows me to analyze smaller utterances by a small group of individuals within the broader context of white and male supremacy at the national level. To return to Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre's (2020) calls, this allows me to move between identity- and structure-based analysis.

As I argue throughout my dissertation, male supremacy and misogyny run parallel to and support white supremacy. While I am deeply indebted to the work of Mondon and Winter (2020) on the mainstreaming of the extreme right and their differentiation of traditional, illiberal, and liberal

racism, I was struck by the lack of a gender-based lens in their work. Thus, I want to propose a gendered component through which I articulate a traditional, illiberal, and liberal misogyny. Such an approach is in line with other scholars working in the field of male supremacy, such as Schmitz and Kazyak (2016), who argue that (digital) misogyny falls along a spectrum ranging from a “woman-hating lens” to a “men-as-oppressed framework” and Mondon and Winter’s categories help give further shape to this spectrum that avoids lazy analyses which in turn bring about the #notallmen responses from my interlocutors. Let me begin with traditional misogyny.

Like traditional racism and the pre-civil rights era, I see traditional misogyny as the status quo for women prior to the feminist movements in the 60s and 70s. It refers to beliefs that women and men are not equal in the workplace, government, or educational institutions, and that women should be limited to specific roles (e.g., homemaking and childrearing). Moreover, it relies heavily on the male supremacist belief that women are inherently inferior to men, in biology and intellect, and that men have the right to control and dominate women (e.g., domestic violence; see also Ging, 2019; Ging & Siapera, 2018). These traditional values and norms, within our *mainstream* and *contemporary* liberal democratic society are considered things of the past, yet they are also what we might consider “canonical” misogyny. This perspective exists in part because of the various waves of feminist movements, which have empowered contemporary women to work outside of the home and succeed in their endeavors. In the present day, feminism has shifted the status quo so substantially that traditional misogyny no longer manifests at a societal level. This parallels Mondon and Winter’s (2020) discussion of how the civil rights movement moved beyond traditional racism and the rights and privileges associated with the Enlightenment were (supposedly) afforded to all.

Now, my interlocutors did this fascinating thing where they explicitly aligned themselves with particular values that crossed and remixed temporal lines. For example, while my interlocutors would often rely on Enlightenment values and the liberal framework for Canadian values when it came to white supremacy, they were often unwilling to hold these values for women unless it suited the maintenance of the former. Consider these Reddit comments,

My deep appreciation for the values of the European Enlightenment are the reason I'm here and made me turn against the left years ago. They are great values, and I'm not ashamed to admit I look down on cultures and people who hold opposite values (like the oppression of women in certain parts of the world, to name one example)...
(OmegaCanada comment).

And

Based but being Canadian does not mean respecting gender equality, in fact, women's liberation is one of the things that helped us get here (Reddit comment).

The first is a clear example of Bonilla-Silva's cultural racism or Mondon and Winter's (2020) liberal racism. It is not about race, but rather culture, and immigrants from non-Western cultures supposedly do not have the required "values" to become Canadian. Here, women (and our rights) are used as pawns in a xenophobic game. With this perspective, my interlocutors ground themselves in the present along gender lines and use a form of racism that is likewise a product of the present, namely liberal Islamophobia. Immigrants, they argue, hold values aligned with the past, specifically the oppression of women, and are therefore not qualified to become Canadians

In the second quote, the argument is made that expanding equality to all, which now includes women, was a mistake. Apparently, the oppression of women is *not* an issue after all! Rather than disqualification through culture, women are disqualified through gender and are indeed blamed for the decline of the country in much the same way as immigrants. This reflects a longing from the present era for a bygone one. This acknowledgment of a temporal and societal shift from a pre-feminist era presents an image of a contemporary society wherein feminism has "won" and traditional misogyny is located firmly in the past. Take for example the discourse of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on the subject:

The days of when old men get to decide what a woman does with her body are long gone. Times have changed for the better. #LPC defends rights. (Twitter, @JustinTrudeau, September 18, 2014)

Moreover, this newly achieved gender equality is now considered a given as feminism is inextricably woven into the fabric of Canadian society. To my interlocutors, however, this is acknowledged with a sense of regret:

Our supreme court is literally filled with activist judges who self-identify as feminists (Reddit user).

Thus, *illiberal* misogyny is understood to be the sort of misogyny that harkens back to the pre-feminism era and yearns for a time when old men made decisions for women about their bodies, their work, and their education. It evokes ideas from the past while existing in the present. At a societal level, those who espouse these ideas are again often shrugged off as mentally unwell, accused of being incels, or criticized for not upholding the liberal values. They are yet another aberration much like the illiberal racist that we as a society would like to ignore.

Following Mondon and Winter's (2020) tracks, liberal misogyny is then the misogyny that is still permissible and does not challenge the *post-feminist* status quo. It is not necessarily the misogyny of the past, but rather that which is allowed to exist without critical attention in the present. As with the liberal racism, it is not only a "post" but also blind (i.e., colour-blind), minimized (i.e., "it's not as bad as it used to be"), or dismissed outright (i.e., all people and all genders are equal). Moreover, those who speak out against contemporary gender discrimination that is neither illiberal nor traditional, are accused of over-sensitivity and reverse-sexism, much like those who continue to critique society for its ongoing racism.

Furthermore, within liberal misogyny the *form* of feminism, or perhaps more specifically the "wave," is defined by the elites. This is, again, because liberalism was never actually about rights for all people, and this includes women and particularly those who have other marginalized identities. Within my work, my interlocutors – by and large men – repeatedly asserted what they felt constitutes feminism. Comments like "Feminism has lost its true meaning!" and "*That's* not my feminism" were common when it was deemed the movement had gone too far, and were most often uttered when intersectionality, trans-rights, and sex work were discussed. Feminism is

permissible, but only within certain bounds and only if it does not challenge the power of the elite few.

What I think is useful about these categories is how my interlocutors frequently shifted from illiberal to liberal misogyny; this shift reflects movement along what Schmitz and Kazyak (2016) describe as a woman-hating (illiberal) to men-as-victim (liberal) spectrum, and it also illuminates aspects of these men's entitlement. In their illiberal utterances, feminism ruined Canada and they longed for a time when the gender roles were clear, and power rested in their hands. Again, this was a misogyny of the past manifesting in the present.

White women are destroying us. They all want to “find themselves” and be career women instead of mothers (Gab user).

Perhaps what is most interesting to me, however, is that *they* do not see this rhetoric as an aberration. Rather, it is a return to how society *should* be. Feminism was almost universally understood to be a damaging movement, at least when “taken too far.” Yet, in their liberal misogynistic rhetoric, they used the successes of feminism against women to reimagine themselves as victims. They use the very values they purport to loathe when it suits them, much like they do with liberal Islamophobia. This is what Ging (2019) has referred to as post-feminism's unforeseen legacy wherein feminism is framed as a personal, rather than structural, issue. For example, within a society that believes gender equality has been achieved, continued conversations about sexual violence against women, girls, and non-binary people elicits #notallmen responses, rather than attention to the structures that continue to permit and hide this violence. To talk specifically about the structural violence that women suffer is, apparently, sexist because it refuses to consider the individual man. Similarly, in these conversations, men pivot to talk about violence against men – which is a topic of concern for feminists – but not necessarily to help male rape survivors, but rather to discredit women and derail conversations (Messner, 1998). This points to a reframing of men, particularly white men, as victims of the new post-feminist order (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012). Here, liberal racism and misogyny combine in a particularly effective way as the suffering white male trope has come to dominate discourse for the right-wing in Canada and elsewhere (Ging, 2019). It is with this suffering

(straight) white male victim trope that I want to conclude this theory chapter. In doing so, I weave together threads of white and male supremacism with entitlement and victimhood narratives.

Entitlement and the Victimhood Narrative

As I noted in the opening section of this chapter, the notion of aggrieved entitlement has dominated every moment of this dissertation project. In many ways, it is the thread that sews all of my patches (chapters) together into a somewhat ugly and mostly finished blanket (dissertation). It is evident in my chapter on nativism, as my interlocutors express their right to urban spaces and their anger that immigrants are reshaping the landscape. It is also evident in my chapter on women and masculinity when they spoke about demographic shifts and the right of white people to have an ethnic, and thereby political, majority. Similarly, in my chapter on censorship, I show how they feel entitled to their platforms and communities, even if these spaces come at a violent cost to immigrants, people of colour, women, and queer folks (and as always, amplified for those at the intersection of these identities). And while hockey may seem a silly or less meaningful site of entitlement, it was an exemplary case of my interlocutors' self-declared entitlement to define what it means to *be* Canadian.

Given its centrality, I want to spend some time exploring the scholars of entitlement—whether that be entitlement racism, aggrieved for economic entitlement—that shape my understanding of the phenomenon. As I am sure my readers have noticed throughout this chapter, I have not conducted a literature review of the theories presented here. Rather, I have focused my attention on those who have had the most profound impact on my work. The others appear in the chapters as supporting voices.

Entitlement: White and Male

Beyond ideas about defining who belongs in a particular place or to an identity, nativist thinking carries with it a sense of entitlement. Within my research context, this entitlement is derived from northwestern European (white) ethnic and cultural heritage, as well as ancestral lineages of

conquerors, settlers/pioneers, and builders via settler colonialism. I argue that this entitlement is what drives much of the nativist framing espoused by my interlocutors. It provides them with a mechanism that necessitates not only a backlash, but a sense of righteousness in their backlash as well.

I begin this section with a Reddit thread, which will guide and frame much of my discussion of entitlement. It opened with the image below (Figure 7) and a caption “Amen to this!” It had a score of 457 upvotes and was 93% upvoted.



I'm tired of having my ancestors compared to today's migrant hordes. Settling an undeveloped land and building a civilization out of it is not comparable with showing up to an aging, post-industrial nation and signing up for benefits.

Figure 7. Screenshot of text post about the difference between settlers and migrants

This image, as well as the 46 comments that it elicited, proposed a difference between white Canadians who had a cultural or ancestral link to the founding *process* of what is now Canada, and post-1970s multicultural immigration waves who arrive to a formed nation. This process is key to the particular brand of nativism evinced in Canada as it establishes a sense of ownership and worthiness. By this I mean that within my research context, the early settlers are – through their hardship and work ethic – morally superior (to current immigrants) and their descendants the rightful heirs of the land they settled. This is, in brief, a clear reflection of Veracini’s (2010) exploration of the difference between founder and migrant, which I discuss in my introduction. Rather than rehashing this conversation here further, I want to briefly outline the scholarly conversation surrounding entitlement that moves beyond the land and considers bodies.

I want to begin this discussion with male entitlement, rather than its white counterpart. I do so because I came to the scholarly concept of entitlement through male supremacist research, and particularly through scholarship on violent misogyny rooted in an entitlement to women's bodies (e.g., incels). Much of the work on male entitlement is indebted to a former Stony Brook University sociologist who has been publicly accused of sexual harassment and subsequently retired before a Title IX investigation (Ratcliffe, 2018). As a result, I acknowledge here his role in the development of this work on masculinity, but I am making the decision to focus on the work of other equally brilliant scholars with whom I want to be in conversation.

In the literature, adjectives are often tacked onto male entitlement such as “aggrieved” and “hostile,” and much of this surrounds instances of offline violence such as the Isla Vista incel shooting and the many high school shootings in the US and elsewhere. The notion of aggrieved or hostile entitlement carries with it a particular intensity beyond general entitlement. As feminist scholar Kate Manne (2019) notes, it denotes a sense of “embittered resentment” and thus is more than entitlement. It is the feeling of being cheated or jilted out of something owed. It is a feeling of loss, or an anticipated one at least.

Manne (2019) continues this line of “owed” in her consideration of entitlement's counterpart, obligation. In her work on the Isla Vista incel shooting, she argues that not only did the shooter feel entitled to women (and resentful and bitter when this was denied), but there was a parallel sense that women were *obligated* to fulfil his needs. While my work here is not particularly concerned with incels – although MRAs, incels, Red and Black Pillers did make up a portion of my interlocutors – there is still a usefulness to obligation. My interlocutors felt *entitled* to the power held by their ancestors. They felt they were *owed* something for the work these men had put into the country, and they were bitter and resentful (and anxious and frustrated) when they were denied. The flipside, of course, was that other people – namely women and people of colour – were *obligated* to facilitate this power or at least not stand in the way. Thus, when women and people of colour (along with queer and non-Christian folks) advocated for their own power, they were shirking an obligation to be mothers, remain in low-paying jobs, and occupy only non-political roles (Singh, 2015). As Manne (2019) argues,

there is something especially vexing about someone who is shameless not only in shirking their duties, but who appears blithe and unapologetic when they effectively turn the tables. They're not only failing to do their job; they're demanding that others return the non-favor... They're feckless, careless, irresponsible, and so on (pp. 106-7).

And this, I argue, could just as easily be said about my interlocutors' bitter responses to the successes of feminism and racial justice. As Singh (2015) notes, despite the loss of social power (perceived or actual), white straight men in the West have not lost their sense of entitlement because "prevailing ideologies, promulgated and maintained through the media and other social institutions, reinforce the belief that white, straight men —those who are hegemonically masculine — are entitled to social power and domination over other men and women" (p. 18). This creates a tension between what they feel they are owed and the perceived reality of their lives.

This sense of being owed something is also interesting when one considers its relationship to ownership within an economic framework and in so doing invoke the capitalist part of hooks' (1995) framework used liberally throughout this dissertation. Within Manne's (2019) context there is a clear link to misogynists and the belief that men should (once again) *own* women's bodies. Again, the parallel for my nativist interlocutors is clear, although this extends beyond ownership of women to Canada as a physical and cultural item. Their ancestors' hard work once again entitled them to the land, sometimes in a very real sense. This was evident in their frustrations with housing and land costs in the GTA and Vancouver, as well as in stories of being unable to afford to live in the towns and cities they grew up in.

Finally, the last part of Manne's (2019) discussion of entitlement that is of use to me here parallels my discussion of the imagined transgressor (see Chapter 8). Manne argues that what makes misogynistic entitlement so insidious is that the feelings of aggrieved entitlement often do not center on a real or specific woman. Rather, misogynists construct a hazy narrative *about* women in general that serves as a scapegoat for the "resented absence" (p. 108). This is not unlike other examples of scapegoating throughout history that targeted Jewish folks and immigrants. Thus, in my analysis of entitlement and obligation, and the anger, hostility, and

resentment that go along with these ideas, I foreground the fact that this is not really about real and specific people, but rather a group of people who fit the profile and this I argue makes the rhetoric of hostile entitlement all the more worrisome. As Manne notes, acts of offline violence, despite their increasing occurrence online, are quite rare. Yet, she argues that “if someone roughly like you will do as a scapegoat or a target, then you join the class of those subject to an atypical kind of crime: an act of retaliation taken against you by a total stranger, yet who hunted you down, specifically... it is not irrational to find this unsettling” (p. 109). And this class of “imagined” person is useful here.

While I began with male entitlement, the framework maps onto issues of race and sexuality well enough for my purposes, not unlike how Mondon and Winter’s (2020) categories of racism are translatable into the realm of misogyny. Of course, with every translation something is lost along the way, but it is nonetheless workable. It is particularly illuminating when combined with economic entitlement.

Entitlement, particularly that of white settlers in North America, is inextricably tied to economic status, or rather precarity. Indeed, Madfis (2014) notes that white men are the most likely to experience anxiety surrounding uncertain futures regarding their class position and ability to buy a home and have a family. He argues that,

When entitled white males encounter this newfound indeterminate future where they are no longer assured status and success through privilege, some may blame everyone and everything but themselves. Their sense of white male privilege does not permit them to acknowledge their own role in any mistakes, let alone any personal limitations (p. 74).

This emphasis on material wealth and economic security amongst American white men parallels my experience in Canadian spaces, and it dovetails well with Manne’s (2019) notion of entitlement and being owed something. This downward mobility and feeling of being cheated, coupled with the rise of women and people of colour, fosters Manne’s embittered resentment. Take for example the following quotes from across my field sites,

“I will not be replaced quietly. Canada is for me and my children, not the World’s unwanted overflow. Canada is for Canadians not Africans, not Middle Easterners, nor Indians or the Chinese, but for the Canadian. F off world. This land is my land. I don’t want to share with the World what my ancestors built for me and my fellow Canadians” (YouTube comment).

“I know my Grandparents struggled and overcame when they moved to this country, there were no handouts and you had to make your own way” (Reddit).

“You don’t even need to be conservative and you are still screwed over” (Reddit).

“So what actually makes you think that things are going to get “better for the next generation? My kid is a toddler and I’m 40, I see no future for the kids... only struggle and suffering due to original sin. The natives and blacks WILL NEVER LET GO OF THE PAST” (OmegaCanada site).

“DOES ANYONE BELIEVE CANADA IS GOING TO SURVIVE THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE HAPPENING? Racism is the future no matter what, whites are dropping in population, fast, and do you ACTUALLY BELIEVE that whites, when a minority in Canada, will be treated BETTER than 2020 or WORSE in 2030” (OmegaCanada).

These comments evince feelings of entitlement and victimhood. Canada was built for them and their children, and no one else. Yet, they are being denied their rightful inheritance. Throughout my fieldwork, particularly within long-form comments on Reddit and the social media work of ID Canada, this notion of inheritance was routinely invoked. Their forefathers had come to Canada in its early years, “conquered” the Indigenous people, broke the land, and built the nation. This, they argued, meant they were entitled to govern and benefit, which includes economic stability and prosperity. They are clearly linking themselves to the founders, and not the migrants, that built this country (see Veracini, 2010 for discussion of founders-as-ancestors and the right to govern).

It is also interesting here to note that, while my interlocutors reference grandparents or Europeans and settlers, this discourse typically centered the actions of white *men*. For example, in response to a YouTube video of a Nordstrom ad entitled True Nord, which featured a diverse array of actors and models, one commenter responded, “where are the straight white men that built the ‘true nord’?” Another echoed the sentiment, “only white men are not allowed. These who created Canada which we know are forbidden to be shown in this ideological commercial. I feel sick looking at this sick discrimination commercial.”

Indeed, I cannot recall a single instance of a user—across any platform—invoking the work of their grandmothers and great-grandmothers outside of the folkish heathens on Gab, and I find this curious given the roles I know the women in *my* family played in the colonial nation-building project. Daniels (1997), however, provides an avenue for understanding this omission. In response to the statement “white men built this nation, white men are this nation,” Daniels argues that this “signals a link between race, ‘whiteness,’ and masculinity, specifically ‘white men,’ such that white men are the central, indeed the *only* actors visible” (p. 59). With this in mind, my early question regarding the selective inclusion of white women and men of colour is somewhat clarified. It is not enough to be white or male. One must be both to truly lay claim to Canada.

And so, I focus on white men. Men who now believe they are failing—to get jobs, to find wives, to have children—despite their expected inheritance via race *and* gender. Indeed, in my small, southern Albertan hometown I have seen these men fail economically during the downturns in the oil and gas cycle. Some are keen to bemoan their individual merit as hard workers who are routinely overlooked and underappreciated because women and minorities received preferential and special treatment within the workforce and Canadian society in general. Here, their failure was a product of a new system that denied them their rightful rewards, and a function neither of their own decision making nor of exploitive capitalists. This particular form of backlash sees a “deep-seated sense among some white voters that immigration, racial policies, feminism, and political correctness have changed the country in ways that erode their traditional values and diminish their status” (Turney et al., 2017, p. 1). This diminishment is amplified by economic

displacement, or the diminishing job opportunities and wages. It perhaps makes sense that they reach back in time, through illiberal racism and misogyny, to an era where they felt in control (see also Wohl et al., 2020 on nostalgia and xenophobia).

Again, it is important to stress the word *felt* throughout this section, as much of this discourse is rooted in *feelings* of victimhood that very often do not map onto real world experiences (Bhambra, 2017). Yet these feelings—these fears, frustrations, and anxiety—create fertile ground for populist and nativist movements that seek to unearth a sanitized and romanticized heritage and national identity (Massey, 1996). Moreover, they make space for the victimhood narrative.

Victimhood Narrative: The Last Resort of the Entitled Straight White Male

So, what is a straight white male in Canada to do when he is denied total control (culturally, politically, economically, and genetically) of the country? What shape does his rhetoric take when denied his inheritance? Aggrieved entitlement is one option manifesting as violently racist and misogynistic rhetoric as described above (see also Chapter 8 for greater detail and more disturbing examples). However, there is another path for my interlocutors, which relies on a deliberate misunderstanding of intersectionality. This is the white male victim trope, referred to here as victimhood narrative. It posits that because of feminism, anti-racist and queer-rights activism, straight white men are actually the most disadvantaged combination of identities in Canada. This is doubly true for those who identify as conservative and Christian. To make this argument, they rely on the liberal manifestations of racism and misogyny that allow for discussions of reverse racism and sexism, rather than the more abrasive traditional or illiberal forms. Take for example, the following Reddit post,

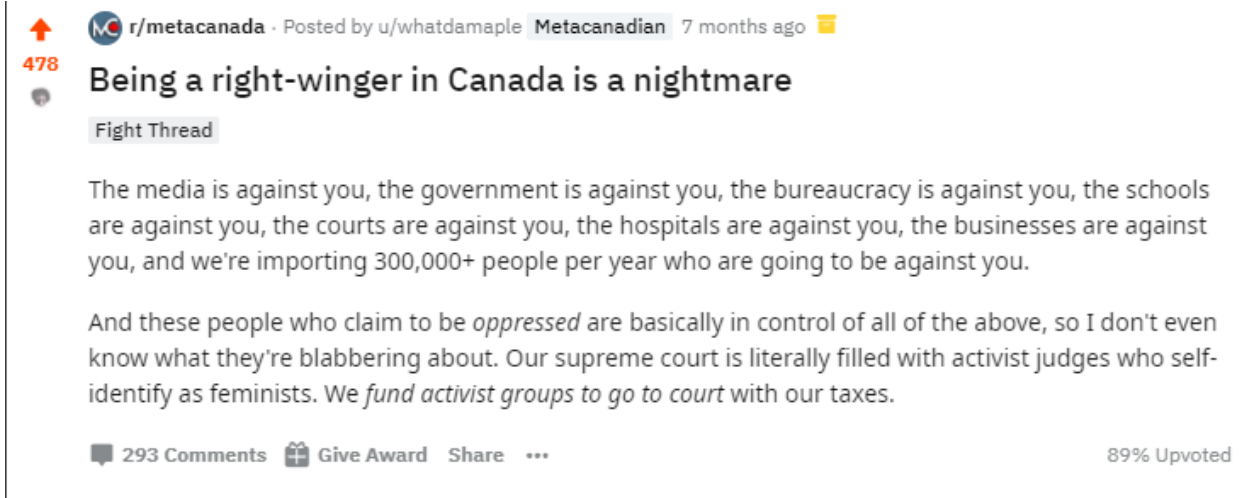


Figure 8. Screenshot of an r/metacanada post entitled “being a right-winger in Canada is a nightmare” and short commentary

Here, the user explicitly notes that women and immigrants “claim to be oppressed,” thus implying that these people are not, in fact, oppressed. Rather, it is the right-winger who is oppressed. There are a few scholars I want to highlight here. First, is the work of Berbrier (2000), whose work on victim ideology of white supremacists was the first to give a scholarly term to what I was seeing in the field. In his review of contemporary literature on white supremacists, he too found that there were two overlapping ‘camps’ of white supremacist groups. The first was prone to overt displays of violence and hate speech. The second was more concerned with optics (Miller-Idriss, 2017; Perry & Scrivens, 2019), and positioned themselves as the victims rather than the righteous oppressors. These are often associated with younger generations, like Generation Identity and ID Canada (see Mack, forthcoming; Zúquete, 2018), and referred to by Berbrier as the ‘new racists’ whereas the former are more associated with violent and aggressive forms of white supremacy (e.g., the KKK, Soldiers of Odin; see Toy, 2006). Berbrier provides a thought-provoking framework for the white supremacist victim ideology:

- (1) that Whites are victims of discrimination,
- (2) that their rights are being abrogated,
- (3) that they are stigmatized if they express “pride,”

- (4) that they are being psychologically affected through the loss of self-esteem, and
- (5) that the end product of all of this is the elimination of the “white race” (2000, p. 176)

Such a framework fits comfortably with the liberal forms of racism and sexism which I have described above, and each theme easily maps onto my research data. In my censorship chapter, I explore how the right-wing feels their right to free speech is consistently curtailed. In my chapter on women and masculinity (Chapter 8), I demonstrate their feelings of discrimination when it comes to jobs and the impact feminism has had on their (and women’s) wellbeing. My hockey chapter attends directly to rhetoric about how white people cannot “be good” at things or “take pride” in historically white-dominated sports and events (Chapter 9). Finally, my chapter on demographic replacement is perhaps the most obvious example of discourse related to the elimination of white people (Chapter 7).

The ‘new racists,’ according to Berbrier (2000), also focus on the ‘love’ for their own people, rather than hatred for others. This trope was repeated throughout my fieldwork and accompanied by frustrations that white people were not ‘allowed’ to love themselves (ourselves). Similarly, men frequently expressed that they felt like they could not ‘be masculine’ without accusations of toxic masculinity. Furthermore, they argue that white men are taught to hate their culture and gender while women and people of colour are encouraged to embrace their lived experiences—even white women can embrace their gender if they “forsake” their race. Yet, as I explore above, pride in whiteness and maleness is certainly permissible within Canadian society, and indeed is still considered the normative standard for Canadian identity (see Chapter 9 on hockey and nationalism).

Berbrier’s (2000) interest in the loss of rights is also of interest to me here when one considers the connection between rights and entitlement. As he notes, white supremacists employ the language of reverse discrimination in situations like job hires. For example, they claim that the first hiring choice would be a Black woman, then a Black man, then a white woman, with a white man at the very bottom of the pile. They are therefore the ultimate victims. As Daniels (1997) echoes,

On almost every front in which white men are presented as ‘warriors’ they are simultaneously presented as ‘victims.’ White men depict themselves as victims of racial discrimination, of class oppression, and as the special victims of race, gender, and class oppression at the hands of the racial state. The white warrior who protects his family may find himself a victim of the state, and his family may be the victim of racial Others” (p. 63).

Within Berbrier’s (2000) data set, this sort of rhetoric was often accompanied by claims that white people were “losing the rights their forefathers fought for” (2000, p. 180). Such a perspective connects rights with notions of inheritance and entitlement discussed above, and it also leads into the discussion of privilege. As Berbrier notes, much of the discourse and actions of white supremacist groups is the maintenance not only of white privilege, but male privilege as well. Yet, my interlocutors, and indeed Berbrier’s, are uncomfortable with the notion of ‘privilege’ and will often reject it outright as it implies something unearned—and remember, my interlocutors feel very strongly that they have “earned” what they are entitled to via their ancestors’ founding work. As Berbrier notes, “clearly, the white supremacist belief is that if indeed Whites hold more power and wealth in the society (which of course makes problematic any claims to victim status!) then they do so completely out of merit” (p. 182). This is just one of many contradictory beliefs my interlocutors hold that I work to tease out in the following chapters. They are simultaneously entitled to power, land, and affluence because of their ancestors, yet, they also only have the things they do because of their own individual hard work (see also Gallaher, 2002 here),

My purpose in including this discussion of Berbrier (2000), beyond his five-point framework for understanding white supremacist rhetoric, is to demonstrate how my understanding and immersion in this rhetoric has been marked by contradictory discourse, positions, and opinions. I do not necessarily mean between interlocutors—although that certainly happens—but rather within individuals themselves. Thus, my ‘thinking through’ work has to grapple with the irreconcilable nature of my interlocutors’ discourse(s). They are simultaneously entitled because of their ancestors, but not privileged because of their race or gender. They claim reverse racism and sexism and at the same time denounce intersectionality. They benefit from the work white

women do to uphold white supremacy, while espousing openly misogynistic and degrading language towards these same women. This thinking-through practice also obligates me to hold contradictory ideas about my interlocutors within myself, but also between myself and the empirical reality I know. By this I mean I must accept that they *claim* victimhood, and as an anthropologist I must attend to their emotions and experiences on their terms, while *knowing* that they hold undeniable power within Canadian society by virtue of their race and gender (and sexuality and religion). Moreover, I *know* that their rhetoric causes real harm to marginalized communities and to me.

Let me conclude this discussion by returning to Daniels' (1997) exploration of the power of imagination. She argues that the “*potential* physical and sexual attacks to which white men *imagine* themselves falling victim ... reinforces the image of white men as victims and Black men as predators” (p. 64, emphasis added). I think it is important to call attention to imagination here because while it is easy to disregard my interlocutors' feelings and imaginings as ‘not real’ or ‘not grounded in empirical reality,’ that does not mean they do not have repercussions for Canadian society.²⁹ If my interlocutors *feel* alienated, *feel* cheated, *feel* betrayed—as many of them do—and they *imagine* themselves the victims of harm—whether physical, political, or economic—then the risk of violent aggrievement manifests.

Concluding Thoughts on Thinking-Through and Thinking-With

I gave this chapter the title ‘thinking-through, thinking-with’ instead of ‘theory chapter’ for two reasons. First, I think it better reflects my approach to theoretical frameworks as helpful tools for thinking through complex field experiences rather than dogmatic approaches that impede the occasional foray off the beaten path. I had hoped that by describing the theories that help me think through my work, and these moments where I explore the bushes, my readers would better understand why I make particular arguments in subsequent chapters. If it has the feelings of an

²⁹ I want to note that my interlocutors likely are responding to changes in their lives (e.g., increased economic precarity) and that they are victims of capitalism and an increasingly globalized and neoliberal world. What I challenge here is the root of their precarity and to stake the claim that it is not women and immigrants who threaten them despite their complex imagination work.

overly descriptive review, know that I do this to stake out the boundaries of my theoretical home and indicate which scholars I am actively thinking *with* throughout this project.

But writing this chapter has also been an example of thinking-through in practice. Here, I wove together theorists and data to show how they complement one another and provide a sturdy framework for me to mess around in for a time. This was not a passive process of outlining people I think are quite clever (although they are), but rather an active one wherein I generated new ideas and insights, which I will take into my more analytical and data-driven chapters. And so, despite still eyeing ‘theory’ with suspicion, this has been a useful practice.

I want to end with another kind of practice, which I take from social media. It is the “tl;dr,” or, too long; didn’t read. It is a simple summary—usually no more than a couple sentences—that accompanies long posts on forums like Reddit. Often, these come at the end of users ‘thinking-through’ some sort of issue of their own. So, it suits my work, but it also answers my mentor’s question regarding the theory that binds my dissertation together.

So,

tl; dr: The guiding thread of this dissertation is the notion of entitlement. This entitlement is derived from a belief that whiteness, maleness, straightness, and Christian-ness are all superior ways of being, and that descendants of early settlers are the rightful heirs of political, social, and economic power in Canada because of the work of their ancestors in building Canada. Thus, this entitlement can be considered a function of white and male supremacy as well as settler colonialism. When denied, this entitlement becomes aggrieved and manifests as anti-immigrant and anti-feminist rhetoric, as well as the white male victim ideology.

Chapter 3 – Ethnography and Right-Wing Spaces

Since beginning this dissertation project, I have been invited into many interdisciplinary spaces dedicated to scholarly analysis of right-wing and male supremacist movements and ideologies. From my time with the *Digital Hate: Global Conjunctures of Extreme Speech* working group in Munich, Germany (2018) and UC Berkeley's Institute for Research on Male Supremacism and the Centre for Right Wing Studies (2020-2022), I have come to realize that there are as many approaches to the study of these phenomenon as there are scholars to do the work. For example, my colleague Indah S. Pratidina (2021) used an interpretive approach to explore how social media and extreme speech shape women's activism. Similarly, Jonas Kaiser (2021) utilized Facebook's API to extract thousands of Facebook comments related to refugee centers in Germany and spatially mapped anti-refugee sentiments in the country. In contrast, some of my colleagues turn to archives both digital and analogue to collect their data. In their work on male supremacism, Alexis de Coning and Chelsea Ebin (2022) turn to archived digital forums to shed light on contemporary misogynist movements.

Many of these scholars focus on methods that either are quantitative or facilitate distance between researcher and subject. Anthropologist Sindre Bangstad, for example, gains insight into Scandinavian right-wing movements through their publications and public discourse, rather than through participant-observation or interviews. This, he explained to me over coffee when I was conducting research in Oslo, is how he attends to the ethical dilemmas posed by research on and with extremist actors (personal communication, November 2019). Others, of course, choose to sit with the messiness and use it as a productive tension (de Coning, 2021; Pasieka, 2019).

Despite the exceptional work by my colleagues, their approaches were not quite right for me as a scholar. I have spent the last decade training as an anthropologist and developing my approach to digital ethnography. As a result, I set out to conduct an ethnography of right-wing anti-immigrant groups, combining digital and analogue methods grounded in participant-observation and interviews. Unsurprisingly, these methodological choices were ethically and pragmatically fraught, and so I begin this chapter with a discussion of ethnography and right-wing spaces and the difficulties of such an approach. I do this so the reader can better understand the rationale

behind my methodological choices, adaptations, and pivots. Throughout this chapter I intentionally shift from an overview of the methods employed as they are understood in the literature to how I put them into practice. As a result, this chapter is not just an account of the methods used, but the process, experience, and lessons learned from using said methods.

Difficulty of Ethnography in Right-Wing Spaces: On Covert Access

As long-time ethnographer of the far-right Kathleen Blee (2007) notes, there has been a tendency within studies of the right-wing to focus on ‘externalist’ data that is publicly available. This originally included pamphlets, cartoons, and radio programs, but in the digital age has been expanded to blogs, social media posts, and multimedia content. ‘Internalist’ data, however, requires a degree of engagement and interaction with right-wing interlocutors, and may therefore include interviews and participant-observation.

Anthropologists and ethnographers have historically relied on internalist data in our work, yet, as Pasieka (2017) aptly notes, there is often a political disconnect between anthropologists and right-wing groups. This disconnect troubles anthropologists accustomed to collaborating with and advocating for the communities they work in (Goldstein, 2014). Shoshan (2016), in his work on German right-wing extremists, expands on this notion and argues that despite a vast array of anthropological work in dangerous and challenging settings, the lack of right-wing research owes to “the moral aversion that the groups with which I worked provoke” (p. 22).

This aversion goes both ways, as interlocutors may find the anthropologist just as unsavory, unlikeable, and untrustworthy as the anthropologist finds them. This, of course, has implications for establishing the rapport necessary for internalist research. This brings me to covert ethnography, which, while effective, is ethically fraught. From Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), covert ethnography occurs when a researcher does not disclose their research activities to the participants in whole or in part. This has been used by scholars of the far-right including Fielding’s (1981, 2016) work on the right-wing party the National Front wherein his work involved both disclosed and covert observations. Perhaps most striking is the writing of Shoshan (2016) on the explicitly covert nature of his work. Shoshan is an Israeli national, yet in his work

he took up the identity of ‘Nate’ who was an American anthropologist from Chicago. This deception was at the urging of his gatekeepers, a group of social workers whose clientele were the focus of Shoshan’s work, who feared his true identity as Israeli might provoke his interlocutors. Yet, his false identity as an American also carried with it possible hurdles. In a similar vein, my identity as a white woman created problems for participant-observation just as it solved others. Another example of anthropological research that pushes the boundaries of covert ethnography is Nancy Scheper-Hughes’ (2001, 2004) work on organ trafficking, which I explore in greater detail in my conclusion.

Covert research is also popular amongst researchers outside of anthropology, and particularly amongst those who work in advocacy roles. Take for instance the work of The Canadian Anti-Hate Network, which is an independent not-for-profit funded by the Government of Canada. In 2020, they released a report on ID Canada—a group I was keenly interested in at the outset of this project—which was the culmination of an 18-month long “undercover” investigation. The leader researcher, Peter Smith (2020) noted that,

Attempting to gain entry into the group is markedly simple, but monetized at almost every level -- at least in Ontario. Their website includes a brief questionnaire that screens for ideology; social media accounts (a fake account was submitted); and a small amount of personal information, including views on immigration. Journalists are asked to self identify -- I did not -- and a secure payment of \$15 is required for membership.

This was followed by a call through the Discord app. The questions were nearly identical to the ones on the sites, but delved deeper into feelings on immigration, the media, and a final question about “miscegenation” (para. 26).

This report was incredibly useful to my understanding of the movement and its inner workings. As I discuss elsewhere (Mack, forthcoming), I was restricted in my ability to access the group precisely because I was unwilling to submit fake accounts and felt compelled to disclose my journalist/academic status. Not doing so would have been a breach of my personal and institutional ethics. As a result, I did not receive any response from ID Canada. What I am

attempting to articulate here is the value of covert ethnography, as well as my personal hesitation to engage in it on ethical grounds.

It is possible to conceptualize most digital research that involves observation as “covert.” In his work on the ethics of covert ethnography, Marzano (2018) argues that

Research is deemed to be covert when researchers do not reveal their identity, as researchers, to those whom they are observing. In such instances, while people are likely to be aware of the fact they are being observed by others in their company, they are unaware that there is a researcher among them and that they are being observed for research purposes... The fact that those being observed are either unaware that they are being observed or unaware of the true purpose of the researcher’s observations is said to undermine the ethics principle of respect for persons and the right to informed consent (p. 399).

This is certainly an admirable stance and would render my research at least partially covert. The 1000 Twitter users I followed were not given the right to informed consent, nor were the nearly 40,000 r/metacanada Redditors, when I observed their spaces. When I engaged with people, that is, participated in their conversations or conducted interviews, my account included a bio that “outed” me as a researcher. Yet, there was no way to let my more than 40,000 possible participants know that I was there and observing. For me, and my moral and ethical position, informed consent matters when there is participation and when the space is conceptualized as private. The question I ask is, “is there a reasonable expectation of privacy?” On Reddit or Twitter, I do not think this is the case. Indeed, my interlocutors frequently noted that they had “followers” and “fans” who were not members of the community. Private spaces, however, would include private Facebook groups or subreddits where an invitation is required. This is one of the reasons I limited my work on Facebook to public-only pages.

Covert ethnography also involves hiding aspects of oneself, not just that one is a researcher. This was, of course the case for Shoshan. As a white woman, I occupy a strange space within right-wing and white supremacist spaces. As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 8, according to my

interlocutors, white women are responsible for the future of white nations (see Belew, 2018; Blee, 2003). White women can either choose to be dutiful mothers and raise white babies, or they can be race traitors who either advocate for feminist and anti-racist policies or engage in mixed-race relationships. The former representation renders women a precious resource to be protected, while the latter becomes subjected to violence and derision. As a result, I was uncertain as to how my presence as a white woman would be interpreted within an offline space, such as a rally or protest. Unlike Shoshan, I was unable to hide the potentially problematic aspect of my identity offline.

Yet, my gender also mattered online. Since the deeply misogynistic and violent #GamerGate movement in 2014, women scholars and journalists have faced increased threats of violence online (Massanari, 2017; Mortensen, 2018; Salter, 2018). While safety for women in the field has long been a point of discussion in anthropology (Mahmood, 2012), the threat of doxing³⁰ has amplified the insecurity of women researchers and this threat is magnified for women who are also queer, Muslim, Jewish, Black, Indigenous, or of colour. This increasingly precarious position requires a management of marginality (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). For those unable to sufficiently ‘manage’ their identities, it makes sense to opt for more distanced research methods that would allow them to collect data without potentially traumatizing and dangerous interactions (see Onuoha, 2021 on far-right research and Black womanhood).

Yet, ethnography helps capture the everyday life of right-wing groups and can provide a more holistic understanding of their online communities. These can include their jokes and linguistic practices, social norms and beliefs, important dates and events, as well as group hierarchies and relations of power. Some of these have been explored by scholars, including everyday practices of banal nationalism (Hearn & Antonsich, 2018), denials of racism through humour (DeCook, 2020; Hervik, 2019), declarations of their right to offend (Finnis, 2009), and even play (Udupa, 2021). Moreover, the long-term participation I was after allowed me to see shifts in the communities and their focus, which ranged from Yellow Vest anti-refugee grievances in 2018 to the Covid-19-related Sinophobia of 2020 and the more recent anti-vax movement in 2021 and

³⁰ Doxing refers to the act of releasing a person’s private information to the public. This might include a home address, place of employment, or financial information.

so-called “Freedom” convoy in 2022. In the remainder of this section, I explore how my methodological choices were put into practice and the difficulties that emerged from these choices.

Difficulty of Research in Digital Spaces: Ethnography & Participant-Observation

Before I begin a discussion of what my participant-observation looked like during my fieldwork, I provide an overview of the spectrum of practices that get included under the umbrella of participant-observation. As my IRMS colleague Luc Cousineau pointed out, I have at times a rather prescriptive approach to ethnography. He likely has something of a point, but this perspective comes from years of frustration regarding the vague and fuzzy nature of digital ethnography (Holec & Mack, 2020). I want to be explicitly clear as to what *I* considered digital ethnography and participant-observation within the context of my research. It might also be prudent to explain first what it was I was chasing after in this work.

Carole McGranahan (2018) argues that there is something about ethnographic work that *feels* ethnographic. She refers to this as the ethnographic sensibility, which feels thick and rich, in comparison to observations that are shallow and thin. Anthropologists can, she argues, tell when an ethnography is a good one—we feel the ethnographic sensibility. And I think her line of thinking (one that is certainly not unique to her) is part of what compelled me to adopt a more participatory approach to my work than some of my colleagues (Cousineau, 2021b for a non-participatory project that uses ethnographic methods), as well as one that was long-term (and see de Coning, 2021 for a short-term ethnographic project). I wanted that sensibility and that feeling of richness and thickness. I wanted other anthropologists to read my work and recognize it as ethnographic. I was, after all, training to be an anthropologist. As a result, at the beginning of my project I followed the methodological school of Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, and Taylor (2012) when they argue that 1) the hallmark of ethnography is participant-observation, and 2) participant-observation is the process of actively engaging as a consequential social actor. This is a particularly prescriptive stance, and one that I took to heart in my research.

Beyond the work of Boellstorff and colleagues, what counts as participant and participation becomes somewhat messier. Take for example the work of Emily Ryalls (2013) in which she states, “I used silent participant observation, so I did not interact with the subculturalists” (p. 87). This was a quote from a brilliant paper regarding masculinity in crisis amongst the emo subculture in which Ryalls provides insight into how the emo masculinity resists hegemonic masculinity while still upholding and deploying the latter’s misogynistic rhetoric. Moreover, Ryalls’ discussion of victimization – at the hands of alpha/hegemonic males and women – is directly applicable to the incel-related rhetoric I encountered during my time in anti-immigrant spaces and am grateful to the analysis. Yet, “silent participant observation” is an interesting methodological intervention.

This ‘silent’ work involved Ryalls (2013) entering a chatroom and watching the conversation play out but never contributing herself. This is, in a way, akin to pulling up a seat at the bar and listening to the conversations. Within some contexts this would be considered eavesdropping, yet in chatroom and other social media-based spaces, the notion of ‘lurking’ is not only common, but also acceptable behaviour. This sort of lurking behaviour is at the other end of the spectrum from the work of Bonnie Nardi (2010), who used the term *participant-engagement* to describe the intense level of interaction and immersion in her research. My work floated between the two poles depending on the field site, although I moved towards greater degrees of participation as my research went on and I developed a level of comfort in the spaces.

The silent approach does have an interesting ethical conundrum with regards to consent, namely, do the other members of the chatroom know that there is a researcher lurking? Of course, in spaces that are entirely public, the argument can be made that lurking or observation without consent is entirely acceptable. Indeed, I made this very argument in the previous section. Conscientious researchers can gain access to spaces with moderator approval, which leave community leaders responsible for informing other members of the researcher’s presence. The question remains, however, if people come in and out of the space rapidly, how would moderators make sure everyone is aware of their presence, and is this necessary?

When I was invited by moderators of r/metacanada to join their Discord server, which is a chatroom-like space, I quickly realized the space was a revolving door of users. Some would pop in for a few moments, others a few hours. The text-based chatrooms (called channels) were often fast-paced streams of emojis, gifs, and comments, which were hard to keep up with at times. My “amy has entered the chat” message was quickly buried by the onslaught of comments. Because of this, it would have been impossible to make myself known to my interlocutors unless I *posted* either using a username that indicated I was a researcher or began each comment with “I’m Amy, I’m an anthropologist and my question/comment is...”

The Discord server was also a publicly available space, and one that the moderators had invited me into. Moreover, one of the first things a new user reads upon entering the space is a disclaimer that anyone, at any time, with any “motives” could be lurking on the space. My interlocutors, it seemed, were aware that they were under surveillance by others, although they did not indicate who might be surveilling them.

This illuminates some of the differences between offline and online ethnographic work, as well as the assumptions our methods and ethics make about participant-observation. In her work on World of Warcraft, Nardi (2010) notes,

I learned to play the game well enough to participate in a raiding guild. I looked just like any other player. For many practical purposes, I was just another player. I could not have studied raiding guilds without playing as well as at least an average player and fully participating in raids. By contrast, when I was walking around villages in Papua New Guinea or Western Samoa, I was obviously an outsider whose identity required explanation (p. 34).

This highlights the ease at which a digital researcher can blend into an ethnographic space, particularly when they are already well versed in the culture. As a Discord user myself, I was not an obvious outsider in this space, and unless I actively alerted others to my presence, I would likely go unnoticed. This was also the case for me when I did offline work. While women were often not at the forefront of many of the movements I studied, by virtue of my whiteness, I could

‘pass’ as a community member. However, for many anthropologists—and indeed myself in previous projects with Indigenous communities—we are often physically identifiable as outsiders. As I discuss in Chapter 5 on fieldwork, this is rooted in the assumption that anthropologists are best suited to do work outside their culture, rather than within it, although this is an increasingly challenged notion (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997).

Ultimately, I chose not to spend time on Discord as I was already stretched thin amongst existing field sites, and participating on Discord would have been time consuming given the rate of flow. Discord was the closest I came to synchronous work online, and it would have required a sort of rooted presence that other sites did not. I could hop between Reddit and Twitter and read a Council of European Canadians blog post while I waited for a reply. I could go for a run, file my taxes, bake bread. Discord, however, would not allow for this. It, as a space, also *felt* more private than Twitter or Reddit because of the ways in which it was bounded and cleaved off from other sites in part by virtue of its relative niche userbase.³¹ Because of this, I felt less comfortable simply lurking, but was overwhelmed at the prospect of actively engaging on a regular basis. This points to the ways in which digital anthropologists are expected to exercise their best judgement with regards to methods and ethics.

But let me return to the research that muddies the water. In her work on gender and social media, sociologist Helana Darwin (2017) put forth a thought-provoking piece on how non-binary individuals “do, redo, and undo gender” online (p. 317). To best access the self-narratives of the non-binary community, Darwin turned to virtual ethnography and Reddit. In her account, she describes her careful reading and re-reading of 500 of the most recent threads within the selected subreddit. During this process she conducted an open reading and took fieldnotes regarding key themes and emergent ideas. However, nowhere in the paper does Darwin address interaction or participation. Perhaps Darwin’s approach to ethnography does not follow that of Boellstorff et al. (2012) and their prescriptive approach. After all, ethnography is many things and these things have shifted over the decades. Perhaps she did engage and participate but declined to include that process for the purpose of the article. This does not detract from the richness of Darwin’s

³¹ Discord is by no means an “alt” tech site like Gab or Voat, but it certainly does not enjoy the mainstream popularity of Facebook or Twitter.

account. However, this points to the necessity for me to be clear about my methodological interventions and why I chose to take them up differently in different spaces, and how this shifted over time in tandem with my mental and emotional capacity. So, allow me to begin with the hallmark of ethnography, participant-observation.

Participant-observation

Weekdays (4-8 hours); Weekends and holidays (2-3 hours); December 2018 to December 2020 (with sporadic updates post-leaving the field)

There were concerns raised by members of my department, the ethics review board, and my friends and family, about the dangers of offline participant-observation. Most of these concerns were rooted in my gender identity. My whiteness protected me from much of the violence in this research, yet my woman-ness could be either a detriment or a benefit depending on the context and the interlocutor. Am I the valuable resource to be protected, or the traitorous feminist slut who deserves violence? Digital ethnography, however, provided an opportunity to obscure my gender. There is an old saying that goes, “on the internet, no one knows you’re a dog.” The same thing applies to gender.

I did not set out to lie about my gender. Rather, it was suggested by my review board to use a gender-neutral pseudonym. As was expected, my interlocutors assumed I was a man and for three years I was referred to as brother, he, him, and King. This shaped the sort of engagements I was able to have, as well as the way other users responded to me. In addition to brother, I was also referred to as a simp, soyboy, libtard, and the f-word. While my imagined masculinity opened me up to a homophobic sort of violence, it also served as a safety precaution. Would my interlocutors have been more inclined to speak to me if they knew I was a woman? Could I have leveraged my perceived weakness and vulnerability? Maybe. Perhaps they would have ignored me or called me some sort of sexist slur and moved on. The truth is, I will never know.

And so, I set out to “do” digital ethnography. Guided by John Postill’s five-part practice of catching up, sharing, exploring, interacting, and archiving (Postill & Pink, 2012), I visited my

field sites daily via computer and smartphone. During this time, which typically ranged from four to seven hours, I collected externalist data, such as announcements, memes, and content shared from non-social media sites. Where possible, I also collected internalist data through asynchronous interactions via commenting and resharing content (e.g., retweet; cross-posting).

While I recognize the value in the methodological musings of Boellstorff et al. (2012) and their definition of participant-observation as the process of actively engaging in a community as a “consequential” social actor, it was not always feasible nor appropriate. As Sophie Bjork-James (2015) notes,

unlike traditional ethnography that involves participating in social activities as a research method, cyber-ethnography does not entail the same type of face-to-face research possibilities... the focus is on experience, and sharing, the experience of the online community. Part of this means the ethnographer should pay attention to the variety of ways people communicate with [social media], including the use of emoticons to convey feeling and to form social bonds (p. 117).

As a result, I focused on what my interlocutors were doing in these spaces. Was posting original content common? If so, how often? What about replies and lengthy conversations? Were emoji reactions more common? Were the users passive in their engagement? Was their presence made visible only through their ‘likes’ and up/down votes?

For now, I want to emphasize that in each space – whether Facebook, Gab, Twitter, or Reddit – I endeavoured to follow the example of my interlocutors and the *general* principles of Boellstorff et al. (2012). This meant that some spaces encouraged a greater degree of participation, and I was able to access more of what Blee (2007) refers to as internalist data. In contrast, some sites necessitated a more lurker style approach to engagement. This gave me a sense of the everyday experience of my interlocutors in these spaces by virtue of repeated and sustained visits. But let me backtrack and start this discussion at the beginning.

I began my fieldwork on the Facebook page for the Edmonton chapter of SOO where interaction on posts was limited (see also Scrivens & Amarasingam, 2020 for engagement practices). As most members engaged using the emoji reactions, I followed suit in my engagements. This work was integrated into my personal Facebook account, and I experienced posts and engagements “naturally” as I browsed Facebook. This felt like a much more passive approach to ethnography, especially compared to previous projects, yet it was how the space was used by my interlocutors. If I had tried to engage more, I would have looked overly eager, out of place, and it likely would not have been positively received. As a result, I would describe my time on SOO’s Facebook page as predominantly lurker based.

In contrast, forum-based sites like Reddit and Gab encouraged passive up and downvoting as well as active commenting and posting. Yet, the number of subscribers and active users again influenced how I participated. During my fieldwork, especially on Canadian-focused parts of Gab and smaller subreddits, there were times where only one or two users would post repeatedly and fill the space with their voices and ideas. Despite the high level of participation by some users, I felt like my level of engagement had to match that of my interlocutors in general. This meant that some forums and spaces were easier to catch up on every day, while others like r/metacanada took hours and were more participatory. Twitter, on the other hand, encouraged both participation and passive scrolling. Some days I would actively reply or retweet/quote tweet, while others I would simply scroll and take screen shots. As I explore in both Chapter 5 on fieldwork and my reflection on tethering in my Epilogue, my ability to participate was also linked to my negotiation of the field/home boundary. Some days, my “home” responsibilities precluded intense engagement.

All my field sites were set to “push notifications” to my smartphone. These notifications ensured I remained tethered to and immersed in my ethnographic spaces despite my attempts to ‘log-off’ of participant-observation for the day. Additionally, it meant I had screenshots and images saved to my password protected phone as well as my computer. Each week I would transfer the images from my phone onto my computer for sorting, coding, and a sort of pre-analysis process.

This methodological approach required a great deal of administrative work. As Postill and Pink (2012) note, it is important to maintain a manageable amount of content producers, engagements, and data. Moreover, there is concern that digital ethnographers are at risk of amassing unruly amounts of data (Hine, 2000). By the end of my fieldwork, my corpus included over 150 pages of reflexive field notes and commentary, as well as over 5000 screenshots from Twitter, Facebook, and Gab, and hundreds of Reddit posts with accompanying comments.

This shift between passive lurker and active participant also brought about ethical quandaries. The notion of a ‘consequential social actor’ is a tricky one for scholars of the right. As Tikka and Sumiala (2014) discuss in their work on media witnessing on YouTube, scholars must also consider how their presence affects things like viewership metrics. Some of the websites I visited tracked page visits per day. Similarly, YouTube videos tracked views. Did I want to contribute to statistics they use to validate their cause? Would my presence, even as a passive lurker, have an impact? Furthermore, if I chose to engage with my interlocutors via retweets, emoji reactions, or comments, would my attempts to become a consequential social actor carry with them negative consequences? And, importantly, negative for whom? Participant-observation is, as a result, a complex and debated method within the fields of male supremacism and right-wing studies. Some of my colleagues elected to immerse themselves passively within the digital and analogue spaces and fully embody the experiential nature of lurking (see for example Cousineau, 2021). Others are inclined to engage and become fully known to their interlocutors (see the exceptional work of Mah, 2022 for an example of how a student and woman of colour navigated this process).

For my work, I elected to shift from lurker to actor depending on the space and community, but also my capacity to do this work. As I have noted elsewhere in this dissertation, this work can be exceedingly difficult to manage and actively participating in all spaces everyday was unrealistic.

Interviews

Email (1); Reddit Chat (2); Reddit Direct Messaging (3 + moderator chat);

Forum responses (+40)

While I had initially hoped to conduct offline interviews face-to-face with right-wing actors in Canada and Europe, I was thwarted by scheduling conflicts and the spontaneity of protests, as well as Covid-19 restrictions. I did, however, conduct conversation-style interviews with members of the Icelandic Asatru community during a knitting and crafting circle in Reykjavik. In this style, a formal interview guide is not used, and questions and prompts emerge organically out of the conversation. Moreover, this approach is meant to reaffirm the power and agency of the interviewees by allowing them to shape and guide the conversation (Kovach, 2009). Thus, while I had themes and questions that I wanted the pagans to reflect on, I allowed the conversation to flow in response to their interests and what they felt I should know about white nationalism and their northern home. It was an interesting moment in my research, as my interlocutors were frustrated with the appropriation of their religion and heritage by those who would use it to harm others. In this way, they became one of my ‘communities of care’ – a term I borrow from Dr. Kim TallBear – alongside the other marginalized communities that are also harmed by this rhetoric.

Reflecting on these conversations now, I realize that they are the only non-right-wing voices that I attended to in this dissertation. This is in part because this is not a dissertation about experiences of Islamophobia, for example, but rather the discourses that include and incite Islamophobia. I also was curious as to how these people, white, leftist, and pagan dealt with their whiteness and their resistance to the appropriation of their religion, and if it paralleled my own experience as I grappled with my own resistance and complicity. In this way, these conversations became less about collecting data and more about reflexivity and negotiating my own position within this work (see Pillow, 2003). As a result, the conversations do not appear in this dissertation, yet they inform how I approached the years of fieldwork that would follow.

My online interviews were markedly different, although I attempted to give my interlocutors as much freedom within the interview experience as possible. First and foremost, I allowed them to choose an interview site that they were comfortable with. I suggested Zoom, Discord, Reddit’s direct messaging function, and email as possible spaces for engagement. Each would create a different environment and channels of communication including asynchronous text-based communication (e.g., direct messaging and email) and synchronous face-to-face and verbal

communication (e.g., Zoom). Some platforms, like Discord, could provide a combination of both verbal, as it includes a Voice over IP function, as well as text. Moreover, each form carried with it varying degrees of instability. No-shows for Zoom events have become common in the Covid-era, as have unread and unreturned emails. Even prior to the techno-fatigue many have felt during the pandemic, there were concerns of “losing” one’s informants when relying on asynchronous communication like email and text-messaging. This makes sense as it is easy for individuals to leave interviews when all it takes is not responding. This is more difficult in face-to-face offline interviews where leaving necessitates announcing the interview is over and physically leaving the space. From an ethics standpoint, this does empower my interlocutors to decline and exit interviews in a way that offline interviews may not. If we were to meet at a rally, would they feel pressured to stay and perform their position, especially if others were watching?

Ultimately, my interlocutors chose three mediums for interviews: Reddit direct messaging, Reddit chat, and email. For the remainder of this section on interviews, I describe the platform affordances of each medium, as well as the experience of conducting interviews in these spaces, including the benefits and drawbacks.

Email

Only one individual followed up with me via email. Initially, the exchanges revolved around what platform would be desirable. I noted that many individuals had opted for the Reddit direct messaging function, but this individual elected to continue with email. I had planned to send out three rounds of questions, with four to five prompts in each. However, I noted that if they took the conversation in a different direction, I was happy to follow up on those lines of inquiry as well. I sent my first round of questions along with a link to my ethics form, which was hosted on Google Drive:

1. Where do *you* think you fall along the political spectrum? How would you describe your political ideology? I ask this because often scholars will assign categories that the people themselves disagree with.
2. What brought you to metacanda?
3. When talking about Canadians, specifically in the context of immigration debates, do

you use racial terms like "white" or ethnic terms like "German-Canadian/Euro-Canadian" and why? I personally use the latter, but I've seen both on meta and other places and am curious as to the difference.

Crickets.

This individual never responded. This was a clear demonstration of how easy it is for interlocutors to exit the interview even after several exchanges. It was hard not to feel disappointed in the lack of response, especially as I grappled with my own expectations of research. How many interviews were necessary? 10, 15, 35? I knew I had an extraordinary amount of data already and the lack of response was data in its own right, but somehow interviews—like participant-observation—felt like the gold standard. Email, it seemed, was not going to be a space of engagement.

Reddit

Most of my engagements happened within Reddit itself. I suspect this is due in part to users' familiarity with the platform and their daily social media habits. I did, after all, send out my call over Reddit. It could have also been a privacy concern for users. Zoom, Google Meet, and Skype reveal voices and faces, which can make some interviewees feel vulnerable. Email may reveal offline identities or necessitate a burner account. The latter was even recommended to *me* by a cyber security expert who specialized in training scholars of the right-wing and male supremacism in safe and ethical research practices. However, with Reddit, I already knew their online identities through participant-observation, and they had nothing more to risk by engaging through the platform.

Reddit Messenger (Chat)

The second-most common interview platform was Reddit's messenger-style chat function. This is set up as a chatroom, although only myself and my individual interlocutors occupied the space. It is meant to facilitate more synchronous and short-form messaging akin to text messaging. In contrast, the direct messaging functioned along the same vein as email, which can prompt immediate responses, but the expectation is a time delay and likely greater length. However, in

practice the Reddit chat functioned in a much more asynchronous manner with conversations lasting up to a week with sporadic responses and exchanges. The chats were entirely text-based without external links or images.

While I had several interesting exchanges via this platform, I would like to highlight what I have come to refer to as my “troll interview” because it speaks to the possibilities of engagement afforded by online research methods. This exchange was prompted by my call, but it was the respondent who sent the first message which read,

Hello King, I wish to participate in your racist research study about diversity and multiculturalism.

I am an able bodied white male, who has privilege in the form of being a construction worker, and I can trace my lineage all the way back to when French and English people used to fight eachother with cannons,. (last name is on a tombstone in Ft. Bsejour)

Race is cockasian, and all my ancestors came here before 1967.

I grew up in a town that was 99.5% white, and legitimately never saw anyone who wasn't black, or native, with the exception of a few doctors and a sub teacher until I moved out west.

My hometown is now 80% white.

Text, Skype, Reddit DM all work,.

As I have to atone for my white privilege I will be working for three more hours and won't be availbe, I have the weekends off, or weekdays after 7~ I'm available.

To which I responded, “Hey man, I'll take whatever you feel like sharing on the subject. Why don't you pick a time next week that works for you? Just let me know the timezone.” We had a

few brief messages about his background. He works in the trades in Alberta, has a non-white girlfriend, and has becoming increasingly disillusioned with the work ethic of his fellow whites back home in Nova Scotia. While he was initially very anti-immigrant, he now sees the benefit from an economic perspective. The conversation petered out, and after a few days of radio silence he followed up with:

Sorry, I forgot and was busy with work, if your still interested in more than happy to help with your project. Just write out 10 questions, or 20 if your feeling ambitious, point form, single spaced, and be sure to include your favorite pepe [a popular right-wing meme with a frog], social insurance number, mother's mating name, and your last address.

It was an interesting shift in the conversation, which I had a thought included some rapport building. He was, at least, willing to engage on some of the topics. Yet, in the end his concluding remarks circled back to his opening "trolling" statement.

While I elected not to follow up with 10-20 single spaced questions, my mother's "mating" name, my last address, and social insurance number, this was nonetheless a fascinating experience, and it demonstrates how much can be gleaned from flippant, trolling, and sarcastic messages. Indeed, it reflected several cultural values that I had observed within the r/metacanada community and the Canadian right-wing social media landscape more broadly.

He began with the comment "Hello King" which is interesting for a few reasons. One, I am not a King as I am not a man. Within AAVE, the terms Queen and King are used to describe Black women and men respectively, and both have been appropriated by the wider non-Black internet culture and are typically used in a positive manner especially by white women. The term King, however, is used within the right-wing community in a derogatory manner. Rather than being something empowering (e.g., YAS QUEEN!), King is used here sarcastically. It is meant to belittle and emasculate by connecting the King in question to both feminine and Black vernaculars. Throughout my fieldwork, it read similarly to terms like soyboy and simp and years of participant-observation had primed me for this understanding. This time spent in the field had

also attuned me to the cultural relevance of the pepe memes and its place within alt-right movement specifically, and its enduring use in broader conservative spaces.

The use of “mother’s mating name,” rather than “mother’s maiden name,” is also interesting. Was it an honest error? Or was it a purposeful reduction of women to their reproductive capacity, which I saw happen so frequently in these spaces? Given the fact that my interlocutor had assumed I was a man, was it said with the intention of riling me up as ‘your momma’ jokes are meant to? In addition to the possible misogyny, he explicitly and sarcastically noted his white and able-bodied privilege through his ‘atonement’ as a construction worker. The practice of framing privilege as something bad and in need of punishment and penance was common throughout my research. It was something my interlocutors used to reimagine themselves as unfairly victimized and oppressed (Campion-Vincent, 2005). My study, after all, was racist, right?

Finally, the invocation of 1967 and the demographic statistics has been a common theme. frequently referenced as a watershed moment in Canadian immigration history and when the decline of white populations—and therefore power—begins. He doubles down on this allusion with the note that his hometown went from 99.5% to 80% white. Yet, as I noted, in our later discussion, he was unhappy with the work ethic of that 80%.

While this exchange succinctly encapsulates the themes of two chapters in this dissertation (Chapters 7 on demographic replacement & 8 on women and masculinity), which was really very kind of my interlocutor, it also evinces the instability and uncertainty of digital interviews particularly with hostile interlocutors. For my second messenger chat interview, the conversation was positive and receptive, however he too stopped responding after a couple of rounds of questions. As a user of these technologies, I understand the ease of dropping out of a conversation all too well. I am sure my readers have found themselves ignoring or perhaps ‘forgetting’ to respond to a tedious or uninteresting text message on occasion.

Yet, as I have noted elsewhere, perhaps this has implications for digital ethics as it demonstrates the ease with which my interlocutors can exit the interview at their convenience, however

detrimental this might be to the research process. The lack of face-to-face interaction reduces the social pressure and perhaps obligation to remain in the conversation. Moreover, given the size of r/metacanada (nearly 40,000 users at the time of interviews), developing rapport prior to interviews is incredibly difficult. Even after years in the space, I only recognized a few dozen usernames, and the rest slipped by my ethnographic gaze. Indeed, outside of getting the moderators' trust, there was little I could do to develop any sort of intimacy with my interlocutors, which is another ethical conundrum given the misalignment of our politics. Even the gatekeepers of the community had little sway when it came down to the actual interviews.

Whether anthropologists like to admit it or not, there are certainly interviews conducted not under violent coercion, but perhaps with a resigned sense of “oh, alright. I’ll answer your questions so that you’ll leave me alone.” This did not map onto my digital space. I cannot coerce or pressure an interlocutor to remain in these digital spaces as one might have to remain in a village, and they always have the option to block my account. When have ethnographic subjects had the ability to block—to completely remove from their entire existence—an anthropologist in the analogue field? To never hear their name or see their face, let alone have to speak to them again? Perhaps a governing body (e.g., Chief and Council) could enact such an expulsion, but I can hardly think of an individual having such power. And I think this is worth exploring further within the field as we confront the shifting power dynamics at play especially when working amongst extremist communities.

Reddit Direct messaging

Finally, three of my interlocutors opted to use the Reddit direct messaging function. This, as I noted above, functions like email. Individuals can include lengthy responses complete with text editing, embedded links, and images. My interlocutors responded at length to my queries, and all but one engaged with three or more rounds of questions, including the follow ups I asked when they took the conversations in new directions. They provided detailed and nuanced responses in part because the medium allowed for such engagements, but also because they were invested in the conversation and seemed to enjoy the exchanges or at the very least tolerated my queries.

What this medium helped reveal was the web of ideologies and media that constituted their beliefs, which is something I am not certain would have emerged in quite the same way had these been conducted via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. My interlocutors embedded links to the podcasts and YouTube creators they recommended into the text of the message itself as they remarked on issues of censorship and ethno-nationalism. They added images and diagrams to reinforce their perspective, and they linked their ideas back to blog posts and websites of prolific right-wing speakers and thinkers. In this way, their responses became something more than a transcript. It became a multimodal web of their media environments and ideologies, and this validated to some degree my experience as a researcher who was trying to experience right-wing social media as a user might. The places I was directed to were rarely new to me, and the ideologies and arguments they brought up had frequently emerged in other spaces.

While I did not find their arguments persuasive, this medium provided the most in-depth and nuanced account of the many reasons *why* they held the beliefs they did—whys that I had already started to sense were important. It was definitely my preferred method of interviewing as the long-form and asynchronous approach allowed me the time and space to respond thoughtfully. As I have noted previously, my politics do not align with my interlocutors' nor do theirs align in any way with mine. While I might understand the root cause of some of their concerns (e.g., precarious housing and financial collapse), we diverge strongly on the causes of and solutions to these concerns. At times during my research, it has been difficult to temper my responses to certain comments whether directed at me or others, yet I have done so to retain access to these spaces, and the temporal distance provided by asynchronous messages allows for this. Offline, I doubt I would have been as thoughtful in my responses, which is always an important challenge but perhaps more so with an untrusting and antagonistic demographic. Put another way: Have I gotten in heated arguments offline with anti-Muslim protestors in southern Alberta prior to starting this project? Yes. Would that be a conducive way to carry out an ethnography? Probably not. Although it would certainly be interesting.

The direct messaging function was also the space in which I had my discussion with the moderators of r/metacanada. While this was not a formal interview, it was an exchange worth highlighting here to demonstrate the complexity and richness of the medium. This exchange

included more than one moderator. However, because they were all able to respond under the pseudonym “moderator” I am unsure as to how many individuals occupied the space and how many were repeated responders. My only clue as to the multiple users is the ways in which they responded to one another rather than me. When I first asked permission, the first moderator approved my request after a couple hours. However, an hour later, another message, again from the “moderator” arrived inquiring as to my motives, yet the grammar did not imply that they had changed their minds. Rather, it indicated two moderators. While it is possible that the first moderator had sent both messages and was playing some strange game, I am inclined to believe it was at least two individuals conversing with me. These exchanges were shorter and informal, despite my somewhat lengthy responses. This contrasted sharply with my more formal interviews using the same medium.

The moderators were generally supportive of the call for participants and offered to ‘sticky’ the post to the front page. This would ensure every user would see it first when visiting the subreddit. One moderator invited me to join their Discord server, although they warned me that the community was in a bit of a ‘mood’ given the recent announcement that the subreddit would be closed in the coming weeks. As gatekeepers, they did not point me in the direction of anyone to interview, but they did give me formal permission to engage in the space.

Forum Exchanges

Again, while not formal interviews in the traditional sense of a structured back and forth between two identified parties, my interactions on the Call for Participants post are also worth discussing here as it included aspects of the process as well as questions and answers. First, when eliciting interviews, it is likely that participants will have questions about the project and aims, as well as the risks and compensations. In the Call for Participants post, many users expressed concerns about the project. Comments such as “sounds risky in this cancel culture” and “mods should shut this shit down” were common. It was then my job to explain myself and hopefully assure possible interviewees that it was safe and worthwhile to talk to me. A lofty and anxiety-inducing goal.

The second aspect of the forum exchanges that moves them into a sort of interview-style space came about because of a user's intervention. In a response to my post, one asked

so what do you want to know? why not just ask us here, why's it got to be email?
Whatever, DM me if you want. I think immigration is bad.

This was a fair question, and it revealed a sense of distrust on the part of the user. What was I trying to hide in emails or direct messages? Why did my questions have to be private? I had initially thought my interlocutors would prefer the privacy of a one-on-one exchange—and indeed one did, opening his comments with “I thought I'd reach out to you here, so I don't dox myself on the sub”—but clearly others felt this was a conversation that required air. This shift took interviews, which are typically private, and moved them into a public space. My interlocutors noted that this, for them, would have been more ethical and transparent. Perhaps there was also a feeling of safety in numbers, which speaks to long-standing concerns about power in interviews.

This prompted me to share several of my interview questions openly in the forum, and users commented on these prompts. Additionally, they commented on one another's comments. This created a braided conversation with a number of strands for me to follow, lose, and pick up again. After a couple comments, users would drop out and stop responding while others picked up the thread. It felt rather like a chaotic “musical chairs” version of a focus group.

What was most revealing about this encounter as a methodological intervention was the space it gave my interlocutors to speak amongst themselves about not only my methods but my project in general. One exchange in particular was instructive,

C1: Sounds risky in cancel culture

C2: Its not risky, read again what he is asking carefully. He wants to interview us aka “a bunch of fucking racists” why we feel the way we do about immigration. He also says how he knows he cant change our mind he just wants to know why a

“bunch of fucking racists” like us think the way we do... Mods should shut this shit down immediately.

C3: This is why everyone thinks right-wingers are closed-minded racist assholes. A left-wing op comes on a right-wing sub civilly asking for your opinion and specifically states he’s open to listening to your perspective and not automatically labeling us as “a bunch of fucking racists.”

What do you do? Convict him of being a typical libtard with “faux-pity” who thinks we’re a bunch of racists because we hold right-wing perspectives, right after he makes it clear that he doesn’t. Then you say it should be “shut down” (so much for free speech, eh?)

This type of attitude is what the leftists eat right up and use to project onto the entire community of right-wingers. You keep complaining about irrational and retarded everyone on the left is, and when someone from the left is genuinely interested in hearing an opinion from the right, you just group them with your typical schema of a braindead leftist. No wonder politics is so fucking polarized.

It doesn’t matter if you think he’s genuine or not. If you actually want your opinion heard without being labeled a racist asshole, you should commend and give your input to someone who says they’re going to listen to your opinion without labeling you a racist asshole. What else do you want?

This multi-linear and braided conversation exploded around the use of “a bunch of fucking racists” in the body of my Call for Participants. During my candidacy exam in March 2020, one of my examiners made the comment that I cannot simply write a dissertation that calls my interlocutors “a bunch of racists.” Rather, anthropology and ethnography demand a more nuanced, fraught, and troublesome exploration of my interlocutors, their behaviour, and their

beliefs. I knew going into this engagement that trust in me—and in my discipline and institution—would be incredibly low, so I included this conversation in the call hoping that it would soften my interlocutors to the idea of talking to me. I *had* to be open to their ideas. I *had* to write about them with care. Of course, I have been grappling throughout my project with the notion of how to represent my interlocutors as the fully complex and contradictory beings they are within an even more complex and contradictory socio-political context. I even hosted a workshop on the notion of ‘critical empathy’ with members from the Institute for Research on Male Supremacism to explore how others did so with care, reflexivity, and a critical lens (de Coning, 2021). My interlocutors did not know this about me, however, and I thought perhaps they might buy it if it came from someone above me in the academic hierarchy.

Now, I added the expletive because I felt it suited the culture and tone of the forum, which was rife with expletives. I am also prone to using such language in my everyday life, and in previous encounters with right-wingers, leaning into my rural, working class and the perhaps somewhat rougher aspects of my identity has proven useful in establishing enough rapport to at least get the conversation started. What I am trying to articulate here is that this method—if you can call it that—gave me precious little time and space to explain myself and hopefully convince enough users to take a chance on a conversation. I had to make strategic choices about what to include and what to bring up later.

So, would I include the phrase again? Perhaps. My fumbling turned into fascinating ethnographic moments that included emotion, engagement, analysis by other interlocutors, and debate. These moments stretched out over 48 hours during which I experienced a range of emotions and embodied experiences. I was excited, anxious, irritated (with myself more than my interlocutors), agitated, and proud. I slept poorly, stress baked, and tried to yoga myself into a state of calm after miles of running in the river bottom failed to soothe my nervous energy. It was, in the end, a truly fascinating way to go about my work. So, yes, I probably would include it again.

[On Data and Analysis: Field Journals for Data Capture and Simultaneous Reflexivity](#)

File Folders & Field Journals

One of the greatest benefits to a digital ethnographic approach is the ability to capture data. While the terms ‘capture’ and ‘data’ might fit uncomfortably in some ethnographic work, my main tool for recording my field experiences was quite literally a screen capture. Screenshots, along with the copy and paste commands, allowed me to record snippets of my ethnographic experience in the moment. Thousands of little pieces of data, both image and text, made their way into meticulously sorted folders, which were organized into larger folders. When I scroll through these images, often trying to find a particular comment or meme, I feel like I am watching my field experience happen all over again in front of me. Entire conversations captured play out as they did in my original fieldwork. Moreover, they *look* like they did when I first experienced them. I have found myself avoiding some folders, clearly marked as Christchurch and Atlanta, which I only venture into when I absolutely must (see Epilogue essay on Christchurch).

There are spaces on my computer where my data are more mediated. Although I am not sure mediated is quite the right word; perhaps decontextualized is a better one. Whenever I took a screenshot or copied something on my computer,³² I imported it to my field journal where I would briefly explain the image, the context, any connections to literature I was reading at the time, and how the data made me feel. I would then code the data and my reflections. Going back to this data in this form, I find that it is easier to stomach. The surrounding discourse softens the experience and I do not feel like I lose myself like I do in the doom scroll of my file folders. The comments are often upsetting and frustrating—just as they were when I first read them—but the commentary of my past self helps. It is oddly validating to hear my own words from a year ago echoing the things I think in the present. It is also interesting when I find new meaning in both the data and the past words. In a way, my notes become a sort of data in their own right, and the process of re-reading my journal as a means of recalling my data is a sort of methodological technique. This is one of the reasons I have suggested intensive field journaling to students I mentor and those interested in this work.

³² Screenshots taken on my phone are not included here unless I actively sought them out after the fact. This caused issues for me during my analysis as the phone-based data was not as extensively coded as the computer-based data.

To do this intensive journaling, I used a program called Scrivener. It is used primarily by writers to sketch, outline, draft, and compile everything from novels to screenplays. During my participant-observation, I would import screenshots of the posts, comments, and memes into a fresh document each day. These were helpfully grouped in the program into monthly folders. I could annotate images (e.g., meme description, transcription of the comment), assign keyword tags, and write extensive notes about each piece of data. This process has proven invaluable as I write this dissertation as I can easily recall all instances of “memes” or “rugged masculinity” into one search. When I was writing a book chapter on Identitarians and rural spaces, it was easy to pull together a 40-page word document filled with all the instances of Identitarian discourse and commentary about the rural. The program also allowed me to import my entire PDF library of literature and link these pieces to my daily fieldnotes. This created a complex and multi-modal web of ideas about my data and emergent themes.

In the image below, you can see the pages dedicated to individual days or weeks, as well as an example of my field journal in the top portion. In the right-hand corner is the keyword search function. The second window pane is my reflexive journal that I would work in simultaneously as part of my methodological and analytical process. This was one of the ways my research took multi-sited ethnography to new levels.

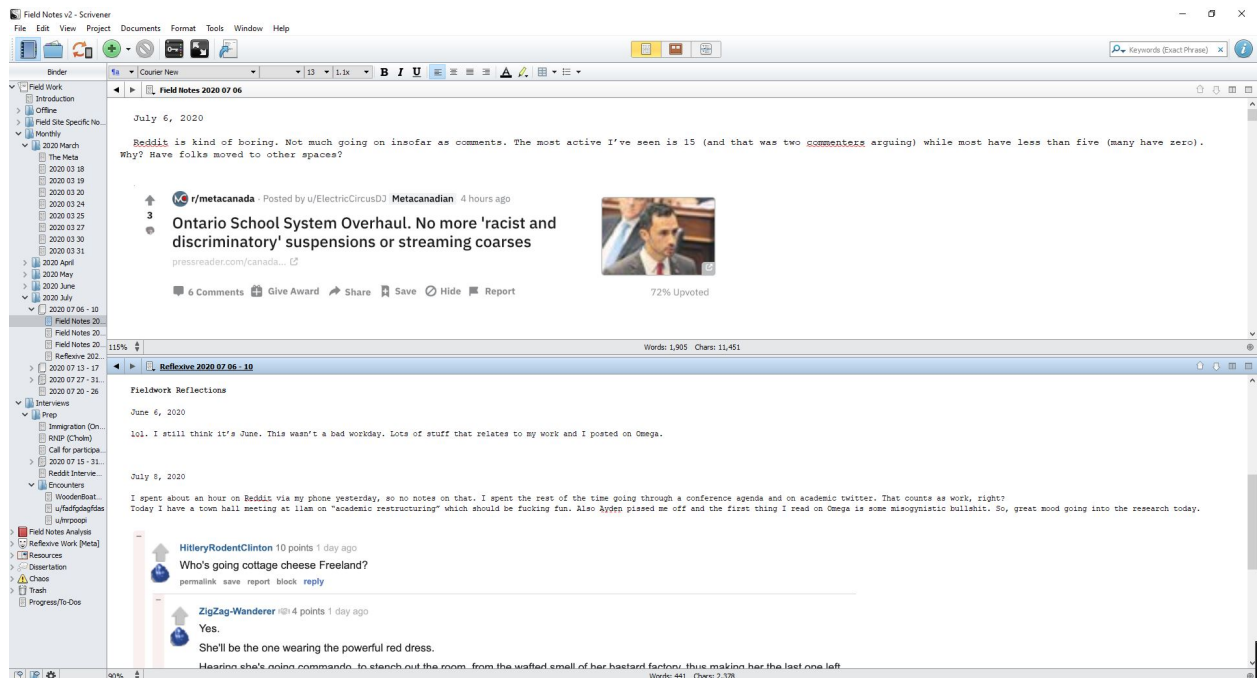


Figure 9. Screenshot of author's writing program

Reflexivity Journal

One of the concerns with my methodological choice was the psychological burden that this research can inflict on researchers. More distanced approaches, and in particular quantitative approaches that involve data scraping through AI and coding, are often suggested to researchers to avoid some of the more taxing aspects of this work. In response to this burden, the Vox Pol Network of Excellence, which is funded by the EU and focuses on the prevalence and impacts of violent online political extremism, has developed extensive researcher welfare resources. These include both privacy and security, as well as resources on wellbeing. With regards to the latter, they developed resources for building resilience, handling traumatic imagery, staying mentally healthy, and self-care.³³ This was also a topic discussed at length at the joint conference between the Center for Right-Wing Studies and the Institute for Research on Male Supremacism. My colleagues and I at the IRMS also hosted numerous workshops and discussions related to the subject. One of the many approaches advocated in these spaces that I took up was a reflexivity journal, which complemented my field notes journal.

The use of a personal and reflective journal is not uncommon amongst anthropologists. Indeed, Malinowski's personal journal is an oft-mentioned example and an interesting point of discussion for my work. In his journal, Malinowski often expressed racist and bigoted sentiments towards his interlocutors. As Symmons-Symonolewicz (1982) notes, Malinowski described the Trobrianders with an utter lack of sympathy at best and with contempt at worst. Such an approach to representing one's interlocutors was understandably jarring for the anthropological community. Based on Malinowski's ethnographies, it seemed he had achieved a close and friendly connection with his interlocutors. His work had, after all, become the gold standard for future anthropologists. As I discuss elsewhere in this dissertation, I and other anthropologists who study white and male supremacism have struggled with this gold standard as our values are often in deep conflict with those of our interlocutors (Blee, 2007; Goodale, 2020; Pasieka, 2019). Moreover, my interlocutors were at times hostile towards me personally, as well as to women in

³³ These can be accessed via the Vox Pol website and I highly recommend any scholar of the right-wing or extremist groups make themselves familiar with their contents.

general. As a result, like Malinowski, my diary included discussions of the physical and psychological toll of field work and my complex relationship with my interlocutors.

Somewhat in defense of Malinowski, George W. Stocking (quoted in Symmons-Symonolewicz, 1982) observed that a field diary was a place for working through the issues of ethnography and may have functioned as a space to create empathy. Regardless of one's position on this rather sympathetic take, the idea of a reflexive diary as a space for methodological empowerment is interesting. Indeed, my personal field journal was a space in which I wrote truthfully about the discourse I encountered, as well as the psychological and emotional burden my interactions often inflicted. Re-reading it now, I can remember the feelings of fatigue, muscle and eye soreness, and the need to escape the field. I can remember the rage and frustration, as well as the moments of sympathy for complicated humans who were struggling under capitalism. It was the space in which I worked through how I could engage ethically with my interlocutors and make sense of their rhetoric. A lot of work happened in this space, certainly more than in NVivo, and I would be remiss to omit that from this dissertation.

To return to the notion of distance, there is a secondary reason for why a reflexivity journal is important for digital ethnographers of the right-wing: radicalization. Beyond upsetting, the content – which I engaged with closely because my methodological choices – is often *designed* to radicalize users, as are the platforms themselves. As I have noted elsewhere (see Chapter 6), the platform algorithms can function to increase user exposure to radicalizing content, and I was already seeking out this discourse. This was particularly important for me as I sought to (and still do) present my interlocutors as humans and all the contradictions and complexities that go along with being human while also acknowledging the very real harm that happens because of the discourse.

Fortunately, because of the digital nature of my work, I found I was able to work in both journals at the same time. In one window I would record my data and field notes (see Figure 9), and in another window I would reflect on how this particular data made me feel, what it made me think of, and any connections I could make to the literature or broader themes. Additionally, I was able to reflect on the other aspects of my life that may have influenced my field notes. Had I slept

well? Was I able to connect with my support network recently? Was it day 279 of the Covid-19 pandemic? Had I eaten recently? This space, and the simultaneous nature of my reflections, allowed for a tandem narrative that has informed my analysis. Again, because of the digital and asynchronous nature of this work, I was able to do this without disrupting my interlocutors. Even when conducting interviews, my furious note scribbling did not bother my interviewees who had no idea I was even taking notes. This is obviously in contrast to in-person and synchronous methods where an anthropologist with her nose in a field journal would be off-putting. Moreover, what does she miss when she takes these notes? I suppose I traded real-time ethnography for real-time reflexivity.

Limitations, Unforeseen Consequences & Things to Ponder Further

While my methodological choices were the right ones within the context of my work and my identity, there are limitations to my approach that other scholars may wish to consider. Additionally, there were consequences for my action that some may wish to avoid altogether. Some of these limitations were brought up to me by other scholars, while others were experienced organically in the field. What I want to do here is acknowledge them as potential limitations, push back where I think there is space to do so, and provide recommendations for how scholars might address these limitations in the future. Finally, I want to leave my readers with threads to pick up and ponder in their own work.

On 'Thin' Data and Deception

Years ago, I took a master's-level methods class at the University of Lethbridge. In it we explored the various tools, techniques, and methods at our disposal. As someone who was already primed from undergraduate studies in digital methods, I was particularly keen to see a reading assigned related to telephone interviews. I was not planning to use the telephone, but I was interested in VoIP programs like Skype and TeamSpeak and thought there might be some useful parallels (see Mack, 2015 for a discussion of VoIP research). What I remember from reading the piece, and the accompanying discussion, was a feeling that telephone interviews were considered "less-than" those conducted in-person. The words 'thin' and 'shallow' were bandied about throughout the reading and the discussion as we grappled with the lack of body

language and environmental cues that were supposedly vital to in-person interviews. When we eventually turned to email interviews, the outlook became gloomier. If telephone interviews were thin and shallow, email interviews must be practically translucent.

This resistance to alternative forms of interviews remains despite the long-standing history of digitally mediated interview techniques, and it evinces a lingering belief that synchronous and in ‘real-time’ should remain the ‘gold standard’ for fieldwork-based interviews (O’Connor, 2015). This is an unsurprising position, and it is one I tried to manage in my project through offline interviews in Europe and Canada—of course Covid had other plans for the latter. But what I want to push back against here is the idea that emails, messenger chats, and forum discussions are inherently thin or shallow. Rather, I want to point out the nuances that a researcher—one that is attuned to her research spaces—will pick up on, and how these add richness and body to text-based conversations. Further, I want to take a moment to discuss how conducting one’s interviews *in the field*—rather than in a separate interview space—is helpful even when that field is social media.

Making thin interviews thick

It is true that I cannot describe my interlocutors for you, aside from the generally accepted (by the communities themselves) belief that they are predominantly straight white men (see Introduction for a ‘portrait’). I cannot describe them as Malinowski or Chagnon might, with vivid descriptions of their bodies, demeanor, and environment (see Chapter 5). I have not the slightest clue what their surroundings look like or even where they are located in the country. My ethnographic writing lacks this sort of descriptive richness. I also cannot describe their posture or body language, nor can I make inferences about their mood or feelings towards me and the subject matter or interview process. Because this is text-based, I cannot listen for the tell-tale uhms, uhhs, and pauses in which anthropologists find hidden nuances: Are they uncomfortable? Should I end this interview early? Are they engaged? Did they seem interested in the little tangent I took? Should we take a break?

So, perhaps this does make my research feel thin when the offline is seen as the standard. There is something missing from my work—something I was trained to look for as a graduate student.

The question now becomes “how can digital ethnographers recognize and reveal the thickness of our work?” A useful starting point for this line of inquiry lies not with me and my work as an anthropologist, but rather with my interlocutors and their relationships with one another and the space. This is where I think participant-observation as a methodological baseline helps in projects where the anthropologist is an outsider to the group at hand. After years in the field, I have become particularly attuned to the nuances of their discourse and not just what they are saying, but how they choose to say it. What I mean by this is I have realized my interlocutors interact in a way that brings meaning to their interactions for themselves and their fellow community members. They are trying to add value to a space where they feel welcome and heard, and their communication practices follow suit. This includes the use of community-derived slang and jargon, emojis, images and gifs, and links to external sources (e.g., videos, blog posts, podcasts). They make their text into something more; they make thin communication thick.

Certainly, there were short, succinct, and rather simple exchanges, but taken as a whole, the conversations in my fieldwork were often much richer than one might assume. This was certainly the case for my long-form interviews. Take for example the following paragraphs in which I have included the linked content to demonstrate the denseness of the message itself,

Human societies naturally operate upon an in-group/out-group bias, or what we can refer to as tribalism, which is biologically rooted to some degree (i.e. dunbar's number). Traditionally the ties that bind have been biological (i.e ethnicity/common descent), but as societies evolved into modern day nation-states (federations of tribes) these ties have been linguistic, cultural, religious, etc with homogeneity often manufactured through the use of force and propaganda. Modern day "leftism" is a more subversive development in that it has formed an intellectual basis for their in-group/out-group preferences. Anyone with alternative/dissident viewpoints is othered and vilified for simply having a different opinion (quick read on this phenomenon <http://teampyro.blogspot.com/2020/06/wokeness-is-hateful-religion.html>). So, for example, if I simply state that immigration is not a benefit in and of itself, I would be instantly labelled a racist and xenophobe (despite being a second generation immigrant

and person of colour). This makes it impossible to have a rational debate with the 'left', who champion diversity, but not diversity of thought and opinion.

What the "left" also fails to understand is that mass immigration is a facet of neoliberal doctrine that a majority of peoples in Western nations oppose, which was evidenced with Brexit (I won't get into details, you can refer to these short essays <http://vjmpublishing.nz/?p=8149>, <http://vjmpublishing.nz/?p=8780>, <http://vjmpublishing.nz/?p=12938>). The problem with mass immigration is that it erases social cohesion (look into low-trust vs high-trust societies), especially with the importation of hostile foreign cultures that are antithetical to Western values (Samuel Huntington - Clash of Civilizations). For example almost all forms of Islam (literally "submisson" <https://imgur.com/a/nr0IN7r>) clash very clearly with secular Western values (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3smmektRcEY>), while masquerading as victims of "Islamophobia" and playing the same grievance politics as the left (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVk9a5Jcd1k>).

The content itself was obviously connected to the root of my research, namely immigration. My interlocutor picked up the threads of tribalism, in/out groups, loss of culture, and leftist discourse. But what astounded me was the level of non-textual inclusions in this discussion, and the ease with which I could slip between different forms of communication. Take for example the last paragraph quoted above. This is how it looks in situ,

What the "left" also fails to understand is that mass immigration is a facet of neoliberal doctrine that a majority of peoples in Western nations oppose, which was evidenced with Brexit (I won't get into details, you can refer to these short essays <http://vjmpublishing.nz/?p=8149>^[3], <http://vjmpublishing.nz/?p=8780>^[4], <http://vjmpublishing.nz/?p=12938>^[5]). The problem with mass immigration is that it erases social cohesion (look into low-trust vs high-trust societies), especially with the importation of hostile foreign cultures that are antithetical to Western values (Samuel Huntington - Clash of Civilizations). For example almost all forms of Islam (literally "submission" <https://imgur.com/a/nr0IN7r>^[6]) clash very clearly with secular Western values (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3smmekRcEY>^[7]).



), while masquerading as victims of "Islamophobia" and playing the same grievance politics as the left (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVk9a5Jcd1k>^[8]).

Figure 10. Screenshot of a Reddit direct messaging interview

My interlocutor linked blog posts for me to 'refer to' that would take me out of the message into a new browser window. However, hyperlinks are risky. Not because I assumed they would lead to nefarious sites or include malware (although that should be something researchers at least acknowledge as a possibility). Rather, hyperlinks carried with them the risk of falling into a rhizomatic rabbit hole of other blog posts, videos, and websites as I clicked through link after link. I often clicked links in Reddit or Gab comments only to emerge from the dizzying journey two hours later with little recollection of what prompted the adventure in the first place. I would eventually trace my way back to the original thread and try to pick up where I left off. This often made for a disjointed and exhausting experience. As a result, I elected to read and explore all the embedded links after I had finished reading the entire response.

This medium also allowed for the embedding of visual materials like images and YouTube videos directly into the body of the text, creating a multimodal experience. In Figure 10 above, my reader will notice that I have clicked on the play icon (the triangle), which prompted the video to play within the message while the second video remains collapsed. This allowed me to either watch the video in the moment and never leave the messaging space, or to return to it after the fact. Similarly, the inclusion of images (the camera icon) allowed me to immediately view my interlocutor's ideas through a new media (see Figure 11 below).



Figure 11. Image of protestors holding pro-Shariah signs from interview message

These messages required multiple reads in order to understand the multiple layers of meaning making. Each form communicated something slightly different, and it expanded the meaning embedded in my interlocutor's text. It is also important to consider how the different media—the blog posts, videos, and images—afford different kinds of meaning and to be curious about the effect they have on my experience reading these messages. I have to wonder, why did he include these images and videos? What was he hoping to elicit in me? Not to be cliché, but McLuhan had a point when he argued that the medium is the message, and within digital ethnography in particular, where there are so many possible mediums through which we can communicate, it is vital to consider these affordances and meanings. Moreover, as Dicks et al. (2006) note, this becomes even more complex when modes are joined,

When we combine different modes through different media, and link these together in various ways, what kinds of new, multi-semiotic meaning are produced? Hyperlinking means that multimodality becomes even more complex. In hyperlinking, we are no longer talking simply about the juxtaposition of image, text and sound, but the creation of multiple interconnections and pathways (or traversals) among them, both potential and explicit (p. 94).

This, I think is one of the values of this sort of interviewing process. There is the possibility of rich, thick, layered, joined, knotted, rhizomatic *meaning*.

My readers may at some point in this discussion question why I included a text-based direct quote as well as a screenshot of my interview with this interlocutor. Why take up space with repeated quotes? To answer this, I want to return to the work of Dicks et al. (2006) wherein they ask their readers to consider how multimodality, multi-semiotic, and multi-meaning making appears in our data outside of the field, and how this affects our analysis. They ask what semiotic modes we lose when we chose different approaches to data collection. What does a transcript lose? What about a photograph? What do these things gain over a film or fieldnotes? I include this discussion in this messy methods-meets-analysis chapter because when writing my dissertation, I found myself flitting between these versions of my field experience. I went through transcripts stripped of embedded links when I needed to grab a quick quote via copy and paste. Yet, I return to the 'field' when I want to re-experience the interview and sit with the multi-ness. There is something about the way this conversation remains the same in this space despite the growing temporal distance that is useful to me. Unless, of course, one of the linked videos or blog posts is taken down, and when this happens, I feel a loss and I must rely on my fieldnotes and memory regarding the piece of media (assuming I ever got around to watching all the videos sent to me throughout my work). This speaks to the notion of interactivity in Dicks et al.'s work. In their discussion they look at how their interlocutors interact with an exhibit through speech, touch, movement, and gestures. They also look at the constraints that might shape how the interlocutors interact. I want to combine both their interest in how different modes affect meaning and this notion of interactivity and apply it to the process of data analysis and

reflection. That is a complicated way of saying I am interested in the interactivity between a researcher and her data, and the meaning produced and lost here.

As I talk about elsewhere (see Epilogue essay on Christchurch), the form that my data takes and its proximity to the field has a profound effect on me. The meaning making that occurs between myself and this form of my data is different than that of me and a stripped down and reduced Word doc transcript. In a way, the fact that I lose some ‘meaning potential’ when I shift from screenshots or my Reddit inbox to a Word doc is actually what allows me to engage with my data. There are times when the thickness of images and videos is too much, whereas with text my eyes can lightly skim over the words with a sense of mediated distance. The meaning of the text is still clear and still often times upsetting, yet my experience interacting with it is different. And so, I want to end this sort of pushback against the claim that digital work—and especially text-based asynchronous work—is inherently thin, with a note that this might not always be a bad thing. Sometimes thin work is necessary, and sometimes the pursuit of that rich and thick ethnographic sensibility is an act of self-wounding. Further, even when the individual unit of data is “thin,” the sheer volume of data a digital ethnographer can amass has a thickening effect that is worth noting.

On liars, trolls, and authentic discussions

Beyond issues of thinness and shallowness, concerns of deception are often raised in debates surrounding digital and asynchronous interviews. “Aren’t you worried they’re just trolling you?” was a question I received after a presentation on my research, and I suppose it is a fair if tiresome question. In the moment I responded with a flippant, “yes, it’s possible that thousands of users across a dozen platforms are engaging in an orchestrated trolling campaign and are engaging with me in the exact same way about the exact same issue.” Possible, yes. Likely? No. I also could not help but think of all the times interlocutors have lied to the ethnographer’s face. As an anthropologist, I feel compelled to at least mention the infamous Mead-Freeman debate here. But I digress because the truth is, I think the much more interesting question is whether it is a space where people are willing to become more vulnerable when they can hide behind a username and screen.

A common thread I picked up across my field sites was a sense that my interlocutors felt silenced. Whether this is true in actuality is debatable and not really the purpose of this particular conversation. Rather, what is of interest for my discussion of digital ethnography was the frequently articulated belief that these digital spaces were the last places they could talk about their beliefs openly. Users lamented that they had to ‘bite their tongues’ at family gatherings or at work, and that they feared being outed and losing their social connections and jobs over their views. In one of my interviews, a self-professed ethno-nationalist indicated that r/metacanada had become the last place he felt Canadians could talk about ethno-nationalism (see Chapter 6 for further discussion of space, place, and censorship).

Of course, the possibility of trolls was certainly present, and indeed I had some interlocutors who were purposefully antagonistic, like my troll interview. Some individuals troll in the form of expressing extreme opinions in hopes of either riling up the community or bringing sanctions towards it. Yet, the community is also aware of these behaviours, not just the anthropologist, and they have mechanisms for negotiating these behaviours as a community.

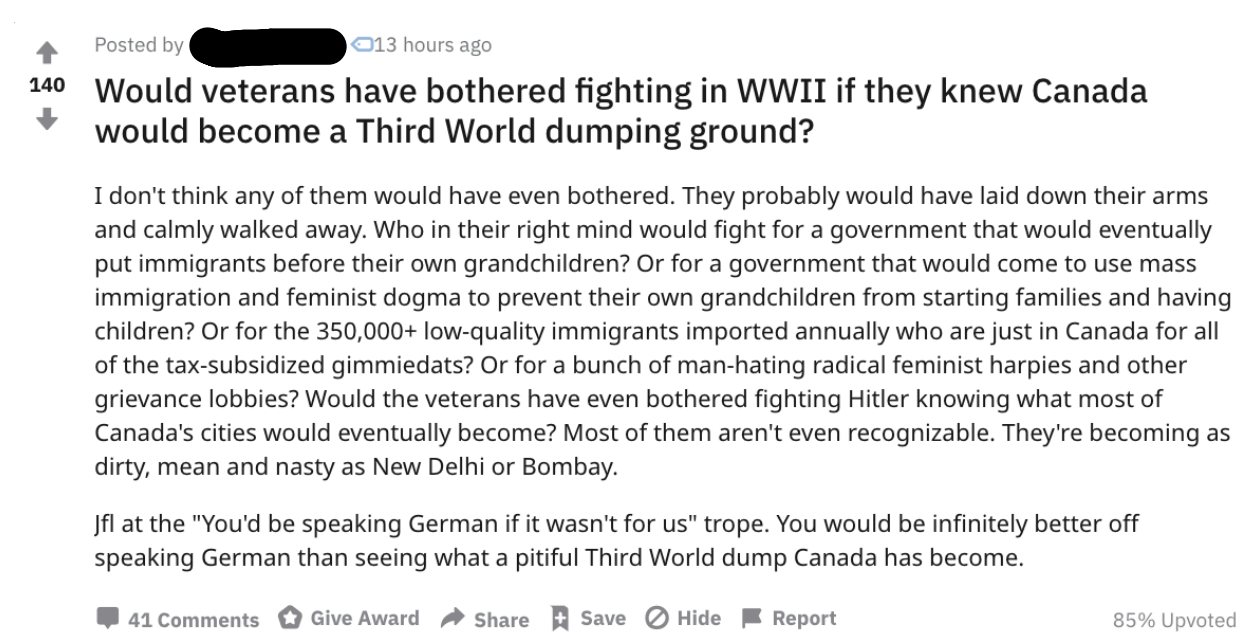


Figure 12. Screenshot of a Reddit post entitled “Would veterans have bothered fighting in WWII if they knew Canada would become a Third World dumping ground?”

The question of “what would veterans have done” is one that emerged on occasion across my field sites, and it related to what I have termed the betrayal of Canada. Here, my interlocutors would express a sense of frustration that the freedoms and securities their ancestors fought for are slowly crumbling as a result of immigration. However, what is interesting about this comment, and what potentially differentiates this comment from many of the others in terms of ideology, was the pro-German approach (“you would be infinitely better off speaking German than seeing what a pitiful Third World dump Canada has become”). Additionally, the use of “88” in their username could be a numerical allusion to the phrase “Heil Hitler” as the letter H is the eighth letter of the alphabet and 88 is therefore read as HH. As one user noted,

So brand new account, has 88 in the name, rants on typical right wing talking points but adds just enough spice where it walks the line between critique and hate and makes the pro nazi sentiment not overtly evident but also just slightly there enough that it’s questionable as to whether it’s intentional or not.

I’m not saying this is glaringly a trap. But it does seem to have cheese on a pressure plate.

Here, the user did not disagree with the assessment that immigration was bad, rather those are “typical right-wing talking points.” The problem came with the “spice” that pushed this right-wing “critique” towards hate. Of course, many of the left see anti-immigrant rhetoric as hate already, but it was useful for the user to articulate their understanding of the line for me at least. What was also interesting was the final comment: that this could be a trap. This evinces a reoccurring sentiment that members of the right are under surveillance and attack from those on the left.

Two other users picked up on the same issues,

C1: Considering the pro German tint of this post I’m a bit curious about the 88 in OP’s user name.

C2: clearly has a neo nazi or edgy boi³⁴ but doesn't make most of what he's saying any less true.

Again, my interlocutors were just as (if not more) attuned to the possibility of deception in their spaces, and they were willing to discuss these instances. One of the other commenters remarked, "Hello, the optics department wants to talk to you," which points not only to the "edgy boi" nature of the comment, but also the fear of censorship. This is all to say that the possibility of deception in online spaces is not necessarily a drawback of digital ethnography. Rather, I see it as a potential for new and illuminating moments of ethnographic richness.

I must also point out that I found most of the people I interacted with sincere in their posts or at least obvious in their pursuit of the 'lulz' (Udupa, 2021; Green, 2019).³⁵ Even when trolling did occur, many users took it as an opportunity to pick up the thread and talk about their concerns, as did the commenter above who notes "doesn't make most of what he's saying any less true." In response to the "88" comment above, two other users remarked,

I used to travel to the GTW a lot when younger and it was such a great place to visit. Clean and fun with a positive vibe. I went back recently for the first time in years and it's such a dirty shithole city of money launderers, street shitters and terrorists now. Sad. The rest of a once great country will follow soon. I am looking forward to the day the country breaks up and the pieces are annexed by the US. That much is inevitable as we become more of a security risk to the US.

And,

Fighting Canada's WW3 pops up into my head every single day. I'm a young man and I boldly speak the exact same sentiments the allied soldiers of our past did, though I go unheard, What's happening is very wrong. The 'next' thing keeps on happening and it's getting worse. There are no more surprises from their leftist parties, so it's up to us to

³⁴ "Boi" is a purposeful misspelling of "boy"

³⁵ "Lulz" is another form of the acronym "lol" or "laugh out loud"

challenge them. Not the other way around. We can still fight for our country. This is psychological/ideological warfare and we have to change minds. We are the Resistance!

What interests me here is that I know they are not engaging directly with an obvious troll, yet they are taking advantage of the space said troll created. If I were to avoid all instances of possible trolling, I would miss out on discourse that was seemingly much more earnest. This is, of course, possible in part because of the long-term participant-observation component of this project. Because of this, I can see the repeated patterns that come out of murky comments.

Moreover, deception and misinterpretation have always been a possibility in ethnography, and it is just part of the messiness that anthropologists have learned to live with as part of their work. One of the most influential pieces of classic anthropology that comes to mind in this regard is David M. Schneider's 1965 'Some muddles in the models: or, how the system really works' in which he explored the discrepancies between expectations and realities in the field for students of ethnography. Quoting Levi-Strauss on the subject he notes that "Therefore, when he is presented a structural model which departs from empirical reality, he feels cheated in some devious way" (Schneider, 2011, p. 452). This has always intrigued me, and it formed the basis of my previous research (Mack, 2015), and it helped me unpack how my interlocutors negotiated the gap between their perceptions of war and their experiences of virtual violence. Here, I think it speaks to the assumptions we make about ethnography and interviews, and how these things are expected to change online. Rather than feeling cheated, or even assuming that deception could happen in the first place, I have come to feel at home in the possibility of both deception and radical honesty. Moreover, I have become curious at the potential possibilities that exist in the gap between expectations and experiences of ethnography.

On Rapport

When I first began to craft a digital ethnographic project amongst the right-wing in Canada, I was presented with an obvious methodological hurdle: rapport building. Rapport is often considered a vital component of the ethnographic enterprise, especially if one is conducting interviews or participant-observation. During my first-year ethnographic methods course, my professor asked, "Without rapport and trust between ethnographer and interlocutor, why would

anyone disclose personal, sensitive, or sacred information?” We took turns discussing techniques that could be used to build rapport: being present for a long period of time, helping out around the field site, attending events that did not necessarily pertain to research objectives, et cetera. I spoke about my past research projects where I built rapport with the Blackfoot community in southern Alberta slowly over the course of many months. I volunteered my time in their communities and attended important political events. I just kept showing up. Eventually, the Elders took interest in me, and I was offered insight and knowledge related to my research interests. This was despite the longstanding—and well earned—skepticism many in the Blackfoot community have for white anthropologists. I am grateful that some of these relationships have remained even after that research project formally concluded with a knowledge transfer. They take new forms now, and they rely more heavily on social media given the distance between Edmonton and southern Alberta and my inability to visit during the Covid 19 pandemic (Mack, 2021b). These relationships are what my classmates and I thought of as the ideal ethnographic relationships: longstanding, reciprocal, and about more than the research project.

If I were in that class today, however, I think I would respond with two questions of my own, “What does it mean to build rapport with people who are antagonistic towards you and whom you find ‘unsavory’ (de Coning, 2021)?” and “How can one achieve rapport on social media?”

Let me begin with the first question.

I have discussed at length the ways in which my work does not fit comfortably with the tropes of my discipline (see Chapter 5 on fieldwork). One of the ways it conflicts with these tropes is the idea of the informant-turned-lifelong friend. Throughout my career I have been regaled with stories of how my professors were invited to the weddings of their informants’ children, of how they grieved at funerals, and how much they missed their friends between field trips. Now, with the advent of Facebook, I see my professors-turned-colleagues post about their informants and hosts as I do my friends and families. As I sat on my couch scrolling through photos of my colleagues’ happy fieldwork memories, I could not help but feel a sense of discomfort. Would this be possible in my work? Could I as an anthropologist befriend someone I likely would not

outside of this project? I felt like I had two options. Either this would be another way in which my fieldwork deviated, or I would have to reconcile becoming (Facebook) friends with ethno-nationalists who may or may not believe I should have rights as a woman. This was something of an exaggeration, an extreme imagined scenario, but it plagued me nonetheless. Certainly, I have people in my life who I would place somewhere towards the more intolerant end of the right-wing, but those relationships have been fraught and filled with conflict for most of my life. How would I interact with these people and build enough rapport with them to hear their personal experiences if they were not already tied to me through kinship?

Thinking back to Kathleen Blee's (2007) discussion on internalist versus externalist approaches, I can understand why so many choose to work with externalist methods. This is further established by Agnieszka Pasieka (2017) who notes that anthropologists have stayed away from this sort of research in part because they do not typically align themselves politically with their interlocutors, it is also important to remind myself that this inherently means my interlocutors do not align themselves with *me*. Thus, the other side of this discussion is the realization that even if I wanted to befriend my interlocutors, there are assumed aspects about my identity and my intentions that would be difficult for my interlocutors to overcome. Why would they want to be friends with a Marxist feminist "harpy woman" who screeches about the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy?

Previously in this chapter I discussed some of the responses I received during my call for participants on Reddit. I want to return to this conversation, specifically the responses to one user calling my request "risky" in this era of "cancel culture." While some users responded that this was an opportunity for the right-wing to have their ideas heard, many were quick to point out the futility in such an attempt. I responded that often times ethnographers run into this issue where individuals on the right refuse to participate, which prompted the following exchange,

C1: "won't talk to us?" Well you're making an effort to engage, and not just screaming racist at us, so you can now say you've put in more effort than 99.999999998% of the people who aren't on the right.

ACM in response to C1: Sorry, in case it wasn't clear what I meant: Refusal to participate in research is a powerful move, imho [in my honest opinion]. And I've experienced a lot of refusal in this work since I began in 2018

C2: The outcome of your dissertation is already determined. You cannot come to any other conclusion than that those against immigration and demographic replacement are “a bunch of fucking racists” and expect to get a PhD in social sciences from any Canadian university. So no.

ACM in response to C2: Your response is one I've received a lot, from strangers online and my extended family, and it's unfortunate that many folks feel that way. It's the biggest hurdle I've encountered in this work. All *I* can do is try to provide a fair and understanding account of *why* folks hold these views in my dissertation.

C3 in response to ACM: You are getting a valid data point on the times we are in. Respect and trust in public bodies must be at an all-time low.

Useful public discourse has been nearly burnt to the ground by it.

This braided conversation was instructive. C1 noted that most people—scholars included, I assume—do not make an effort to engage. This shifts the narrative from one of ethnographic refusal (Ortner, 1995; Simpson, 2007), to one of scholarly and leftist neglect. In contrast, C2 remarked that it did not matter if my interests were genuine or if I was sympathetic to the right-wing because academia would not allow for a nuanced analysis of their community. It did not matter that I grew up in a rural community, was baptized Lutheran, that my family was full of ranchers, tradesmen, and gun owners, or that I was white. In other words, it did not matter what sorts of things we might have in common, which in other spaces might facilitate rapport. All the complex and contradictory aspects of my identity were overshadowed by my status as a Canadian researcher. This was not the first-time aspects of my identity was met with distrust initially. When I worked with the Blackfoot community, I had to work hard at rapport building to earn back the trust that my race, but also my discipline, had broken. Yet, in that context I was

able to show up and live up to my words. In a digital community the size of r/metacanada, this is much more difficult.

Turning to the more pragmatic question I would have posed on how rapport can be achieved online, the answer for me was “with great difficulty” most of the time. This felt strange given the degree to which other digital anthropologists talk about their successful rapport building. Nardi (2010), for example, was able to join multiple guilds during her time in the online video game *World of Warcraft*. The members of these small groups became the people she interviewed. Similarly, Boellstorff (2008) was able to befriend other users in *Second Life* and participate in their gameplay. Even during my previous work with military-themed shooter games (Mack, 2015), I was able to join a team of gamers and then conduct interviews via email and their VoIP system known as TeamSpeak. While I would not say I befriended these individuals, they were at least willing to entertain my presence and seemed keen to discuss something about which they were passionate; they even invited me to join their gameplay. I suppose I could have become a hyper-active user to the point where I was known to the community. Some users had achieved a level of notice amongst other active users. These included the moderators, whose usernames would indicate their role, and extremely active users known for controversial “hot takes” or humour that pushed the limits in a way the community appreciated. After a couple of years on the platform I began to recognize usernames that came up repeatedly in my research, but these were not necessarily users who espoused rhetoric of interest to me.³⁶

Perhaps the most important question to come out of these musings is, “Was rapport necessary?” My answer is, not really. Or, at least, not to the extent I had expected. In a conversation with far-right researcher Anita Nissen (Aalborg University, personal communication), she noted that it was actually quite easy for her to solicit interviews with leaders of the European identitarian movements for her work (Nissen, 2020). All but one leader was eager to have a captive audience and the opportunity to share their ideas. This was a similar sentiment amongst my gamer interlocutors during my videogame work (Mack, 2015). While the community was grappling with hostility towards women in the wake of the #GamerGate movement, some of my interlocutors were keen to tell their story and saw my work as a legitimate avenue to explain

³⁶ For example, this discourse was often geared towards American politics or gun rights

their community and their values. This sort of perspective was also evident in the responses to my call for participants when one of the users noted that this was their opportunity to be heard by someone who was at least going to *try*.

This idea of validation and audience is an important one to consider from a methodological standpoint as well as an ethical one. As anthropologists of both the digital and the far-right Bjork-James (2015) noted in her case study of the white nationalist site *Stormfront*,

For a variety of reasons I remained an observer to the website instead of a participant. Becoming a member, and thus developing a screen name and avatar, would signal ideological agreement with the movement and increase their perceived tally of supports, even if just by one. The opposing views forum on the site allows non-members to post, however in my observations I found anyone posing oppositional perspectives was labeled an anti, and that engaging with opposition was a key way that White supremacist ideology was cemented on the site (p. 120).

While I do not agree that becoming a member of site automatically implies ideological agreement (as the existence of trolls indicates), it is vital for researchers to consider what rapport indexes beyond access, and this pertains to participant-observation as well as interviews. Ultimately, this is an individual choice for each researcher made in response to their research context. For me, my lower-level participation and subsequent lack of rapport building was in response to my anxieties around this research, namely the safety and ethical concerns. I was worried about drawing too much attention to myself or my account through high activity, which to some might feel slightly deceptive or perhaps ethnographically thin. Yet, at the end of the day I had legitimate concerns for the wellbeing of myself and those in my network.

Censorship

There were a number of limitations to my methodological and ethical choices, and I have tried to indicate where I think criticisms of digital ethnography are fair as well as how researchers can address these in a meaningful way. A lot of my work consisted of trial-and-error and, for lack of a better word, winging it. This is in part because the field of digital anthropology is still

relatively niche, and its application to the far-right is even more specialized. However, because of this approach I did make mistakes and I have learned a few lessons over the years. While I expand on these errors further in my Epilogue, I do want to talk about one costly lesson I learned that relates directly to rapport.

In 2019 both Soldiers of Odin Edmonton and ID Canada had their Facebook accounts removed. Because my research ethics approval had only been granted in late 2018, I found that I had not had sufficient time to participate in their spaces online and develop the necessary rapport. I was also incredibly nervous engaging via my personal Facebook (see Chapter 4), and this prompted me to observe more than engage. ID Canada later lost their Twitter and Instagram accounts. I include these here in a section on rapport because had I known that these bans would occur, I might have tried to engage more directly with these individuals and members from these movements. I would have done so with the intention of connecting with members offline as both had offline presences in Alberta. In doing so, I would have sought out alternative ways of communicating with my interlocutors and potential interviewees (e.g., WhatsApp, Signal). Unfortunately, however, once their social media accounts were banned, I found myself completely cut off from the movements. To this day I do not know what happened with Soldiers of Odin as a group or their leaders, and while I have been made aware of ID Canada activity in Calgary, I have no means of connecting with them. What I am trying to suggest here is that in some cases rapport can help shield a research project from the effects of censorship, especially when this rapport comes with a move to other forms of communication that are not dependent on a social media-based community. Thus, while rapport is ethically fraught, it has obvious benefits for ethnographic methods.

Leaving the Field: Impact of Rapport and Methodological Choices

“When do you decide to leave the field?” This was a question that has been posed to me on a number of occasions, but most recently in a talk I gave at the University of Lethbridge to a group of anthropology students. Like me, they were keenly attuned to stories of entering and leaving the field that typically involved a plane ticket and a strict timeline. In their conceptualizations of fieldwork, they would board a plane to the Andes in early May and return before the fall semester began in September. The field season was clearly defined and revolved around the

general academic term. Faculty also took advantage of summers off and sabbaticals, and some attempted to do short-term fieldwork when they could piggy-back off of conference travel. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) note, for those who conduct fieldwork away from “home,” leaving the field is often externally motivated (e.g., lack of funds, report deadlines). As a result, both students and faculty return when other responsibilities call them home or the grant money runs out.

My work was decidedly fuzzier. Outside of my funding timeline, which was set to conclude in August 2022, my project lacked the external pressures that would end fieldwork. I could teach, work as a research assistant, publish, and travel for conferences all while doing field work. As a result, I spent a good portion of 2020 reflecting on data saturation and whether I had met my own standards for long-term ethnography. Every time I attempted to leave the field, something brought me back to it. Thoughts of “what if I miss something important?” and the ease of access kept me tethered to a space without an end in sight. By the summer of 2020 I knew I needed to switch gears and begin the process of analysis and writing, yet I was still dragging my feet.

In July 2020, a post was made by the moderators of r/metacanada notifying the community that they had decided to lock the subreddit before it was banned by Reddit administrators. In the post they encouraged users to abandon Reddit and regroup on a “.win” site. While I discuss this rupture in my fieldwork in greater detail in Chapter 4, what is important to note here is this was one of what felt like a hundred ruptures in my access to these social media spaces. I knew their numbers would be smaller as users were unwilling to migrate. I knew that this new space would affect their discourse as the “.win” sites had greater tolerance for right-wing opinions. Indeed, this was its appeal. This would be an interesting ethnographic experience, just as all the other ruptures were. My methodological choices had primed me for this move, and there was really no reason not to take up the .win site as a new field site. Afterall, I had shifted away from Gab, Minds and Voat (which shutdown in December 2020), so obviously I had the capacity to do it again. Yet, I distinctly recall sitting on my couch in my living room, in the middle of my third year and a global pandemic, and muttering aloud, “*fuck*, I really don’t want to do this all over again.” I proceeded to stare at my computer as I contemplated having to learn a new platform *again*.

My greatest concern with moving my research to a new site was my mental capacity. I was so very tired of the fieldwork and trying to maintain a high-level of engagement during the pandemic. My project was now well established, and I had thousands of screenshots, memes, posts, and comments. I was also starting to experience a sense of saturation, which was made obvious when reflecting on my data in my field journals. My notes started to become clipped, with comments like, “Oh, this *again*. Nothing new on Reddit today.” It occurred to me that when r/metacanada shutdown, so could my daily participant-observation. And so, for the final month of my intensive fieldwork, I doubled down on the emergent themes I had found, developed an interview protocol, and solicited formal interviews. By December 2020 I was done with my daily participant-observation and interviews.³⁷

This exit was abrupt, and recently I have come to contemplate the ethics of leaving and how it relates to my methodological choices. After all, exiting the field looks different depending on engagement. During my master’s research, which involved digital ethnography, I was prompted with the following query from my review board:

Some types of research involve intense or lengthy contact between a researcher and the study participant(s), which may result in a close personal relationship, especially if the research itself involves matters close to the heart of participants. For this section, applicants should consider the possibility that a strategy may be required for participants who have difficulty in disengaging from the project after their role is completed or the project has terminated.

This sentiment, that interlocutors may become attached, invested, or even dependent on the researcher is not unique to this institution. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) note that interlocutors can feel abandoned, betrayed, and distraught when the researcher takes their leave. I felt this when I left my previous research project with Blackfoot youth in southern Alberta when

³⁷ I continued participant-observation briefly on the “.win” site to get a sense of how the community was migrating. I also checked back on this site following the January 6 coup attempt in the US more out of curiosity than for research purposes.

one of the youngest participants hugged my legs and cried. It can also be disorienting and traumatic for the researchers as they are forced to reintegrate into their home lives and leave new friends and collaborators behind. Of course, with the advent of social media, researchers are able to stay in contact digitally if they so choose (Mack et al., 2021).

These tensions and emotions play out in digital spaces as well. Indeed, as Boellstorff et al. (2012) note, “participants may feel confused, betrayed, or abandoned if we simply disappear one day, never to log on again” (p. 148).

After I conducted my interviews, I stopped visiting r/metacanada on a regular basis, yet no one noticed my absence. Of course, this was facilitated by its dissolution and the relocation of my interlocutors. I began checking my Reddit account weekly, rather than daily, for messages. Weekly became bi-weekly, and I now only check once a month. Eventually, I will close the account entirely.

While I feel somewhat mixed about leaving the field this way – a sort of slipping out the door as someone else closes it – I have to remind myself, and perhaps my reader, that this was a community of nearly 40,000 users. Aside from the moderators and the most prolific commentators and trolls, it is unlikely anyone’s absence would be felt, let alone mourned. As I noted above, I did not establish the level of rapport that my colleagues or Boellstorff and Nardi have in their research. If anything, many my interlocutors are likely pleased to no longer have a pesky Marxist feminist in their midst asking inane questions and prodding at them to reflect on off-handed comments and troll posts.

Chapter 4 – A Note on “Sites”

In this chapter, I outline the “messy places,” a term I borrow from John Postill & Sarah Pink (2012), where I did my research. There are many confusing and tangling aspects of these places, which is one of the reasons I think the descriptor messy fits. The platforms themselves, as well as the people and ideas that inhabit them, are chaotic, constantly shifting, and complex. As an anthropologist, it is my job to untangle these spaces a bit and to render these sites and platforms knowable to my readers who may or may not be familiar with them. While I describe what these sites look like as platforms in ways that most users would recognize, I also explore them as I *experienced* them as an anthropologist and ethnographer.

I began practicing digital anthropology in the last year of my undergraduate degree, but I had yet to take the leap into digital *ethnography* as a method until my master’s project (Mack, 2015). Throughout my master’s program, I grappled with the notion of what constituted the ‘field’ both in terms of a site and a discipline. I felt compelled to prove that digital ethnography was ‘real’ ethnography and much of my anxiety came down to my field sites. To compensate for this, I doubled down on how my methods could be adapted for the digital space. I argued that if I can ‘do ethnography’ in these spaces, I – the ethnographer – made them into ethnographic spaces. Yet, here, I want to focus not on my methods and how they mirror, compliment, or perhaps improve upon traditional analogue ethnographic methods (see Chapter 3), but rather the spaces themselves. How did they contribute to the richness of my ethnography? How does understanding their unruly ways inform my understanding of my interlocutors?

Observing Facebook & Twitter

When I first drafted this chapter, I had intended to divide it up into on- and offline spaces, and then describe each individual field site. However, I think a much richer understanding of how these sites contributed to my ethnography will be achieved by following the timeline of my fieldwork. This, I hope, will help my reader get a sense of the flow from one space to another as well as the pressures that encouraged and at times necessitated these flows.

My digital fieldwork began almost by accident. As a millennial, I have used social media and its predecessors for most of my life. I remember when Facebook was released to the wider public and I made my account in 2007, which was followed by a Twitter account a few years later. Beyond staying in touch with friends and family across the globe, I used these sites to access news and connect with other activists. These were the spaces where I engaged with #OccupyWallStreet and the #ArabSpring, and I reveled in the affective publics—the feelings of connectedness—that these sites created (Papacharissi, 2016). Because of this emphasis on activism and politics, my Facebook feed was likely algorithmically primed to share news about the far-right group Soldiers of Odin Edmonton. The news articles that began to appear in my feed referenced the group’s Facebook page, and in summer 2018 the idea of a digital ethnographic project focusing on this group emerged. Following Bowman-Grieve (2009) and Castle and Parsons (2019), I knew I wanted to focus on social media platforms as these sites allow for a more participatory approach to fieldwork rather than blogs or news sites. Facebook provided a perfect space for this approach.

Facebook is one of the largest and most well-known social media sites. Started in 2004, the social networking site was initially a way for college students in the US to connect with one another. This membership was expanded in 2006 to anyone over the age of 13. Since the mid-2000s, the site has changed dramatically. It is now fully functional on both smartphones and web browsers, includes e-commerce features, facilitates groups and pages dedicated to everything from local lost pets to celebrity fan pages, and has a direct instant message function (messenger). As a longtime Facebook user, I had amassed hundreds of friends, acquaintances, and colleagues on the platform and was subscribed to a number of pages and groups related to my interest including graduate school memes, professional and anthropological organizations, local running groups, and a number of news outlets.

One aspect that has remained is the tendency for users to use their real names rather than anonymous pseudonyms. Indeed, Facebook’s community standards encourage this and will remove accounts they believe are opened under fake names. This policy is an attempt to ensure that users are presenting an ‘authentic’ identity (Haimson & Hoffmann, 2016). This meant that my research on Facebook would be conducted using my personal Facebook account. As a result,

the space itself shapes how people interact as having one's real name associated with their discourse raises the stakes when discussing controversial topics across the political spectrum. Canadians have faced social repercussions, from familial ostracization to job loss, for their online discourse. As a result, people often note the need to rein in their commentary. My interlocutors often expressed frustration at the need to be 'politically correct' or face censorship or other repercussions ("Facebook jail").

The space itself also shaped the work I would conduct over the following years. First, my research took place in public Facebook groups dedicated to a number of right-wing groups in Alberta and Canada. These included Soldiers of Odin Edmonton, ID Canada, Yellow Vests, Old Stock Canadian, and Common Sense Canadians. Other groups appeared and disappeared throughout my research, and many became inactive as members left or lost interest. I chose public spaces because private groups required a greater degree of ethical negotiation, and I was not keen to enter into these spaces using my personal profile. This was in part an issue of *my* safety, but my profile included linkages to all my friends, family members, and professional colleagues. I had chosen to travel to these field sites, but my network had not. However, Facebook frowns on creating secondary accounts, which made observations in public groups the best solution.

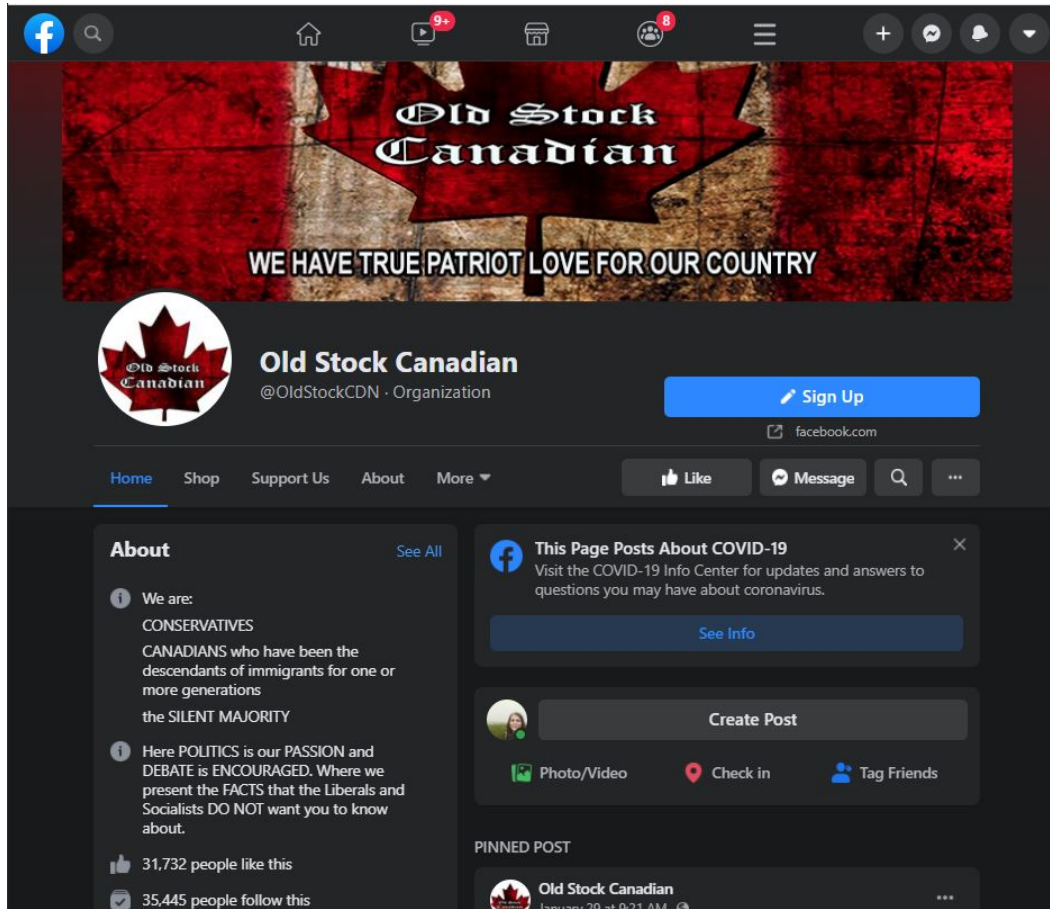


Figure 13. Screenshot of Old Stock Canadian Facebook Page (February 9, 2021)

The image above is a screenshot I took while writing this chapter. Across the top are icons related to Facebook’s functions: search, home, watch (video content from groups and pages), marketplace, and groups. The icons to the right of the three lines, which indicate “more,” are new post, messenger, notifications, and account. The image itself is of the Old Stock Canadian’s Facebook page. On the left, one can see what the group is about, how many people like the page, how many people follow it, as well as contact information. The distinction between “liking” and “following” a page is purely semantic – both contribute to metrics and will result in post notifications. However, to “like” a page implies that one actually does *like* the page. As a result, I followed these groups. This was in part so my in-real-life friends, who were unaware of my research interests, would not assume I suddenly “liked” far-right groups. Within the “follow” function, I could select how often I wanted to see these posts and what kind of content I was interested in experiencing. I typically selected the “favorites” option so that I would not miss a

post in my daily Facebook scroll. This meant that Old Stock Canadians were woven in between memes about grad school, pictures of my cousin’s children, and angry posts from my anarchist colleagues. It was as immersed and embedded as I could get without moving into private spaces.

In the middle, users can navigate to the home page, where the posts by the page and community members appear, access their shop, support page, or a more detailed about us page. At the bottom right is a “pinned post” which will remain the top of the posts regardless of its posting date. This is usually a post that the page owners want all knew and returning users to take note of, and in the case of Old Stock Canadians, it was a post regarding the merchandise they sell. Because this is not just about anti-immigration but making money, too! Below this, posts will appear in chronological order. These posts can be interacted with via the comment function as well as emojis (like, love, care, haha, wow, sad, or angry). Comments on posts could be sorted by posting time (oldest), or by users who were also friends (most relevant), or all comments. Comments can be text-based, images, or even gifs (very short videos).

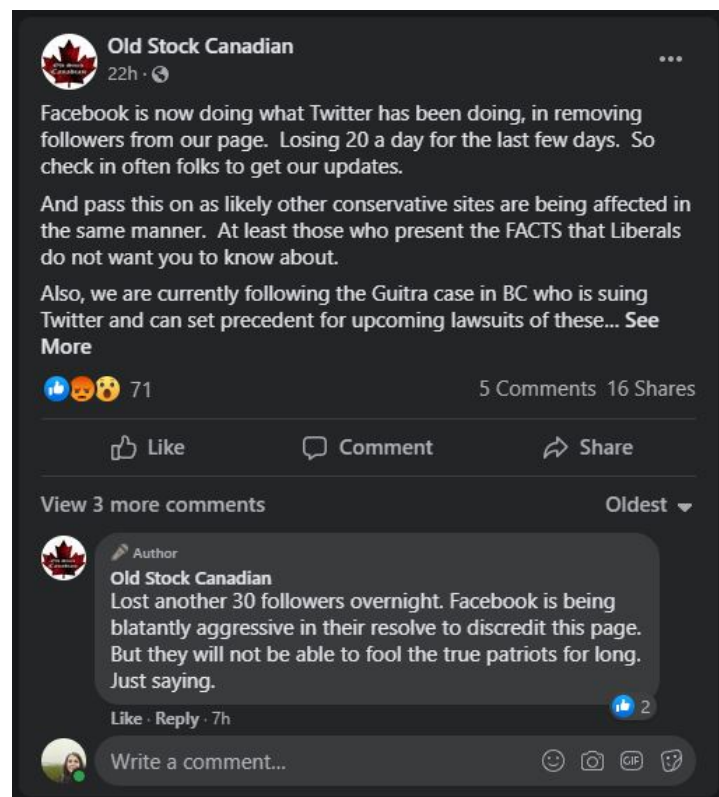


Figure 14. Example of a Facebook post with emoji reactions and comments

While I spent a great deal of time following Soldiers of Odin Edmonton at the outset of my fieldwork, I was also keen to understand how this discourse was manifesting on Twitter. This was prompted in part by news reporting and academic literature on the alt-right, which rose to prominence via the platform during Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign (Hawley, 2017). I knew this was a space where potential interlocutors were networking with one another, and I wanted in on their world.

As with Facebook, I have been an avid user of Twitter for years, and I registered my personal account in 2010. I went into this space with a high degree of Twitter fluency, and I understand the affordances of the platforms, as well as many communities within Twitter (e.g., academic twitter, anthro twitter). However, right-wing Twitter was still a new space for me and required some time to adjust to the social norms and build my network. I created my "right-wing" Twitter account in July 2019 and to date I have curated a timeline of over 1000 accounts connected to the right-wing in Canada. This was an overwhelming amount of people to follow, and it also meant that I was somewhat reliant on the algorithm when it came to my experience. It would be impossible to catch up on what each of those 1000 users were doing every day. So, like a regular user, I allow Twitter to show me what it thought I should see based on my previous interactions as well as the behaviours of those I followed. In this way, the algorithms became my collaborators. Certainly, there were times where I sought out certain conversations or interlocutors, especially if something had occurred and I wanted their perspectives. Yet, for the most part, I was content to surf the web rather than dig in my field.

Twitter is a social networking site where users can share short text-based public posts. Initially, Twitter limited these posts to 140 characters, however, this has been increased to 280. These posts can include images and links; however, many are strictly text-based. Users may also include hashtags (e.g., #conservative) to connect their content with other users who are also using the same hashtag. In Alberta, one might follow the #ableg hashtag to see a wide range of posts related to the Alberta legislature. Similarly, #cdnpoli is a common hashtag for Canadian politics. During my dissertation, the most recognized hashtags amongst the far-right were #altright and #maga, both of which rose to prominence during Trump's 2016 presidential

campaign. Hashtags are a useful means of finding like-minded users as they are included in tweets and user bios.

Users can also use the “@” symbol to tag other accounts as part of their content or to bring other users into the conversation. For example, one might tweet:

I hope the scarf industry survives the lack of an in-person @AmericanAnthro meeting this year #RaisingOurVoices

This makes a connection to the organization referenced here (the American Anthropological Association), as well as the conference community through the official conference hashtag. One might also use the @ function to encourage the other user to engage in a conversation in the comments; however, the other user may choose not to respond. I might, when on #abpoli Twitter, tweet something like:

Dear @jkenney, care to explain #alohagate? #ableg #cdnpoli

This sends a notification to his Twitter account while also ensuring that other users see my tweet via the #ableg (Alberta Legislature) and #cdnpoli (Canadian Politics) hashtags. Moreover, the #alohagate is a short-term hashtag that references a specific political event that other users are following.

Alas, Premier Jason Kenney is unlikely to respond to my tweets. This reality, however, did not stop my interlocutors from tweeting at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on a regular basis (see Figure 15 below for an example).



Figure 15. Screenshot of tweet using the @ function

Beyond creating content, users choose to “follow” other accounts, and this curated collection is known as a timeline. Users can scroll through the tweets from the accounts they follow and “like” or “retweet” content they enjoy or want to amplify. There is also a “quote tweet” function where users can reshare a tweet with added commentary. Users can also comment on the tweets to start a conversation related to the original tweet. Finally, some users will respond to their own tweets and create what is known as a “thread” to move beyond the 280-character limit.

Twitter will send users notifications when their content is liked, retweeted, or quote tweeted. It will also provide suggestions for accounts and content that users may enjoy (see Figure 16 below for a visual). This is based on the accounts users were already following and interacting with on the platform as well as sponsored content. This was a useful means of curating my Canadian right-wing timeline as it showed the networks my interlocutors were building throughout Twitter.

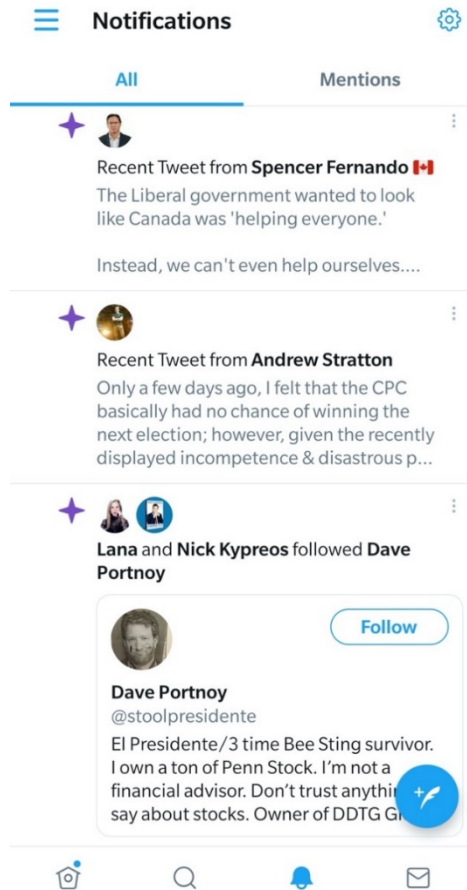


Figure 16. The purple cross indicates a tweet or user that the algorithm thinks would interest me

Another way that content I did not choose to follow appeared in my timeline was through retweets and likes by the accounts I followed. This was not their original content, but it was content they shared on their timeline. In Figure 17, you can see a user I followed “liked” the content, which then pushed it to my timeline.



Figure 17. Image of a tweet “liked” by a followed account; the original poster is not a followed account



Figure 18. Image of a tweet a followed account retweeted without commentary

Twitter was an interesting space for my interlocutors as it was broader and far more networked than Facebook. The option for pseudonyms also shaped how my interlocutors interacted with one another and the site itself. Some of my interlocutors felt freer to speak their minds behind an account that was not directly linked to their offline selves. Moreover, the network on Twitter was less likely to reflect their offline networks than Facebook. As a result, Twitter could carry less social risk for users than their personal Facebook accounts.

However, Twitter as a platform was perceived of as having strict rules around hate speech, and that the site was liberal in its use of suspensions and bans for right-wing users. On Gab, my interlocutors spent time reflecting on their decisions to leave Twitter. My interlocutors frequently claimed that ‘anti-white censorship’ was rampant on the site, and that they could not speak their minds as women, Muslims, and people of colour could. They developed complex “folk theories” to explain their experiences (see Chapter 6),

I was shadow banned & muted on the regular Twitter. They're biased and against Conservatives as they run a liberal/democratic favoured platform. Twitter suspends users for free speech supporting the white race & being critical of Islam.

As West (2018) notes, censorship is a "restraint on a user's voice; it quite literally removes the content of their speech, and in the case of an account suspension prevents their access to a channel for future expression" (p. 4374). It is this idea of censorship and restraint that is interesting to my discussion of Twitter as a field site. The threat of censorship, or even the mere feeling of restraint, by the platform was enough to influence how my interlocutors interacted with and within the space. It also meant that the space was a highly volatile one in terms of membership. In his study on Twitter bans, J.M. Berger (2018) found that while some users were able to return to Twitter following suspensions and bans, many chose to migrate to new platforms.

Because I followed so many Twitter users, and many of them retweeted accounts I was not actively following, it was difficult to keep track of which accounts were still active in the space. At times I would return to my profile where the tweets I had retweeted and archived were visible, and I would find that the original tweets were unavailable. This was often because the accounts were likely suspended or banned. This showed the fragility of Twitter as an ethnographic space, and I came to see users as bricks that built out the space and made it meaningful. When too many bricks were removed via bans or migration, the field site began to crumble in on itself although the platform and site remained intact. This was a weird experience for me as an ethnographer. The structure of the field site was still there, and I could have thrown out enough lines to other accounts to build it back up, but it *felt* like my field site had gone elsewhere. Indeed, many of my interlocutors had packed up their bricks and moved elsewhere.

Moving to Gab

While selecting a single platform for an in-depth study or a comparison between two sites like Facebook and Twitter was appealing, the nomadic nature of the users began to render such an approach problematic (Postill & Pink, 2012). Moreover, the increased bans on Twitter, and the

eventual bans on Facebook, made a multi-sited approach a necessary step if I wanted to conduct at least a year of fieldwork amongst a group that was at least loosely networked together. Additionally, I quickly realized that my interlocutors were already keen to find multiple spaces to engage with like-minded people and express all aspects of their identities (Jasser, 2021; Jasser et al., 2021). Ultimately, I decided that if my interlocutors were going to exist in multiple spaces, I should as well. Besides, it was an excellent opportunity to look at how different platform infrastructure facilitated different kinds of spaces and communities, and Gab was certainly different from both Facebook and Twitter.

Gab is an American-run alternative social media platform, also known as an “alt-tech” site. Unlike Facebook, it promotes the use of pseudonyms as opposed to real names, although some users may choose to use their names. As with Twitter, I used a pseudonym on this site. Unlike Facebook and Twitter, however, I had never used the site before. As a result, I spent months observing behaviours, developing a basic fluency in the communication style, and finding the spaces where my interlocutors congregated. The space *felt* foreign to me whereas Facebook and Twitter felt familiar even if the discourse was upsetting.

Users can post in a number of ways including text, images, links, and polls. Users can attach warnings to their posts as well as expiration schedules. The most common posts were opinionated text-based posts or links from either the news or another social media site (e.g., Voat or YouTube), or memes.

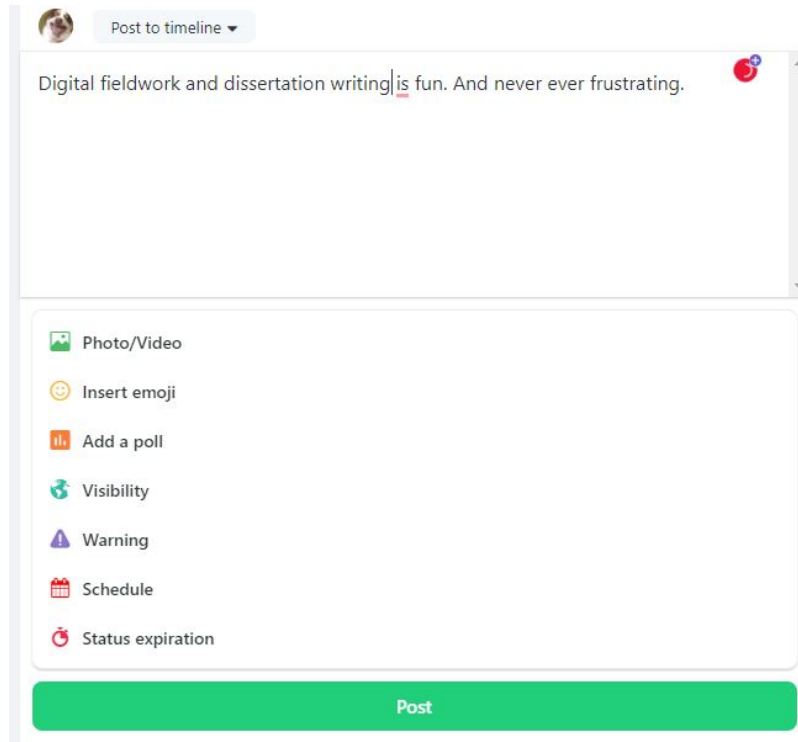


Figure 19. Image of a Gab post in draft format

Interaction on Gab posts included likes, comments, and reposts. Reposting allowed users to share a post or individual user comment on their own page or in another group with or without commentary. I used the repost function in my work to create an archive of posts I found related to my work. Thus, my user homepage is filled with anti-immigrant posts. As with Twitter, however, this process of archiving was subject to censorship. If users were banned, or self-deleted, the data would disappear from my archive. This pointed not only to the fragility of these spaces, but also the need to archive my data offline.

Like Facebook, users can join groups dedicated to their interests. I joined groups related to Viking and northern European issues, as well as immigration and white supremacy. Due to the demographic makeup of Gab, many of these had an American bias, but they served to situate my work in a broader context. There were also two Canadian related groups, The Great White North and Canada News. Both provided insight into Canadian right-wing rhetoric, which included many of the themes discussed in this dissertation.

Gab is hailed as an alternative to mainstream social media sites, like Twitter and Facebook, due to its emphasis on free speech and individual liberty. Many of my interlocutors migrated to Gab following repeated suspensions and bans on Twitter. As a result, the site attracts more extremist content, including that which is anti-Semitic, Islamophobic and anti-immigrant in nature (Jasser, 2021; Jasser et al., 2021). Indeed, it was on Gab that I was exposed to the greatest degree of violent rhetoric. The space was emotionally bruising in its extremism, and something that had not existed in the same way on the other sites. It was this extremism that brought the platform to mainstream media attention in 2018, and it was this extremism that solidified my interest in it as a possible field site.

On October 27, 2018, a user posted his plans to attack the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh moments before he began shooting at worshippers. The attacker had a long history of anti-Semitic posts on Gab, which were positively received and left uncensored by the platform. The entire site was deplatformed following an FBI investigation, and although it re-emerged, many of my interlocutors had moved on to other spaces as they felt Gab was caving to censorship pressures (Berger, 2018).³⁸ Many users suggested migrating to Voat, Minds, and Telegram.

Experiencing violence from my office (March 2019)

Despite the FBI investigation and temporary deplatforming, Gab remained a space of hatred. More than that, it remained a space that hurt to exist in for too long. In 2019 I began actively participating in the space, yet I would find myself staring at my screen, after having zoned out for a few moments, not remembering what I was doing. Then I would re-read the latest comment and remember how emotionally bruising it was to read such vile comments about women, people of colour, Jews, and Muslims. Comments would make me nauseous, and I would have to step away from my computer. I needed to create physical distance between my real-world body and my digital-field site accessed through my computer. I would go for a run to further distance myself, but my mind would continue to exist in that space.

³⁸ Deplatforming is the process of preventing someone from contributing to a forum or social media space (e.g., the removal of a person's YouTube or PayPal account). In the case of Gab, the entire site was deplatformed as their service provided blocked their access.

This space exploded in violence March 15, 2019. Gab was a toxic and brutal space that day. There had been a terrorist attack in Christchurch and over 40 people were already pronounced dead and countless wounded. A far-right extremist had opened fire on Muslims as they were praying, and he had livestreamed it on Facebook.³⁹ My interlocutors were jubilant. Being in that space, so far from the offline violence, and yet so close to a different sort of violence, was an indescribable experience. And I have struggled to, as a good ethnographer should, explain the space. I have tried to do so here in an abstracted and academic way; however, it has proven difficult. So, I would point readers interested in my field reflection on Christchurch to my Epilogue essay on that day.

In the meantime, what I want to emphasize here is that as a space Gab *looked* the same as it always had. The structure of the site was the same white and green. The icons, text, and user profiles had not changed. Yet, the *feeling* of space had. Significantly. Comments about the shooting flooded every corner of my field site from the right-wing Norse pagan groups, who typically shared mundane memes about Odin and whiteness, to the Canadian news groups. The more extreme groups, like those explicitly and overtly dedicated to white nationalism, were the most active. Every time I refreshed my page, dozens of new posts with many comments emerged. It felt like no matter how fast I worked, I could not keep up with the pace of my field site. It was as if my space had shifted into hyper speed. Moreover, because the shooting was such a dominant topic, it felt like there was nowhere on the site that I could find some relief. Some peace and quiet. I could have gotten up, walked out of my office and away from my work. But I felt obligated to not only bear witness to what was happening, but to immerse myself in the intensity of my fieldwork. Was this not a key ethnographic moment?

I spent the rest of the day bouncing between field spaces and my personal social media feeds. I was desperately trying to stretch myself out over multiple field sites and digital spaces to lessen the engagement. I needed my fieldwork to be shallow and thin. While I thought rich, thick ethnographic work came from deep and long-term immersion in spaces, as well as engaging with

³⁹ See Ward (2020) for a discussion of Christchurch that situates the tragedy within both Australia's history of settler colonialism and global white supremacy.

sometimes uncomfortable events and situations, this richness was harmful. When discussing these experiences with my colleagues and friends, some noted that my experience sounded clinically traumatic. Others worried that I had experienced emotional or psychological bruising. Regardless of the term, that space was a damaging one. And this is why, I think, I respond so viscerally now to accusations that the digital field is not ‘real’ enough for an ethnographic study. Fieldwork is difficult; our sites push the limits of the ethnographer, and it changes us. Gab certainly did these things for me.

Managing offline research with digital obligations

Initially, I had hoped to conduct research offline at rallies, protests, and group meetings in Canada and Europe. However, in Canada it became abundantly clear that this was unlikely. Protests were few and far between, indeed many of the high-profile Yellow Vest protests occurred while I was in Munich, and I was limited to digital observations during those times. Protests also emerged in 2020 in response to the Covid-19 lockdowns and the Black Lives Matter movement; however, these were technically illegal protests given the health orders. I was not keen to face a hefty fine for my research, nor did I wish to risk contracting Covid-19.

I did, however, spend time in Iceland (January and February 2019) and northwestern Europe (Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, in September and October 2019). The point of these trips was to conduct offline research at rallies and conduct interviews with members of these movements. Unfortunately, my timing for these trips did not align with rallies and protests in any of the countries. Instead, I focused my time in these spaces on networking with other scholars of northern-ness (University of Akureyri, University of Reykjavik) and right-wing extremism (northwestern Europe). These scholars provided critical insight into the realities of this work, from the difficulty of doing offline ethnography at these events to the ethics of digital work. These spaces were, of course, decidedly northern, and they allowed me time to reflect on the notion of northern-ness and my “idea” of the north.

While in Akureyri, I enjoyed warm weather in January. The temperature barely dipped below minus 10C while my family back home in Edmonton and southern Alberta were experiencing a

polar vortex. Beyond temperature, however, the space felt northern. The colours of the landscape were white, pinks and blues, and I knit scarves and cowls with my host to match these hues. The sun rose late in the morning and set in the early afternoon, and I was served special pancakes on the first day the sun managed to rise over the mountains that bordered the town. The landscape was barren, windblown and rocky. I visited museums dedicated to the north, to fishing and maritime travel, and of course to the Vikings.

While in Reykjavik, I spent time at the Asatru religious center, which was a non-descript office building in an industrial neighbourhood. Inside, the place was decorated with stuffed ravens, Norse pagan artwork, and Icelandic crafts. I attended their monthly crafting night, where adherents helped me with my lopapeysa (an Icelandic sweater) and provided feedback on the far-right memes I had brought with me. These memes featured their gods, although the visual representations differed from those they had on their walls. In Iceland, I was searching for a sense of what drew my interlocutors to this land of Vikings as source for inspiration, especially for those without heritage ties to Iceland.

In contrast, my time in both Germany and Denmark was marked by a cosmopolitan experience. I spent my time in large cities with universities and academic conversation. However, chance encounters drew me back to my fieldwork. While in Bonn, Germany, I saw what Miller-Idriss (2017) has characterized as the extreme gone mainstream. On multiple occasions I saw young people in ‘yakuza’ branded clothing as well as what locals called the “AfD haircut,” which I was told is popular amongst far-right young people and football hooligans. While there, I felt a sense of possibility: the possibility of a protest – indeed, there was a climate strike at the university campus – as well as the possibility of engaging with a young AfD member or identitarian. Yet, before I knew it, I was on a bus to Copenhagen where I spent my time amongst my academic colleagues rather than right-wing interlocutors. My colleagues showed me their favourite coffee shops and dive bars, and I quickly learned the twists and turns of the old streets as I ran over them each day. It rained a lot, and the flower shops outside my apartment smelled glorious after an evening shower.

In Sweden, I spent time in Norrköping and Uppsala. I was invited to give a lecture at the Museum of Work in Norrköping and engaged with a group of scholars who were also working on digital and extremist issues. Again, these were cosmopolitan spaces with limited day light but lively night lives as we gathered around frothy pints of local—and expensive—craft beer. Uppsala was an interesting space to occupy, and I chose it specifically in response to my interlocutors' perceptions of it. They claimed it was the “rape capital of Sweden” because of Sweden's mass immigration policies. This city was supposedly unsafe for young white women, who would purportedly find themselves assaulted by Muslim and African migrants. This was not my experience, nor was it the experience of the Swedish women I spoke to throughout my time in the country. What I remember most of my time in Sweden were the forested paths leading from the city in Old Uppsala. The trees were well into their autumnal splendor, and I relished the colours. I spent an evening at the royal mounds at Gamla Uppsala, where mythology says Odin, Thor, and Freyr rest, while other legends claim the mounds are the resting places of fifth-sixth century royalty.

My time in Oslo was similar to my time in Copenhagen in my attention to scholarly conversations and museums. The city felt like equal parts modern concrete and old-world architecture. My first day in the city I witnessed a violent altercation between an unhoused man and the police, and I was reminded of my time living in southern Alberta. Despite the geographic distance, culturally our countries are quite close in some regards, although the city was dreary and cold with rain rather than snow. Again, I wondered how a country so clearly articulated as “northern” could feel so much more southern than my hometown in southern Alberta.

While in these cities I also spent a lot of time in coffee shops, pubs, and restaurants talking to locals about my research, and they gave me feedback where I might go and who I might talk to. Bartenders and baristas, I learned quickly, were a great source for information on the town as well as the experience of young people. In addition to becoming informants and guides, they were sounding boards for my research on the local experience of right-wing protests and rallies. Yet, the only protest I was alerted to was a *pro*-immigration rally in Reykjavik. I attended, but the right-wing did not.

I also spent two weeks in a tiny village called Oppdal, where I wrote the majority of my prospectus. The town is not known for extremism or identitarian rhetoric; however it is the closest settlement to Romfo, the village from which my maternal family emigrated. Again, I was searching for a sense of connection to these spaces as a means of understanding why my interlocutors were so keen to look to Europe – to their European heritage – as a source for their anti-immigrant rhetoric. Where was the space of common curiosity between us? Could I find it here?

Romfo is largely abandoned; however, a beautiful little church remains with graves of my distant ancestors. Yet, I did not feel the connection that my interlocutors talked about. I had hoped that an auto-ethnographic approach would help me close the gap between my interlocutors and myself, yet I felt it widen the longer I spent in my offline field. My informal chats with Europeans—locals and academics alike—provided to be of little assistance. I knew that everything I did would frame and inform my dissertation, even if it was not the fieldwork that I had envisioned. I now see my conversations with academics who had studied the right-wing for decades, as well as graduate students who were charting new paths in digital ethnography and white and male supremacist studies, as vital parts of my analytical process. And, perhaps more importantly, my capacity to finish my fieldwork as a whole, albeit slightly bruised, human. Yet, at the time, I could not help but wonder if the work I had done abroad was rich enough, thick enough, or carried with it the ethnographic sensibility I sought.

My fieldwork began to feel like a failure. I had conducted interviews. I had run a workshop using my interlocutors' memes as prompts. I had tried to attend rallies and protests, yet they refused to cooperate with my schedule. Indeed, the Canadian protests occurred while I was in Europe! I was frustrated. I had gone *away* to do my research just like the ethnographers in my texts, but somehow it felt incomplete. I had visited eight countries over the course of a year, yet I could not quite conceptualize them as field *sites*. As spaces, they were something else, and something that *felt* not-quite-ethnographic. As Carole McGranahan (2018) notes,

For an anthropologist, ethnography that is not ethnographic feels off, thin, undeveloped, and thus, not incredibly useful or insightful. It can be easy to see and to name what is not

ethnographic, for example, that which is merely description or observation or some other form of qualitative data. In contrast, although we know good ethnography when we read it, it is harder to articulate what makes something ethnographic (p. 2).

This notion of *knowing* when something is *not* ethnographic is what marks the spaces I visited. Rather than ethnographic spaces, these were sites that an ethnographer visited where I observed and lived and talked about my research. Despite the fact that they were, as I describe below, appropriate sites for ethnographic exploration, they just did not manifest as such. Not in the way my digital sites did, at least.

Part of this, I suspect, is rooted in my multi-sited approach, and what was interesting at this point in my fieldwork was the overwhelming sense of losing control of my research sites. My fieldwork had become a monstrous set of tentacles that spanned multiple spaces on and offline, and it had become an uncontrollable mass of ethnographic mess. I felt I needed to be fully immersed in each space even as they shifted and crumbled just in case something re-emerged out of the rubble. This is in part because of my search for ethnographic sensibility and a space that felt ethnographic. It is also in response to what Anna Tsing refers to as a “nightmare possibility” of multi-sited work. In a co-authored piece between Tsing, Timothy Choi, Shiho Satsuka, Lieba Faier, Michael Hathaway, and Miyako Inoue, the group, which writes under the collaborative name Matsutake Worlds Research Group, comes together to discuss experiments in collaboration around the matsutake mushroom. Beyond collaboration, however, Tsing provides commentary on multi-sited ethnography. In her introduction to the piece, she notes,

...taking our responsibilities as fieldworkers seriously, we have tried to avoid building an analysis based only on superficial encounters. This is the nightmare possibility of a multisited ethnography and one that collaboration can potentially address (Matsutake Worlds Research Group, 2009, p. 382).

This is an interesting point of discussion for those of us who conduct multi-sited research. How do we ‘seriously’ defend against shallow, superficial, and thin encounters? How do we maintain the ethnographic sensibility that comes with long-term and immersive research (McGranahan,

2018)? For my dissertation project, collaboration was not a viable option in part because of my research interests, but also because of the lone anthropologist trope that continues to define our discipline, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 5. My time in Europe was a whirlwind, and I was never able to dig into the spaces. They were, unfortunately, superficial encounters. If anything, they amplified the ethnographic sensibility of my digital sites. For my work more broadly, however, the ‘nightmare possibility’ came towards the end of 2019. Yet, it was not, as Tsing had predicted, a consequence of superficial engagements. Quite the opposite.

I returned home in November and had an upcoming trip to Vancouver and the AAA annual general meeting planned. I was exhausted, as I imagine most ethnographers are when they return from the field. Yet, I was not really ‘out’ of the field. Instead, my digital field had followed me from my home in Canada across the European continent all year. It followed me to Vancouver and then back home again. I had watched the waning Yellow Vest movement from my desk at the Stefansson Arctic Institute in Akureyri, Iceland. I followed my interlocutors move from Twitter to alt-tech sites while on a family vacation in Ireland. I spent hours on Gab while on trains between Germany and Denmark. I dug deeper into new communities I had found on Reddit in preparation for a research presentation in Sweden. I checked in on all these sites during my downtime at the AAAs. My wifi-less airplane rides across the Atlantic became the only time I felt truly disconnected from my field sites. I was tethered to these spaces. These spaces had slowly become marked by feelings of resentment, exhaustion, and nightmare impossibility (see also Epilogue essay on tethering). There were too many spaces, too many Twitter accounts, too many memes on Reddit, too much fracturing on Facebook, too much violent misogyny on Gab.

In my attempts to take my field sites seriously—to immerse myself over years and avoid the superficial encounters—I had rendered myself useless. Burnt out, I withdrew my paper from the AAAs and floated through the week in Vancouver. I caught up with colleagues, met other graduate students over pints of beer, and ran along the city’s waterfront. Once back home, I returned to the daily process of checking the dwindling and crumbling Facebook groups, scrolling Twitter, and engaging on Gab. Occasionally an interlocutor would send me to a more temporary site, like YouTube or Voat (described below). I was concerned I would lose all capacity to remain ethnographically engaged in these spaces if I included yet another site.

My relief came in the form of r/metacanada. I had first stumbled upon it during the summer that year, and I had begun to ramp up my time in Reddit more broadly. Indeed, the value of Reddit quickly overwhelmed the broader multi-sited context I had developed over the preceding months. As a result, in 2020, I committed almost entirely to Reddit as a field site. I would continue to monitor Facebook, Twitter, and Gab, especially when ruptures emerged, but there was something about Reddit as a *space* that began to feel sensible in an ethnographic way.

Finding and Living in Reddit

In her ethnography of Reddit, Massanari (2015) notes that her interest in geek culture and technology helped her feel at home in the space, as it was largely related to all things nerdy in its formative years. I have been an avid Reddit user (Redditor) since the early 2010s and was brought into the space through my interest in geek culture as well. As a result, after nearly a decade it feels familiar to me too.

Reddit is considered a social media site, but unlike its social networking siblings – Facebook and Twitter – it is actually a media aggregator. Users repost content from other sites, including Twitter, YouTube, and media outlets, for commentary. It is this process of aggregation that they refer to when Reddit describes itself as “the front page of the internet.” The site is clearly riffing on newspapers, wherein all the happenings around the world are aggregated into one space for consumption and commentary. Of course, some users create original content, whether visual media or text-based posts.

One does not need a user account to access Reddit as an observer. Observers can browse Reddit from the front page and seek out specific subreddits to “lurk” in. However, if one wants to engage, as I did, it requires a username and password. Again, I used a pseudonym here as real names are not the social norm.

Like other social media sites, users can find communities related to their interests. On Reddit, these are called subreddits. These forums are typically public, although some private subreddits

do exist. I subscribed to a number of right-wing subreddits, including r/metacanada, r/UnbiasedCanada, r/PeoplesPartyofCanada, r/MetacanadaTwo, and r/Libernadian. I discovered many of these through Reddit's algorithms and suggestions, as well as through user suggestions (e.g., "This sub sucks, we should all go to r/MetacanadaTwo") or cross-posts from other subreddits. Beyond r/metacanada, which boasted nearly 40,000 subscribers, most of the right-wing subreddits were small in subscribers and interactions. These subreddits had between 2,000 (r/PPoC) and 750 (r/Libernadian) subscribers as of February 2021, and r/MetacanadaTwo was banned in December 2019 rendering their subscriber count zero. Many posts in these smaller spaces garnered little engagement with some posts receiving less than 10 upvotes and zero comments; moreover, posts were often made by a small, dedicated group of users. In contrast, r/metacanada had posts that often received over 100 comments and up to 1,000 upvotes. These posts were often controversial or related to a hot button issue.

I also subscribed to Canadian subreddits that were centrist or leftist to provide greater context to my research. This was useful as the same media links and articles were often shared between forums, yet they elicited different reactions. These forums included r/OnGuardForThee, r/Alberta, r/CanadaPolitics, and r/Canada. This gave me a wide range of subreddits and perspectives to situate my ethnographic engagements in, particularly those from my primary subreddit, r/metacanada.

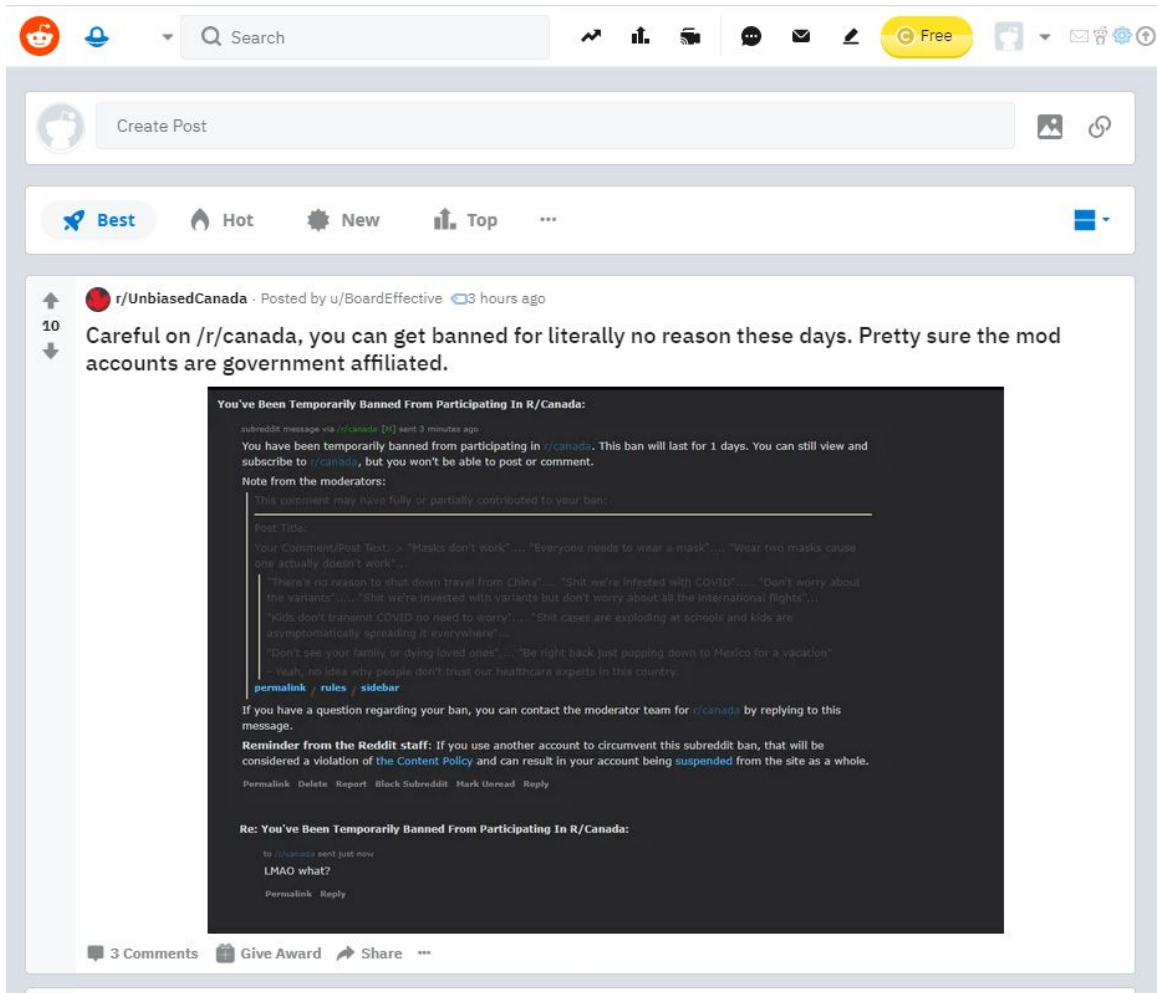


Figure 20. The front page of my research Reddit account

Once on a post, Redditors can choose to comment on the post itself (parent comment) or on another user's comment (child comment). These are typically restricted to text-based responses; however, users can use links to include media content. Comment threads can have seemingly unlimited children and following the responses can be quite difficult, especially when multiple users respond and start new comment trees.

Posts within subreddits, and comments within posts, can be sorted by "hot" which refers to content with the highest upvote recently, "new" is the most recent content, and "top" is the highest upvotes regardless of downvotes. There is also a "rising" function that shows content that is gaining popularity. These can be sorted within a date range as well. For example, Figure 21. Shows the top content on r/metacanada of all time while Figure 22. Shows the newest content.

As a result, how one configures their field site affects the content they will be exposed to. I allowed my subreddits to default to the community standards, which was usually “hot.” Redditors can also sort comments by additional criteria including “best,” “controversial,” “old,” and “Q&A.”

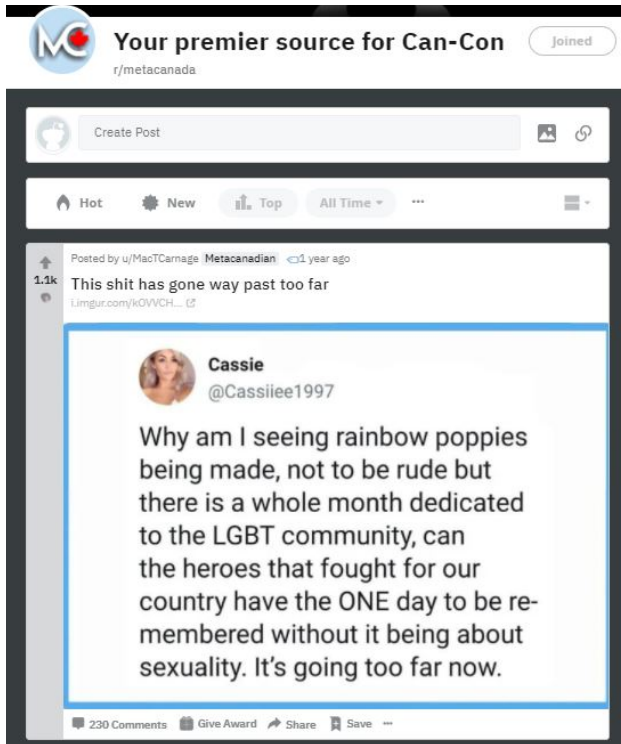


Figure 21. Top post in r/metacanada of all time (left)

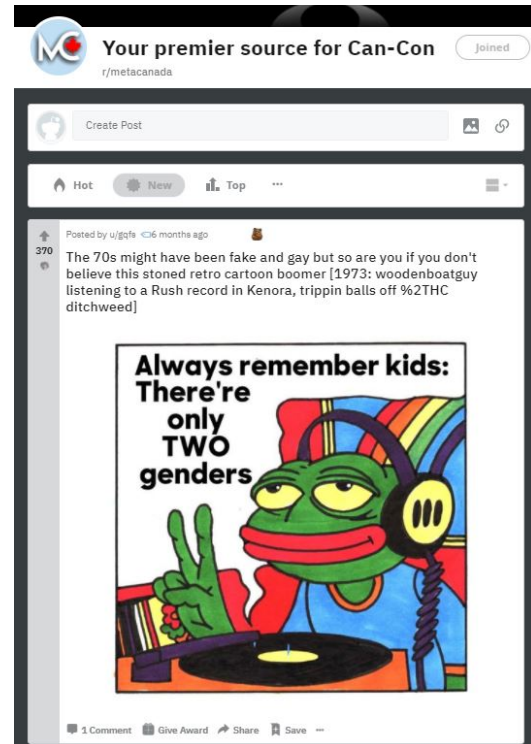


Figure 22. Most recent post in r/metacanada (right)

What makes Reddit unique is its “karma” system. This refers to the up and downvoting system for each post and comment. One’s karma reflects the number of upvotes their post or comment received less the downvotes. Users typically strive for upvotes, although some users will purposefully post antagonistic content or comments and receive numerous downvotes (Massanari, 2017). Indeed, during my first week on r/metacanada, I found myself with -35 karma after what felt like a successful trolling session (see Conclusion on building rapport).

Beyond a space for aggregating content, Reddit also had two messaging functions. The first is their direct message, which operates like email. The exchanges are asynchronous and can include

formatted text and embedded links to media. They also have a chat function, which can in theory achieve a more synchronous exchange if both users are at their device. This is reminiscent of Facebook messenger or a text message app. While these were not sites of participant-observation, they were spaces where I conducted interviews with members of r/metacanada.

Unlike Gab, I found Reddit to be a fairly mainstream space in terms of discourse. There were certainly times where racism, homophobia, and misogyny were displayed, but because of the platform's position on hate speech, the discourse was somewhat reigned. Because of this, and the relative anonymity we were all provided by our pseudonyms,⁴⁰ I felt more comfortable engaging with my interlocutors via quick, asynchronous comments. Moreover, this was the first space that felt distinctly Canadian with critical mass. While Gab had spaces dedicated to Canadian news, they came together through the interactions of less than a hundred users and there were periods of time where the space stood still in the absence of users. In contrast, r/metacanada, which quickly became my primary field site within Reddit, was a lively space at all hours of the day and night. It was *finally* a space that *felt* ethnographic when I stepped into it. It was a more 'bounded' community than Twitter, it had more engagement and action than Facebook, and I felt fluent enough in the platform to not look like a total noob.

What I briefly want to note before I move on from Reddit, is how my devices shaped my field experience. Like Facebook and Twitter, I could access it via my computer or my smartphone, and this had a marked effect on my research process, and it shaped how I experienced these platforms as sites. Most mornings in 2019 and 2020 began on my computer. With coffee and breakfast in front of me, I would enter my field site from the comfort of my living room couch. Reddit was a space I was comfortable with, and I found myself floating through my timeline with ease. I explored areas that piqued my interest either by the title, the number of comments, or the upvote percentage. My experience in the space was often at the pace of a stroll. I wandered about and sat down in places I found interesting. I began to recognize a few usernames despite the large number of subscribers. Even in a space occupied by so many people, there were still a few vocal regulars.

⁴⁰ I have noted this elsewhere, but it bears repeating: I had ethical clearance to use a pseudonym so long as I indicated I was a researcher in my user bios.

Experiencing it as a site through my computer allowed me to take brief moments away from my scroll to tab over into my reflexive notes document. These moments let me reflect on what I had experienced and even jot down a few connections to key literature. I was able to take screenshots and import them directly into my data folder with keywords and short notes. In contrast, when I accessed Reddit via my smartphone, I found myself exploring the space in much the same way as Twitter: endless scrolling with a large number of screenshots, which were automatically uploaded to an online folder that grew increasingly unwieldy and overwhelming in size. My responses to comments via mobile were often shorter given that it is easier for me to type on a keyboard rather than smartphone screen. At times I would give up on my phone and access the site on my computer if my engagement became too, well, engaging. I would straighten up from my increasingly horizontal position on my couch and focus. My computer-mediated field was more focused and engaged, while my smartphone was more passive. This points to the importance of considering how field sites are accessed. It is not just the platform that shapes the field, but the physical technology that facilitates our movement into the field that matters as well.

Transient Space: YouTube & Other Minor Sites

Some of my sites made me feel particularly transient. While I would camp out in Facebook, Twitter, Gab, and Reddit, some sites simply did not hold me or encourage further exploration. These included blogs and websites, as well as smaller, alternative media sites like Minds, Telegram, Voat, and Parler. YouTube also proved to be a minor site despite its use by right-wing social media influencers.

Minds, Telegram, Voat, and Parler.

Minds was a site similar to Gab in that it was organized around interests and groups, and many of the Gab users I followed tried to recreate these groups on Minds. Telegram functioned as a broadcasting platform where users could post and reshare content, and other users could subscribe to the stream/broadcast. Telegram is increasingly popular amongst the right, though it has infamously been utilized by jihadi extremists (Urman & Katz, 2020). It was also my last connection to ID Canada, and while they no longer maintain it, their channel remains the only

available source of their content (Mack, forthcoming). Voat was markedly similar to Reddit, to the point that this similarity was addressed in their FAQ. Voat's administrators made the decision to take down the site on December 25, 2020, after realizing it was unviable financially. Parler functioned similarly to Twitter and became widely known after its use in the January 6, 2021 coup attempt in the US after which Parler was removed from its host server and the Apple and Google app stores. Like Gab, it was later restored and presented itself as a martyred platform. In a recent email newsletter, which I continue to subscribe to, they boldly claimed that they were not "going to let facts get in the way of free speech."

These sites remained minor in my research for a few reasons. First, and most importantly, my interlocutors did not gather in the same way on these sites. The clusters of users on each platform were significantly minor compared to Twitter, Reddit, and Gab. As a result, the discourse was not as vibrant. Posts on Voat would solicit only a few comments, and mine were met with silence. The groups on Minds were similarly small and inactive as users seemed unwilling to leave Gab. Parler also felt decidedly American, especially in comparison to Reddit. What was more common in the migration discourse amongst my interlocutors was a begrudging resignation to return to Twitter and "play by the rules" in order to connect with a larger network and community. Here, the users once again shaped the kind of ethnographic engagements possible.

YouTube and Bitchute

For some ethnographers, YouTube is a vibrant ethnographic space (Tikka & Sumiala, 2014). For me, YouTube and its alt-tech twin Bitchute were strange spaces. Like Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit, YouTube is a familiar space as I have used it consistently since it was launched in 2005. Through the site, users are able to generate visually high-quality content that rivals television broadcasts. Some "channels" are professionally produced and have sponsorship agreements. In terms of engagement, viewers can up or downvote the video and leave comments in addition to viewing the video and adding to its metrics. As with other social media sites, the comments can be first level (parent) comments on the video or in response to other users (children).

The platform has also introduced a "livestream" function which allows creators to stream content in real time, and viewers can comment in a chatbox during the stream. Through this function,

entire communities can cluster around a YouTube host and engage with one another in real time. It was apparent that many users were returning viewers as their usernames were known to others in the chat, and subconversations would emerge alongside commentary on the livestream content. Livestreams also have a “tip” function, wherein users can donate real currency to the content producer.

This was a fast-paced space for ethnographic engagement as multiple layers and threads of communication were woven together. I struggled to keep up with comments and mine often went unnoticed as hundreds of other comments poured in, and I frequently rewatched the stream several times to pick up on what I had missed. This chat is often available alongside the livestream in the producer’s video library, although this is at the discretion of the producer. As a result, I tended to privilege paying attention to the chat in my first watch and the video itself in the second so as to not miss out on community conversations.

For three months I joined the weekly live stream of an American folk right content producer who had garnered a substantial social media following on Twitter (10k users) and Gab; this included many Canadians in addition to Europeans and Americans. Her work was broadly related to my own through an emphasis on northwestern European heritage as a marker of national identity. Yet the experience of a weekly “community” and synchronous space was unique in my research. As a space, it was also the most vivid example of integrated audio, textual, and visual communication. I also joined the livestreams of Canadian far-right figure Faith Goldy. Her streams, which were more focused on Canadian and American politics, solicited similar discourse to what I found in Canadian Twitter and Reddit spaces.

Like Twitter, YouTube was frequently criticized as a space defined by censorship. Often, the streamers would lament that they could not say what they really meant—and what their viewers really wanted to hear for fear of suspensions and bans. Despite their strategic use of language and imagery, many right-wing content producers found themselves banned from YouTube just as they predicted. As a result, some content creators setup backup or alternative accounts for their more controversial content. If those were censored, at least the primary account remained intact.

Maintaining these primary accounts was vital for content creators who generated income from their work.

Other creators migrated to BitChute and PewTube as these sites either explicitly permitted or tacitly allowed content that would violate YouTube's content moderation policies. Indeed, it was on BitChute that I first came across footage of the Christchurch mosque attack. While these sites were useful archives, the effervescence of livestreams did not migrate along with the content. As a result, I found myself spending less time on Bitchute unless explicitly directed there by an interlocutor. While it could have been an ethnographic field site, it simply did not feel like one I should prioritize given the vast web of field sites I had already developed.

While the YouTube livestreams were a fascinating space, particularly because of their real-time engagement and multimodal expression, they significantly narrowed the topic and perspective of my research. I found the fact that because the conversations happened within a single person's livestream, it was a more contained site. This was in contrast to sites like Reddit or Twitter, which while they had to contend with moderators, were much less controlled or even hierarchical in nature. Moreover, I did not really care about individual content producers, as other scholars of the far-right might (see Park, 2022 for a discussion of Gavin McInnes, for example). I was concerned with broader conversations amongst the members of the communities themselves. Thus, while livestreams were intriguing, I rarely felt like they were the right space for me to engage in earnest.

Chapter 5 - On Fieldwork as Space and Method

“So, where do you do your work?” asked the woman standing next to me. We were at the 2019 AAA/CASCA conference in Vancouver, and I was surrounded by anthropologists, which is usually a wonderful feeling. However, in that moment I could not help but think how much I hated that question and how every single anthropologist asks it. “Oh, I do multi-sited work in Canada and northern Europe,” I replied. This was only half true, but I was too tired to get into what digital ethnography looks like in my project. I had already been a part of three conversations that were, unfortunately, hostile towards digital ethnography. I also heard from a junior colleague that they were berated for not doing “real” ethnographic work during their poster presentation. It was easy enough to shrug these events off in the moment as remnants of an old guard unwilling to dream bigger dreams for anthropology and find a cup of coffee somewhere else. Yet, I argue that they speak to a larger story within anthropology. In some ways, it *is* the story of anthropology and how anthropologists *do* anthropology. As Gupta and Ferguson (1997) note,

As all graduate students in social cultural anthropology know, it is fieldwork that makes one a ‘real anthropologist,’ and truly anthropological knowledge is widely understood to be ‘based’ (as we say) on fieldwork. Indeed, we would suggest that the single most significant factor determining whether a piece of research will be accepted as (that magical word) “anthropological” is the extent to which it depends on experience ‘in the field’ (p. 1)

This enduring notion of what constitutes the anthropological and ethnographic continues to shape how graduate students think about and design our fieldwork. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to ‘mess around’ with the notion of fieldwork as it has been conceptualized in anthropology and to locate this messiness within the context of my fieldwork. I ask, what does it mean to ‘do’ fieldwork? What does it mean to others in my discipline and how does my research reflect and remix these assumptions? In this discussion of fieldwork, I attend to both space and method in this chapter and draw on discussions from Chapters 3 and 4.

I want to note that this chapter is conceptualized as a discussion with my fellow anthropologists, rather than with (digital) ethnographers who hail from multiple disciplines. I locate this conversation within the discipline of anthropology because fieldwork, and the burden of disciplinary expectations, is seemingly at the root of what constitutes the anthropological. This is despite the work of anthropologists like Tim Ingold (2017; MacDougall, 2016) who are trying to move anthropology beyond ethnography.

As I note elsewhere, who we cite constitute our citational genealogies, and I endeavor to be as ethical and attentive to power and marginalization within the academy in choosing my genealogy. I take seriously the call to attend to citational politics and practices. As feminist scholar of colour Sara Ahmed (2017) notes, citations are bricks, and they are how we build the intellectual spaces we inhabit. Therefore, the type of citation-as-brick shapes the kind of space we can build. They are the maps and blueprints that show us where we can go and what we can build. In her feminist practice, Ahmed cites work that

lays out other paths, paths we can call desire lines, created by not following the official paths laid out by disciplines. These paths might have become fainter from not being traveled upon; so we might work harder to find them; we might be willful just to keep them going by not going the way we have been directed... Citation is feminist memory. Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow (pp. 15-16).

Ahmed (2017) sees her decision to not cite white men as a feminist act that gives her the space to build, theorize, and grow. Yet here, I deliberately cite white men and follow those lines laid out by my discipline, and I cite them at length. I do this not because these are the bricks that I want to use to build my anthropological home, but rather because they are the bricks that built the discipline's prevailing ideas about ethnographic field sites. These are the bricks that were given to me in my graduate and undergraduate methods courses. Indeed, I draw from many of the readers assigned to me over the years. As a result, in the first half of this chapter I attend to these traditional approaches to building field sites and fieldworks.

While I owe much to my anthropological predecessors, I want the space to ‘talk back’ in a hooksian sense (hooks, 1989). Through this conversation and pushback, I am creating space to explore the messiness as well as the restrictive nature of their paths, and the possibility of other equally messy but liberating lines of desire. I envision this as a dialogue with both my canonical anthropological predecessors and the feminist wayfarers who have shown me alternative ways of theorizing ethnographic work. As a result, the second half of this chapter is dedicated to my research and how digital fieldwork talks back, to, and beyond the classical approaches to fieldwork.

Of course, the digital adds another layer to this messy space. Yet, what concerns me here is not arguing whether or not the ‘digital’ part of my ethnographic work—as both a data collection and writing practice—renders spaces messy in a unique way. Indeed, in my discussion of earlier digital anthropology, I argue that anthropologists strove to show the parallels between on- and offline fieldwork as similarly fraught. Thus, the goal of this chapter is to further illuminate the ways in which ethnographic field sites have *always* been contested, and how digital ethnography as a form of fieldwork continues this legacy and perhaps makes this more obvious. Importantly, it explores the possibilities available when disciplines are allowed to be unruly. I ask what has fieldwork looked like historically? What has it looked like in a digital context? How do ethnographic methods shape this work and what is the relationship between method, space, and ethnographer? How have anthropologists pushed back against these assumptions and how have they reimagined them for their own purposes? Importantly, how have I pushed back against these notions and how have these assumptions pushed back against me?

Real Ethnography, Real Messy Places

Now that my readers have a better understanding of the places where I did my fieldwork (after hopefully reading Chapter 4), as well as my struggles with each of these sites, I would like to think through the notion of a field *site* and how it relates to the process of fieldwork. The platforms I described in Chapter 4 are, in the popular sense of the word, sites. While I refer to them here as platforms or apps, they are, indeed, *websites*. Yet, they are unlikely the sort of sites

to spring to mind when one is asked to provide an example of an ethnographic field site. It is this traditional notion of site that I want to push back against and, in doing so, make room for new ethnographic possibilities.

This desire to pushback against field sites are not new, nor is it the result of a digital environment. Rather, the notion of a field site has been contested within anthropology and ethnography since the 1990s before the wide-spread adoption of internet (Downey et al., 1995; Escobar, 1995; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). Questions as to who has the power to define and delineate the boundaries of a field site, who is excluded, whose subjectivities are reified, othered, and reduced through the demarcation of a field site, have rightfully been raised as the discipline continues to grapple with its colonial history. So, I ask: What is a field site? More importantly, what is it that an anthropologist *does* at an ethnographic field site? As I have noted in my chapter on field sites, some of my places *felt* more ethnographic than others. What was it about these spaces that made me think they made sense for ethnographic exploration? What about my experience and methodological work with these spaces in turn made them ethnographic? In contemplating these questions throughout my doctoral project, I returned to the basics of my methodological training.

When I think about the bricks of my field, and perhaps what some might call the cliches, my mind immediately turns to the work of Napoleon Chagnon. While certainly a controversial figure within the field of anthropology, he has prompted the discipline to reflect on our ethics and perspectives, which is what I hope this dissertation does in some small way. Moreover, he is a useful place to start the conversation I want to have with the field. Or, rather, his description of his first foray into the field is a good place to start,

I had traveled in a small aluminum rowboat propelled by a large outboard motor for two and a half days, cramped in with several extra fifty-five gallon gasoline barrels and two Venezuelan functionaries... My ears were ringing from three dawn-to-dusk days of the constant drone of the outboard motor. It was hot and muggy, and my clothing was soaked with perspiration, as it would be for the next seventeen months. Small biting gnats, *bareto* in the Yanomamo language, were out in astronomical numbers... The village

looked like some large, nearly vertical wall of leaves from the outside. The Yanomamo call it *shabono*. The several entrances were covered over with brush and dry palm leaves (Chagnon, 2014, pp. 15–16).

In these descriptions of his first foray into the field as a graduate student in the 1960s, Chagnon attempts to bring the reader along with him up the river to the Yanomamo. He plays on our senses and our own embodied experiences of being cramped, muggy, and bitten by incessant bugs. In doing so, he creates a sense of the space where he is about to spend a great deal of time. He conjures up an exotic scene, rendered even less familiar by the descriptions of his interlocutors that follow the site itself,

I saw a dozen burly, naked, sweaty, hideous men nervously staring at us down the shafts of their drawn arrows! Immense wads of green tobacco were stuck between their lower teeth and lips, making them look even more hideous. Strands of dark green snot dripped or hung from their nostrils—strands so long that they drizzled from their chins down to their pectoral muscles and oozed lazily across their bellies, blending into their red paint and sweat (Chagnon, 2014, p. 19).

These vivid descriptions of his field sites were interspersed with images of the people, huts, and snot. Taken altogether, they paint a picture of a place filled with strange and terrifying things where the anthropologist struggles to collect his data. It is meant to feel unfamiliar to the audience back home. These dichotomies between strange and familiar, and field and home have become staples within the discipline.

The notion of the unfamiliar is something that Clifford Geertz picks up in his now canonical essay “Thick Description.” In his discussion of the ethnographic account, he argues,

the claim to attention of an ethnographic account does not rest on its author’s ability to capture primitive facts in faraway places and carry them home like a mask or a carving, but on the degree to which he is able to clarify what goes on in such places, to reduce the

puzzlement—what manner of men are these?—to which the unfamiliar acts emerging out of unknown backgrounds naturally give rise (Geertz, 2000, p. 16).

The questions Geertz asks are, of course, very good lines of inquiry and theorization that I have every intention of addressing in other places. Yet, I want to highlight a few threads in this passage that read very differently to me now than they did when I first engaged with Geertz's work in my undergrad. The first is the notion of distance. Geertz, like many other anthropologists, invokes the notion of 'faraway places' as a descriptor of ethnographic spaces. This brings to my mind black and white images of Malinowski amongst the Trobriand Islanders or Margaret Mead in Samoa. But it also reminds me of the images my colleagues recently shared on Instagram of their time in Greenland and the Arctic, as well as the vibrant photos of Singapore and Java shared by former mentors on Facebook. What I am trying to articulate here is that while anthropology has certainly changed over the years (see Lamphere, 2018 for an overview of the discipline's transformations), some tropes *linger*. One of these is the notion of distance.

When thinking of these 'faraway places,' there is a sense of geographic distance between the ethnographer's home and her field sites. Each one of these individuals had to board a plane, and perhaps a boat or series of buses, to get to the field. But there is also a cultural distance, one that is marked by the 'unfamiliar acts' and 'unknown backgrounds' that arise in these faraway places. The photos often captured moments in the field that were varying degrees of different from life back home – dog sledding, drying fish, an Indonesian wedding ceremony, tropical foliage.

To return to Chagnon for a moment, he notes in his introduction that it is the process of entering the exotic, dangerous, and unfamiliar space -- and *surviving* it -- that makes one an anthropologist,

The year of fieldwork ahead of me was what earned you your badge of authority as an anthropologist, a testimony to your otherworldly experience, your academic passport, your professional credentials. I was now standing at the very cusp of that profound, solemn transformation and I truly savored this moment (Chagnon, 2014, p. 18).

To go away to an unfamiliar—or what Chagnon calls “otherworldly”—place is what makes one an anthropologist. Here, Chagnon is participating in a discipline-wide phenomenon of staking out one’s fieldwork territory and authority within it. This discourse parallels the commentary by Gupta and Ferguson (1997) that I open this chapter with. Yet, as I will argue below, these notions of the field—including the notions of distance and familiarity—are troublesome for me, and it has been troubled by anthropologists before me. However, this perspective on field sites has a profound effect on how graduate students conceptualize and experience fieldwork. After all, a ‘good’ fieldworker constructs a ‘good’ field site (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997), and what graduate student wants to be a bad graduate student with a bad site? Who wants to make securing a job even more difficult (see Weston, 1997)? This is also why comments like “where do you do your fieldwork” are so difficult for digital anthropologists, particularly early career scholars, to entertain.

Now, what would Chagnon or Geertz make of my ‘ethnographic’ field sites? My work was rarely conducted in ‘faraway places’ and when it was, these spaces were far from unfamiliar to those in the West—indeed, as I explore below these European sites are ranked rather low in the hierarchy of purity. Sure, the pickled herring I ate in Denmark was not something my pallet was accustomed to, although that would probably be to the dismay of my Danish and Norwegian Great-Grandmothers, but the culture felt familiar enough to me especially in comparison to the ‘entering the field’ vignettes I have read over the last decade as a student of anthropology.

So far, I have noted that the spaces in my research (both on- and offline) were relatively familiar, and I go into more detail on this in Chapter 4. But what of the ‘unfamiliar acts’ in my research? The perhaps unfortunate reality for me is that while the ‘unfamiliar acts’ at the center of my research are perhaps unsettling, unwanted, and uncomfortable, they are not unfamiliar. After all, white and male supremacy is all too familiar within the Canadian and European nation states.

So, why bother to quote Chagnon and Geertz at all if I have already decided that my fieldwork took place at home, and I was familiar with the acts? I do this because this discourse is a part of the tensions in my fieldwork. It is appealing to me to carry with me the threads, bricks, and maps

of my discipline to show how complicated fieldwork is at this point in the discipline's history. Presenting the work of Chagnon and Geertz as I have produces a black and white take on fieldwork filled with firm dichotomies and hierarchies of purity (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). Yet, my work (and indeed the work of many anthropologists) is much more about spaces of grey where the dichotomies are mangled and the boundaries are fuzzy.

Before I move to the complexities of my uncomfortably familiar sites and the ethnographic wonder of these spaces, I want to begin with a slightly different kind of bricks within anthropology, namely those produced within the field of digital anthropology and ethnography. In the following section, I outline some of the assumptions digital anthropologists took with them into digital spaces, as well as the ways in which they played into classic assumptions as the nascent subfield grew. Following this I turn to my own fieldwork experience. I divide this into three sections: 1) the not-far-away-enough field, 2) the multi-sited field, and 3) the fuzzy boundaries of the field at home. I conclude with a discussion of whether 'the field' serves the discipline or if, perhaps, it is time to move on to something a bit freer.

Cyber Fieldwork: On Sites and Methods

With the rise of the internet and social media, the notion of the 'field' continues to be contested and (re)constructed. Early digital anthropologists and virtual ethnographers picked up the work of those in the 1990s who called for attention to the intersection of culture and technology (see Downey et al., 1995), as well as those who were critically interrogating the notion of the field. In this section, I provide a brief overview of key anthropological texts on digital fieldwork as they relate to both field sites and methods. I argue that early digital anthropologists were keen to stake a claim that the digital provided new and exciting spaces for ethnographic inquiry (Escobar, 1995). In doing so, they doubled down on the applicability of ethnographic methods and classic approaches to fieldwork, as well as old tropes and clichés about the field including entrances to the field, the strange, and the mundane. In essence, the nascent subfields of digital anthropology and ethnography explored what fieldwork looked like offline and how this could be reasonably replicated, remixed, and repackaged for the online space. While this was

undoubtedly useful for an emerging field, in the subsequent sections of this chapter I want to push back against such limiting presentations of my field sites and work as an ethnographer.

I structure and ground this section in the work of Christine Hine (2000) who published her now canonical *Virtual Ethnography* well before the oft-cited work of Bonnie Nardi (2010) and Tom Boellstorff (2008) on ‘massively multiplayer online’ video game cultures that dominated my early graduate training in the early 2010s. Hine’s point of focus was how users of the internet understand its capabilities and its significance, and its relationship to the so-called ‘real’ world offline. She was curious about the ways in which it organizes time and space and how identities were performed. These are all questions common in the anthropological canon and her process of paralleling on- and offline ethnographic work serve as a useful jumping off point. Moreover, the pieces I cite in this brief literature review feature works that were pivotal for my formation as a digital anthropologist. Like Chagnon and Geertz, these digital anthropologists informed my understanding of ethnography as a graduate student and gave me some of the bricks to build the foundation of my graduate research.

On Digital Field Sites

While Hine (2000) tackles a great deal in her discussion of ethnography and digital spaces, which is out of the scope of this chapter, what is interesting for my purposes is her attention to the internet as an ‘authentic’ and ‘plausible’ ethnographic field site. She demonstrates that the internet can be considered either a place, where culture is constructed and remixed, or a cultural artifact, and therefore a product of offline cultures. With regards to the ‘authentic,’ she pushes back against early researchers of the internet (circa the 1990s) who were critical of conceptualizing groups as communities as they did not produce the level of connection or intimacy required by offline communities. These early researchers argued that the transient nature of these communities called into question the authenticity of these sites as users could log off or unsubscribe at any time. As Hine notes, however, this perspective approach is reminiscent of old, romanticized notions of communities where membership is enduring and limited to a bounded field.

While Hine's critique is in line with the likes of Gupta and Ferguson (1997) and their contemporaries, her discussions still draws on traditional conceptualizations of the field. For example, in her analysis of the internet as a cultural artifact, she notes,

This approach sees the Internet as a product of culture: a technology that was produced by particular people with contextually situated goals and priorities. It is also a technology which is shaped by the ways in which it is marketed, taught, and used. To speak of the Internet as a cultural artefact is to suggest that it could have been otherwise, and that what it is and what it does are the product of culturally produced understandings that can vary... **Local contexts of interpretation and use therefore form the ethnographic field.** (pp. 9-10, emphasis added)

It is the notion of the local contexts and use that constitute the 'plausible' ethnographic field for anthropologists. This, of course, fits squarely with Gupta and Ferguson's (1997) discussion of the assumptions anthropologists make about the field, namely that it should be rooted in 'the local' and the small-scale manifestations of culture. Certainly, local, and small-scale experiences of the internet exist and are worth ethnographic attention. The Soldiers of Odin Edmonton Facebook group was an example of this. It was rooted in a small, offline group with limited membership, and they used the space differently than the Facebook groups in Finland. Yet, the internet is also about the global and the networked human experience, which may also form the ethnographic field (see Miller & Slater, 2000).

In their handbook of methods for ethnography and virtual worlds, written over a decade after Hine (2000), Tom Boellstorff, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce and T.L. Taylor (2012) detail how they conceptualize digital spaces plausible (and perhaps obvious) for their ethnographic explorations. They note that 'virtual worlds,' which are the focus of their ethnographic work, are

places and have a sense of *worldness*. They are not just spatial representations but offer an object-rich environment that participants can traverse and with which they can interact. Second, virtual worlds are multi-user in nature; they exist as shared social environments with synchronous communication and interactions. While participants may

engage in solitary activities within them, virtual worlds thrive through co-inhabitation with others. Third, they are *persistent*: they continue to exist in some form even as participants log off. They can thus change while any one participant is absent, based on the platform itself or the activities of other participants. Fourth, virtual worlds allow participants to *embody* themselves, usually as avatars (even if ‘textual avatars,’ as in text-only virtual worlds such as MUDs), such that they can explore and participate in the virtual world (p. 7).

Boellstorff and colleagues engage with the critiques of the early internet researchers. Virtual worlds can be enduring, they can allow for embodiment, and they are deeply social spaces. This approach to virtual worlds also brings with it a thin thread from classical anthropology, namely the bounded or at least identifiable research site. These spaces are in opposition to spaces that they do not consider virtual worlds. They argue that,

Sometimes networked environments are miscategorized as virtual worlds. For example, because of their lack of worldness and embodiment, we do not consider social networks like Facebook or Myspace in and of themselves to be virtual worlds... Nor do we consider online communities sustained via chat forums or other media virtual worlds. First-person shooter games, such as Counter-Strike or Halo, also do not qualify because they are not persistent: the world is only ‘on’ as long as players are present. (Boellstorff et al., 2012, pp. 7–8).

These other spaces, which also included blogs, wikis, and forums, were considered ‘locales’ but not worlds. It is important to note that worlds and field sites were not used interchangeably. Rather, field site could be “understood as an assemblage of actors, places, practices, and artifacts that can be physical, virtual, or a combination of both” (Boellstorff et al., 2012, p. 60). As a result, within Boellstorff and colleagues’ rendering, blogs, wikis, and chatrooms can be ethnographic spaces, just not worlds. Yet, these digital anthropologists focused on worlds rather than locales. Why?

Perhaps the emphasis was because these ‘worlds’ had recognizable examples of language, religion, subcultures, gender roles, and many of the other markers of an offline culture that made their way into the table of contents of classic ethnographies. Moreover, the use of an avatar allowed for discussions of embodiment and emplacement, as well as identity, that have become central to the ethnographic enterprise (McGranahan, 2018). Furthermore, as my colleagues across the globe (as well as the unwanted audience member) have admitted, the lingering gold standard of ethnography continues to be ‘being there’ in a space—even if we recognize that anthropology is more than ethnography and that this cliché is limiting—and spaces like virtual worlds were more immediately recognizable as a place one could go to and ‘be there’ amongst others. Yet, as sociologist Rob Shields (2003) noted in the early 2000s, one of the interesting things about “virtual” worlds were the moments where they diverged from maps of “actual” worlds. It is these divergences that interest me as they present new possibilities for anthropological inquiry.

On Digital Methods & the Importance of Participatory Fieldwork

What makes the internet a further ‘plausible’ site for ethnography was the applicability of ethnographic methods, or what anthropologists ‘do’ in the fields and how these actions shape the space into something ethnographic. Hine (2000) aptly notes that for contemporary academics, the long-term and immersive fieldwork conducted in Chagnon’s era is increasingly difficult to undertake due to limited time and resources (see also Weston, 1997, Nardi, 2010). Moreover, she notes that the internet still allows for participatory and active engagement in the field, and the ethnographer can still take on the behaviours and practices of her interlocutors. This implies that the method—participant-observation—is one way to render the field site ethnographic in a digital context. This makes sense when I consider that many of my colleagues in the field of white and male supremacy do work on the same platforms, yet they do not consider them ethnographic sites as they do not ‘do’ ethnography. Thus, it is not the space itself, but what the anthropologist does within the space that renders it ethnographic.

Hine (2000) is not the only one that grounds their defense of a site as ethnographic in the applicability of methods rather than engaging with what the space itself offers. In their oft-assigned book on offline ethnography, Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson (2019) spend a

great deal of time talking about fieldwork yet never discuss what constitutes the field itself. In the text they have indexed field relations, field roles, fieldnotes, fieldwork (and the stresses thereof), fieldwork termination, and fieldwork journals. Here, the focus seems to be placed on what an ethnographer does in the field, and very little on what constitutes the field itself. In their section on digital ethnography, the only attention given to sites was to note that ‘naturally occurring’ communities exist in virtual spaces. There is nothing wrong with this approach, but it does strike me as curious that so little attention is given to space itself. Is it because anthropology takes for granted what a field looks like? Or is it because fields are fuzzy, and it is just easier to ignore the discomfort such ambiguity produces? The latter is an understandable choice for a nascent field struggling for recognition.

Hine (2000) was not alone in using ethnographic methods as a means of building the legitimacy and credibility of the subdiscipline. Her contemporaries, Daniel Miller and Don Slater (2000), also highlighted participation and long-term involvement as key components of ethnography. They note,

...an ethnographic approach is also one that is based on a long-term and multifaceted engagement with a social setting... for us an ethnography **does include participating**, which may mean going on a chat line for the eight hours that informants will remain online, or participating in a room full of people playing networked Quake... an ethnography is also much more than fieldwork... in most ethnographic reportage of quality, **the length and breadth of the study** allows one topic to become understood as also an idiom for something else. Finally, ethnography should form part of a comparative project (Miller & Slater, 2000, pp. 21-22, emphasis added).

Here, Miller and Slater, who had both conducted extensive offline research, identified long-term participation as key to ethnographic work. Beyond demonstrating how their work mirrored that of offline research, they were also quick to define ethnography from an anthropological perspective in contrast to its use in other disciplines,

...we are both relatively conservative in our defence of traditional canons of ethnographic enquiry. This seems particularly important at the present time, when the term 'ethnography' has become somewhat fashionable in many disciplines. In some fields, such as cultural studies, it has come to signify simply a move away from purely textual analysis. In other cases, the idea of an Internet ethnography has come to mean almost entirely the study of online 'community' and relationships (Miller & Slater, 2000, p. 21).

While they note that ethnography is more than just participation, indeed it is a way of knowing, a theory, and a way of writing, this qualification pushes against the ways in which ethnography has been used interchangeably with "that which is merely description or observation or some other form of qualitative data" in offline spaces (McGranahan, 2018, p. 2). Here there is a need to preserve and reproduce a particular kind of fieldwork within digital spaces, to use the classical bricks, lest the ethnography become thinner in the digital sphere.

This practice of emphasizing the appropriateness of ethnographic methods, particularly participant-observation, to the study of digital spaces was also picked up by Nardi (2010) in her ethnography of the massive online video game *World of Warcraft* and the communities that formed around it. She argues that participant-observation is a key component of the ethnographic enterprise and that it "would be impossible to penetrate the game without becoming engaged as a player" (Nardi, 2010, p. 28). Again, it is the ability for the anthropologist to participate that makes the site ethnographic. In her collaborative work with Boellstorff et al. (2012), she and the others boldly state,

...one method above all others is fundamental to ethnographic research. **This method is participant observation, the cornerstone of ethnography.** Participant observation is the **embodied emplacement** of the researching self in a field site as a **consequential social actor**. We **participate in everyday life** and become well-known to our informants (p. 65, emphasis added).

This paints a very clear picture of what is ethnography in a digital space, just as Chagnon and Geertz articulated the requirements of the field and home as spaces. It leaves little room for the

complexities of fieldwork on- or offline. Despite the stifling nature of the narrow trail mapped by my predecessors, this perspective deeply shaped my approach to digital ethnographic work in much the same way as Geertz and Chagnon. These were the bricks I had to work with when setting out to build my virtual ethnographic world (or perhaps they are locales?). As I noted at the outset of this chapter, anthropologists have wrestled with the notion that ethnography is not the entirety of the discipline and that one can apply ethnographic insight without attending to such prescriptive measures. Yet, to a certain extent, it makes sense that early digital anthropologists took such a stance and that they focused on virtual *worlds*. Showing the similarities between their on- and offline work legitimized their virtual fieldwork. In order to push on the boundaries of the field in one area, they had to rely on the hallmarks of classical anthropology and ethnography.

Beyond simply engaging in the culture as a player, digital ethnographers like Nardi (2010) also doubled down on other cliché notions like that of ‘growing up’ in the culture as a means of making sense of data and experiences. But what of the native or ‘virtual ethnographer’ in Weston’s (1997) sense of the term? What about digital spaces and virtual worlds that anthropologists are already a part of? When I first read Nardi’s work on *World of Warcraft*, I had already been playing the game myself for a few years. If I was interested in following Nardi’s path—which I was—how would I “grow up” as an anthropologist in a space that I had already grown up in?

Within her research context, Nardi (2010) also explored the possibility of becoming more player than anthropologist (see Powdermaker, 2012 for a discussion of “going native”), as well as the authority of engaging in the repeated, mundane aspects of a culture. This idea of practicing the mundane was also emphasized by Boellstorff (2008) in his ethnography of the massively multiplayer online game *Second Life*,

I shopped for clothes for my avatar in the same stores as any *Second Life* resident. I bought land with the help of a real estate agent and learned how to use *Second Life*’s building tools. I then created a home and office for my research named “Ethnographia,” purchasing items like textures, furniture, and artwork. I learned games created and played

inside Second Life... I wandered across the Second Life landscape, flying, teleporting, or floating along in my hot air balloon, stopping to investigate events, buildings, or people I happened to encounter... I joined many Second Life groups and participated in a range of activities, from impromptu relationship counseling to larger-scale events like a community fair (pp. 69-70).

Here, Boellstorff's authority came in his participation in the everyday mundane aspects of the virtual world and the breadth of said engagement. As other digital ethnographers have noted, fieldwork is about daily life and immersion within a culture. While Boellstorff acknowledged his work and experience in the field was partial, as is always the case in ethnography, it was no more so than his 'real' work in Indonesia. This process of comparing digital ethnography to offline or analogue projects was also common in the literature. In their discussion of ethnography, Miller and Slater (2000) draw on work both on- and offline. They spent extended periods of time in chatrooms as well as in cybercafes where they watched others spend hours in chatrooms. They conducted offline interviews and surveys, and they situated this project within Miller's decades-long work in Trinidad and Slater's 18 month-long study of the internet. There was a connection between the online and offline not only in early digital anthropological contexts, but also in the ways these scholars wrote their ethnographies. Fieldwork was couched and framed in terms of the offline and this framework served to validate the online component of the research.

Fieldwork in Practice

So far in this chapter I have taken stock of the classical approaches to anthropological fieldwork and argued that appropriate spaces were those that were both unfamiliar and faraway. Moreover, they were spaces that allowed for long-term and immersive participation and embodied emplacement. I have noted as well that early digital anthropologists relied on these ideas of fieldwork in part to justify the 'plausibility' and 'applicability' of their field sites, and perhaps because they held these same assumptions as anthropologists who had conducted offline fieldwork prior to digital work. These early digital ethnographers also structured their ethnographies along the same lines as traditional or classical ethnographies, with chapters on gender, political economy, place, and time. Indeed, Boellstorff's title, *Coming of Age in Second*

Life is a clear homage to Margaret Mead's (1968) canonical ethnographic account *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Moreover, he notes that his work

intentionally draws upon classical anthropology to demonstrate the promise of ethnographic methods for the study of virtual worlds. This book is meant to recall *Coming of Age in Samoa*... at the same time, it will be obvious that I draw upon contemporary anthropological critiques of ethnographic method (2008, p. 20).

This gives the impression of pushing the boundaries of what constitutes the ethnographic but tethering oneself in strategic ways to the genre for support.

Of course, I too have chosen to play up tropes and cliches from my discipline and have made parallels between offline and online experiences, and I have highlighted both the mundane day-to-day aspects of my work alongside the unfamiliar and unsettling when appropriate. I go into detail regarding my entrance into the field, my first antagonistic experience with participant-observation, and the burdens of fieldwork. Moreover, one of the driving forces behind my decision to study the right-wing in Canada was that I felt it was an understudied area and population for anthropologists. This was not unlike Nardi's (2010) musing that there were no longer new frontiers left for anthropologists to explore. Yet, as I discuss below, the spaces and people who inhabited them were a mix of foreign and familiar, and they were at once home and field, and they were a mix of immersive participation and shallow engagements. I turn now to a discussion of what my fieldwork looked and felt like, the ways in which it confirms and denies the assumptions of my discipline and hints at the possibilities of messiness.

Challenging the Trope of Going Away

“If you didn't get on an airplane, did you really do field work?”

“Oh, just leave that ‘digital stuff’ to the sociologists.”

These were two comments I received during my graduate work, and while they were uttered by different people, they do something productive when brought together. The first, a joke, reveals the very real ideas and normative assumptions that some of my colleagues hold about fieldwork. Namely, that there is a space, a site, a field to ‘go away’ to. Anthropologist James Clifford, like geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), takes issue with the taken for granted nature of space as a place of meaning.

Drawing on Michel de Certeau, Clifford (1997) argues that spaces are not spaces (or places in Tuan’s reading) until they are inhabited by people. Thus, a field site is not a field – that is a discrete social space – until it is peopled by “embodied practices of interactive travel” of the anthropologist (p. 186). He argues that “when one speaks of working in the field, or going into the field, one draws on mental images of a distinct place with an inside and outside, reached by practices of physical movement” (p. 187). Here, the invocation of an airplane ride in the first comment makes sense. Can you call it a field if you have not physically moved to get there? As I note in my chapter on field sites, many days I reached my field from the comfort of my couch with very little physical movement required to get there and even less once I arrived.

When coupled with the second comment about the inapplicability of digital worlds to the field of anthropology, which was not in any way a joke, this assumption is expanded to include not only the far-off field site, but one that is not mediated via technology. As Gupta and Ferguson (1997) note that within classical approaches to anthropology “going to the ‘field’ suggests a trip to a place that is agrarian, pastoral, or maybe even ‘wild’; it implies a place that is perhaps cultivated (a site of culture), but that certainly does not stray too far from nature” (p. 8). As a result, a project that explores ‘home’ *from* home and is mediated through technology violates both assumptions about fieldwork. But why is the notion of home, or one that strays from nature, viewed as a lesser site of anthropological inquiry?

Both of the comments above speak to what Gupta and Ferguson (1997) refer to as the hierarchy of purity in field sites. While most anthropologists recognize that the flows and systems of capitalism, colonialism, and globalization have bound field sites together and brought them closer to home, there is still a lingering sense of what makes something a better ethnographic

site. For example, Africa is more of a field site than Europe, and if one must study Europe, Eastern is preferable to Northwestern. Within all these spaces, rural areas are deemed more ethnographic than urban centers. The existence of ‘urban anthropology’ demonstrates this taken-for-granted aspect of the discipline. We do not need a ‘rural anthropology’ because it is assumed anthropology will be rural or small-scale. Importantly, this purity is determined via the *distance* between field site and home geographically and culturally.

Even within the field of digital ethnography, anthropologists still appeal to this hierarchy and the enduring assumptions about appropriate field sites. Early socio-cultural anthropologists who forayed into the world of online multiplayer games like *Second Life* (Boellstorff, 2008) and *World of Warcraft* (Nardi, 2010), went to great lengths to demonstrate the similarities between on- and offline worlds, and in so doing, defend the applicability of ethnographic methods in these spaces. As I noted above, Nardi framed her entrance into the World of Warcraft community as unfamiliar, strange, and exciting. Importantly, it was one where she could engage and participate just as she had done in offline ethnographic work. Similarly, Hine (2000) noted that some sites allowed for more active participation in the community, which was for her a key component of ethnography. Now the hierarchy of purity is distant, strange, and *participatory*.

So, what does my work have to say about the notions of purity as it relates to going away to ‘do fieldwork’ and the nature/technology dichotomy? I want to spend some time addressing the issue of purity in the hierarchy of my field sites and how this shaped my understanding of certain sites. While I remain critical of the taken-for-granted nature of the ‘going away’ trope, I understand its usefulness within the discipline and academia in making my work legible to my audience, my evaluators, and perhaps to job search committees. Even Gupta and Ferguson (1997) acknowledge that their position is not that anthropologists should only study in their home areas instead of going away. Rather, it is about the uncritical and taken-for-granted assumptions regarding what makes a good field site, as well as the corresponding mapping of otherness (and exotic-ness—see Conclusion on researching the right-wing) onto the field sites and the people within them – because it is not just distance between home and field, but anthropologist and interlocutor.

Going away and the experiential and embodied nature of digital field sites

In my chapter on field sites (Chapter 4), I discuss how my work in Europe felt less ethnographic than my work online, particularly the work I did on Gab and Reddit. Despite ‘going away’ to ‘be there’ amongst my interlocutors offline, the feeling of entering a new world where I could attempt to make sense of something unfamiliar never manifested. Rather, I was left feeling as though the time there was great for networking and collaborative work but was somewhat of a waste ethnographically. Indeed, while in Europe some of the largest offline rallies occurred at the Alberta Legislature. However, like Miller and Slater (2000) my time offline informed my understanding of the online. For example, my time in a museum on fascism in Munich informed my exploration of memes on Gab (see Chapter 7). Similarly, my time amongst scholars of the European right in Norrköping attuned me to the differences between Canadian and Scandinavian right-wing movements, even as the latter produced content for the Anglophone market. As a result, I now see my offline work as a framework for understanding my digital work. Yet, I am not quite ready to relinquish the notion of ‘going away’ just yet as it can still do useful work for me when it comes to the experiential and embodied nature of fieldwork.

Let me begin first by returning to Nardi’s work (2010) in which she also played up many of the tropes found in Chagnon’s work regarding going away. This included her entrance to the field, something Gupta and Ferguson (1997) note is a point of authority and authentication for anthropologists. Like Chagnon, Nardi provides a rich account of her field experience albeit one that is markedly different,

My entry point to the field site was a computer on my dining room table where I sat in a comfortable chair and played for many hours. And yet this fieldwork was nearly as immersive as the fieldwork I conducted for my postdoctoral research in Western Samoa or Papua New Guinea, where I accompanied my husband for his doctoral research. I typically played about 20 hours a week. I read fewer novels and slept a bit less. In addition to game play, I read my guild’s website nearly every day and spent considerable time reading about *World of Warcraft* on the internet (2010, p. 29).

Here, Nardi (2010) highlights things like a comfortable chair, the amount of time played, the minor sacrifices made, as well as the level of immersion. This points the reader to the ways in which her day-to-day life, including her bodily experience (comfort, sleep), was affected by her research. This was something that many of the early ethnographies I studied in my training discussed. Whether it was Chagnon's bugs or the heat of Bali for Geertz, there was a connection between going somewhere foreign and physical discomfort. Discomfort seemed to be part of the rite of passage that is fieldwork, and this makes good sense when one considers ethnography as an experiential and embodied enterprise. If the body is comfortable, then it must not be experiencing something different enough because what is home if not familiar and comfortable? And so, I want to focus on here the concept of bodily and emotional dis/comfort and its relationship to both immersion and the notion of 'real' fieldwork.

My readers will, I am certain, at some point become weary with my constant return to the notion of "being there" as the gold standard for ethnographic research (McGranahan, 2018). I know this because I am weary with me and my preoccupation with this notion. Yet, I think there is something generative here in my struggles when considering what makes ethnography such a rich and valuable method, especially in a digital environment. To dig into this, I explore work on the sensorial, embodied, and experiential aspects of ethnography. I think there is value in this not only because it pushes back against the critiques of digital ethnography as something thin, less than, or not-quite-there, but also because it speaks to my desire for closeness and intimacy with my data and analysis and the repercussions of those decisions. In particular, I want to focus on discomfort.

My experience going away to my digital field sites was similar to Nardi's description. I accessed the sites via my laptop or smartphone from my living room couch, kitchen table, office desk, and occasionally the pub. My seats were not particularly comfortable, but I found myself logged onto my sites for at least 30 hours a week where I would scroll, reflect, take notes, scroll some more, and eventually reach a point of saturation and log off for the night. Occasionally, something would pull me back into the field in the evenings but more on that in a later section. Now, what does this have to do with embodiment, immersion, and discomfort?

In her work on sensory ethnography, anthropologist Sara Pink (2015) encourages ethnographers to “be more explicit about the ways of experiencing and knowing that become central to their ethnographies, to share with others the sense of place they felt as they sought to occupy similar places to those of their research participants, and to acknowledge the processes through which their sensory knowing has become academic knowledge” (pp. 2-3). There are a few things I want to highlight here. First is the sense of place and the experience of that place as ethnographers attempt to move closer to their interlocutors. I want to emphasize the sensorial and emotional component of space and place in my work and what it means to occupy this space alongside my interlocutors. Second, is the idea that sensory knowing becomes academic knowledge. Pink, drawing on Greg Downey, argues that embodied knowledge is not just knowledge stored in the body, rather it is the process and site of knowing. This is vital for me to unpack in my work as so much of my analysis has been – and continues to be – hindered, informed, and amplified by my embodied experience. The feeling of being in *my* body in these spaces, places, and times seems like something worth unpacking here. These sensorial, embodied, and experiential moments are what solidify for me that *I was there* just as my interlocutors *were there*, and I continue to *be there* every time I look at my data and field journal, and this process cannot be disconnected from my analysis or discussion of fieldwork.

So, what is it like to enter the field and ‘be there’ online? If I had to describe the way my fieldwork felt in a handful of words—like the keywords at the beginning of an abstract—I would choose exhausting, horrifying, and anxiety inducing. If I had to describe how my body felt, I would probably add words to explain my physical discomfort like neck cramps, muscle soreness, eye strain, and cluster headaches.

At times during my fieldwork, I could feel the frustration begin to build in my body as I scrolled on and on through Twitter or a lengthy series of comments on Reddit. It would start in my legs like a feeling of anticipation; it would be sort of tingly and uncomfortable like I needed to shake them out after a long car-ride. At times I would get up and walk around the room absently stretching out my arms. Often, I would find something else to do for a moment or two to delay my return to the field: make a cup of tea, unload the dishwasher, move the clothes from the washer to dryer. Eventually, I would drag myself back to my seat and subsequently to my site.

Sometimes, I would just stare at my computer screen, zone out, or rub my temples while I contemplated why I had chosen to do this work. Other times I would let out a long and heavy sigh, prompting questions of “are you alright?” from my partner down the hall. At times I felt like a child who was told she had to eat a food she disliked as I squirmed in my seat like a kid in a highchair. I longed to be free from my fieldwork, from the office space I had begun to associate with work, and even from my phone which had tethered me to these spaces and become tainted. Even now as I analyze my data and write my ethnography, I must force my body into these spaces and processes. It is as if my fieldwork is repelling me even as it follows me.

On days when I was working in particularly misogynistic or racist spaces, that tingly anxiety would begin to manifest in my stomach like an unpleasant version of the butterflies. I was nauseated for much of my fieldwork and this, like my anxiety, was probably heightened by the levels of caffeine I consumed in an attempt to stay focused. I would make cups of coffee and tea to hold in my cold hands—they always got cold on the days I wrote a lot—as I thought about my work and the feelings of impossibility. By the end of the day my neck and lower back would inevitably begin to ache mostly from poor posture that got worse with every hour as I sunk deeper into my chair or couch. A painful throbbing feeling behind my eyes would form by three or four o’clock, which was often only cured by an aspirin and a short nap in a dark room. A hot water bottle became my fieldwork companion while nightly yin yoga became a necessity to deal with the compounding stress digital fieldwork was putting on my body.

In my notes I would write about how I was just *waiting* for things to happen. Would this be another day of delayed responses in the comment section of a Reddit post? Would someone call me a slur again? Would they advocate *again* for sexual and physical assault to keep white women in line with the ethno-nationalist agenda? While I was waiting, the discomfort would grow. My senses were always on high alert for the tell-tale ding of my phone. Would it be a message from a friend or one from an interlocutor? By the end of my fieldwork, unpleasant and horrifying things did not have to happen regularly for me to feel as if they had happened. The cumulative toll of small pains in the field had built up to the point that my permanent state was discomfort even when I was ‘out of the field’ and at the pub, having Christmas dinner, at a

hockey game. The price of immersion, of actively being in the field and engaging with my interlocutors over the course of years is prolonged discomfort.

If discomfort is the price one pays for admission into the world of anthropologists, my embodied experience seems to cover the charge. I may not have been dealing with mosquitos or oppressive humidity, but my body was experiencing the emotional and physical tolls of my fieldwork. Beyond the physical, I experienced deeply upsetting and difficult emotions and thought. These experiences shaped how and when I was able to write as I resisted reminders of my fieldwork, which I explore further in my Epilogue.

When going away is both familiar and strange

In the previous section, I explored how the going away trope has carried with it the notions of distance and discomfort. If a site is not far enough away, perhaps it can still be salvaged if the time spent there is marked by discomfort and deeply disturbing experiences. Anthropological ways of knowing, it seemed, were rooted in distance or trauma. Another component of this trope includes the idea that what is experienced will be strange and different from what the ethnographer experiences at home. Put another way, we come to know things anthropologically – and to understand the nature of being human – through difference.

When I presented my research at conferences, there was a tendency to assume I was working on alt-tech sites or even the dark web. Moreover, attendees and colleagues similarly assumed I was working amongst the ‘extreme’ right and the violent radicals within those movements. Facebook and Twitter were familiar spaces to many of the anthropologists I spoke to and were rendered somewhat mundane along with the people who used the platforms. Sure, Uncle Jim shares racist memes on Facebook all day long, but that is not really what anthropologists are interested in, right? Were these comments from my listeners, which carried notes of disappointment, due to a boring lecture or something else?

Like Esther Anderson (2021) writing about her doctoral research in her home community, I acknowledge that my musings here reflect the ways in which I have internalized and ruminated far too long on the comments from those who would limit fieldwork. She notes in this regard,

When I first began my PhD study, I thought that other anthropologists viewed me as unadventurous because my fieldwork took place ‘at home,’ and I had not travelled elsewhere. It is possible that this was an entirely imagined slight, internalized from messages received through theoretical undergraduate training, but nevertheless, I felt it deeply and it allowed a sense of inferiority to fester in my mind. As a student-turned-ethnographer, I felt the need to continually justify my research and its location (Anderson, 2021, p. 3).

Perhaps, however, my experience at conferences would best be understood as a reminder of the assumptions we make about field sites and interlocutors. Instead of asking what this says about my work (and its potential or perceived inferiority), I could ask what this says about the messaging I have internalized. This was, in part, a reflection of Gupta and Ferguson’s (1997) notion of the hierarchy of purity with regards to field sites. One of the key facets of anthropology has been its emphasis on cultural difference and making the ‘unfamiliar’ and the ‘unknown’ a little more understandable. In the introduction to her methods chapter, Nardi (2010) reveals that she “initiated the research [on World of Warcraft] with a desire to satisfy a deeply felt urge of the cultural anthropologist—to journey to a foreign land, **to discover and experience the strangeness of a new culture**, to find out what the natives are doing and what they think about what they are doing” (p. 27, emphasis added). Here, she connected anthropological ways of knowing to distance, difference, and strangeness. As a result, objects of difference are rendered suitable for anthropological inquiry. Similarly, the field is understood to be a space of difference, which is in contrast to home with its assumed sameness (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). But what if home is a space of difference? What if it is both familiar and strange? What if I am both insider and outsider?

If we return for a moment to my opening quotes from Chagnon and Geertz, it is important to point out that these are white men who come from a part of the world (and a discipline) where white men are the normative standard. Moreover, “despite the fact that women, people of colour, people from marginalized parts of the world have become anthropologists, ‘the self’ that is implied in the central anthropological ritual of encountering ‘the Other’ in the field remains that

of a EuroAmerican, white, middle-class male” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 16). So, for this archetype, home is full of sameness and therefore less worthy of anthropological scrutiny as it does not produce the desired ‘Other’ for investigation.

This is where things become a little messy for my work because it was truly a hodgepodge of sameness and difference, of familiarity and the unknown, of selves that are not normative and ‘Others’ who are the standard. This applies to both the spaces and people fashioned by my anthropological interventions, and I have given a great deal of thought to how my anthropological work—both my data collection and writing practices—shapes how I talk about people. As I discuss elsewhere in this chapter, the process of ethnography necessarily includes the dividing the world up into different cultural areas, which makes fieldwork as we know it possible (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). In doing so, we territorialize, other, and create the spaces before we reach them. Do we not do the same for the people we study and create people that are ‘better suited’ for anthropological scrutiny than others, namely those who are not like us?

The majority of the people I encountered and interviewed were white like me. They look like they could be my kin, and indeed some may very well have been related to me in some way. We were raised in the same country, perhaps even the same province, under the same structuring logics of white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy. We speak the same language and likely share many cultural practices rooted in Christianity even if we are not practitioners of the religion. They could have easily been the anthropologist in the scenario. From an ideological point of view, of course, we were very different. The men I interviewed ranged from libertarians to ethno-nationalists, and those I engaged with online similarly embodied right-wing perspectives on social and economic matters. This points to how people who were “the same” as me and culturally very close, could be construed as different in specific ways. While I reject the notion of turning my interlocutors into exotic others in the name of anthropological difference (Pasieka, 2019), I recognize how highlighting this difference makes them recognizable to my discipline. I understand why my colleagues at conferences asked questions about my “extreme” interlocutors and “alt-tech” field sites. They were searching for a way to construct my interlocutors as different from them.

Multi-sited Work & Web 2.0

Anthropologists have, since the 1990s, adopted multi-sited research (Marcus, 1995) to reflect the ways in which our work is embedded in networks of exchange and flows that span the globe. Even when the ‘community’ is not bound by ethnicity or culture, anthropologists still want some sort of boundaries, whether they be a neighbourhood, an office, or an institution. This gives a sense of stability and regularity even as this prioritisation of the durable obscures other lines of inquiry (Malkki, 1997). This has troubled the discipline, however, given its preference for stable and bounded sites. As Des Chene argues, “Most disconcertingly, the field may not be a place at all, but a period of time or a series of events, the study of which will take a researcher to many places... If one's work concerns events that have taken place in many locales, what renders one of these the primary site for research?” (1997, p. 71). This diverges dramatically from the tales of ethnography by the likes of Chagnon, Geertz, Malinowski, and Mead.

As I have said repeatedly, the notion of a bounded and enduring field site had been challenged by anthropologists well before the rise of Web 2.0 and Facebook (Barley, 1983; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997), yet the networked nature of the internet exacerbates the tension between a site and a network of spaces. Beyond accepting the fact that field site might be multiple, shifting, and transient, digital ethnographers have to consider that the people who inhabit these spaces are equally complex. Even when there is a ‘bounded’ field site from which to begin an ethnographic project, the research subjects (or objects) can radiate outward to other places like rhizomes (Des Chene, 1997). This is a useful perspective for my work as my interlocutors moved across platforms, dragging with them ideas, media, and other users, in the wake of censorship and algorithmic suggestions. So, what does my fieldwork experience have to say about multi-sited ethnographic research?

One of the things my work illuminated was the difficulty in naming spaces field sites. Boellstorff (2008) noted that while much of his work occurred within the virtual world of Second Life, as that is where many of his interlocutors focused their time, many of the game’s ‘residents’ frequented other websites and blogs related to the game. As a result, these media became important points of inquiry. What is interesting in his discussion of these secondary spaces is that

he refers to them as ‘media’ rather than field sites in and of themselves. As I noted above, through the work of Des Chene (1997), it can be unsettling to work in multiple spaces and to not have a primary site firmly established. Reading Boellstorff, it is clear that Second Life was the primary site wherein “residents offered analysis and commentary on many aspects of the virtual world” (2008, p. 79). Within my work, I had many primary sites. These shifted over time and at times overlapped in their primacy, and my understanding of the community was similarly buttressed by user-generated commentary and analysis. For example, the blog posts on the Council of European Canadians, a distinctly ethno-nationalist group, was a place I found myself directed to on occasion. However, I did not engage or actively participate in the space as a field site. I read the posts with the eyes and questions of an anthropologist, but I did not immerse myself in the site (e.g., comment), nor did I frequent it on a regular basis. Rather, I let myself be guided to it when appropriate. Is this a field site, a world, a locale, or just media? Or a site for broadening my understanding of ethno-nationalism in Canada beyond social media platforms?

What has been useful for me in thinking through these ideas is the notion of primary, secondary, and peripheral sites as well as the core. As I use these terms below, it would perhaps be useful to explain what I mean by them and how I visualize my fieldwork as a spatial experience. First, I see a core and a periphery. The core is the center of my fieldwork and where I spend most of my time. I think of this as a hot spot on heat maps that show where people congregate. In contrast, the periphery includes the spaces that I visit only on occasion, yet I keep them within my fieldwork orbit. It is important to note that some sites shifted between core and periphery depending on how much time I spent in them. Facebook waned as a core site, while Gab shifted from periphery to core and then back to periphery again. Secondary sites are those that I visit frequently, yet do not form the main focus of my work. Twitter is an excellent example of this; I spent time nearly every day throughout my fieldwork on Twitter, yet because it is a loosely networked site, and very much the antithesis of Boellstorff et al.’s (2012) ‘worlds’, it never became a primary field site like Reddit or Facebook. Despite my attempts to push back against some of the assumptions of the discipline, I suppose I still like my field sites somewhat bounded.

In Chapter 4 on field sites, I spoke briefly about how I would switch from site to site. Yet, I did not go into detail on what the felt like or why it happened with regards to censorship (see also

Chapter 6). This is one place where fieldwork online might diverge substantially from offline work. Because of the content shared by my interlocutors, they were unsurprisingly subjected to censorship practices. As a result, I routinely lost access to individuals, communities, and entire platforms. Some would return, but many chose or were forced to find other spaces to congregate. Returning to the interview I did with a Reddit ethno-nationalist, I want to pull out a few threads,

MC has turned into a sort of safe haven catch all for the remaining ethnonationalists on Reddit, so discussion about the same 3rd world invasion happening in Western Europe ends up on there... maybe you didn't check out some of the other (edgier) forums on the internet where Americans are actively discussing these things, such as 4chan.org/pol (I wouldn't go there if I were you). Also, you should check amren.com and listen to the podcasts or watch the videos. Sadly, Jared Taylor was recently purged from YouTube. He is a gold mine of ethnonationalist talking points... There aren't many forums left though for ethno-nationalists... Admittedly, pol is a dump now and I don't know where to turn. Voat isn't that bad but it's a quiet place.

This conversation highlighted the issue of finding spaces for community. Reddit, and in particular r/metacanada, had become a 'safe haven' implying that the discourse of ethno-nationalists was unwelcome in other spaces, and unwelcoming spaces are not conducive to community building. He also noted that some of the existing places were undesirable: /pol was a 'dump' and Voat was a 'quiet place' leaving my interlocutor not knowing where to turn. He pointed to places that other digital anthropologists would likely recognize as places for media collection. He also highlighted the issue of censorship when he noted that Jared Taylor, a staunch ethno-nationalist from the US, had been 'purged' from YouTube. It was not just me who struggled to keep a finger on the pulse of the community and a foothold in the spaces they congregated. The members themselves were struggling to maintain their community. This forced migration was picked up in other parts of my research on Twitter and Gab as users navigated temporary and permanent bans (see Chapter 6 for examples).

This demonstrates the precarious nature of digital research on the right-wing and the necessity of at least paying attention to other sites of inquiry. I recognize the warning of Tsing and colleagues

when they argued that the “nightmare possibility of multisited ethnography” was analysis “based only on superficial encounters” (Matsutake Worlds Research Group, 2009, p. 382). Yet, given this precarity, it became vital that I maintain at least shallow connections to the alternate spaces and engage in superficial encounters. I say superficial encounters because immersive participant-observation in these spaces was impossible not only due to time constraints—there are only so many hours in a day—but also because of energy levels. After spending a morning on my primary sites, I would find myself exhausted with glazed over eyes and a mind incapable of processing what I was experiencing. Visiting all the sites that sat along the periphery of my fieldwork and giving them the same attention as my primary sites was decidedly unappealing. As a result, my time spent in these spaces was often limited to a quick browse of the most recent posts that organically appeared in my homepage or timeline, and a slightly more in-depth look at what my primary interlocutors were posting (e.g., heavily active users, content creators).

However, some of these peripheral sites moved towards the core throughout my research and my initial work in these spaces, shallow as it may have been, was vital to this movement. Twitter was never a primary site, in part because it was the least bounded community, yet as a secondary site it continually alerted me to other spaces of potential importance. One of these was Gab, which I found through Twitter discourse, and I visited it sporadically while I was still deeply invested in Facebook as my primary site. Yet, when Facebook began to wane in importance because Soldiers of Odin Edmonton fractured and was eventually banned, I was able to transition Gab into a primary site as I had already laid the groundwork tiny brick by tiny brick in the months before. I had followed users who had similar values to Soldiers of Odin and found Canadian-specific groups and topics. When my emphasis shifted to Gab almost entirely, Facebook moved from the core to the periphery, and I only checked it on occasion or when it organically appeared in my personal browsing practice. Similarly, I began visiting Reddit towards the end of 2019 but only for short periods of time. It was not until 2020 that I truly dug into the space as a primary site. This occurred as Facebook, Twitter, and Gab shifted almost entirely to the peripheries. This was in part because Reddit, and r/metacanada in particular, took up so much of my time but also because the discourse on the former sites had shifted in a way that was interesting, but not particularly productive for my work (e.g., American-focused, anti-vax).

Some peripheral sites, like Parler, Telegram, Minds, and Voat never shifted towards the core like Gab and Reddit. Telegram for a time became central as it was the last hold out of ID Canada online, yet it too fell by the wayside towards mid-2020 as Reddit became central, and I cleaved off this experience and compiled it into a book chapter (Mack, forthcoming). These sites, particularly Minds and Voat, were also quick visits because my interlocutors had not fully embraced or relocated to those sites. Even after the Gab shutdown, Minds did not become the new site of congregation; indeed, many opted to return to Twitter and “play by the leftist rules” in order to stay connected. There just was not the draw I needed from them to commit the time and energy that participant-observation required.

A multi-sited approach was time consuming, as well as physically and emotionally exhausting. In a recent conversation with a colleague, they noted that they only conduct three hours of ethnographic work on a single site a day from Monday to Friday. This, they noted, was their attempt to maintain healthy work-life balance and protect their mental wellbeing. This, I think, is an admirable goal and something I might have benefited from at times. However, it would have been impossible to keep tabs on all of my field sites if I had imposed such restrictions. As a result, I likely would have spent three hours solely on Facebook and been utterly screwed when it imploded and I had no idea where to turn as it was my time scrolling Twitter (a secondary, yet not necessarily peripheral site) that attuned me to other spaces. So, while I acknowledge that the shallow work I did can still be the anathema of good ethnographic work, it was absolutely essential for what I think was good work in the end.

Fuzzy Boundaries: On exits and distressing fieldwork

One of the things that Gupta and Ferguson (1997) note that anthropology is preoccupied with is field site entries. As I have noted above, anthropologists are keen to write about how they traveled to the field and how they experienced the trip. This was true of Nardi just as it was true of Chagnon. One thing I found lacking in these ethnographies, as well as in my training, was the notion of exiting the field. Surely this is an important part of the fieldwork process, no?

In a discussion with members of my former department, I was told that there was power in ‘coming home’ to ‘do the analytical work’ and that the distance allowed them to dig into their research. There was something powerful, for them, in the plane ride home and the distance it provided. Yet rarely did I discuss fieldwork exits—the process of extricating oneself from the field—with my colleagues. Perhaps this is due in part to yet another trope of the discipline: the idea that we build lifelong relationships with our interlocutors. Indeed, this idea of long-term relationships *is* at the core of Indigenous-led research projects, and this is in response to extractive work wherein anthropologists parachute in, collect their data, and then never return. There is a belief that we will return to our research areas over the course of our careers and iteratively build upon the work of previous field seasons (McGranahan, 2018).

Drawing on the work of Mary Louise Pratt, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) argue that within fieldwork, there is a great deal of emphasis on an anthropologist’s entrance to and exit from the field. This is part of a process that seeks to “authenticate and authorize” the data and the analysis of the objective observer anthropologist. Once again, my fieldwork fits uncomfortably within this perspective.

One of the biggest struggles for me when conceptualizing what fieldwork feels like and what field sites look like was the blurring of boundaries between the field and home. When I found myself in the middle of a heated discussion with my extended family about veiling and Islamophobia, I was struck with the realization of how strongly the conversation paralleled some of the discourse in my research. I had previously joked that my upbringing and where I had lived for most of my life prepared me for my research. Yet, when I truly confronted this fact in the moment, it was far from funny. Rather than build out a field site, I began to feel as if I needed to carve out spaces of ‘home’ that bore little resemblance to the field that had seemingly swallowed up every space I inhabited (see Epilogue for a further discussion of this process). This feeling that the boundaries between home and field had completely collapsed came to a pique in March 2020.

When the pandemic hit, it was hard to think about anything else when my personal social media and research sites were laser focused on the topic. My research had already been tuned into what

was happening in China for weeks via an inordinate amount of anti-Chinese memes and Sinophobic rhetoric. Reddit seemed to be a hotspot for this kind of discourse and media, although Twitter too was rife with burgeoning conspiracy theories and thinly veiled racism masquerading as public health concern.

With the first work from home order, my partner began working from home and our internet strained under the weight of both of our work. It was a bit easier to do this work when I could get up and talk to someone, although I think it began to wear on him. I suppose other spouses do not have the same in-real-time experiences of the field unless they also travel to the field, which seems less common as funding becomes increasingly scarce. I was grateful that running was never banned, as it was in other countries. I was worried constantly about my capacity to do this work if I was unable leave the house for an hour every day. I would be stuck in the field with no return date in sight, and that was an ugly thought.

Looking back on my reflexive field notes, I made a lot of comments along the lines of,

Was sent to YouTube for a video on how COVID-19 is going to result in a police state with no rights for Canadians. I couldn't bring myself to watch a 26+ minute video on the topic. Minimal engagement on Reddit, but lots of comments on YouTube. Lots of deep state and boomer commentary.

We're having internet issues because [my partner] is also using a large amount of the bandwidth through video conferencing. It causes Reddit to crash/not load a lot. Frustrating... Back on Reddit some posts about riots in German refugee camps over COVID-19 quarantine (they call it 'WuFlu' in the thread) with comments like "diversity is our strength" and "let garbage in, get garbage prizes" etc.

So far pretty meh. I noticed a post I saved via my phone yesterday. Going to check and see if there are any new comments. Nope. Never mind... Another term that I've learned indexes the fake Canadian/immigrant is 'Canadian of Convenience' (see also Paper

Canadian). Everything is about hatred for Trudeau. A lot of anti-Ottawa discourse too. Very populist.

I really struggled with one of the posts about a woman (apparently ID'd as a Chinese woman, I thought white, tbh), where her figure was critiqued strongly. Anorexia jokes were really tough.

I'm really struggling with all the COVID-19 talk. Because it also dominates what [my partner] wants to talk about, what our friends talk about... And so on.

Covid became a force that turned every part of my life into a possible fieldwork moment. The disinformation meme a cousin shared on Instagram? Fieldwork. The conspiracy theory tweet (and ensuing comments) that came up on my non-fieldwork Twitter account because a member of the Edmonton Oilers is an anti-vaxxer? Fieldwork. The notification I got while on a run that informed me of a new 'trending' anti-Asian meme on Reddit? Definitely fieldwork. Moments and places that should have been 'not the field' were transformed into something that seemed a lot like the field.

The way that fieldwork followed me through spaces for three years was tolerable because I could rationalize it as a period of fieldwork. I dealt with what felt like intrusions into non-fieldwork spaces because I was still in the midst of deliberate fieldwork elsewhere. Was this not how other anthropologists experienced fieldwork when they took a plane to the Andes? Potential field experiences, interviews, and vignettes could be anywhere for them. Why should it be any different for me?

A related line of inquiry, which I think muddies the position I take above, is what happens when you cannot escape the distressing parts of research even after 'leaving' the field? An enduring feature of the field is distance, namely distance between the field and the ethnographer's home. The field is where data is collected, field notes are written, and where the anthropologist engages with interlocutors. In contrast, home is where the data is analyzed, manuscripts are written, and where the anthropologist engages with scholarly peers. I think home is also where

anthropologists emotionally recover from what is supposed to be difficult and at times distressing and discomforting work.

However, for me, this is a complicated picture. I understand the perspective of Gupta and Ferguson (1997), as well as all the other anthropologists who have advocated for an anthropology of home, yet few of them have attend to how extraordinarily difficult this can be in practice. So, in this final section I want to talk about how the lack of distance impacts ethnographic work, particularly that which is almost always deeply troubling. I recognize that many anthropologists encounter hardships in the field. I will always remember the work of Cynthia Keppley Mahmood (2012) and her vulnerable retelling of the sexual assault she experienced in the field, as well as the many traumatic experiences my colleagues have shared with me over the years. Indeed, trauma and discomfort have always been taken-for-granted aspects of fieldwork.

This discomfort has also continued into my writing practice. Fieldwork left me traumatized in a very real sense and I relive those experiences every time I sit down to write about my work because it is unmediated. For many anthropologists the field is experienced through participation and the body's senses. It is lived in the moment for a period of time, and then translated into field notes, photographs, or even video. Every time the experience shifts in terms of media, the distance between the event and the ethnographer grows. Reading a transcript is a different experience than sitting down to have the conversation. Of course, transcripts trigger memories—ones that might be uncomfortable or upsetting—but they are again different than what was experienced in real time and face-to-face. For my work, there is no translation process. The data I work with is exactly as it was when I first experienced it. Scrolling through my screenshots is just like scrolling through my social media sites—jarring, upsetting, never ending.

Moreover, while many anthropologists who subscribe to the 'going away' component of fieldwork, if there were uncomfortable or disturbing aspects of the field, they can escape them when they return home. For me, home is my field, and my work is all around me each day. Even as I claim that I have left the field, it seems the field is unwilling to leave me alone. As a result, I have come to see my post-fieldwork 'home' as a sort of field-not-field. It is a space in which I do

not seek to carry out fieldwork. Yet, by virtue of events outside of my control, it can morph back into the field without a moment's notice. It is as if the space is one of becoming. At any given time, it can become either the field or home and I never know which until something happens to mark it one way or the other. This applies to both my offline 'home' as well as my online 'home' on Twitter and Facebook.

This issue of home becoming the field-not-field and even 'the field' is aided by the fact that I do not need to procure funding, a visa, and a plane ticket. As a result, it is frighteningly easy for me to slip back into the field. While writing a previous section in this chapter I found myself on the Council for European Canadians website. My hand moved almost by its own volition to scroll down the page as my eyes took in the discourse. I landed on an article about how white people needed to move to and reclaim the countryside as that is where the last of the 'real Canadians' who 'drive pickup trucks and own guns' can be found. I must have sighed heavily, or maybe groaned, because my partner from the other room came to check in on me. I read him a section of the article and he just shook his head in disbelief. I was once again upset, my body brimming with frustration, and I appeared distressed enough for my partner to suggest a break. I longed for a sense of permanent distance necessary to be able to write this dissertation. It was as if I was always at the edge of my field-not-field, ready to fall back into the deeper reaches of 'the field.'

This was a minor break in the flow of writing by an unplanned 'field day.' Two other unplanned forays into the field come to mind that I think will help demonstrate my point. The first was the January 6 coup attempt on the US Capitol building, and the second the misogynistic and anti-Asian shooting on March 16, 2021, in Atlanta, Georgia.

I had been 'out' of the field since September of the previous year after concluding my interviews with members of r/metacanada. I was finally overcoming the cumulative stress of fieldwork and burnout that I had sustained since late 2018. Truthfully, I was enjoying the pivot to writing and thinking about my work as a contribution to anthropological theory even as revisiting my data continued to upset me. I had moved apartments and had a fresh new physical space that I did not associate with fieldwork. I had high hopes of that I had created enough of the 'distance' that my

previous mentors had spoken of and that I could now do the work of writing my ethnography. I had finally convinced myself I was ‘home’ when the January 6 coup attempt happened.

The words “Lol jk” stare back at me from my reflexive field notes from the days after the attempted coup at the US Capitol building. In this context, the two simple acronyms meant “Haha, you naïve anthropologist! The field was ‘just kidding’ when it released you from its clutches!” I had spent the entire day in what was without a doubt the field—on Twitter, OmegaCanada (the new home of r/metacanada), Gab, and Parler. This was a decidedly American rupture in the global right-wing landscape, but the ripples had made themselves felt in Canadian spaces. Admittedly, I had no idea that this coup attempt was brewing and was shocked to watch it play out. I had, after all, spent only an hour or two on each site each week after leaving the field. A couple of weeks later, the discourse had died down in my field sites and I returned ‘home’ to my writing. The coup turned out to be mostly irrelevant for my work here, although it was yet another instance of a field site loss as Parler was shut down due to its use by coup members. This was not unlike what had happened to Gab, and like Gab, it was eventually resurrected.

Ultimately, I was left with a sense of “hmm, that was neat” and “well, I didn’t get much writing done this week.” During this time, I wrote less, let the dishes pile up, ran fewer miles, and stress baked a bit more than usual. But it does demonstrate how quickly digital anthropologists can slip back into the field when big events happen. We do not need to book flights, apply for visas, or arrange for childcare. We just slip into old spaces, hope old interlocutors and informants are still around, and go along for the ride. While this is, perhaps, a selling feature of digital ethnography, and indeed I have pitched it as such during talks on the method, it is disruptive to our home lives. And we are, after all, supposed to be home at this point, no? Perhaps we need that airplane ride, that physical distance, to convince ourselves we are home.


The second slip into the field was the misogynistic and racialized shooting in Atlanta, Georgia on March 16, 2021, almost exactly two years after the Christchurch attacks. As with the attack in Boulder, CO, I was alerted to this attack via Twitter. My American colleagues who worked on male supremacy were already fielding interviews and trying to curtail the misappropriation of

their work. “Yes, incel attacks are misogynistic. No, not all misogynistic attacks are incel related. No, we do not yet know the motive, and no, we should not prematurely call this an incel attack when there are other misogynistic movements that are equally plausible.”

Suddenly my ‘home’ space on Twitter began to feel less like home. Less tweets about hockey and Alberta politics populated my timeline as a lot more discussion of male supremacy and violence filled the space. This field-not-field was like a liminal bridge between home and the established field, and it facilitated my shift between the two spaces. Reluctantly, I returned to my field sites to see what they made of the attack. All I knew at the time was that most of the victims were Asian women, and that this coincided with an increase in anti-Asian violence due to the pandemic. My interlocutors had little to say about the event outside of the usual concern about gun rights. So, why include this in my chapter on fieldwork? Besides being an example of slipping into the field for a few days, what does this act of violence contribute to my understanding of fieldwork?

The Atlanta shooting was a reminder of the emotional, embodied, and sensorial aspect of fieldwork and the way that fieldwork *lingers*. While the January coup attempt was disturbing from a national-security perspective, it was mostly an absurd and surreal thing to watch play out online. The Atlanta attack, however, hit differently. The nausea that plagued most of my time in the field returned, as did the fatigue, cramps, and strain. I was constantly on edge, waiting for further bad news, and it was deeply upsetting. The field, I remembered, was an unpleasant space to navigate. I longed for the safety, comfort, and security of home. And I realized that my colleagues in the field of male supremacy were struggling with this too. In a Slack group—yet another digital space that formed because of my research—Yebin Won, an Asian-American scholar, asked the rest of us how we were coping with the trauma of the day,

Q to fellow mentees on this thread: how do you all practice self-care, especially when research/world events becomes too much? This past 40-ish hours have been particularly difficult for me, and I've tried the pina colada, skipping class (because god forbid I don't need to sit in on a class called "the forensics of mass killings" as I try to process the shootings in Atlanta), and a big bowl of my favorite Korean stew. But the fear and

tension and anger is still there, so I'm taking any and all advice here. Thanks all, and I hope you're all safe and well ⁴¹

How do we deal with this work? Some of us chimed in with suggestions. Have a drink. Turn off the TV. Eat a bowl of comforting food. Spend time with family. I suggested calling our therapists.

For me, as distanced as I was as a white woman living in Canada, this moment made writing my ethnography nearly impossible for weeks. Everywhere I turned, violent misogyny was front and center. I was freshly upset with the rampant and violent misogyny in the West and seeing the discourse around the attack throughout what should have been my 'home' spaces made revisiting moments of past fieldwork an exercise in masochism. It was as if I was primed to relive my fieldwork and all the frustration, horror, and pain I experienced while in the field because I was in the field-not-field. I flipped through screenshots of conversations, which live on my computer as discrete files, and years of misogyny played out in front of me like one of those picture books that if you flip through quickly create a moving image. How could I abstract from these comments, memes, and tirades when the ramifications of this discourse were playing out around me? So much for the clarity of home.

So, I worked on other things. I spoke with my therapist—herself an Asian-Canadian impacted by the shootings—about how to cope with and manage these moments. I cannot keep avoiding my data forever because the dissertation must be written eventually, right? Indeed, the impact of Atlanta lessened as other horrible things inevitably happened and my attention was drawn elsewhere, and my experience of the field-not-field shifted closer to 'home' even if it has not quite arrived there over a year later.

Conclusions

⁴¹ Quote used here with permission from Yebin Won

This chapter has been a wild, messy, and unyielding thing to write. In many ways, this process has been one of catharsis as I try to make sense of the practice of ethnography as both data collection and writing. What I have tried to grapple with here are the taken-for-granted assumptions, the normative standards, and the bricks of the discipline that have shaped my experience as a student of fieldwork. More importantly, I have reflected on how the trope of going away—and the notions of distance, discomfort, and sameness—influenced the choices I made in the field and in my writing. I have also articulated how the experience of being at home in the field and vice versa has impacted my capacity to do good work and write with empathy, intention, and care.

While it feels good to share my messy fieldwork experience, and to make transparent my process, feelings, and decisions, I am left with a few questions that I have yet to answer which I feel are important for future scholars to consider:

1. What happens to the anthropologist who cannot leave?
2. How does one disentangle themselves from the field when it is outside their door?

For me, I want to know when a conversation at my hometown pub about the Rural and Northern Immigration Program—which said hometown is participating in—will cease to be research and become a part of regular life again. I want to know when people who say Islamophobic and misogynistic things online will cease to be potential interlocutors. Importantly, when will my perception of them—and my process of interacting with them—shift and return to how it was before my research? Perhaps a better question is *will* it shift? As an ethnographer I have sat with the messiness of critical empathy (de Coning, 2021), yet when I step out of that role, does it not (re)open other avenues of interaction that I may have pursued previously? Should it?

Is it as simple as these shifts will happen when my ethics expires, or my dissertation is turned in to my committee? Will this stop me from slipping into the field and will this have any impact on home as a field-not-field space?

Or does the fieldwork forever change and scar those of us who choose to embark on the journey?

Chapter 6 - “(((They’re))) Coming for Us Next”: Censorship & Folk Theories

I had originally intended to include this chapter much later in the dissertation after I had laid the groundwork for what anti-immigrant and anti-feminist rhetoric looked like in this project. Yet, I have previously given a great deal of time and space to where my fieldwork took place, how I moved within these spaces as an ethnographer, and what my methods looked like in practice. I have since come to the realization that censorship, or the anticipated or imagined threat thereof, deeply shapes my research space, methods, and even my ability to ‘do’ ethnography as a long-term and immersive practice. As a result, I open the more data-driven chapters of my dissertation with a conversation about the role censorship plays in this relationship. This chapter also speaks to broader conversations in anthropology about silencing, disciplining, and folk theories, and for that reason it sets the stage well for my subsequent discussions of nativism, women, and hockey.

As with all my discussions, I must preface this with a note on validating and legitimizing my interlocutors’ feelings of censorship and oppression. So, let me be abundantly clear in my positioning: the right-wing as a collective is not silenced in Canada. White conservative men in Canada still have outlets for their beliefs and the capacity to build communities. As the Freedom Convoy in early 2022 made clear, it is still possible for right-wing groups to disseminate information about their movements, to make use of social media like Facebook live streams (even when led by known white nationalists), to crowd-fund millions of dollars in multiple campaigns, and to occupy the nation’s capital and critical border points for weeks on end. All of this is achieved with minor repercussions—if any—for most participants. This is in stark contrast to the treatment of Indigenous land defenders. It would be tempting to say that the latter are treated in such a violent way because it disrupts capitalism, but the weeks-long Coutts border blockade by Freedom Convoy participants demonstrates the privilege right-wing protestors experience even when they disrupted crucial trade.⁴² Similarly, one could argue that this was about race. It is true that white privilege was certainly at play, especially given the reluctance of

⁴² It is estimated that the Coutts border sees \$44 million dollars in trade every day. See: <https://calgaryherald.com/business/thats-44-million-per-day-coutts-border-blockade-slams-alberta-economy-and-trade>

police to intervene. Indeed, there are videos circulating of police officers hugging people who have participated in a prolonged illegal blockade. Yet, white leftists and environmentalists are often victims of police aggression.⁴³ So, I am left to conclude that there is indeed something different about conservative white men in this country and their ability to move through the world unencumbered by the threats of violence the rest of us must navigate in our activism. Threats they, somewhat ironically, consistently imagine and anticipate yet rarely experience.

However, were I to ask my interlocutors about their experiences with privilege and silencing, as well as threats of violence, I am certain they would tell a different story. I am certain their story would include allusions to systemic, rather than individual, silencing and fears of financial repercussion and social ostracization for having conservative values. My interlocutors spent a great deal of time discussing censorship as something they themselves experienced as individual users, or as an anticipated inevitability that would befall them and others who expressed right-wing views (i.e., “wrong think”). Thus, like threats of violence (Daniels, 1997), it was the imagined possibility or the anticipated transgression that spurred much of the discourse online. “The ban hammer is (unfairly) coming for us all,” claimed my interlocutors even as they expressed ideas that often flirted with hate speech, which is explicitly disallowed on these privately owned capitalist platforms.

While there are some moments of truth in their claims, which I explore below, I am not primarily interested in whether my interlocutors were unfairly censored, nor am I interested in judging the legitimacy of the censors themselves (Candea, 2019). What I am interested in are the “folk theories” my interlocutors have developed to explain their experiences with censorship. These are the ways my interlocutors make sense of and respond to the *feelings* that censorship (real, anticipated, or imagined) elicits. This follows Candea’s (2019) work on an anthropology of censorship that attempts to move away from moralizing censorship, and instead to focus on how our interlocutors perceive this experience.

⁴³ For example, counter protestors have reported police violence during counter-protests at the Freedom Convoy rallies in Calgary, Alberta. See: <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/more-police-enforcement-needed-against-beltline-protesters-gondek>

Some have argued that presenting these folk theories and claims of illegitimate censors runs the risk of validating their beliefs. However, I am not convinced that this is the case. Rather, I see it as an important site of inquiry. After all, who they blame in their folk theories gives us insight into those they feel have robbed them of their rights, as well as those who might feel the brunt of their rage and resentment (Manne, 2019). For me, it matters less if they are justified in this rage, and more that they feel this rage in the first place. To this end, I begin with the works of Candea (2019) and West (2018) both of whom have shaped the aims of this paper as well as the intellectual inquiries I am interested in pursuing.

Candea (2019) argues that anthropologists should move beyond what censorship is (or is not) towards an exploration of what notions of censorship actually do in practice. For my work, I am curious as to what my interlocutors hope to achieve when invoking claims of censorship. I am interested in what these rhetorical practices reveal about their worldview, their entitlement, and their anger. Such lines of inquiry fit well with the work of West (2018) whose work on folk theories frames this chapter. She examines how her interlocutors think content moderation practices work, how these perceived practices impact their lives, and how these practices shape (or do not shape) their actions as a result. Similarly, I ask,

- 1) **How do my interlocutors think content moderation works and who makes it work in this way?** This line of inquiry illuminates the imagined and anticipated transgressors who move entitlement towards aggrievement and hostility (Manne, 2019). It also speaks to the issue of expertise, authority, and legitimacy (Candea, 2019).
- 2) **What is the impact that moderation, or censorship, has on their ability to communicate and build communities?** This is an important site of investigation if one recalls Berbrier's (2000) victim ideology in which white supremacists articulate that the supposed anti-white rhetoric has a negative impact on their well-being and self-esteem.
- 3) **How do my interlocutors respond to these experiences or the (anticipated) threats of such experiences?** Exploring these practices sheds light on other areas of concern in this dissertation, such as platform migration and the possibility for violence.

Reasoning & Reality: On the calls for censorship and its (un)intended results

My fieldwork coincided with increased calls for the monitoring and removal of racist, misogynistic, homophobic, and xenophobic content on social media platforms. As a result, many of the right-wing communities I worked in found their ability to maintain an online presence threatened. Like many threats explored in this dissertation, the threat of censorship is always anticipated, imagined, and, in some instances, real. Sometimes people and places go dark. This is a historical and ethnographic reality (Candea, 2019). This, again, should not be overly surprising. After all, any individual⁴⁴ user who violates the community standards set by platforms may receive temporary or permanent bans from sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube (Gillespie, 2018), while larger personalities and organizations may be de-platformed on e-commerce sites such as PayPal (Tusikov, 2019). This is true for users across the political spectrum. Indeed, I have received threats of censorship from Instagram for my leftist and Marxist memes. Even the platforms themselves are not immune to censorship practices, as the alternative social media site Gab evinced in the wake of the Tree of Life synagogue shooting in Pittsburg (October 27, 2018) and Parler following the attempted coup at the US Capitol building in Washington, D.C. on January 6, 2021. So, what does censorship, or rather the notion of censorship, do here in practice and imagination, and what does the word even mean?

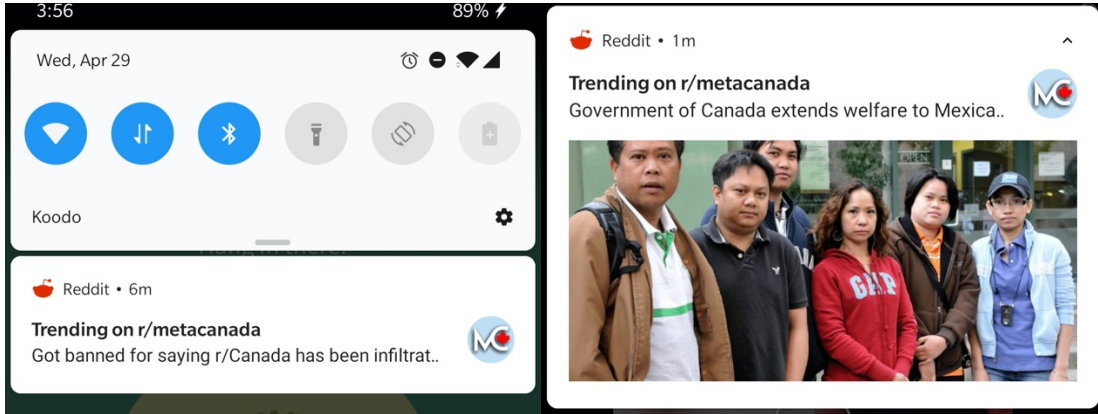
Within my digital context, censorship in practice refers to a wide range of moderation practices, including post or content removal, bans, and de/no-platforming. The impact of these practices, as well as the appropriate usage of each, is widely debated amongst scholars, policymakers, and activists. Yet there are tangible effects when groups and individuals are censored. For example, deplatforming, which involves the removal of a user or group from an entire platform, can undermine the reach and economic viability of right-wing ideas. If high profile content creators are censored, users must spend time finding new sources of information. The removal of accounts and platforms, or portions thereof, also threatens the cohesion and continuity of groups

⁴⁴ I want to stress the use of “individual” here as censorship discourse was often an example of the right-wing using individual experiences to represent a collective one. By this I mean, if one right-wing user is banned, it is taken as a sign that the entirety of the right-wing is being suppressed.

and movements as it limits their ability to interact with one another (Ben-David & Fernández, 2016). These are important issues for groups across the political spectrum to consider in the absence of offline interactions. If someone only knows me by my Twitter handle, and I am banned from the platform, will they be able to reach me in the future, or is that the end of our social connection?

Much of the literature surrounding content moderation focuses on the perceived effectiveness of said moderation in the disruption of radicalization and recruitment processes. Social media is undeniably a space where individuals can access and circulate extremist materials and ideologies. These spaces are prone to echo-chamber or cyber-balkanization effects, which inhibit dissenting views and encourages the adoption of the group's social norms and values (Urman & Katz, 2020). As a result, individuals may come to feel that previously taboo and hateful ideas are acceptable. Furthermore, through algorithms meant to help curate content, platforms can unknowingly increase users' exposure to extremist content (Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 2017). Again, this is true across the political and religious spectrum, and it is a primary concern for those working to counter jihadi extremism (see the work of Amarnath Amarasingam).

This concern with radicalization was something colleagues, mentors, and friends brought up when I discussed my research. After all, if my interlocutors were susceptible to the radicalization pipeline that is social media, could I also be susceptible? Indeed, during my fieldwork on Reddit, I received daily push notifications to my smartphone of trending topics and threads related to the right-wing forums I had subscribed to. This ensured I had repeated exposure to right-wing content without actively seeking it out, although I was certainly seeking it out at other times. I began a collection of screenshots entitled "Daily Reddit." It has nearly 500 posts. Of course, not all of them were directly related to my research, but they gave me a broader sense of my interlocutors' concerns.



Figures 23 (top left) and 24 (top right). Screenshots of “trending on r/metacanda” posts sent to author’s mobile.

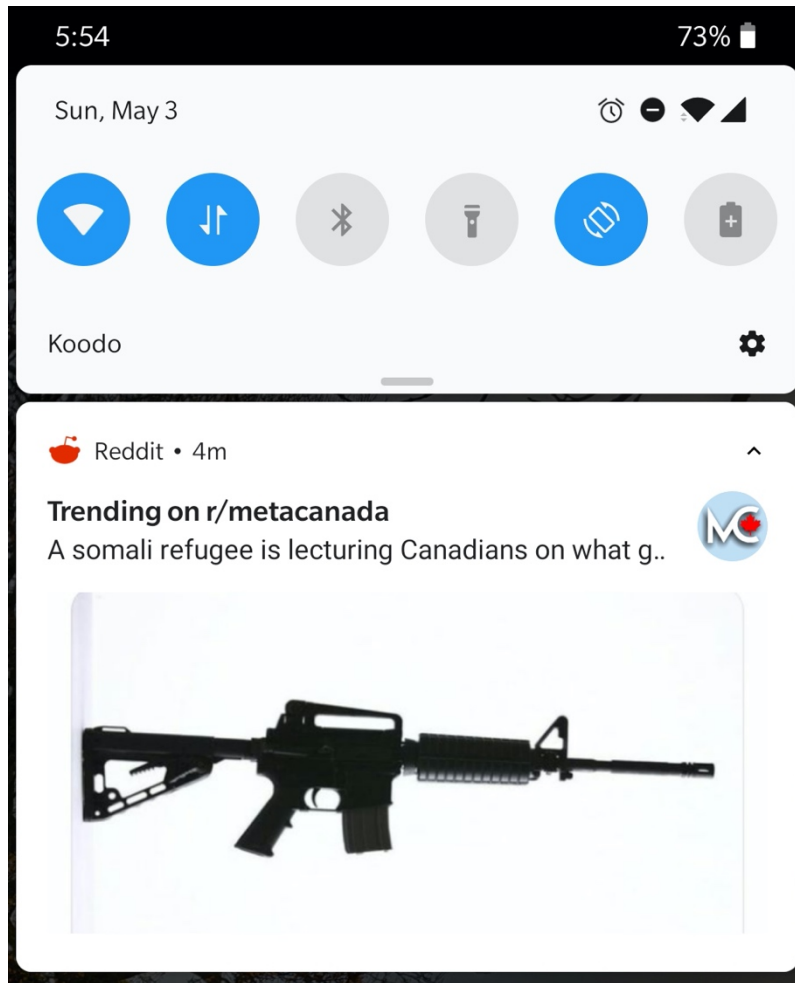


Figure 25. Screenshots of “trending on r/metacanda” posts sent to author’s mobile

The posts arrived at various times during the day, but I found many came through during my daily run around 11 in the morning. They concerned a broad range of topics including censorship and the leftist influence online (Figure 23), foreign aid to non-white countries (Figure 24), and anti-immigrant rhetoric⁴⁵ mixed with gun violence (Figure 25). The content was never in violation of Reddit’s community guidelines, nor was it particularly jarring relative to the broader content I was exposed to throughout my field sites. However, the comment section was always an unknown as my interlocutors would use the initial post as a springboard to explore deeper and more varied grievances. Thus, while all three posts were not deemed harmful, they fostered spaces in which more radical ideas could be explored.

Given the ease of access to this content and its role as a pipeline towards potentially harmful rhetoric, one might be inclined to believe that removing this content could interrupt radicalization. Such is the perspective of “hard approaches” or “negative measures” advocates, who argue that restricting extremist material will correlate to less radicalization. Such approaches include removing, filtering, or hiding the content. Yet, the difficulty with this approach in my field context was the mainstream or ‘mild’ nature of the content (Won & Lewis, 2021). It contributed to larger discourses of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, racism, misogyny, and homophobia, but it was rarely the outright violent rhetoric I found on Gab or in the comment section hidden behind strategic language and aesthetics. In contrast, advocates of the “soft approaches” contend that media literacy and counternarratives are more effective means of combating radicalization and disrupting echo-chambers (Meleagrou-Hitchens & Kaderbhai, 2017). The former approach, however, has impacts beyond disrupting radicalization as it can impact the financial viability of extremist groups.

As Caiani and Kroll (2015) note, the internet, and particularly social media, are also effectively exploited by right-wing extremists who use it to promote their ideology and raise funds. Artists and freelancers across the political spectrum who use social media as a business tool have experienced the detrimental economic impact of censorship (West, 2018). This extends to right-wing actors who use these platforms to generate income through donations and sales. As with

⁴⁵ The “Somalian refugee” in question was Liberal MP Ahmed Hussen who made public statements about his party’s plan to strengthen Canada’s gun control legislation

other platforms, e-commerce sites are self-regulators, although they too disallow transactions that contribute to the incitement of violence or promote hate. They rely on data surveillance methods wherein social media data is used to determine user behaviours. However, enforcement of their terms of service has been largely slow and reactive (Tusikov, 2019). For groups who require funds to mobilize and disseminate their ideas, censorship can undermine their ability to effectively sustain their communities. The Freedom Convoy is a perfect example of this as their GoFundMe, which raised over 10 million dollars (CAD), was frozen and subsequently dissolved. This left many protestors without the financial assistance their occupation required.

Beyond disrupting radicalization, recruitment and fundraising, censorship policies can undercut community continuity and their sense of connection. Throughout my fieldwork, users expressed frustration at the bans that forced them to build new accounts or relocate to new platforms and lamented the difficulty in re-establishing their communities. In his survey of Twitter bans, Berger (2018) found that those who chose to leave Twitter for Gab found themselves forced to conform to what they felt were anti-free speech policies. As Berger (2018) noted Gab “started cracking down on its more extreme users, under pressure from its domain registrar” (p. 45), and this was exacerbated by offline events, specifically the Tree of Life synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh on October 27, 2018.

The Gab shutdown was short-lived. Yet, many users were wary of the site moving forward. They saw this as Gab yielding to the demands of the left and government agencies—both considered illegitimate censors (Candea, 2019)—at the expense of free speech, specifically that of right-wing conservatives. In contrast, other field sites suffered permanent bans. Following weeks of negative media attention, including reports that members had “cased out” a local mosque (Mosleh, 2019), the SOO Edmonton found their Facebook page permanently banned without notice (Issawi, 2019). This ban also included their backup “support” pages, which they had set up in preparation for censorship practices. However, this demonstrates the futility of their contingency plans.

During this time, Facebook also permanently banned the identitarian group, ID Canada. ID Canada is an offshoot of the right-wing Generation Identity movement (Zúquete, 2018, see also

Mack, forthcoming), although they elected to rebrand in response to the unique cultural context of Canada. They had a strong social media presence across platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. However, on February 15, 2019, ID Canada posted on Twitter,

ID Canada's Facebook page as well as leadership's personal pages have all be permabanned by @facebook. All we take from this is that the elites are worried about the rise of identitarianism and are trying to silence us.

We will never, ever retreat. Thanks for the accolade.

In response to the Facebook ban, ID Canada focused on Instagram and Twitter, although they were eventually banned from the former and have since chosen to focus on offline community building. As of January 2021, the group declared on their now defunct website that "ID Canada **no longer** has *any* official presence on *any* social media platforms (twitter, facebook, instagram). Anyone claiming to represent ID Canada on any platform is doing so with **malicious intent**" (emphasis in original).

Each act of censorship limited my interlocutors' ability to connect and exchange ideas and information. With each migration and permanent ban, the communities diminished in size as users were forced to find each other and their followers once again or focus on offline community building. This also posed challenges for my participant-observation as I endeavoured to follow the breadcrumbs users left to new sites of engagement and took note of their back up plans (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Legitimacy, Authority, and Control

Despite the feelings of belonging that these platforms can elicit, users clearly have little control over the standards of their communities. Moreover, despite early beliefs that the internet would be a liberating and utopian space, many users today feel it is the domain of private companies, government, and other censors (Roberts, 2020). When my interlocutors express these feelings, they often include discussions of authority and legitimacy. These discussions were not simply about being censored, but rather about who or what was behind the censoring.

To return briefly to Candea (2019), they note that there is something worth exploring when it comes to legitimacy of censors along the lines of expertise and authority. They give the example of a librarian and a government body and their role in determining what books should and should not be stocked. The former is likely never criticized for their choices as society at large bestows upon them a sense of expertise and corresponding legitimacy in their selection, which is a form of censorship. In contrast, if a government body were to do this work, there would likely be a great deal of pushback. The government is not deemed to be an expert and therefore legitimate censor.

This issue of legitimate versus illegitimate censor occurs across ethnographic settings. Take for instance the work of Vegner (2016) on anti-government student groups in Iran. She points to the case of student-activist Majid Tavakoli, an outspoken critic of the Iranian government. In an attempt to silence Tavakoli and his movement, the state-run press released digitally altered photographs that depicted him in women's clothing. The hope was that by depicting Tavakoli as a "cross-dresser,"⁴⁶ it would shame and humiliate him and his movement into silence. This silencing tactic played into a broad campaign of credibility for the state.

The Iranian government went to great lengths to bolster its credibility not only as the government authority, but as a legitimate censor. Its use of religious metaphors and signifiers attempted to portray protestors as morally dubious (i.e., dressing as a woman), and therefore censorable by the morally righteous state. However, as Venger (2016) notes, the attempt backfired as "the opposition supporters bestowed a new meaning of resistance to the regime upon the photograph and upon the stereotype of cross dressing as a woman (p. 74).

I include this discussion here because it is important to explore instances where very powerful censors, like the Iranian government, are not always successful in their attempts to silence or discipline. Here, Iranian protestors effectively mobilized against a misinformation smear campaign using logic and reason in part because they could not call for "hard censorship" of these images. What is important here is that new feminist meaning trumped the shame and

⁴⁶ Vegner's terminology

effectively undermined attempts at silencing. As a result, the notion of “legitimacy” is a contested one.

This is a clear example of speaking back to power, and as I explore below in my case study of r/metacanada, this is something that my interlocutors also advocate for. They feel the state is an illegitimate and immoral censor. Yet, there is also something powerful about self-imposed silence.

McCormack (2017), in her auto-ethnographic account of self-silencing amongst rural Catholics in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, notes that “as a social phenomenon, silence is also employed strategically to accommodate, though not necessarily comply with, the commemorative performances of powerful groups” (p. 54). This is interesting with regards to my interlocutors. In many exchanges online, my interlocutors discussed all the spaces they were unable to express their true identities and perspectives out of fear. Fear that they would be ostracized, disowned, reprimanded, or fired, and so they would “bite their tongues” and sit in silence. They lamented that none of the personal spaces were safe—not work, not time with friends or family. Indeed, McCormack (2017) notes that during the Troubles, there was a system of silence to keep the peace within friendship and kin networks,

The silence within kin or friend groups may not have the same implications for harm, though it is, nevertheless, politically charged. For instance, within groups of ethnically mixed friends, truth telling is either impolitic or potentially dangerous. As a result, all individuals in the group have a stake in remaining mute... Better to remain silent (p. 58).

Of course, for McCormack (2017), there was a very real threat of physical violence and even death if one revealed too much. Yet, for my interlocutors, the possibility of social backlash was enough to remain silent. Their silence should not be read as an agreement with those in power—or at least those perceived to be in power as I continue to question if marginalized folks can adequately be described as powerful. Rather, their silence is part self-preservation and part-defiance. There is, of course, power in refusal to engage with the dominant discussion (see Mack & Newberry, 2020; Ortner, 1995; A. Simpson, 2007 on refusal)

McCormack (2017) also introduces the notion of “telling” in her work on silence. Here, telling consists of all the non-verbal social cues that give away information about a person’s identity. In her work, these were the things that gave someone away as Catholic, rather than Protestant. What is necessary for this process, however, is a particular level of cultural knowledge and competency as the uninitiated is unable to make this evaluation. This, I think, is an interesting line to follow when it comes to the speech practices of my interlocutors. Their use of specific words and phrases, as well as memes and emojis, indexes their belonging to the community. It also indicates that they feel censored and silenced, or else they would simply come right out and declare themselves to be a conservative, ethno-nationalist, or perhaps white supremacist. Instead, there are subtle cues that reveal—to the initiated—the truth of their identity. It is akin to the difference between a wink and blink.

This discussion of expertise, authority, and legitimacy is not surprising, of course. Moderation is everywhere, and it continues to tackle old issues, such as sexuality and nudity, as well as violent and graphic imagery, all of which have been the focus of longstanding debates within journalism and film (West, 2018). Of course, some issues are more recent phenomena, such as the use of social media by terrorists for recruitment and radicalization, as well as the threat of chatroom-based sexual predators. While I could continue to point to a number of ethnographic examples of this use of social pressure,⁴⁷ I want to end with two different takes on the field of anthropology instead. After all, a primary theme in this dissertation is turning the gaze back on anthropologists.

When perusing the literature for this chapter, I came across two short critiques of the American Anthropological Association and its role in silencing. The first was by the late UC San Diego anthropologist Marc J. Swartz and was a letter to the editor-style commentary in *Anthropology News* (1972). In his short piece, he discussed the “questionable” work of Herrnstein, Shockley and Jensen, all of whom were well known proponents of racial determinants of intelligence at the time.⁴⁸ His position was that the AAA’s censoring of their work would be a “clear act of censorship unworthy of free men.” Further, the suggestion that the AAA should act as a censor

⁴⁷ See Kocer (2013); Gill (2017) Sheriff (2000); Kuebler (2011) for rich, ethnographic examples.

⁴⁸ Referred to as “the history of race and intelligence controversy”

was “deeply shocking.” Instead, anthropologists should be called to “present data and analysis which show them to be unsound.” What is interesting to me here is that his argument reflects contemporary discussions of “hard censorship” versus education as a means of quelling the rise of the “racial IQ” and “race realism” discourse that I encountered throughout my research. Perhaps to Swartz’s delight, the motion to censor was ultimately defeated (see Wiegele, 2019). However, attempts by anthropologists to address the issue of so-called “race realism” has, unfortunately, been less than successful and the legacies of Herrnstein, Shockley, and Jensen live on in my fieldwork.

Yet, there have been instances where the AAA has censored the work of anthropologists. While Swartz (1972) points to a single instance of proposed and unsuccessful censorship, Gill (2016) explores the unevenness of censorship from the AAAs. She notes that while the AAA has acted as a censor in the past (e.g., during the Vietnam war), it has not done so with regards to state violence in the Middle East, nor has it engaged in censorship-based criticism of the relationship between the US and Israel (see for example the failed BDS vote in 2016). However, scholars of the Middle East and North Africa, as well as those who criticize Zionism, have found themselves responding to censorship pressures from the discipline itself. This manifests at the doctoral level, on the job market, and in the classroom as academics monitor and self-censor themselves in an attempt at academic self-preservation. Within the context of an increasingly neoliberal post-secondary education model, this is even more prevalent as pro-Zionist funders shape university and government policies. It is particularly ironic for such censorship to play out within academia, as academia is meant to function as a space of intellectual freedom. Yet, anthropologists find themselves constrained and constricted by external forces functioning as censors—legitimate or otherwise.

So, what of my interlocutors? Are their censors experts and legitimate? This is an interesting line of inquiry because my data is, unsurprisingly, conflicting. This is in part because of the hierarchy of censors and their relationships with one another, as well as the pervasive power of capitalism.

Let me start with the platforms themselves. They are the property of private companies. As a result, these companies can determine their own community guidelines and terms of service so

long as they fit within the legal frameworks of the countries they operate in. Users are therefore required to follow suit. This presents a bit of a conundrum for my interlocutors who usually argue that private companies should enjoy these freedoms. For example, they rallied behind a waxing salon that refused service to a transwoman,⁴⁹ arguing that private companies should have the right to determine the limitations and scope of services even if it infringes on the rights and access of private citizens. Yet, these same interlocutors balk when Reddit, Twitter, or Facebook do just that. As one right-wing interlocutor lamented in early January 2021 after the alternative and far-right friendly social media platform Parler was de-platformed,

Amazon pulled support for Parler, which was hosted on Amazon Web Services, and the free-speech social network is now offline. This comes only days after Apple and Google both announced they were kicking the Parler app off of their platforms.

Free speech is not free and tech conglomerates now control the narrative. This comes as a lesson to never host a site in North America, and to certainly never hand control of your site to one of the big tech giants.

We wait to see what the Parler team does next, whether transition their site to an offshore host or simply admit defeat (OmegaCanada user).

Here, the critique was leveled at the private companies, who are deemed illegitimate censors. After all, a legitimate censor would have the authority to “control the narrative.” However, for platform administrators, the reality is that “they must, in some form or another, moderate: both to protect one user from another, or one group from its antagonists, and to remove the offensive, vile, or illegal—as well as to present their best face to new users, to their advertisers and partners, and to the public at large” (Gillespie, 2018, p. 5). Community-level moderators are then expected to reinforce these conditions and practices. Some may choose to enact stricter rules and

⁴⁹ See Larsen, K. (October 22, 2019). “Estheticians don't have to wax male genitalia against their will, B.C. tribunal rules.” CBC. Accessed April 27, 2022. URL: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/transgender-woman-human-rights-waxing-1.5330807>

norms for their communities, while others chafe under platform policies and resent their position as middlemen between platforms and users.

This process paints private companies as responding, or perhaps succumbing, to the coercive power of illegitimate censors, namely those who create hate speech policies and those who advocate for their creation and adoptions. This line of critique was increasingly common amongst my interlocutors, who occasionally blamed neoliberalism and globalization for corrupting a capitalist system they felt should work for them. This evinces once again the contradictory and conflicting ideas my interlocutors had even regarding issues that the right-wing seems united on (e.g., capitalism). This also creates a relationship of power, with social media companies in the middle of the hierarchy.

Above social media companies in terms of power sit the federal government, law enforcement, and academic institutions that advise the former bodies. These groups exert what is deemed illegitimate control over private companies via hate speech legislation. Importantly, this legislation is understood to be anti-white, anti-male, and anti-conservative in its application, and follows the logics of a white supremacist victim ideology (Berbrier, 2000). It is also here that anti-Semitic tropes of Jewish global domination are trotted out alongside criticisms of communism and Marxism due to academic influence.⁵⁰ That these groups can exert influence over legislation and policy is an affront to my interlocutors. After all, as I have established previously, my interlocutors feel that they are the ones uniquely situated to govern and police. It is they who have the right to censor, and indeed they have consistently done so throughout Canadian history, often at the expense of marginalized communities who are now protected via hate speech legislation and policy work.

Below social media companies in the hierarchy of censorship relations are the moderators and users. These are the individuals who, at the platform level, establish community norms in relation to both the platform's guidelines and the prevailing government policies. In practice, this means that something permitted by both the platform and the government might not be allowed

⁵⁰ It should be noted that these criticisms are not actually of communist or Marxist ideologies, but rather the authoritarian behaviours of supposedly communist states like Russia and China.

in smaller communities (e.g., subreddits, Facebook groups, Gab topics). Members of r/metacanada, for example, often reflected on their migration from r/Alberta or r/Canada because of censorship practices. These were either formal bans from the subreddit or informal actions like downvotes and critical comments from other community members which made the user feel unwelcome in those spaces. Although the latter is not censorship as it is popularly conceptualized, it is a form of silencing. While these user-moderators do not have the same degree of power as the social media companies or the government, they do exert a certain degree of control over their small communities via local bans. Here, the influence of leftists, feminists, anti-racist and queer activists is understood as illegitimate as the historically idealized Canadian—a straight, white Christian male—should hold this power because they are the experts on Canadian culture and their legitimacy is predicated on tradition.

Yet, to leave the conversation with “my interlocutors believe there are illegitimate censors dictating what they can and cannot say online, and that these are governments and leftists” would be to ignore the complex and contradictory sources and targets of their aggrievement. It would also miss what conversations around censorship reveal about my interlocutors themselves. As McCormack (2017) notes, “surveillance is paradoxical. It is a technological power aimed at penetrating silences, fragmenting the social person into ascribed and transparent characteristics, a reduction likely to lead to the social exclusion of so-called deviant ethnic groups” (pp. 55-56). I suspect this is how they feel, namely broken down into the tiniest categories of their being: white, male, straight, Christian, and conservative. These, they argue have come to be understood as deviant in the so-called “woke” and “feminist” nation state that is Canada and therefore subject to surveillance and silencing. So, let me turn now to the folk theories my interlocutors developed as a means of making sense of their experience with real, imagined, and anticipated censorship practices.

Folk theories and contingencies

To begin, conspiracy theories are a way to “provide meaningful and accurate explanations of the world’s condition” (Campion-Vincent, 2005, p. 103). It is clear that my interlocutors feel anxious, uncertain, and perhaps unmoored in current Canadian society. They are searching for

ways to explain these feelings and are looking for root causes. This is not so different from the academic project. My interlocutors are attempting to make sense of their world through analysis and discussion just as I am as an anthropologist. There is a theoretical thinking through happening, which brings to mind the work of Holmes and Marcus (2006) on para-ethnographers. These are people, in the case of Holmes and Marcus high powered finance folks, who do analytical work but do not necessarily call it such. Therefore, I see conspiracy thinking as a form of analytical work that makes sense of their lived experiences, and attending to this process illuminates a great deal about how they see power relations in Canada.

To understand these power dynamics, users construct folk theories, or an intuitive explanation, about why the censorship occurred and the driving force behind it. While user understandings of this process reflect individual experiences, communally formed folk theories do arise during discussions of censorship and reflect users' ideologies regarding media and society.

Censorship folk theories often emerge out of individual experiences with content removal and include human, rather than machine involvement. This may include individuals known to the user such as a friend or acquaintance, or perhaps more likely a troll. With regards to the latter, these are typically unknown individuals or groups who oppose the users' speech, position, or existence and constitute a sort of nebulous other. West (2018) notes that marginalized communities experience these sorts of attacks when pressing for racial, religious, or gender-based justice. This is something I have faced in my anti-capitalist social media discourse, and I have in turn developed my own theories to explain this pattern of experiences.

Certainly, my interlocutors feel attacked and persecuted by an external force. Yet, one of the interesting things about conspiracy thinking is how it shifts the position of the adherent beyond that of victim. Champion-Vincent (2005) argues that conspiracies are not always the product of imagined persecution or victimhood, but rather the belief that they are being unfairly accused. This fits squarely with my interlocutors' experiences. They feel they are being unfairly penalized for their whiteness, maleness, straightness, Christianness, et cetera. What I see as unearned privilege they see as an accusation of wrongdoing, and through folk theories and conspiracy thinking, my interlocutors are able to shift towards an innocence that is still grounded in entitlement. What I mean by this is that they construct a reality in which one cannot be a

‘privileged’ antagonist for defending what was always their “right.” Instead, they become martyrs and warriors for their cause. Importantly, they become crusaders against the powers and illegitimate censors that threatens their social certainty. But who are these censors? Who holds the unearned power in these theories? I want to put forth the argument that the two primary enemies are 1) leftists and feminists who were anti-white and anti-free speech, and 2) the “evil elite” globalists who were invoked alongside anti-Semitic discourse.

It might come as a surprise that the category of “immigrant” was not included as a primary censor or source of unearned power. As Campion-Vincent (2005) notes, conspiracy theories are often tied to the nation and have historically focused on the perceived threat of foreigners (e.g., immigrants). However, contemporary conspiracies increasingly target those with “political or social status rather than ethnic or religious groups, who are protected by prevailing rules of politically correct speech” (p. 106). In Canada, this protection is also codified in our hate speech legislation, and this is reified in the social media platforms’ community standards policies. This does some work in explaining why my interlocutors focus on feminists and leftists—political orientations rather than gender or racial categories—and use language like “globalists” and “elites” rather than saying “the Jewish community” even if that is who they are actually indexing. While these conspiracy theories may be on the rise, traditional conspiracy theories that positions immigrants, refugees, and other minorities as internal enemies are still prevalent (see Chapter 7 on nativism), although immigrants were not bestowed the same level of power as leftists and globalists with regards to censorship—at least not yet.

Let me begin with the leftists who, as I outline in my Introduction, include academics, feminists, and racial-justice activists. These “enemies of the people” are understood to have infiltrated the very institutions designed to protect society and are corrupting it with progressive beliefs about race, gender, sexuality, and capitalism. As a result, these folk theories and conspiracy thinking coincide with discourses of mistrust. Those who hold conspiracy theories often argue that they know the “truth” and that those in power—the illegitimate censors and corrupted governments—are either obscuring the truth or outright lying (Campion-Vincent, 2005). This distrust is well demonstrated by the anti-vax and anti-mandate movement in Canada, which culminated in the Freedom Convoy movement (see Conclusions for discussion of the convoy; see also Mah, 2021).

But it was also highlighted not only in the comments I observed throughout my fieldwork, but in my direct interactions with interlocutors as a known researcher. During my call for participants, one r/metacanada user expressed frustration with my request claiming that

The outcome of your dissertation is already determined. You cannot come to any other conclusion than that those against immigration and demographic replacement are “a bunch of fucking racists” and expect to get a PhD in social sciences from a Canadian university. So no.

I attempted, and failed, to convince this user that my interest was in the logics of *why* people held anti-immigrant beliefs. In response, another user pointed out that,

You are getting a valid data point on the times we are in. Respect and trust in public bodies must be at an all time low. Useful public discourse has been nearly burnt to the ground by it.

In response, I asked “how can researchers claim to talk *about* segments of our society... if the folks in those communities won't talk *to* us?” And the second user responded,

It is even simpler than that. Just cast your mind back to the vagaries of the federal government's handling of the pandemic. They were back and forth, making statements with great earnestness, then turning around and saying the complete opposite, all within a matter of weeks. No acknowledgment of what drove them to each end of the spectrum. Just keep moving.

If at the very least we saw “wow – did we ever screw up on that borders thing, or that masks thing, or shipping our PPE to China when they were secretly shipping it to themselves before this blew up” ... ok then.

Instead we have doublethink on steroids.

THAT is the reason why the public discourse trusts nothing anymore. It was destroyed by our own institutions, supposedly designed to protect the public, not exploit it.

Occam's Razor. Eventually we end up sliding down to the simplest explanation. The leftist government we have is not being honest with us. Not before. Not during. And not now. The one we look to for peace, *security*, and *good* government.

And, we've been getting that kind of government for at least 20-30 years now. Probably more.

This emphasis on security and 'good' governance highlights the mistrust in governing bodies. It also evinces an increasingly popular sentiment that the government is intentionally harming its subjects (see Chapter 8 on the mistreatment of white men and Introduction on globalists).

Another user chimed in with a similar take that placed me at the center of the conversation,

The left has *certainty* that they are morally correct, and that anyone who disagrees with them is either immoral/evil or stupid, or both. This viewpoint is particularly prevalent in academia, even in STEM now, rather than just the softer disciplines. It really is rather astonishing how quickly this has happened. Universities used to be a place for vigorous discourse and exchange of ideas. Now they are places where all dissent is squashed.

Speaking to you as an individual, you are someone who has both the means and the ability to be going for a doctorate. I wonder why you don't see through this stifling of debate and call it out for what it is. I don't expect you as one young individual to actually do that, because it would be the end of your academic career. What I do hope you'll do is realize that choosing this academic path left you with no option but to tow the line and hope you don't make some mistake that will instantly turn you into a pariah.

These comments reflect much of Campion-Vincent's (2005) argument. There is a positioning of right-wingers as not only victims, but also the unfairly accused. There is a thread of "common

sense” attitudes to see the “real truth” of the matter, which the leftist elites hope to hide. And there is a real emphasis on the untrustworthy—even malicious—nature of institutions in Canada, particularly the federal government and universities.

This discourse about leftist infiltration extended to the platforms themselves. Referred to as discriminatory, dishonest, politically correct, and pro-communist, the censorship policies of mainstream platforms were heavily criticized across my field sites. The platforms were referred to as “leftist circle jerks” and “pro-China” (i.e., pro-Communist), where pro-white and pro-conservative discourse was limited. This prompted many in my Twitter ecosystem to leave the site for Parler and Gab as they felt Twitter limited their communicative possibilities. These leftist-related folk theories also reflected a belief in “reverse racism” and that the censorship practices unfairly targeted users, groups, and pages that expressed pro-white sentiments. This brings to mind, once again, Berbrier’s (2000) “victim ideology” in which white supremacists feel that they are now the victims of racial discrimination for the purpose of white genocide. Moreover, it reflects Bona-Silva’s (2015) abstract liberalism and Mondon and Winter’s (2020) “liberal racism,” both of which render conversations of “reverse racism” and “reverse sexism” legitimate in our supposed post-racist and post-feminist era.

One notable case in Canada of this discourse is the work of Students for Western Civilisation, who have filed a criminal complaint against the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) for promoting hatred against European Canadians (Students for Western Civilization, 2021). In response to reports that Canada would consider forcing social media companies to remove extremist content, the group declared on Facebook that “if the government starts censoring white people’s calmly expressed perspectives on cultural and political issues... then we’d be happy to sue them for racial discrimination.” This declaration circulated throughout my field sites, garnering support for the group in their battle against the oppressive left’s anti-free speech censorship policies when it came to white users. These conversations became tangled up in broader discussions of violence against white people as other users pointed to what they felt was a double standard regarding the Black Lives Matter movement and their discussions of white victims of violence. In a discussion of this double standard, one Reddit user declared, “This happened. It’s factual. We should be allowed to talk about it. Reddit is an echo chamber of Anti-

white racism right now with hoaxes being used to make white people look bad, while huge increases in racist attacks on whites go ignored.” Here, we see Campion-Vincent’s (2005) theory that adherents to conspiracy thinking believe they know the “truth” or have the “real facts” despite what others say and despite their lack of citations to back up their claims.

They further argued that community-level moderators were “crossing the line into complicity” for censoring the discussion post even though it did not violate any of the official community standards as it did not include graphic imagery. They argued that moderators were restricting their ability to talk about the issue while tacitly permitting both graphic images and videos of police brutality against Black people and discussions of the violence. This brings to mind Nurik’s (2019) notion of “implicit censorship,” wherein biases and social norms inform individual moderator choices and may contradict or go beyond the official affordances of the platforms. The social norms of the platforms, according to my interlocutor, were anti-conservative, anti-white, and pro-leftist.

The folk theories also revealed on-going themes of anti-Semitism. This facet of the globalist folk theory played on old tropes of a powerful and controlling Jewish elite, most commonly referred to as globalists (Campion-Vincent, 2005; Zúquete, 2018). When discussing a migration to Minds during the weeks leading up to Gab’s de-platforming in 2018, one user asked, “How often do the jews demand we get wiped there [on Minds]?” Another responded, “No clue. There seem to be a lot of our kind of people already there. It’s decentralized, so (((controlling))) it is naturally a little more difficult.” This reflects their adherence to a globalist conspiracy theory that claims the Jewish community controls society at the expense of white people. There was a reoccurring belief that several platforms were under Jewish control including Minds, Gab, Facebook, and Twitter. Moreover, the explicitly anti-Semitic use of “shoah’d” to refer to bans exemplifies such themes as the word shoah refers to the genocide of Jewish people under the Nazi regime. Its appropriation is used ironically to describe the supposed decimation of their communities by the Jewish community.

Similarly, users who employed anti-Semitic tropes in their folk theories often fell back on another component of globalist ideology, anti-Muslim xenophobia (Zúquete, 2018), to

rationalize the restrictions they experienced. The idea behind this theory is that in order to destroy the white race, Jewish elites are facilitating high levels of immigration from Muslim countries into historically white countries. This discourse was most often tied to the mass immigration policies implemented by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's' Liberal Party, which they argued could not be criticized when moderators were leftist. They also connected their experience in Canada with the plight of the right-wing in Europe. In a thread on how hundreds were probed over anti-immigrant comments on Facebook in Germany, Reddit users took the opportunity to critique the controlling nature of the left when it came to white dissent. One user noted, "Can't criticize the actions/policies of your government. What do you think this is? A western liberal democracy? 'Hate speech' legislation has no place in the western world." For my interlocutors, social media, like society was against them, and their folk theories explaining this victimization reveals a great deal about their broader understandings of the world around them.

Both the leftist and globalist folk theories demonstrated a belief that the censorship policies reflect discriminatory hegemonic social norms. As Nurik (2019) argues, content moderators, often working under difficult time constraints, make decisions that reflect the hegemonic biases of society and are thus both subjective and discriminatory. This results in implicit censorship, which disallows certain kinds of speech and is seen as antagonistic by users. For example, when seeking racial justice, marginalized and racialized communities are often censored. In contrast, misogynistic rhetoric is rendered permissible in digital spaces as it reflects offline social norms. Yet, within this hegemonic system, my interlocutors were still able to leverage claims of victimization but also of being unfairly accused (Campion-Vincent, 2005). They asserted that "the Media is against us [conservatives], and most Canadians seem to be eating it up" and "the media collusion with globalist liberal party should be investigated." Moreover, they argue that many go along with the media discourse for social clout or to avoid cancel culture. This evinces a belief that the hegemonic powers of society are in conflict with the right-wing. Again, while I would strongly argue that the social norms of Canadian society skew towards the white male normative standard, the "truth" of my interlocutors' claims are not the subject of inquiry here, but rather what conspiracy thinking does and what it reveals.

r/metacanada: Theorizing censorship and contested approaches

One of the most interesting instances of censorship was that of r/metacanada. It was interesting not because some heavy handed “ban hammer”-wielding elite demanded their silence as was the case for Tavakoli and the Iranian government. Rather, it happened because my interlocutors envisioned a future in which such an action would inevitably occur. They anticipated it. Imagined it. Perhaps even fantasized about it. A full-community censorship would, after all, help justify their victim narrative. As a result of this vivid and collective dream, r/metacanada chose to shut down their forum and migrate to omegacanada.win. The folk theories of censorship amongst r/metacanada users included the leftist and globalist censors, and these provide insight into the community’s experiences and ideologies. The folk theories invoked varied depending on the thread, yet they consistently reflected the censorship forces r/metacanada was reacting against.

Although most users focused the blame on leftists and Justin Trudeau or the Liberal Party for stifling their right to free speech, some chose to criticize the subreddit’s moderators and claimed they were traitors, cucks, and shills. This was a sentiment that emerged throughout my time in r/metacanada. Others pointed to the capitalist nature of the platforms and advocated for a libertarian approach. “Big Tech” was deemed incapable of stewarding a free social media landscape given that they were beholden to advertisers and governments, who were in turn controlled by globalists.⁵¹

It quickly became clear that although users generally agreed over the forces behind the censorship (leftists and globalists), the path forward was less unified. Some argued that the community should try to play by the rules and maintain a presence on Reddit (self-silencing), while others argued that it was time to find a new platform.

⁵¹ Again, this was an interesting line for me, a Marxist-feminist, to follow out as I too have concerns with the power of big tech companies and their billionaire leaders. For example, Elon Musk buying Twitter—the same Elon Musk who tweeted support for the Freedom Convoy’s GoFundMe struggles—will undoubtedly have an effect on socio-cultural and political aspects of Canada.

In line with much of the folk theory discourse I encountered across social media, r/metacanada users also felt they were victims of leftists censorship. Again, this was typically a nebulous and shifting other and rarely a specific user. Reddit administrators, usually described as the extreme-left, were typically invoked as the driving force,

C1: Why r comment scores being hidden. Is reddit censoring because their leftist talking points r getting downvoted? Social credit score, surveillance state and digital currency here we come.

C2: Reddit-left wing ideologues doing what left wing ideologues do best: censor people

To further substantiate their theories regarding the systematic suppression of their views by the “controlling left,” many users pointed to the lack of transparency in content moderation decisions. Just as Nurik’s (2019) participants expressed frustration when appealing bans or contesting moderation decisions, users on r/metacanada noted that it was difficult to understand why they were banned, “They banned me for complaining about mass migration (I even stipulated regardless of race). They refused to state what rule I broke.” Others chimed in with similar stories of being “downvoted to hell then permabanned, silenced, no right to a fair trial...in typical commie fashion: guilty, no matter what.” The frequent invocation of Soviet Union and Chinese Communist Party imagery linked Reddit’s censorship to leftist authoritarianism and positioned the users as victims. This discourse gave more specificity to the leftist folk theory, namely that this kind of leftism was extreme and authoritarian in nature.

Despite individual experiences of censorship and the belief that administrators were harsh in their authoritarian-style approach, Reddit is slow to ban entire communities (Massanari, 2015). Instead, one approach is to “quarantine” subreddits. This refers to restricting access to particular subreddits as a means of reducing the proliferation of controversial or hateful content. As Copland (2020) notes, quarantined subreddits have their reach substantially reduced. They are not found via searches or recommendations on the platform itself, and users must actively seek

out the forum even if they are already subscribed to it. Moreover, this approach is framed as an opportunity for the users to enact the behavioural change necessary to avoid an outright ban.

The threat of quarantining was often discussed on r/metacanada as sanctions were carried out against similar right-wing subreddits. Indeed, moderators pleaded with users to abide by the community's rules and guidelines, as well as the implicit censorship practices. This is a common tactic amongst right-wing groups who attempt to “tone down their rhetoric in an effort to maintain their presence online” (Scrivens & Amarasingam, 2020, p. 82). Here, users demonstrated that although they were restrained by leftist censorship policies, they were unwilling to cede the platform. Playing by the rules was often what came before talks of contingency plans.

Although the community, and in particular the moderators, were determined to maintain a presence on Reddit, they did set up a backup site on the “.win” platform. The site, [omegacanada.win](#), was initially set up as a “standalone mirror for reddit” which would “run parallel with the subreddit.” The idea of a parallel or alternative site was a common one throughout my fieldwork as users uploaded content to YouTube, including their alt-accounts, and BitChute to ensure their content reached their audience and remained accessible (see Chapter 4). The proponents of the new platform argued that while the rules would remain the same, they would “consider context and intent, and give the benefit of the doubt as we’re not being watched over by admins who are acting in bad faith.” However, they were clear that this was not a call to abandon Reddit; rather, they encouraged users to continue to push back and influence the norms of the platform. Again, this was an attempt to reinscribe meaning on acts of perceived silencing. Nevertheless, moderators realized the need for “a more secure/stable base to congregate in, given recent events on reddit.” This once again evinced a desire amongst right-wing communities for an enduring space wherein they can express themselves authentically without leftist or globalist control.

Despite their beliefs and practices, r/metacanada existed within a broader ecosystem of right-wing forums and was influenced by bans in other spaces. This approach to community continuity was tested following several high-profile subreddit bans as r/metacanada experienced an influx

of right-wing users looking for a new community. They were at the mercy of new users who shared their folk theories, but not necessarily their contingency plans, namely playing by the left's rules. In response, r/metacanada members expressed concern that this would result in their own quarantine or ban. As a moderator for r/metacanada noted, "there has been a significant migration from other subs, and their behaviours (which got those other subs banned) hasn't changed," which prompted the community to double down on efforts to avoid attracting the attention of Reddit's moderators. The bans conveyed the limits of discourse afforded by the platform to users and reinforced their folk theories.

In one discussion of the so-called "ban-refugees," humorously entitled "Attention Ban Wave Refugees -- Your subs got yeeted due to excessive edge posting. MetaCanada has closed its boarders [borders], you are not welcome here" users debated contingency plans. Many expressed frustrations with the limitations of Reddit and the need to employ communicative strategies to maintain their presence on the platform, arguing that the creative means they had developed for effectively communicating their message were no longer sufficient. They did not want to behave; they wanted to take up anti-leftism in earnest. Thus, the way forward for the community seemed clear: "Get the sub banned from this shit site and we can all move over to omega. I don't see the point in self-censoring to stay here." Advocates of what some called a "Reddexit" believed the ".win" site would provide the affordances necessary for authentic communication and community,

Good lord, please all of you, leave this shithole of a site... This is utter and complete garbage from the interface to the censorship... Complete shit. It takes 20 fucking seconds to make an account at a new site that starts with the word 'the' and then has a word that is the name of a certain world leader and then there is a dot and then the word "win".

There is even a Canadian version of the site and other special related sites...

Yet, when users suggested "edge-posting" on the community's backup ".win" site, others were quick to dismiss it, "Edge post away, but expect to be regulated," evincing contradictory opinions about the affordances of the new platform or the viability of other alternative social media sites. In a thread on Reddit's new rules and moderation standards, one user urged other

posters to “Go to gab and voat or stop whining.” The comment was heavily downvoted in the thread, prompting a follow-up comment, “Edit: sure, just prove you want to complain more than you want a solution.” Despite the downvotes, another user remarked, “yup. 100%. Like everything else on this garbage site [this sub is worthless]. Join GAB, fuck jannies.”⁵²

Some advocated for more users to use the subreddit’s Discord server or any of the other alternative platforms that would allow users to discuss their interests without having to hide their meaning. They argued that joining these alternative platforms would allow users to “stay in the group” before the subreddit was censored. Yet, they were skeptical that such a site could exist unless run by conservatives or libertarians,

C1: It has really become obvious at this point: We need a new search engine, new social media site, and a new competitor to YouTube. Run by Conservatives for Conservatives. We shouldn’t put up with this dishonest censorship anymore.

C2: Run by libertarians. But don’t expect an easy fight. Gab already exists but Apple and google refuse to allow the apps in their stores.

This pointed to the community’s disillusionment with “Big Tech,” namely that it was complicit in the globalist or leftist censorship practices. As another user argued, “In fact [Big Tech] don’t give a shit about the social consequences, it is per request from the advertisers who aim at the general public who wish to find messages that aren’t conflicting with the MSM’s [mainstream media] narrative.” This again reflected their belief that the hegemonic forces were against the community and were upholding the nebulous leftist other. This also invoked the globalist folk theory, reproducing the longstanding trope of a Jewish-controlled media.

Advocates for relocating to new sites were explicitly critical of the subreddit itself and its moderators, “I’ve already pretty much dumped this train wreck of a sub as it’s no good for staying on the pulse anymore but whatever, you can keep your little vanity project as there are

⁵² Jannies is internet slang for moderators who are overly sensitive or censor minorly offensive content. See: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Jannie>

many other better places now. Cower in fear of losing it, you guys have become what you hate.” According to these users, the leftists and globalists had effectively weaponized the techno-conditions of the platform and through censorship policies silenced users, and r/metacanada moderators had helped. Despite the technical and structural affordances of the site, specifically the official rules of the platform, the implicit censorship made their desired communicative practices impossible. This prompted feelings of paranoia regarding bans as users continued to push back against the conditions of the platform and consider contingencies,

C1: They’ll be coming for us soon.

C2: It’ll be any day now.

C3: Would you use another platform that would be like Reddit but that would give users free speech. What can we do about it? Is there such a platform right now ?

C4: I would, if we could somehow all perform a mass exodus.

What is key here is the notion of a “mass exodus” or a simultaneous relocation to another site that the community agreed upon. Urman and Katz (2020) argued that such relocations to Telegram have allowed previously banned communities to re-emerge and that the new space allowed for increased radicalization and more authentic discourse. Again, this focus on ‘authentic’ discourse and spaces that allow for such exchanges evinces a belief in victimization, but also a sense of entitlement. My interlocutors felt they deserved a space in which they could express themselves authentically regardless of any harm it might inflict, and it is easier to sidestep reflections on harmful behaviour when one adheres to a “delirium of accusation and inquisition” which allows adherents to “prove their innocence and infallibility” (Campion-Vincent, 2005, p.106).

Such an exodus would, however, require agreement on contingency plans. At this point in my fieldwork, I had little faith that a heterogeneous community of nearly 40,000 users would agree

on the path forward despite their shared frustrations, media ideologies, and folk theories. Yet, in July 2020, a moderator post appeared on the r/metacanada's front page titled "The end of /r/metacanada." The lengthy post outlined the grievances and struggles of the moderators of r/metacanada, including many of the prominent folk theories I had come to expect from the community. Reddit, they argued, was increasingly stringent in their rules and liberal in their user and subreddit bans,

As all of you are aware, reddit's rules are becoming increasingly strict, and they are banning users and entire subreddits without warning for rules that were never stated and never enforced prior to the bans. Over the years, as a mod team, we have carefully avoided trouble with the admins by following rules and paying attention to their constantly-changing definitions of what is "rule-breaking", keeping in mind that the rules for left-wing subs do not apply.

The moderators had until this point attempted to respond to the techno-conditions of the platform and work within its content moderation parameters despite their vehement belief that it was politically biased and anti-free speech. In the wake of further restrictions, the moderators unilaterally chose to lock the subreddit on August 1, 2020 and encouraged users to relocate to the ".win" site,

We have already moved to www.omegacanada.win, which is part of the T D dot WIN network, started by r/thedonald mods who were treated even more unfairly. They have a large and active user base and we trust them to be fair about rules moving forward... We encourage you all to leave reddit behind, stop supporting this shit, and hopefully join us on the new site, where you can post more freely.

What is of interest here, is the manifestation of the community's folk theories and media ideologies, and how these factored into their community contingency plan. When they noted the unfair treatment ("keeping in mind that the rules for left-wing subs do not apply"), the moderators explicitly invoked the leftist folk theory, and they once again pointed to their frustration with a lack of transparency that doubled down on the nebulous nature of censorship

(Nurik, 2019). They also pointed to the sense that a ban was inevitable, a reoccurring sentiment I encountered throughout my fieldwork. Playing by the rules, using strategic language such as (((they))) to denote Jews, was no longer sufficient. A mass migration was the only viable contingency plan for r/metacanada.

As I have noted previously, a concern for communities when they migrate is their inability to reassemble their numbers even if the affordances of the new platform would include less regulated speech (Urman & Katz, 2020). As a result, r/metacanada moderators gave users a month's notice that the site would be locked and archived, allowing them time to make the transition or identify other spaces to congregate. This strategic act was met with some resistance as users lamented that they should have gone all out in their discourse and let the administrators ban the subreddit.

The choice of omegacanada.win was also contested. It was promoted for the large conservative-minded userbase, which in theory would allow for the reconstruction of their community. Yet, some users were uncertain of the platform choice, noting, "Moving to omega will keep a chunk of your existing viewers/participants (how big, who knows) but it will pretty much eliminate the stream of new people finding the sub." As of writing, the ".win" site is functional and active, albeit not to the extent of r/metacanada.

To r/metacanada, the leftists and globalists had so effectively manipulated the affordances of Reddit through moderation and censorship policies that the subreddit was rendered an inauthentic and ineffectual space for political and social action. Their response represents an exemplary case study of the power of folk theories to affect contingency planning amongst the Canadian right-wing, and it reflects the community's perception of Reddit's affordances and techno-conditions. The ensuing arguments on the announcement thread further demonstrate both the contested nature of the contingencies and the unified nature of their folk theories and media ideologies.

Conclusion

Censorship has a clear and lasting impact on right-wing groups across Canada's social media landscape. The repercussions of content moderation, suspension, bans, and de/no-platforming include disruptions to fundraising, radicalization, and recruitment are well documented within the scholarly literature (Caiani & Kroll, 2015). In this chapter, I have argued that censorship also impacts how, when, and where communities form, and it shapes their media ideologies for each space beyond the structural affordances of the platform.

Moreover, they develop folk theories through conspiracy thinking that reach across platforms to explain their experiences of censorship, which serve to unify the right-wing across the social media landscape. These reflect prevailing attitudes I have observed throughout my fieldwork and discuss in this dissertation. In particular, I find the use of anticipation and imagination fascinating. My interlocutors were not just theorizing—or thinking through like para-ethnographers—the experiences and (individual and anecdotal) data at hand, they were developing complex theories about what *would* happen. This sense of inevitability with regards to a decidedly negative event, drastically influenced the behaviours of my interlocutors at an individual and community level.

This brings to mind the work of Cohen (2011) on moral panics. One of the ways in which Cohen assists in my intellectual heavy lifting is in his assertion that “discrete and volatile moral panics might indeed once have existed but they have now been replaced by a generalized moral stance, a permanent moral panic resting on a seamless web of social anxieties” (p. xxxvi). And this notion of a generalized moral stance that reflects a web of anxieties rings true for my work. It is not just immigrants, but rather a dozen other issues that are bound up with the fuzzy notion of ‘the immigrant.’ Similarly, the issue is not women, but again the many conflicting and contradictory takes on feminism, women's sexuality, and our reproductive potential. These are both entangled with one another, and to parcel out distinct panics as discrete entities is futile. Indeed, the truth of this was made abundantly clear to me as I tried to divide out my data into units for analysis into the discrete chapters that follow this one. The seamlessness of my interlocutors' landscape of anxiety, fear, and anger was obvious. So too was its enduring nature as moral panics, in their previous rendering, were temporally discrete with time between each era of panic.

Following Cohen (2011), I argue that my fieldwork reflects not a series of discrete panics, but rather a prolonged state of anxiety during which various issues would bubble to the surface and then slowly settle to the bottom. Importantly, I should note that I cannot think of a single issue that emerged during my fieldwork that was sufficiently resolved. Rather, all the mini-moral panics have become threads that are tangled up in the broader panic over the state of straight white conservative and Christian men in Canada. The issue of “free speech” represents an ongoing thread in this prolonged state of anxiety, and it is an extremely useful one to follow as it reveals much along the way.

Chapter 7 - Nativism and the City

When I consider the term nativism, two words come to mind: imagine and feeling. I suppose this should not be particularly surprising given that nativism concerns the nation, and I follow Anderson's (2006) argument that the nation is an imagined community. So, let me begin with a discussion of what it is to imagine, as well as its relation to nativism and entitlement.

Merriam-Webster defines imagine as “to form a mental image of (something not present)” or “to form a notion of without sufficient basis.”⁵³ While perhaps a simple definition for something I find quite complex, this is a good starting point, and it works particularly well in conversation with the work of Daniels (1997) and Manne (2019). As I noted previously in my theory chapter, Daniels' work highlights the power of imagination in white supremacist movements. For these individuals, it is not the actual threat of Black men against them or their families, but rather the belief that Black male violence could happen. The mere possibility, however miniscule, of assault or rape is sufficient for them to feel validated in their need for a white only nation. To return to Merriam-Webster, such an imagining is neither present nor with sufficient basis. Yet, it persists.

Let me turn now to Manne (2019) who argues in her work on male entitlement that it is not actual individual women who defy and deny men. Rather, it is a shadowy, nebulous, and vague category of person who sparks their rage. It is an imagined woman who spurns them, but it is real women who become the recipients of aggrieved male rage. This process parallels the reworking of every Black man into a would-be/could-be aggressor within a white supremacist context. Within my research, I have the imagined stranger—the new immigrant, who is likely Black or Brown and either Muslim or Sikh. This imagined stranger is so broad that many can fit the description, and therefore many can feel the repercussions of aggrieved entitlement. As Schrag (2010) noted in his introduction, the list of things that makes a person unwanted and threatening ranges from race to ethnicity to religion to customs (see Introduction for discussion).

⁵³ Merriam Webster (n.d.) “imagine.” URL: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/imagine>

But what about feelings? Merriam-Webster has a number of definitions for feeling, but I think “an emotional state or reaction,” “capacity to respond emotionally,” and “often unreasoned opinion or belief” are interesting starting points.⁵⁴ Feelings are something we all experience within ourselves but also collectively. I explore at length the feelings of discomfort, fatigue, and trauma I experienced throughout this work. I also explore the feelings of collective identity that things like hockey can elicit in a nation. What I highlight here is that, while these feelings are reactions to things we experience in the world, they can also be reactions to things we imagine. Take for example Daniels’ description of the white supremacist. He *feels* threatened by Black men and worries about the safety of his white wife, and this feeling exists whether or not such threats have actually been uttered.

This evinces a sort of toxic compatibility between imagination and feelings. It is possible for people to become emotional over things that are not real, but rather made up in their minds. For my interlocutors, as I will explore further in this chapter, the threat is expulsion and alienation by the imagined stranger. Some vague, nebulous, non-white immigrant is going to take their jobs and their homes, and they are furious, anxious, and frustrated with what they feel is an inevitability (even if it is only an imagined one).

I have noted throughout this dissertation that there is a ‘slippery slope’ when it comes to discussing the feelings that inform the rhetoric of my interlocutors. This slope leads from presenting these feelings for what they are, that is emotional reactions, to what they are not, namely accurate depictions of empirical reality. The latter runs the risk of legitimizing nativist sentiments (Bhambra, 2017; Mondon & Winter, 2020). And so, in this chapter I grapple with the slipperiness of presenting the emotional reactions, the feelings, of my interlocutors while also acknowledging the role that imagination (and indeed at times fantasy) plays in this process.

This is not to say that urban centers are not experiencing an influx of non-white immigrants who apply for jobs and homes. It is also possible that my interlocutors experienced antagonistic exchanges wherein a person of colour made them feel unwelcome or unsafe as individuals. All people have the capacity for cruelty just as we all have the capacity for compassion. Yet, my

⁵⁴ Merriam Webster (n.d.) “feeling.” URL: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feeling>

interlocutors' discourse takes the anecdote—and it should also be noted that an anecdote share on the internet may very well be fabricated—of the *individual* straight white Christian male and extrapolates it onto the *category* of straight white Christian male in much the same way as Daniels' white supremacists and Manne's violent misogynists. Here, anecdote and imagination come together to foster feelings of aggrieved entitlement, alienation, and anxiety. Feelings that, once again, do not have to be entirely rooted in reality. This is all to say that this chapter is about what my interlocutors' nativist discourse reveals about their idealized and imagined version of Canada, and it should not be seen as a reflection of empirical reality. For that, I would encourage readers to turn to literature on the demographic makeups of cities, rather than the rhetoric of demographic replacement.

On Nativism, Briefly

Let me (re)turn briefly to the concept of nativism as it relates to the 'threatening other' and the city. As Schrag (2010) notes, certain immigrants have historically been considered unfit for assimilation into the dominant culture and denied belonging in the white nation: those reimagined as threatening is a category that has, of course, changed over time and differs between countries. Indeed, they shifted over the course of my fieldwork. Yet, as Daniels (1997) argues, the primary antagonist for white supremacists is the *racialized* other. Within her American context, this has historically meant Black and Jewish people, whose Blackness and Jewishness are set in opposition to whiteness. In more recent years this has been expanded to include Mexican immigrants, as well as Asian Americans in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic (DeCook & Yoon, 2021). In Europe, immigrants from Muslim countries have been targeted as the unwanted other in recent years (Engbersen & Broeders, 2009; Keskinen, 2013), and there has been a long history of anti-Semitism in Europe as well.

The Canadian context is similar to the American and European experiences, but it has its own historical and cultural nuance. As noted elsewhere in this dissertation (see Introduction), Canada has a history of discrimination against Chinese and Japanese immigrants, as well as those from the southern regions of Europe and Africa, and this preoccupation with the cultural and racial makeup of immigrants persists in Canada today. It is also no surprise to scholars of nativism that

the discourse is resurgent. As Higham (2002) notes in his historical account of nativism in the United States, “nativism usually rises and falls in some relation to other intense kinds of national feelings” (p. 4). As I have argued thus far and will continue to argue throughout the rest of this dissertation, now is a moment of intense feelings for my interlocutors. They are anxious, despondent, disillusioned, aggrieved, resentful, and angry. They feel that the political elites, alongside their white countrymen and women, are betraying their version of Canada. Beyond their feelings, it is a decidedly precarious time in our nation’s history. We are in the midst of a global pandemic, housing market crisis, and economic downturn, and we are faced with an impending climate crisis. We are also being asked, as a nation, to reckon with our history of settler colonialism, genocide, and ongoing white and male supremacist violence. This situation strikes me as an expected cause of a rise in intense feelings about the nation.

Nativist discussions of immigrants have often used metaphors to convey meaning and feelings. Immigrants have often been referred to by nativist thinkers using catastrophic language like hordes, invasion, and floods. Yet, pollutant-based language is also common and reflects anxieties around purity. Metaphors of the immigrant as a disease, infection, infestation, or contamination have all been invoked throughout our history (Cisneros, 2008). These metaphors of immigrants as polluting bring to mind notions of purity. Purity is, of course, a common theme amongst white supremacists as much of their ideology is predicated on racial purity.⁵⁵ For my interlocutors, at least in the discourse I present here, purity refers to both time and place. They long for a time when Canada was supposedly ethnically pure, or at least nearly pure depending on the level of collective misremembering and nostalgia work at play (Wohl et al., 2020). But it is also about spaces. The cities, for example, are rendered sites of impurity due to high numbers of immigrants and non-white people. This contamination brings with it ideas of crime, degeneracy, and danger. Such a perspective relies on imagination work that posits that an all-white space would be crime free and safe for all.⁵⁶ Similarly, rural communities are (re)imagined as “untouched” and “unchanged” spaces of whiteness. They are then inscribed with feelings of safety, belonging, and survival (Forchtner, 2016).

⁵⁵ Take for example the notion of miscegenation and their violent aversion to racial mixing.

⁵⁶ Or perhaps only safe for white men. See Chapter 8.

But what do my interlocutors mean by ‘immigrant’ here? Who are they referring to when they speak of floods, invasions, and contaminations? It is important to clarify the term immigrants in the context of nativism. Canada, after all, encourages immigration and welcomes immigrants from all around the world each year. The Canadian economy depends on recruiting migrant workers. Yet, my interlocutors reference only a particular subset of these people. Here, the feared others immigrating to Canada were not the white Europeans who my interlocutors assumed would be active contributors to Canadian society and capable of assimilation into the “we.” Rather, my interlocutors were referencing the non-white and non-European immigrants assumed to “only want handouts” (referred to as gimmie-grants) and would resist assimilation. These feared immigrants were those who came from ‘shithole countries,’ and were assumed to be poor, illiterate, incapable of speaking English, and non-Christian (Kendi, 2019). They were rendered a “them” in opposition to the “we” of white Canadians and European immigrants. As in the American context, there was evidence of both anti-Blackness and anti-Asian hate. Yet, it was frequently directed at recent immigrants and focused on issues of assimilation and criminality, as well as (undeserved) financial and political power. These discourses revealed a form of white supremacy framed in terms of cultural incompatibility and entitlement.

As Arjun Appadurai (2006) reminds us, globalization stirs up social uncertainty during which we become increasingly unsure who the “we” actually is among “us” and who the “they” are (and how many of “them” there are). The uncertainty that globalization stirs up also creates an “intolerable anxiety” about the relationship between “them” and the “state” and specifically the state-provided goods (i.e., the “gimmie-grants”). Minorities elicit new anxieties about rights, citizenship, belonging, and entitlements and they become scapegoats as nations struggle with precarious natural resources and sovereignty in the face of globalization (p. 42). Thus, it does not really matter how many minorities there are in Canada. Any at all pose a threat to the white city and the nation broadly.

What I want to argue here is that this is a period of great anxiety in part because of globalization but also economic uncertainty. Therefore, it is no surprise that nativism has emerged as a strong theme in my work. While it has manifested in many areas, what I want to dig into now is the relationship between nativism and the city.

Sad Keanu: Memes and Belonging



Figure 26. Screenshot of Reddit post entitled “how I feel walking the streets of Toronto” with a “Sad Keanu” meme

If I had to define my research in a single image, it would be Figure 26. It is screenshot of a Reddit post entitled “How I feel after walking the streets of Toronto” with a “Sad Keanu” meme with the phrase “I don’t belong here” added to it. It also happens to be my favourite piece of data. I favour it because it is emotionally evocative, the caption makes a clear and concise connection between the meme and the Redditor’s personal experience, and it prompted many conversations about nativism and belonging in and beyond Toronto.

The meme itself is an image of actor Keanu Reeves eating a sandwich by himself on a park bench. The popular interpretation of the image is that he is sad, hence the meme name, “Sad Keanu.” It is reused and remixed in a number of formats to elicit feelings of sadness, alienation,

and despondency.⁵⁷ The meme creator altered the image to include the caption “I don’t belong here,” which doubles down on feelings of alienation and despair already present in the image. This is then rendered geographically specific by the Reddit user who shared it on r/metacanada with the post title “How I feel after walking the streets of Toronto.” The Redditors who interacted with the post, however, broadened the discussion beyond Toronto by connecting the original poster’s (OP) experience to other parts of Canada, including Brampton and Vancouver.

While the post received moderate interaction with a couple hundred upvotes and a few dozen comments before the post died, it was an interesting remixing of ideas and modalities that spoke to much of the nativist sentiment I have encountered in relation to urban spaces. It evoked a sense of alienation at the hands of immigration, feelings of entitlement to a space and what it looked like, and it was an excellent example of global discourses manifesting in a localized setting. Because of this, I want to use the meme as a prompt and guide for the aims of this chapter.

The meme evokes ideas about belonging, alienation, and anxiety, all of which featured prominently in my work. In this chapter, I introduce these ideas as they relate to the concept of nativism and the right of a specific group to determine who belongs and who is unwanted. Here, I reflect on my interlocutors’ assertion that they have been stripped of the decision-making power regarding immigration and have in turn been rendered the unwanted other. I argue that their reliance on a nativist framework for understanding Canada and who belongs here is what produces feelings of alienation and anxiety about their future and Canada’s more generally. But first, I want to attend to the meme itself and in so doing pick out a few threads in the overarching weave of this chapter.

I see this chapter as having three layers of data. At the center are two memes, Figure 26 shown above and Figure 27 that is explored below. These are not particularly unique or extreme memes; rather, they are what I consider exemplary in their ability to communicate major themes related to anti-immigrant rhetoric, namely entitlement, alienation, and exclusionary definitions of Canadian-ness. In analysis of these memes, I follow Shifman’s (2014) call to attend to content,

⁵⁷ See the Know Your Memes entry for examples: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/sad-keanu/photos>

form, and stance of memes, as well as the commentary by users (Doerr, 2017). To that point, the second layer of my analysis knits in the comments users made about the memes, as well as those that were prompted by the meme. Finally, these are contextualized within broader discussions of entitlement, alienation, and exclusionary in-group/out-group renderings. These comments will be explored in the following section but let me begin first with the meme itself.

Feeling through a Meme

Memes, despite their association with millennial and GenZ internet culture, actually originated with Richard Dawkins in 1976, when he used the term to describe cultural replicators, or those institutions and systems that reproduced and transmitted cultural phenomena (McGrath, 2005). Language and religion were examples of these. Shifman (2004) describes these as “pieces of cultural information that pass along from person to person, but gradually scale into a shared social phenomenon” (p. 18). Of course, memes are now conventionally understood as images or short media clips with corresponding words or sound. Historically, these were often jokes that gained influence as they were reproduced, remixed, and transmitted across the internet (Davison, 2012). Yet, memes are not always funny, nor do they have to go viral to achieve their purpose (Mack, 2021). Rather, they have to communicate something to and resonate with the viewer. In this way, I can understand what the right-wing memes are trying to communicate; however, they rarely resonate with me (at least not in the way the original poster likely anticipated).

As I noted above, the meme shared in r/metacanada was neither viral nor highly engaged with. It was also not meant to be a joke, but rather a despondent reflection on the poster’s emotional state in relation to their home, Toronto, and immigration. This is where Shifman’s (2004) attention to *content*, *form*, and *stance* are key. Content refers to the ideas or ideological grounding of the meme itself (e.g., anti-feminist, anti-immigrant). Form is how these ideas are represented visually or aurally (e.g., static images, video, or audio). Finally, stance is how the creator positions themselves in relation to the viewer (i.e., the stance they take), and may include things like tone or style of communication (e.g., irony, satire, mocking). This, I argue, is the most difficult to ascertain, and a degree of cultural fluency is required to understand the stance of the meme as well as the stance of the receiving audience or community, which long-term

ethnography certainly assists an outsider to understand. This is also a strong justification for including commentary and situating the meme within the community more broadly.⁵⁸ After all, sarcasm and other forms of humour do not always translate well in digital spaces.

Beginning with *form*, this is a static image meme, and a popular one at that. It features Keanu Reeves eating a sandwich and he is often interpreted as sad. There appears to be garbage next to him as well as a pigeon in the foreground. Nothing about this image is particularly invigorating or humorous. It is bleak, grey, and concrete filled. This static form was also a common format for memes on r/metacanada. Other social media sites, such as Instagram for example, may facilitate the sharing of audio or video-based memes, yet r/metacanada traded predominantly in static images.

What is interesting, however, in terms of form is the use of Keanu Reeves as the subject of the meme. This is important to consider alongside the words “I don’t belong here” in large white text. It begs the question of who the subject is: the poster or Keanu? Or is Keanu taken to stand for the poster? If one is unfamiliar with the meme and Reeves, one might mistakenly assume the man in the image is white. Thus, the content of the meme could be read as “I, a *white man*, don’t belong here [in Toronto]” despite the fact that Reeves was born outside of Canada and is of mixed heritage. Yet, given the way the meme was framed, as well as the community in which it was posted, the use of a white-passing and straight-passing man in the meme is worth noting because of what it is not. This is not a meme that features a black man, a woman, or an openly gay white man. Was this a deliberate choice in terms of form? Perhaps not. But this speaks to the ways in which whiteness and maleness are taken for granted standard and normalized as Canadian. This is not an image of a “sad” Drake, Rachel McAdams, or Daniel Levy, on a park bench despite the fact that they are also Canadian actors and media icons who have “sad” memes the poster could have chosen in terms of form. They are, however, deviations from the straight white male norm of the discourse (and userbase) in right-wing social media spaces like r/metacanada.

⁵⁸ There are generational differences with regards to memes. Often times, an anti-immigrant meme was shared, and it was poorly received, despite following community norms with regards to content. The form or stance were critiqued as “Boomer tier” and “cringe” and rejected. Without cultural fluency (i.e., knowing what memes are in vogue) or attending to comments, the researcher is at risk of inaccurate analysis.

As with stance, the ideology or *content* of the meme at times requires an understanding of the community in which it was produced and shared. A meme of sad Keanu Reeves with the caption “I don’t belong here” and “How I feel after walking the streets of Toronto” could, in theory, be shared in a leftist anti-capitalist group to critique the unsustainable and unaffordable housing market in the city. I could share a similar meme about walking through parts of Edmonton or Calgary that are clearly well outside of my tax bracket. Yet, this was shared in r/metacanada, a site that had consistently over the course of my fieldwork been far more inclined to critique immigration than wealth disparities (although the latter did, in fact, occur at times). Given what I have repeatedly experienced throughout my ethnographic work, the content of this meme, especially when one considers the commentary below, references a distinctly anti-immigrant ideology. Immigrants, particularly those from non-European nations, were remaking Toronto into a space that was unrecognizable and unwelcoming to the poster (Massey, 1996).

Finally, the tone is distinctly despondent and serious, rather than the sarcastic or mocking tones that were common *stances* amongst right-wing memes that often took shots at Liberal and NDP politicians. This meme’s tone is meant to convey a sense of alienation, which was picked up with enthusiasm by the commenters. Ultimately, the content, tone, and stance resonated with members of r/metacanada, and they doubled down on the themes I argue this meme exemplifies: alienation, entitlement, and exclusionary definitions of Canadian-ness. This speaks directly to the feelings that my interlocutors experience, but what of imagination? What is its role in this nativist discourse?

Imagining Dislocation through Comments

It is not surprising that the meme was in relation to Toronto. Cities were a constant source of frustration and anxiety for my interlocutors. Many lamented the changes they had experienced within their neighbourhoods, districts, and cities. In their estimation, these were almost unanimously negative and served to undermine the country and its identity. Specific cities often surfaced as key “battle grounds” for the demographic struggle. The most frequently mentioned were Toronto and the GTA (specifically Markham and Brampton) and Vancouver given their

high immigrant populations.⁵⁹ Richmond was also often referenced in these discussions, with users arguing, “You should check out Richmond. It’s all mainland Chinese. And they are all very deliberate in making a point of transforming it into China.” But let me turn now to the comments this particular meme elicited,

C1: I just went to the park here in Toronto yesterday. I feel like we’ve been conquered. Walked through it and I don’t think I heard one person speaking English.

C2: I know exactly how you feel. Everything is so different from even just a few years ago. It doesn’t feel like Canada anymore (not talking about Toronto, I don’t live there). I feel like I want to go home, but there is no home to go back to, it’s just gone.

Here users lamented a loss of home and feelings of being conquered. There is a sense of longing for a by-gone era when their sense of place was unchallenged by non-white immigrants. There is also a sense of uncertainty with regards to these spaces. Will they continue to change? Will they ever feel like home? As cultural geographer Doreen Massey (1996) points out, this uncertainty about places and how we relate to them is the product of both nostalgia and imagination. She asks,

How, in the face of all this movement and intermixing, can we retain any sense of a local place and its particularity? An (idealised) notion of an era when places were (supposedly) inhabited by coherent and homogenous communities is set against the current fragmentation and disruption... But the occasional longing for such coherence is nonetheless a sign of the geographical fragmentations, the spatial disruption, of our times. (p. 24)

⁵⁹ The GTA discourse included anti-immigrant rhetoric about a wide variety of ethnicities, while Vancouver was frequently focused on Asian immigrant, particularly Chinese. This is illustrated by user comments later in this section.

Here, Massey (1996) makes clear that this idealized and imagined sense of place was likely never a reality experienced by my interlocutors nor their ancestors.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, it produces a sense of ‘dislocation’ between what my interlocutors experience and what they imagine – as well as what they feel entitled to experience. Massey (1996) goes on to note that,

And occasionally, too, it has been part of what has given rise to defensive and reactionary responses – certain forms of nationalism, sentimentalised recovering of sanitised ‘heritages’, and outright antagonism to newcomers and ‘outsiders’ (p. 24)

This is a particularly interesting thread to follow in this section as the poster of the “I don’t belong here” meme had “MCGA” in their username. This is a clear riff on Donald Trump’s Make America Great Again (MAGA) in which it is Make Canada Great Again—itsself another example of a meme and of remixing of content. It is also an example of nostalgia for an idealized era wherein places were “coherent and homogenous.” Part of MAGA’s success was the deployment of this collective nostalgia wherein disillusioned and disenfranchised Americans were pitted against the ‘newcomers’ who were supposedly at fault for their economic precarity, namely immigrants and elites.⁶¹ This produced a feeling that self-continuity would only be possible if these outsiders were removed from the nation (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2013).

Certainly, a different America existed, just as a different Toronto existed prior to the 1970s. Yet, what is interesting to consider here is how different these spaces are from how my interlocutors remember them. Were cities truly the homogenous white enclaves my interlocutors imagine? Or were they always sites of cultural exchanges and complex negotiations of belonging? In her work on settler colonialism and the city of Toronto, Freeman (2010) argues that Toronto has always been what Mary Louise Pratt refers to as a “contract zone” in which different groups meet. To ignore this is minimize a history that is diverse, complicated, and contradictory. To unpack what cities were like before the 1970s further is out of the scope of this chapter, but what I want to

⁶⁰ See Higham (2002) for a discussion of the nativist rhetoric aimed at “undesirable” and “unassimilable” European immigrants in the US, including the Irish (Catholics) and Germans (“radical” Marxists)

⁶¹ As Bhambra (2020) noted, however, it was predominantly white *middle-class* voters who delivered Trump his victory as well as *white* working-class (disillusioned and disenfranchised) voters. Analyses commonly focused on the working-class but did not attend to race, which made it seem like working class people of colour voted for Trump which they overwhelmingly did not.

highlight is the possibility of (mis)remembering. Here, I am drawing attention once again to the process of imagination and feelings amongst my interlocutors.

As I have discussed elsewhere, drawing on the work of Wohl et al., (2020) and their notion of the malleability of collective memory, there is often a *misremembering* of history, and this misremembering serves a purpose: it is meant to inform the ‘in-group’ of who they are and what they can be in the future (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2013). It relies on romanticized and idealized understandings of national, ethnic, and cultural histories, and it also has a tendency to remember the positive aspects of the history and to downplay the more unsavoury components. For example, it doubles down on white male centric notions of national identity, like the hardships of settling the West and the sacrifices made while fighting during the two world wars. Yet, in doing so, it glosses over the violent removal of Indigenous people in order to create the new cities. Although given the glorification of colonialism in my fieldwork, perhaps this is not seen as something to hide but rather emphasize (see Introduction on settler colonialism). It also ignores the complex relations between various European ethnic groups, particularly those who were not always considered quite white and functioned as ‘internal others’ (Lapiņa & Vertelytė, 2020). There has always been an unwanted newcomer or outsider in Canadian cities—from the Ukrainian to the Syrian fleeing war in their homelands—but such a remembering is inconvenient. Thus, in the case of my interlocutors, they remember cities as they need them to be, as spaces of homogenous and uncontested whiteness. This gives them something to reach back to in their longing for a sense of place, as well as something to root their frustrations in. This process of sanitizing and misremembering was common throughout my fieldwork, and it is worth turning to the broader context from which this meme emerged.

The Broader Context of a Meme and Its Comments

Now that I have provided an exemplar piece of data, let me zoom out to the greater context in which this meme was produced and distributed as this will help substantiate my claims about the meme as well as the comments. Zooming out also attends to the ways that my interlocutors

combine idioms and tropes (comments and memes), and how these are then assembled in larger scripts and broader narratives through imagination, fantasy, and story work.⁶²

So, what are the scripts and narratives that the Sad Keanu meme contributes to? What story do my interlocutors tell about themselves and Canada through it? One of the key premises of my dissertation work and my analytical engagement with my interlocutors, data, and field experiences is that entitlement is a root cause of much of the violent discourse. This has been used to frame my work on women and the right-wing in relation to demographic replacement and birth rates. Here, I use it in a manner more akin to my analysis of white Canadian masculinity and hockey. It is not an entitlement to an actual thing (e.g., women's bodies and reproductive capacity), but rather to an *imagined* thing, namely the nation and its identity. As I note in my chapter on hockey, the actual work of creating an imagined Canadian collective identity was the work of a select few, and it was formed to meet their needs and desires (Robidoux, 2002). As a result, it was distinctly straight, white, and masculine. Rather than focusing on these aspects, however, I want to discuss here the notion of how a “select few” were tasked with making Canada in their own image.

Canada, many of my interlocutors argued, had always been a white nation built on British and French cultures,⁶³ and it suited them just fine that this reflected their history and heritage as well. Others were a bit broader in their list of who counted as early Canadians and included those of Germanic, Eastern European, and Scandinavian heritage. This was in line with much of the early Canadian literature on identity that saw Canadians as descending from a rugged northern stock and emerging from an equally rugged northern environment (Berger, 1966; Massey, 1948). These have become what some call “Old Stock” Canadians (see former PM Stephen Harper's

⁶² While my sort of “scaling up” from tropes to narratives emerged organically as I assembled my data into my own sort of narrative, an interested reader could turn to Zivkovic (2011) and his work on idioms, tropes, scripts, plots and narratives for a sort of analytical scaffold.

⁶³ Some of my interlocutors would occasionally mention the influence of Indigenous cultures in the formation of Canadian identity. This was by no means common, however. Moreover, such a line of reasoning placed British, French and Indigenous claims to the land on the same level, which gave the former a sense of legitimacy.

comments in Hopper, 2015).⁶⁴ Similar terms used by interlocutors included multi-generational Canadians and Euro-Canadians.

In one Reddit thread I challenged a poster on their pan-Canadian critique of demographic changes and national identity by arguing that Canada has distinct regional differences that reflect local politics as well as different patterns of immigration. Moreover, immigration always included people of colour and non-Christians. They responded that it would not “be a stretch” to argue that Canada was a WASP country “excluding Catholic French areas, of course” and that this has been challenged by immigration in a new and extreme way as it “destroys our culture since the new comers have no respect for the established norms.” This sort of discourse illuminated how my interlocutors saw themselves as threatened, as well as in conflict and opposition with many people in Canada, including their fellow white Canadians. This process produced the feelings of dislocation discussed above. Canada was no longer the homogenous WASP nation it had (supposedly) once been.

What I want to emphasize here is that my interlocutors very much imagined themselves as not only the heirs of this national identity, but as the arbitrators as well. They were the ones to determine the “established norms” and maintain them. They felt, by virtue of their (sanitized) heritage, lineages, and settler ancestors, that they should dictate the state of Canada and its identity. However, anti-racist and feminist movements, as well as increased immigration from non-white nations, have challenged this long-held assumption of power and control, as well as entitlement and inheritance. This results in what I describe as a backlash (Braithwaite, 2004), or what Massey (1996) would describe as reactionary forms of nationalism, which produced interesting discourses about cities.

In another thread on Reddit, which was prompted by a British immigrant asking why everyone in “Canada” seemed to hate Americans, users took the opportunity to explore how Toronto was no longer representative of “Canada” because of high levels of immigration and low levels of

⁶⁴ It should also be noted that the use of “stock” carries with it notions of breeding, eugenics, and racial purity. Old Stock specifically refers to people of white European heritage and carries with it notions of racial superiority see McReynolds (1997).

assimilation. This once again evinced my trifecta of alienation, entitlement, and exclusionary identity making practices. Let me turn to a few of the comments,

C1: Canada? Are you sure? Toronto isn't Canada anymore. There is no hint of a Canadian city there.

C2: Exactly. Toronto is some Mumbai-Shanghai hybrid. It's not Canada.

Such comments evince the notion that there is something distinct about Canada, and while they do not describe what makes something Canadian, they do tell other users what it is not: Indian and Chinese in nature. Moreover, it is not Toronto, which has been lost to the newcomers,

You are in Toronto. You are not in Canada, you are in Little Somalia. You are in the heartland of the communist insurrection in Canada.

Here, a user once again noted that Toronto is no longer in Canada as it has lost what makes a place Canadian. This has been replaced with the qualities that make something 'Somalian.' It is important to note here that throughout my research, Somalians were discussed in much the same way that Daniels' (1997) American white supremacists imagined Black men. They were always imagined to be the source of crime and danger by virtue of the culture, religion, and nationality. Somalians were cast as the latest in a line of unwanted newcomers incapable of assimilating in Canadian culture and norms—as defined by my interlocutors, remember. This discourse was found throughout my field sites, including Twitter:



Figure 27. Screenshot of Tweet featuring anti-immigrant meme and “real” Canadian discourse

There are so many things to say about this particular piece of data: the username, the emojis, the close up of a woman’s chest in the profile picture, the reference to European heritage, Somali immigration, and the use of an Irish anti-immigration meme in a Canadian context.⁶⁵ But what is important for the conversation here is the obvious positioning of a someone who is Somali as incapable of being Canadian. She writes,

“Come to Canada, be Canadian”

Will Canada still be Canada if Europeans are a minority? [thinking emoji]

⁶⁵ While this Twitter account no longer exists, it is possible they will reactivate or may be serving a suspension and have therefore blocked out the username itself. I have left the “name” in for analytical reference.

Infinity Somalians who come here legally does not a European settler make.

The meme includes Somali-American actor Barkhad Abdi, who is known for his role in the film *Captain Phillips* in which he says, “Look at me, I’m the captain now.” Abdi is wearing a poorly photoshopped Leprechaun hat with the quote altered to say, “Look at me, I’m Irish now.” The meme is almost laughable in its crude attempt at photoshopping, but this serves to establish the belief that any attempts by Somalians at being Canadian (or in this case Irish) would be as poor (and comical) as the photoshop attempt.

She, like the other users included in this chapter, wonder about the dislocation that will happen should demographic shifts continue. It is not just about feeling out of place in Toronto, which my interlocutors lament has already occurred, but Canada in general. While my other interlocutors were quick to point out who cannot become Canadian (e.g., Chinese, Indian, and Somali immigrants), this user points out who can be Canadian, namely ethnic Europeans. Yet this again plays into attempts to misremember history as it needs to be remembered, namely as a process in which pan-European settlement of Canada and the formation of its cities was a coherent and uncontested process. It is, of course, just as likely that an early 1900s version of this meme would have included an Eastern European man in a poorly photoshopped Mounties uniform instead of a Somali-American in a Leprechaun hat.

But let me return to the original focus of this section, the “Toronto isn’t part of Canada anymore” discussion as there are two threads I want to continue to explore further. The first is the notion of leftists as betrayers of whiteness.

You’re correct actually. Vancouver is Shangmumbai-land, Toronto is Bangleshistanai.

The former is a commie cesspit, the latter is a neoliberal cesspit.

What is interesting about this comment, beyond the brutal attempts at being clever with names, is the differentiation between Vancouver and Toronto based on stereotyped patterns of immigration. Yet, the concerns were not just with the newcomers who threatened their version of

Canada. Here, we see the positioning of leftists—who turn spaces into cesspits and sites of insurrection—as threats to their imagined version of Canada alongside neoliberals.

According to one Redditor who I pressed to be more specific about who threatened Canada, the destruction of their Canada is facilitated by those who are “in a constant state of revolutionary action (i.e. they are constantly against established norms). They are destroying the church, the family unity and (healthy) patriotism.” Here, the “they” stands for the leftists, anti-racist activists, and feminists who continue to advocate for refugee and immigration supports, as well as rights with regards to race, gender, and sexuality. This is a thread I pick up in greater detail in my chapter on censorship (Chapter 6), but what is important to highlight here is the very narrow definition of in-group allowed by my interlocutors. They are straight, white, male, and now apparently right-wingers only. The positioning of ‘neolib’ as equally to blame also shows the complexity of the right-wing sphere. Not all were convinced that neoliberalism would save their version of the country. Rather, it and globalization were often blamed for facilitating the influx of non-white immigrants into Canada and its cities. Take these anti-leftist critiques for instance,

Meanwhile toronto is turning into a garbage heap filled with people who are new here and the rest who want to leave. Its a leftist shithole (Reddit user).

And,

Canada’s culture has been heavily compromised by forced multiculturalism and gaslighting for decades that “Canada has no culture.” But we do and it is entirely based on Western values stemming from England France with a dash of Native Canadian in their also. We are already a small, humble country, and with our culture being purposefully eradicated... it has lead to people more just viewing themselves as “not American” (Reddit user).

Here, alienation (the feeling of wanting to leave) had reached a volatile tipping point wherein users were willing to cleave off cities like Toronto. The sheer volume of immigrants had rendered these spaces unrecognizable, and un-Canadian, to the users. What is striking here is the

use of “eradicated” which brings to mind Berbrier’s (2000) framework for the white supremacist victim ideology wherein one of the five themes was feelings of persecution for the purpose of the eradication of the white race. My interlocutor argues that Canadian culture, which as I have repeatedly argued is synonymous with whiteness and maleness, is not only being pushed out but destroyed. To some, this eradication is the result of immigrants who refused to assimilate:

C1: It might already be too late [for the cities and Canada]. There are already too many people here who aren’t interested in being Canadian/integrating, plus they vote too.

C2: It’s true. We shouldn’t even let them vote if they want to pretend to be another nation too.

As Essed and Hoving (2014) note, it is particularly infuriating for nativists when immigrants make use of the rights granted to them. Governance is, after all, meant to belong to those entitled to it by virtue of their family lineage, race, and gender. The repeated emphasis on voting also points to their feelings of disempowerment and the imaginative work their rhetoric does. Clearly, they imagine a Canada in which they lack political control over the country in addition to cultural and economic control. Even if this never comes to fruition, and it is indeed unlikely under the current white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, the process of *imagining* this threat is enough to foster their backlash.

Each comment included here either doubled down on the “this is not Canada; this is now [insert non-white country here]” formulaic response, or on how these spaces had changed from a safe, humble, and kind space to one of crime and violence. This thread demonstrated again what the “I don’t belong here meme” was trying to communicate: a sense of alienation due to changes in the cities they grew up in or visited (or imagined) and a frustration that the spaces they felt entitled to were (supposedly) no longer under their control. By this I mean they could no longer control who could belong in and to Canada and the shape of the country’s idealized identity.

They were quick to ascribe blame to immigrants for the increase in crime. This is, of course, a common theme throughout right-wing discourse and was a central concern in my chapter on

women and immigration. Here, the “once great country” is at risk because of demographic shifts. This is a common line of argument in nativist discourse in Canada and an example of how users would use European nations, like Germany and Sweden, as cautionary tales, which I explore further in Chapter 8.

In response to the “I don’t belong here meme,” another user doubled down on the state of the GTA highlighting the threat of the unwanted other,

I used to travel to the GTA a lot when younger and it was such a great place to visit. Clean and fun with a positive vibe. I went back recently for the first time in years and it’s such a dirty shithole city of **money launderers, street shitters and terrorists** now. Sad. The rest of a once great country will follow soon (emphasis added).

The terms I highlighted in the above quote are explicitly racially coded terms. They are not referring to white-collar executives that are financially corrupt nor are they addressing the growing threat of right-wing extremism (Boyd, 2004; Braithwaite, 2004; see also Conclusion remarks on the Freedom Convoy). Street shitters is also a derogatory term that doubles down on racist ideas about hygiene and people of colour.

Similarly, in a r/metacanada thread on a protest-turned-riot in Montreal, another city that often surfaced in these discussions, a user asked, “Is this Montreal or Africa?” while another responded with a common formulaic response of “import africa get africa. diversity is our strength.” Again, crime was immediately and intrinsically linked to immigration and race, and the users critiqued leftist arguments that diversity is not only a moral imperative but a benefit for the country as well.

On the new platform, OmegaCanada, a similar discourse played out around Vancouver. In a thread focused on a stabbing at a Vancouver library, one user stated,

C1: Don’t fucking care! Enjoy the diversity you voted for, Vancouver.

C2: Now all of Vancouver has decided the rest of Canada is not diverse enough. Vancouver was once based, anon. Four generations of my family grew up there before I was forced to leave.

Again, the decline of a city was lamented, and the blame for crime was placed on “diversity,” which is coded language for non-ethnic European immigration. The second commenter also emphasized their family’s legacy in Vancouver (“four generations”), which as I have argued throughout this work is a tactic for establishing legitimacy and entitlement. Here, the user is denied what was rightfully theirs (“forced to leave”) because of immigration, and not because of capitalist greed that drives the housing market, but I digress.

Beyond alienation-driven despondency amongst my interlocutors, there was a strong backlash against immigration that mirrored anti-feminist backlash (Boyd, 2004; Braithwaite, 2004) and what some scholars have come to call *whitelash* (Embrick et al., 2020; Kellner, 2017; Lippard et al., 2020). This was articulated further in the Vancouver stabbing thread, yet it was not taken up unanimously indexing the complexity of opinions amongst the right,

C3: We need to retake control of our country. Enough is enough (OmegaCanada).

The user clearly articulated feelings of loss of control while also emphasizing a right to control the country. Moreover, they had reached a breaking point. The changes, it seemed, were sufficient to render Canada in need of saving. Yet not all were willing to fight to take back what they felt they were owed,

C4: Fuck that, let the whole country burn at this point (OmegaCanada).

Here, the user had deemed Canada a lost cause. Moreover, it was clear here that they found no value in the changes brought about by immigrants, leftists, and feminists. You do not burn something you can salvage, after all.

The third commenter (C3) responded with, “I have kids I’m trying to raise.” And this brings to mind once again the notion of inheritance. From their perspective, Canada is for them and their descendants, which was a theme that emerged repeatedly throughout my work. This was particularly true in conversations about sexuality, which was always framed as damaging to children.

C4: I think we’re past the point of fixing it. The country is going to fall apart eventually... I’d say find a more secluded part of the country where you can continue to earn a modest living and remove your kids from Satanic Canadian globalist clown culture as much as possible.

Just move to a white area, that’s all you can do at this point.

Here, the responding user (C4) doubled down on the futility of trying to return Canada to its former homogenous state, and instead pointed to rural spaces as the last bastions of whiteness, where masculinity, Christianity, and conservatism could flourish.

This singular exchange, which began with a conversation about Vancouver, pointed to what I have come to see as the two ‘options’ my interlocutors saw themselves left with: “take back your country” or “let it burn.” The former, the notion of being betrayed and the need to fight back, was a common thread throughout my fieldwork and across platforms, and it links up with both the Trumpian and Brexit discourses. The rhetoric of both campaigns was grounded in conceptions of the past as the basis for political claims in the present. Both established the past as constituted by nations that were represented as ‘white’ into which racialized others had inserted themselves and gained disproportionate advantage. Hence, the resonant claim that was broadcast primarily to white audiences in each place was ‘to take our country back’ (Bhambra, 2017). The latter, “let it burn,” invokes feelings of dislocation, despondency, and disillusionment, all of which were likewise invoked by the Sad Keanu meme.

The last comment in the exchange, that moving to a white area is “all you can do at this point,” is an interesting, albeit old suggestion. It was also a common theme in my fieldwork. As another Reddit user noted,

Go out into the country side (and certain suburbs) and meet the real Canadians, natives⁶⁶ who are born in Canada and immigrants who assimilate... My neighbourhood borders the countryside and we're still one of the few pocket areas in the Greater Toronto Area where you can leave your door unlocked, and we're also surrounded by several church communities (around five), this is what most of Ontario *used* to be like, from the 19th century to the 1970s.

Many of my interlocutors noted that “white areas” were now almost exclusively rural or on the prairies, and they held these spaces up in contrast to the cities. As the comment above notes, the “countryside” is where real Canada can be found: church-filled, crime free whiteness (although immigrants who assimilate are apparently allowed). It also explicitly notes the 1970s, which refers to the shift in immigration policies towards “forced multiculturalism” and the so-called mass immigration. Here, my interlocutors are reaching back to a bygone era and longing for the values they associate with those spaces (Forchtner, 2016; Ostiguy, 2017; Virchow, 2015). This was, again, a search for racial and cultural purity (Cisneros, 2008; Mancuso, 2010)

Through this process, my interlocutors are also mapping these values onto contemporary spaces, which may or may not be real spaces but rather idealized ones. Rural parts of Canada have, of course, changed since the 19th century. Perhaps not to the extent of cities, but it is not as if they are spaces of untouched and unchanged whiteness. Such imaginings also, as Massey (1996) points out, misremember these spaces as homogenous and coherent, when they were always complex and diverse. In the prairies, which are often identified as spaces of survival for white people, such discourse ignores the labour of people of colour along the railroad and on farms, as well as the forced relocation of people during the second world war into internment camps. How

⁶⁶ Note: In this context, “native” does not refer to FNMI peoples as the comment above it does. Native in this context refers to white Canadians of European ethnic heritage who were born in Canada and are likely from families who have been here for more than one generation.

would my interlocutors explain the Japanese Buddhist Church in Raymond, itself a decisively Mormon settlement,⁶⁷ which was the oldest continuously used Buddhist shrine in Canada?⁶⁸ How would they explain how nearly every small town in southern Alberta has always had a Chinese food restaurant? How would they explain names like Okotoks, a decidedly non-Anglo word?

It also collapses all Europeans into the category of white, when a nuanced analysis of history shows that the category of white has been contingent for many from Eastern Europe. Such imaginings sanitize these spaces and remove not only the non- and not-quite-white workers, but the Indigenous peoples as well whose land was taken for the benefit of the rural communities and the farm that surrounded them.

Beyond being an example of white flight, this comment, as well as the prevalent discourse it reflects, is also interesting because it explicitly articulates cities as un-survivable spaces. As Appadurai (1998, 2006) notes in his work on uncertainty, notions of dignity and survivability go hand in hand with the possibility of ethnocide. What happens when my interlocutors decide that even the rural spaces are unsalvageable and *unsurvivable*? What happens when they decide to let it burn? I am not suggesting that my interlocutors are at risk of committing the atrocities Appadurai explores in his work, but it is important to understand the possible ramifications of this sort of sentiment if left to fester. Feelings of threat and anxiety, even those that emerge from a questionable sense of nostalgia and one's imagination, can still result in real world violence. Moreover, such acts were hinted at throughout my research as the only option available at this point as some cheered the chaos that would come with the downfall of the Canadian state.

I want to close this line of thought with a note that the patch adopted by Soldiers of Odin Edmonton when they rebranded to Canadian Infidels was found on the bulletproof vest seized at the Coutts border following the border blockade crisis. This was a group that openly espoused

⁶⁷ The municipality is politically guided by Mormon doctrine in terms of policy (i.e., alcohol prohibition) and urban planning (i.e., road width).

⁶⁸ See <https://hermis.alberta.ca/ARHP/Details.aspx?DeptID=1&ObjectID=4665-0482>

the nativist rhetoric described here and shared discourse related to the fall of European cities. They are now implicated in an attempt at a violent insurgency.



Figure 28. Image of seized weapons and body armor⁶⁹ (left)

Figure 29. Cropped image to highlight patch on bullet proof vest (right)

Conclusions

I end this chapter with a quote from an interview I did with a member of r/metacanada. In our interview, I wanted to ask about the sort of sentiments I had encountered in response to the Sad Keanu meme and the discourse that seemed to echo it throughout my field work. I asked about this general sense that Canadian cities were lost, that the rural spaces were the only holdout for those who were straight, white, male, conservative, and Christian. Importantly, I wanted to know his take on the “take it back” vs. “let it burn” mentalities. He noted,

I think you are correct about the sense of betrayal and hopelessness. I look around and see everyone in positions of power genuflecting to the groups that are pushing diversity, and then demanding everyone beneath them follow suit... The divide in responses, one being to stay and fight, the other being to pack up and leave, I think is just people’s

⁶⁹ Image source: <https://globalnews.ca/news/8618494/alberta-coutts-border-protest-weapons-ammunition-seized/>

musings on how to react to this situation as it unfolds. Both options are bad. In the first response, you basically give up your birthright and abandon your country. In the second response, you will have to out yourself and lose everything you have and possibly be imprisoned or fined severely.

Such a response evinced a number of themes discussed here: inheritance and entitlement, loss and anxiety, and importantly the root cause being diversity. I have argued throughout this chapter that these feelings of betrayal, hopelessness, anxiety, and entitlement are all a product—at least in part—of collective nostalgia, misremembering, and imagination. My interlocutors described themselves as unwanted, forced out, and “pariahs” in these formerly welcoming spaces. Whether or not these feelings are rooted in empirical reality does not change the fact that these are fiercely experienced emotions with ramifications for Canadian society moving forward. While I am not suggesting we legitimize the validity of these feelings, I am suggesting that we take their existence seriously. My responsibility to my interlocutors was to listen to their perspective and to present their feelings and emotions. Following Doreen Massey (1996), I do not think it is unreasonable for individuals to feel somewhat dislocated in an increasingly globalized world. The time-space compression she writes about spares no one.

Yet, as the crisis at the Coutts border and the nation’s capital throughout January and February 2022 made clear, there is the possibility for this kind of frustration and anxiety to spill out offline in violent and reactionary ways, even in spaces that are not particularly urban. And so, it becomes necessary for scholars of the right to be on guard for when entitlement shifts from hopeless to aggrieved if we are to intervene in meaningful ways.

Chapter 8 - When They Talk About Women

This chapter has been the most difficult to write for a number of reasons. First, it has been one of the most traumatic aspects of my research.⁷⁰ As a woman, reading through violently misogynistic male supremacist rhetoric, collecting and archiving it, coding and analyzing it, and now writing about it has been an exercise in repeated emotional bruising. I sought out spaces that I knew would harm me, and now I turn to writing about these harms knowing that the process will continue to be damaging.

This work has also made clear what I already knew: that whiteness will not save me in the face of violent misogyny just as maleness will not save men of colour in the face of violent racism. Yet, it has also made clear the depth of my unwilling complicity in these narratives as a white woman who, while the subject of violence, is also seen as a saviour of the white race through my reproductive potential. And I benefit from this positioning even as these men seek to deny me my rights and safety. So, while I must attend to my wounding in this work, I have to also attend to the multiple wounds that women of colour receive, particularly my sisters who are also Muslim.

It is my hope that these chapters are read deeply by other white women—particularly those who identify as Christian and conservative. I hope it reveals something about the spaces we inhabit as white women, things we might choose to ignore, downplay, or brush off perhaps in the name of our own safety and comfort. And I hope that it forces us to think about the possibilities for alternative futures wherein we are all safe and respected.

In what follows, I explore notions of gender, and specifically white womanhood, as it relates to upholding the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. I have chosen to write this chapter in two parts in order to give space to my trauma but also the literature and data I have found myself entangled in. These parts interrogate the ways white men engage with white womanhood and

⁷⁰ Christchurch, which I discuss in my final chapter on trauma ** was the single most traumatic day in my fieldwork experience, and I continue to grieve for the Muslim community. The so-called freedom convoy that occupied Canada's capital and the Alberta/Montana border was also a dark time in my research.

reproduction in their nativist rhetoric. I argue that within the context of demographic replacement discourse women are placed in a critical position in the production and maintenance of whiteness in Canada. Following Daniels (1997), I frame this position as a contradictory, if common, one. They are either symbolic saviours of the white race – via their reproductive potential, and therefore threatened by immigrants – or ‘traitorous sluts and feminists’ who turned their backs on white men and now work alongside ‘the globalists’ and become threats in their own right. While contradictory in their regard for women, both forms of rhetoric work to uphold what I term the white male nation fantasy (Hage, 2000) and position white men as victims of a ‘devious ploy’ to strip them of their inherent right to rule (Berbrier, 2000).

In Part I (*On the Threatening Other and the White Damsel in Distress*) I begin with a discussion of the subtle and strategic use of women in relation to anti-immigrant rhetoric and violence. I open with my first fieldwork experience, wherein discourses about the need to protect white women against the violence of the immigrant other first emerged for me. It is with this short exchange that I begin to explore how my interlocutors, who were frequently perpetrators of violent misogyny, came to the defense of (*imagined*) women when it could be leveraged against Muslim men and other immigrants. Here, white women come to stand symbolically for the nation and were rendered a site of cultural and ethnic reproduction. Thus, any threat against them was similarly made against the (white) nation. I argue that this reflects my interlocutors’ attempts to defend the whiteness of Canadian society.

In Part II (*Undermining Whiteness: Feminist Sluts & Undermining Whiteness*), I open with a discussion of male supremacism in Canada as a historical phenomenon as well as one I experienced in the field. I connect this discourse of replacement and disempowerment to the rampant misogyny leveled *at* white women in these spaces. Where the first set of discourses in Part I pertained to the need to care for white women, the latter pertains to the inescapable and insidious power of women and feminists who betray white men in favour of these elites and the Muslim men they encourage to immigrate. Thus, this section moves the argument from the defense of whiteness to the victimhood of white *men*. In particular, I attend to the emergence of a victimhood narrative (Berbrier, 2000), which is rooted in the white (male) nation fantasy (Hage,

2000). I argue that this reflects a sense of entitlement (Essed & Hoving, 2014; Nielsen, 2019) and backlash (Boyd, 2004; Braithwaite, 2004; Embrick et al., 2020; Lippard et al., 2020).

I begin by laying out the framework for both parts: the entitlement that undergirds the white (male) nation fantasy, which when threatened, produces a victim ideology.

White (Male) Nation Fantasy

Throughout this chapter, and indeed this dissertation, I frequently attend to and speak of imagination. By this I mean things, scenarios, events, and people that are imagined by my interlocutors. They are things that are not borne out by statistics and empirical findings (Bhambra, 2017), and yet they are real in the minds of my interlocutors. I explore the notion of both imagination and feelings in greater detail in Chapter 7 on nativism, but I want to introduce here the notion of *fantasy*.

I am drawn to anthropologist Ghassan Hage's (2000) work on the white nation as a *fantasy*, as it indexes something slightly different than imagination. Fantasy is something yearned for and desired. For my interlocutors, fantasy is about power, and specifically the power to "do something" about the state of the cities (see Chapter 7).⁷¹ Fantasy is also about a sense of place and belonging, especially when one considers the white male nation fantasy. In contrast, I have used "imagined" throughout this dissertation to refer to violence, threat, and transgressions.

As Keskinen (2013) notes, the white nation fantasy

is about yearning that nationalists aim to bring about and to simultaneously construct themselves as 'meaningful' subjects driven by the task of building a homely nation. What is at stake for these nationalist activists is not only the national order, but a personal struggle for a meaningful life and subjectivity (p. 226)

⁷¹ Another analytical tool of use here is Zivkovic's (2011) dreamwork, specifically the notion that "the dream is a 'machine for thinking' about our social world" (p. 6). My interlocutors' use of imagination, fantasy, and nostalgia function along these lives.

This is about building, maintaining, and protecting an idealized and *imagined* nation and by extension personal or group identity. As Keskinen argues this white nation fantasy carries with it a sense of “home” for the in-group. Within this imagined and idealized home only “certain groups can claim governmental belonging and harbour beliefs of participating in the management of the nation, involving the treatment of ‘others’ to be managed” (Keskinen, 2013, p. 224). Previously in this dissertation (Chapter 7), I have framed nativism as policies and perspectives that prioritize or favour the ‘native-born’⁷² inhabitants of a country or region over those who immigrate to the area (see also Introduction on settler colonialism). The so-called natives are understood to be the rightful rulers of the society; they are *entitled* to this role and power. In contrast, the immigrants are deemed unwanted ‘others’ who are incompatible with the native culture. Moreover, these others are thought to be inherently criminal and a source of problems (Schrag, 2010). They jeopardize this feeling of home and stand in the way of its existence. Even in small numbers, and perhaps because the numbers are small, they are a reminder that the white nation fantasy is not quite complete (Appadurai, 2006). The presence of immigrants become a reminder of this incompleteness and it grates on my interlocutors. In short, they threaten the fantasy.

I stress, however, that this notion of the incompatible and unwanted other plays on both white and male supremacist thought, which, at their core, are beliefs that whiteness and maleness are superior. Such feelings of superiority are inherently bound up with hierarchy and difference. As Abby Ferber (1999) notes, these ideas rely on the work of early evolutionary theorists and scientists and their notions of “differentiation.” In essence, this work tried to establish quantifiable differences between white men and women and their Black counterparts. This difference, or perhaps distance, between the two races was understood to signal superiority (i.e., the white man was further along the evolutionary chain than the Black man). This was also applied to gender, which created the same sort of difference/distance between white men and white women. According to Ferber, “this convenient matrix of differentiation perches white

⁷² A note on the use of ‘native’: it does not refer to First Nations, Metis, or Inuit people. Rather, it is an emic term used to describe Euro-Canadians, particularly those who have been in Canada for multiple generations (see also ‘Old Stock’). When referring to FNMI communities, I use either Indigenous or the specific community term (e.g. Metis, Kainai Blackfoot).

males firmly at the top” (1999, p. 77). They are followed by white women, Black men, and Black women at the bottom.

Where my work builds on, and pivots slightly, from Hage’s (2000) is the inclusion of gender in my analysis. For Hage, the fantasy is about the superiority of whiteness, but for my interlocutors, and indeed the right-wing more broadly (see Bjork-James, 2020a, 2020b), this is both a racial and gendered fantasy. Within the fantasy constructed by my interlocutors, white *men* are conceptualized as superior to all others. And I take seriously Keskinen’s argument that the reaction of white men in anti-immigrant spaces reflects a desire to “reimagine ‘whiteness’ and ‘masculinity’ in order to politically mobilise in a changing societal setting (2013, p. 226). Thus, my framework is a white male nation fantasy in crisis.

It is important to note that imagination is not limited to the formation of the nation, which I have described here as fantasy work. Rather, imagination plays a role in shaping who is blamed for the crisis. I want to return to a thread from my theory chapter (Chapter 2) that speaks to entitlement and backlash. Manne (2019) astutely notes that when it comes to aggrieved male entitlement, the source of the grievement is usually somewhat vague. Rarely is it about a specific woman who has wronged a specific man. Rather, it is about the category of woman in general, and the imagined attributes of said category. As I note elsewhere, this notion of the “imagined stranger” has been weaponized against marginalized communities throughout history, including the Jews, the Roma, the disabled, and the queer. Thus, in discussions of entitlement and obligation, and the anger, hostility, and resentment that goes along with these ideas, the concept of the imagined and hypothetical once again becomes an important thread.

This is picked up by Embrick et al. (2020) note in their discussion of whitelash, itself a riff on backlash, and I include a brief discussion of whitelash here so as to not lose the thread of whiteness in my discussion of men. The term refers to

individual, institutional, and structural countermeasures against the dismantling of white supremacy (as it intersects with other systems of domination) or actions, *real or imagined*, that seek to remedy existing racial inequities... it is also about the fear of

change in white superiority, *whether it be imagined or real* (Embrick et al., 2020, p. 206, emphasis added).

I place emphasis on imagined or real here because it is hard to believe that white masculinity in Canada is in crisis, let alone victimized, due to its normative position of power (Allain, 2015). Yet, the popular conceptualizations amongst my interlocutors of this supposed double crisis are extremely productive in their narrative of the white male nation in crisis. This produces an image of the white man as the ultimate victim within Western society and a desire to return to a time before feminism, anti-racism, and immigration ruined the lives of white men.

The connection between a nostalgia for an idealized past and white/backlash is a central component of many counter movements, which emerge during times of economic precarity for privileged groups. For my interlocutors – and indeed many right-wing groups – it is marked by a longing to return to the pre-1960s era, before the women’s and civil rights movements, “when whiteness and masculinity worked as unmarked categories of privilege, when the maintenance of the social order was presumed to be one in which white men had political and economic power” (Maskovsky, 2017, p. 435). This was not unlike the longing to return found in other counter movements including the Nazis during WWII who longed for a golden age of power (Sima, 2021; Zernack, 2011)

Some of my interlocutors lamented that it might be difficult to return to the bygone error given the influence feminism has had on Canada and its immigration policies. Take for example the user who, on a popular Canadian identitarian YouTube channel, threw out the challenge “To the youth, start having white babies.” Some responded positively, “As many as you can Lads, beautiful, intelligent, strong, healthy, white babies. No better time than NOW!!” However, others were quick bemoan the futile nature of this call. Feminism had done irreversible damage to white women, and by extension, the white population in Canada,

I think that over half a century of feminism has done a lot of damage to the state of women. It’s not clear how this could be corrected. The only path to fixing this that I can see would be very jarring to a lot of people, to say the least (YouTube commenter).

The commenter was not inclined to share their “jarring” method for fixing Canada’s feminism problem, but with the rise of incel and anti-feminist violence in Canada and other parts of the West, it is a deeply disturbing sentiment. What is also troubling is the broad category of women. To revisit Manne (2019), this produces a particular class of person who can now be subjected to violence. Again, my interlocutors’ backlash is not really about real and specific people, but rather a group of people who fit the profile. A group of people who stand between my interlocutors and the *fantasy* of home. A group of people who remind the majority that they are not a pure and whole ethnostate (Appadurai, 2006; Forchtner, 2016). This, I argue makes the rhetoric of hostile entitlement all the more worrisome.

With my musings about the white male nation fantasy and the imagined acts that threaten it, as well as supremacy and entitlement, in mind, I want to move on to my analysis. In what follows, I once again use Berbrier’s (2000) conception of victim ideology to frame my discussion. The framework consists of five interconnected themes, and I focus on themes one, two, and five,

- 1) that men are now victims of discrimination,
- 2) that their rights are abolished,
- 3) that they cannot express pride,
- 4) they experience a loss of self-esteem and psychological distress, and
- 5) believe the end goal is their elimination.

Throughout this analysis I ask what does this rhetoric tell us about their ideologies of victimhood? What does it tell us about the state of white masculinity in Canada? While my interlocutors spend a lot of time talking about women and immigrants, I argue it reveals a lot more about themselves. Specifically, it evinces the *belief* that their rights have been systematically abolished, that they are now more victimized than any other group, and that they have no place in Canada or its future. And, as I have noted above, there are threads of violence that are deeply concerning.

Part I: On the Threatening Other and the White Damsel in Distress

My first post, my first true moment of anxiety-inducing participation, consisted of a flippant comment on Reddit. In response to a rant about the challenges to Canadian identity I asked, “What identity? Hockey and Tim Hortons? Didn’t the whole ‘Canadian identity’ thing go out the window when immigration moved beyond the British with waves of German, Scandinavian, and Eastern European immigrants?” I expected discussions of race and anti-immigrant rhetoric. I had hoped that they would fill my notifications with their thoughts on what it meant to be Canadian. I received this in earnest, but it came with a gender component I had not expected, nor even noticed at first if I am being truly honest. One user responded,

I will chime in on the ‘What identity’ part, in the future even I couldn’t tell you. Have fun letting your daughter out in the street at night.

While this evinced an anxiety with the fate of Canada’s identity as a white nation with European heritage, it also implied that there was a connection between women’s safety and immigration. Here, immigration was framed as a threat to women and specifically to daughters. Others in my fieldwork would later invoke wives as well, indexing that this was a threat to their kin that they took seriously. I had little time to sit with the comment and its implications at the time, however, as moments later another user followed up with,

Just wholesome values like not setting your wife on fire because she disobeyed you. You know, the basics and stuff.

This comment shifted from implied sexual assault to spousal abuse and control. While these comments did not explicitly reference Islam, months of observation in these spaces attuned me to the subtle anti-Muslim rhetoric. It was my first taste of what Mondon and Winter (2020) refer to as liberal Islamophobia, or the trotting out of women’s safety and women’s rights for the purpose of justifying anti-Muslim racism. It became a rhetorical practice found throughout my fieldwork and amongst right-wing movements in the West (Keskinen, 2013). Comments about safety and spousal abuse were often in reference to the frequent and ongoing discussions about Muslim

immigrant violence in Europe, which I had already seen play out on Gab in the months prior. Take for example two quotes from my time in Canadian-focused Gab groups, which are exemplars of the rhetoric. These quotes were, unlike the ones above, unprompted,

“Canada. This is your future, get your wives, mothers, daughters...prepared for it is here and growing. Muslims in Germany who all say women who are raped deserved it if they aren't dressed like Muslim women. This is the bona fide, religiously sanctioned and certified” (Gab user).

“They clearly were not accommodating enough to him. Unlike other religions and cultures, Islam needs complete submission upon arrival. We Westerners are evil for not complying faster. They really were bigots for not providing him with multiple women to rape upon crossing the border so he grew radicalized and decided to start killing people” (Gab user).

Comments like these doubled down on stories of sexual assault and of abusive and controlling Muslim men. My interlocutors were explicit in their attempts to frame Islam as a threat to European and Canadian women, as well as to the nations themselves. Such discourse became a daily occurrence as I remained in the field and was consistent across my field sites. Moreover, it was an example of the banal, everyday racism bandied about online in Canadian spaces (Campana & Tanner, 2019). I say banal and every day not because this rhetoric is in some way harmless, it certainly is damaging, but there was very little pushback from the communities when it surfaced.⁷³ It is therefore fair to say that it was normalized as part of everyday discourse. The comments also spoke to the entitlement that my interlocutors felt they had to be racist, dehumanizing, and rhetorically violent (Nielsen, 2019), so long as it was in defense of idealized and hypothetical white women.

What I want to unpack in this section is how this strategic use of ‘care’ for women upheld the nativist white male nation fantasy wherein immigrants are unworthy of belonging and

⁷³ Siapera (2019) also discusses the notion of the “banal” in relation to online misogyny. She notes that although the banal is not as “dramatic” or “spectacular” as rape threats, such acts must be understood as operating within and supporting the same system (p. 26).

undesirable sources of crime that threaten the continuity of the nation. What is important to note here, however, is that this was not really about women's safety, but rather the safety of their wombs. My interlocutors occasionally shared the belief that white women could be 'ruined' through sexual relations with non-white men, which included assault. So, this was not about protecting women from the trauma of an assault, which was more likely to occur at the hands of white men, but rather about protecting their ability to reproduce the white nation. But before I turn in earnest to this analysis, it would be beneficial to situate this online discourse within the broader context of Canada.

Like many Western countries, hostility towards Muslims and immigrants has grown in Canada since 9/11 and it has become central to many far-right organizations (Campana & Tanner, 2019). Moreover, anti-Muslim hate crimes are the second most common amongst police-reported crimes and they continue to rise (Leber, 2015). In 2021, a number of attacks directed at Muslim women were reported in Alberta (Boothby, 2021; Snowdon, 2021), which continues a history of deadly attacks against Muslims. In 2017, a man murdered six men and injured 19 as they were finishing their evening prayers in Quebec City, QC (Bilefsky, 2018), and in 2021, another man purposefully drove his vehicle into a Muslim family killing four people (Faheid, 2021). This rise in violence is also situated within a broader global context that includes the Christchurch attack in 2019, which left 51 dead and 40 injured. This is only a small glimpse into the violence faced by the Muslim community in Canada, and only includes the years during my dissertation research.

I want to begin this conversation here because while my interlocutors strive to frame Muslim and non-white immigrant men as *potential* threats to *hypothetical* white women, they downplay and ignore the very real violence enacted by white men on Muslims and immigrants. This use of violent imagination once again reflects Daniels' (1997) commentary around the imagined threats of Black men. While the imagined threats my interlocutors discuss are not always Black, although they certainly are when they discuss Muslims from Africa, Daniels' point is still valid. This is about the framing of non-Christian and non-white men as *imagined* threats to whiteness, and specifically white women, generally as a means of justifying bigotry and supremacy. Yet this

imagined reality rarely bears resemblance to the socio-cultural or political reality of Canada.^{74 75} Furthermore, there were moments in my fieldwork where I was left with a lingering sense that this process of imagining harm had slipped into the realm of fantasizing about harm, because it would justify an equally violent response. While many immigrant groups were deemed incompatible and were the focus of this anxiety, what I want to focus on here is the relationship between specifically anti-Muslim rhetoric, feminism, and white women.

Liberal Islamophobia: “Caring” for Women as Optics

As Barbara Perry (2001) notes, there has been a shift in right-wing rhetoric and discourse towards the adoption of respectability politics, emically referred to as “optics.” This refers to the deliberate and strategic use of language, imagery, and policies that allow individuals, movements, and political parties to gain respectability within mainstream society (see also Hawley, 2017; Miller-Idriss, 2017). This allows them to frame the less appealing aspects of their ideologies in a more palatable light. Campana and Tanner (2019) describe this process within the Canadian context as a “de-demonization strategy” in which they “attempt to portray themselves as less radical or extreme and their views as sensible responses to clearly visible problems” (p. 13). This opens up a productive space for my interlocutors to reframe their nativist rhetoric as “common sense” or even progressive. It is a rhetorical strategy that is used throughout right-wing discourse and can be deployed against a multitude of antagonisms.

In this section, I want to focus on a similar reframing wherein my interlocutors argued their nativist ideas were about ‘care’ for their women. In this rhetoric they painted the undesirable Muslims as a threat to women and their anti-immigrant position as a “sensible solution” and “common sense approach” to resolving the issue.

Care in the International and National Context

⁷⁴ Of course, my interlocutors would (and perhaps will) point out that this violence *does* happen, but it is censored by mainstream media (see Chapter 6 on censorship and mistrust). This is an argument I find particularly unpersuasive given the rise of right-wing ‘news’ outlets in Canada like Rebel Media.

⁷⁵ See Chapters 1 and 7 for a more in-depth discussion of Canada’s nativist approaches to immigration historically.

Among European populist parties, using gender equality as a cultural boundary between the so-called natives and Muslim immigrants has become an effective political strategy. Specifically, issues surrounding veiling, female circumcision, and honour killings are framed as cultural problems that are incompatible with European society (see Mondon & Winter, 2020 on cultural racism). As Keskinen (2013) notes, the very notion of gender equality is vital for the notion of Nordic nationhood and it “provides ground for the creation of self-images as modern, progressive and advanced nations through a juxtaposition to migrant ‘others’ projected to the past and stagnation” (p. 226). Similarly, in their work on populism and European politics, Meret and Siim (2013) argue that, from a nativist perspective, “people who come from these cultures will always remain ‘strangers in the land’, their fundamental values and beliefs are incompatible, and they themselves are ‘non-assimilable’ (because they are both unable and unwilling to assimilate) and therefore a potential threat to the ideals and institutions of the host society” (p. 90).

The process of framing the treatment of women within Islam as somehow antithetical to Western values as a means of marking Muslims as an incompatible other is also evident in the Canadian context. It is perhaps most obvious in Quebec’s repeated attempts to ban veiling in the province. Bill 21, passed in June 2019, officially prohibited the display of religious symbols by public-sector workers. Of note in the bill itself is the affirmation that the Quebec nation “has its own characteristics, one of which is its civil law tradition, distinct social values and a specific history” and “attaches importance to the equality of women and men” (National Assembly of Quebec, 2019, p. 5). Such phrasing establishes the dominant culture as grounded in feminist notions of equality, while simultaneously marking any deviation from these “feminist values” as existing outside the nation. Thus, the practice of veiling, considered an anti-feminist practice, renders Muslims anti-feminist and therefore outside of the dominant culture even if they were born in Canada. This was reflected in the discourse of my interlocutors as they contemplated western and Canadian values,

Our Indigenous⁷⁶ and European people's heritage is what defines this land today.

Welcome to all who can contribute to the common cause. Canadians are well known for equally working together, this is quite contrary to being behind a veil (Reddit user).

Here, my interlocutor played on ideas of immigrants who can contribute and ideas of equality to construct the notion of Islam as explicitly antithetical to the Canadian enterprise. This process was common throughout my research, and the notion of incompatibility became a primary theme. My interlocutors repeatedly expressed their belief in the perceived incompatibility of certain immigrant groups and traditional Canadian cultures, even as they upheld anti-feminist views themselves (see also Siapera, 2019). Many were explicit in the criminality and countries of origin,

Rural Ontario has seen a spike in sex crimes due to Muslim migrants from Somalia and Pakistan. Toronto has seen several pro-sharia demonstrations. Ottawa has seen several pro-sharia demonstrations. Rural Alberta has seen a small rise in sex crimes. We don't hear as much about it here, because our media benefits from the "diversity is our strength" bullshit as the propaganda arm of the Liberal party (Reddit user).

This comment does a lot when it comes to my work. It touches on nativism, the heartland, liberal Islamophobia, and anti-leftism. The Redditor opened with sex crimes and explicitly identifies the religion and country of origins of the attackers. The claim is transparent in its liberal Islamophobia, which permits anti-Muslim rhetoric if it is in defense of Canadian values, like the rights and freedoms of women and queer folks. It also notes pro-Sharia demonstrations. Sharia law is understood to be in conflict with the Enlightenment values, which my interlocutors hold as synonymous with Canadian values. Yet not every Muslim in Canada supports the implementation of a Sharia-based tribunal for family court purposes. However, for my interlocutors, every Muslim immigrant represents a possible vote for such a policy. Therefore, they once again imagine the worst-case scenario to justify Islamophobic rhetoric. Of course, this

⁷⁶ My interlocutors were often blatantly anti-Indigenous, especially in the context of the oil industry and government benefits. Their invocation in comments like this reflects an attempt to bolster their anti-Muslim stance by aligning themselves with Indigenous communities and their struggle to maintain their culture.

is somewhat ironic as they rail against #allmen and #allwhite people style discourse in their white male victim rhetoric.

Both Pakistan and Somalia are also noted here as sources of unwanted newcomers, and both countries are frequently invoked as less-than countries filled with undesirable and incompatible people who would – by virtue of their race, religion, or culture – inevitably commit “vile crimes” against women. Crime, as Ferber (1999) notes, is consistently linked with race and culture throughout right-wing and white supremacist discourse, an association that is not unique to Canadian spaces. Yet, the user does not provide citations for their claims around the increase in crime. Rather, they circumvent the need for such proof with a claim that the media would not report on these statistics as it contradicts the “pro-diversity” rhetoric of Justin Trudeau’s Liberal Party. This was a widely accepted claim throughout my research, and it is something I explore in greater detail in my chapter on censorship (Chapter 6). But it also relies on the centuries old tactic of using sexual violence—and specifically the imagined threat thereof—as means to villainize entire racial and cultural demographics (Dorr, 2004; Hodes, 1993).

Finally, the invocation of the rural is interesting as much of the discourse around immigration is firmly located in the cities. This makes sense given that cities are, by and large, much more diverse than small towns even if small towns are not (and have never been) as homogenous as my interlocutors imagine them (Massey, 1996). But this belief, this rendering of small rural towns as homogenous and continuous spaces of whiteness makes them a sort of bastion of whiteness. They become the strongholds of ‘real’ Canadian culture where the values have not been corrupted by immigration (or by feminism, anti-racism, and queer rights). They have also become some of the only places where my interlocutors feel like they might still belong (see Chapter 7; Taggart, 2000 on heartland; Mack, 2021, on rural romanticization). Thus, while cities might be lost and left to crumble, rural spaces become sites of struggle and resistance (Forchtner, 2016).

Another key component of this discourse connects to Campana and Tanner’s (2019) notion of ‘sensible’ responses to perceived and imagined scenarios. They argue that this discourse is a “demonization strategy” in which far-right groups “attempt to portray themselves as less radical

or extreme and their views as sensible responses to clearly visible problems [which] contributes to promoting an ordinary racism” (p. 13). Further, this ordinary racism and its companion, ordinary violence, “aims at indirectly imposing norms and societal control on those who, according to the promoters of these norms and values, have violated them. It creates a form of societal vigilantism that transforms those who adhere to far right views into many potential gatekeepers in charge of maintaining societal order” (p. 13). In turn, this creates a category of people who violate these norms. For nativists, these are immigrants. To return to Daniels (1997) and her assessment that it is not acts of violence against white people that foster white supremacist reactions, but rather the process of imagining such violence, Campana and Tanner further note that “*anticipation* of transgression is a key component of the attitude of far right groups” (p. 13, emphasis added). Again, it is not that immigrants *have* sexually assaulted white women in large numbers (the statistics do not bear out such assertions), but rather that they could. Or, in the minds of my interlocutors, they *will*. For them, this imaginative process in turn validates the anti-immigrant, and particularly anti-Muslim, rhetoric as well as violence committed in the name of protecting white women (again, a sort of fantasy work). In my fieldwork, this manifested as the following,

this guy is calling out low IQ rapey invaders who crawled out of 3rd world shit-holes raping white women and white ppl gang up on this prof and call him a white supremacist with extreme views... that needs explaining (Gab user).

The above quote also does a lot for this chapter. First, the quote is in response to a news article regarding the firing of Canadian sociologist and UNB professor Ricardo Duchesne. He is the author of the controversial *Canada in Decay: Mass Immigration, Diversity, and the Ethnocide of Euro-Canadians* (2018) as well as a contributor to The Council of European Canadians referenced above. The news article focused on a letter that circulated amongst, and was signed by, hundreds of UNB faculty calling for Duchesne’s dismissal because of his white supremacist views. This transformed Duchesne into something of a martyr who “tells it like *it is*” despite working within the corrupt and politically correct university system. “It,” of course, was the perceived sense of crisis brought on by immigration.

Returning to the quote, it invokes “low IQ” and rape, as well as both “3rd world” and “shithole” terminology. Such discourse doubles down on perceived inferiority of immigrants along cultural lines who are deemed unworthy of living in the white male nation state. Again, it invokes rape as a means of justifying the xenophobic and white supremacist position, a decidedly liberal Islamophobic position. Finally, what is particularly important for my discussion here of the “sensible response” is the ending: “this needs explaining.” Or, put another way, “this is nonsensical.” For this interlocutor, it was obvious there was a problem in Canada, one that directly resulted in the rape of white women, and the obvious answer was to reverse the demographic changes in Canada. In other words, nativism—and Campana and Tanner’s (2019) ‘sensible’ ordinary racism—will save white women, who will in turn save Canada through their reproductive potential.

This notion of ‘sensible’ responses to anticipated transgressions was paired with rhetoric of fighting and resistance. Take, for example, Figure 30 below,

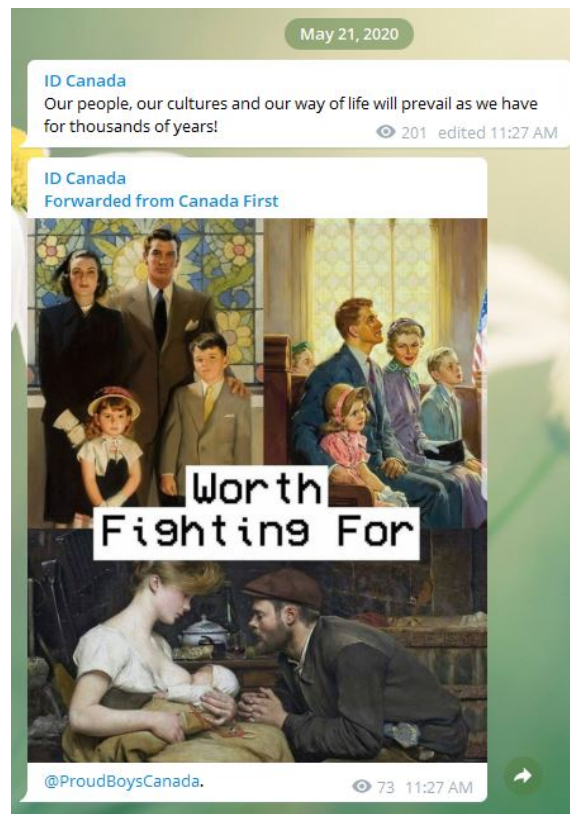


Figure 30. A screenshot of ID Canada’s telegram feed labeled “worth fighting for”

In the screenshot, ID Canada claims “our people, our cultures and our way of life will prevail as we have for thousands of years!” It was posted alongside a meme, which included three images and the text “worth fighting for.” The images included white, heteronormative families. Two of these families are depicted in church, while the third image includes a woman breastfeeding in front of a man presumed to be her husband. Each image includes people in historical garb, rather than contemporary fashion. All of these aspects together invoke a nostalgic image of the past when people were god-fearing, and women were seen (and saw themselves) solely as mothers and wives. The text, “worth fighting for” serves as a rallying call to pushback against cultural and demographic shifts in Canada that are perceived of as threats to the traditional white family. Again, women and their reproductive capacity are centered in this rhetoric. This meme does not use derogatory language or demeaning imagery of people of colour; rather it is a reframing of their white supremacist ideology as one of ‘care’ for their own people (see Berbrier, 2000 on new racism).

Of course, not every bigoted comment or ‘save white women!’ meme went without pushback. In one particularly heated conversation on Reddit, users argued over the possibility of multiculturalism and immigration in Canada. One user argued that multiculturalism had always existed, pointing to the waves of migration across Europe, as well as the various European ethnicities that settled Canada. This was a thread I had often picked up in my discussions with my interlocutors, after all I am a walking embodiment of diverse European ethnicities. Where I felt constrained in my discourse, however, the user did not. They accused their fellow Redditor of simply being racist:

C1: Just take your mask off and admit that this has nothing to do with ‘multiple’ cultures.

It is your issue with specific cultures.

It was a clear challenge for the other to defend themselves against the accusation of anti-immigrant racism and to be clear that it was not all immigrants, but rather specific ones. Ones deemed unassimilable and undesirable. In response, the user replied,

C2: Finally! Someone gets it! The *cultures* in places like Somalia, Afghanistan, Sudan etc. are shit. The number of people who should be accepted to Western nations from these places is few to none.

You can promote female genital mutilation; Sharia amputations, stonings and lashings; Islamic cleric warlords as government etc. but people on this sub aren't stupid enough to buy *your openly misogynistic, anti-freedom, anti-intellectualism stance*. (emphasis added).

Here, the anti-immigrant Redditor (C2) strategically, if not convincingly, invoked feminism, freedom (liberalism), and intellectualism in their defense. They acknowledged their disdain for immigrants from these regions on feminist and intellectual grounds, and even went so far as to claim that support for Muslim immigrants was the misogynistic and therefore problematic position. This was not a racialized racism, but rather a cultural one (see Bonilla-Silva, 2015 on cultural racism; Mondon & Winter, 2020). Yet, this was not a consistently deployed strategy. Despite their strategic and selective use of feminism to promote anti-immigrant policies, there was concern that such an approach was inappropriate. As one user noted,

Let's be honest: the reason why we in the right don't want Islam is NOT primarily because of homophobia and anti-Semitism. It's because they hate Christians and want to rape our women. Don't use the left's framework to advocate for your own interests.

This demonstrates the complexity and the resistance to the deployment of feminism, particularly an intersectional version that would be attuned to the struggles of queer and Jewish people, as part of their anti-immigrant discourse. Yet it still invokes concern regarding the safety of “our” women. Or at least our bodies and reproductive potential.

But what happens when people like my interlocutors start to believe either that there has been sufficient transgression against white people, or that the threat and anticipation of such transgressions justifies a pre-emptive show of force? And how is such violence interpreted and understood within the framework of ‘care’ for white women and the white race?

Violence and the Enduring Rhetoric of Care

On March 15, 2019, I woke up to a flurry of messages from friends and colleagues that all read to the effect of “I think something related to your work happened in Christchurch.” There had been a deadly attack on the Muslim community, which left 51 people dead and 49 wounded.⁷⁷ It was decidedly Islamophobic and white supremacist. However, it is important to note the ways in which it was also fueled by patriarchal and male supremacist beliefs about white women and how these beliefs rippled out across my field sites that day. Here, care for the white race via white women became a central feature in both the attacker’s discourse and that of my interlocutors.

During my fieldwork that day I was provided with a link to the attacker’s long-form manifesto. It had been circulating on Gab, despite repeated attempts at removing it on the part of governments and cloud storage service providers. It is, after all, a piece of hate speech. Despite this, it was widely read by my interlocutors, and it became the subject of many of my interactions and observations that day. I also spent time reading the words myself so that I could understand my interlocutors’ commentary.

In the manifesto, the attacker detailed the reasons behind his attack. In it he claimed,

It’s the birthrates.

It’s the birthrates.

It’s the birthrates.

...

This is ethnic replacement.

This is cultural replacement.

This is racial replacement.

⁷⁷ The attack is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 (“A Field Reflection: Experiencing violence form my office”) and in the Epilogue (Christchurch).

These words are seared into my mind, and the memory of this day returns every time someone mentions birthrates as some sort of abstract or debatable concept. Beyond my personal emotional response to the passage, it evokes themes that emerged repeatedly in my research. It brought together issues of race, gender and reproduction, entitlement, and victimhood all at once. For the attacker, there was a clear connection between birthrates and the changes he saw in white countries. He was concerned that if white people became minorities, they would no longer have the power to govern, to control the cultural and political landscape, as they are entitled to do by virtue of their whiteness. White women, he argued, were not reproducing enough because of the shifts brought on by feminism. In contrast, immigrant women and particularly Muslim women, reproduced too quickly. As I note in my Introduction, Appadurai's (2006) work on globalization and fear of small numbers is important to consider. It does not matter that white people in Canada are still the numerical majority. The numerical minority still reminds the majority that they are not ethnically pure in the present, and this prompts nightmare fantasy work about a future that is even bleaker for white men.

Appadurai (2006) also notes that in the era of globalization, people feel compelled to double down on belonging work in order to create new levels of certainty about their identity, nation, and humanity. As a result, that the connection between birth rates and globalization is a key component of ethno-nationalist and identitarian discourse should be unsurprising (Zúquete, 2018). Ethno-nationalism is, after all, fantasy work for the purpose of feeling safe, secure, and like one belongs through the exclusion of others.

The fear of replacement amongst white and ethnically European groups has been in circulation for over a century, with the politics of reproduction stretching back further in time (Daniels, 1997). However, it has been taken up in earnest by groups since 2011 when Renaud Camus, a French intellectual, penned *Le Grand Remplacement*. In this work, Camus argued that a network of global elites was systematically orchestrating the erasure and replacement of white peoples in traditionally white countries both racially and culturally. My interlocutors picked up this discourse and pointed to Canadian and United Nations policies they felt promoted globalization and mass immigration, as well as the high birth rates of immigrant women and comparatively

low birth rates of their white Canadian counterparts (Cosentino, 2020). Both of these forces combined would be disastrous for their conceptualization of Canada,

The ‘progress’ that Canada is achieving with a low birthrate amongst the natives and white population and incredible lax immigration policies and booming birth rates amongst Islamists, its just a matter of time till Canada becomes another Sharia following country (Reddit user).

This Great Replacement parallels other discourses of replacement and elimination including white genocide or ethnocide. In these conversations, a shadowy and nebulous group was responsible for orchestrating the downfall of the white race broadly, and conservative working-class Canadians more specifically. Here, we find yet another imagined stranger—one that supposedly holds a considerable amount of power and influence. Comments like “They don’t want us to reproduce. They want us to be a minority” were common throughout my work. But who is this “they” that was constantly invoked? Cosentino (2020) notes that white genocide has its roots in anti-Semitism and the Great Replacement in Islamophobia, yet both place blame on global and political “elites” (see also Chapter 6 on folk theory antagonists). This was reflected in the manifesto of Anders Breivik, who in 2011 killed 77 and injured over 300 in Norway. In the manifest he blamed cultural Marxists, the multicultural elite, and feminists for the decline of Norwegian society. He argued that it was this nebulous group of people who orchestrated and facilitated increasing levels of immigration from Muslim countries (Keskinen, 2013).

Both the Norway and Christchurch attacks are unusual in the level of devastation and violence they inflicted, and it therefore might be tempting to dismiss them as outliers. Yet, following Keskinen (2013), I want to situate the rhetoric of these terrorists within the context of my much more mainstream and everyday fieldwork to show the flow of ideas and articulations of victimization and entitlement at the hands of a nebulous elite. Take for example this response to the Christchurch attack,

It’s [the Manifesto] not a meme. It’s the replacement of our people and our culture with another for the economic gain of a small class of elites (Reddit user).

Here, my interlocutor took seriously the writings of the Christchurch shooter, which some amongst my field sites tried to play down as the ravings of a mentally unwell individual. Even they attempted to frame him as illiberal racist, an aberration, as something different than themselves. Many did so out of fear that white people would face the same backlash that Muslims face in the wake of jihadi extremism. Yet, the rhetoric of his manifesto resonated with some, and it reflected the broader discourse of others whether or not they wanted to admit it. There was nothing in the manifesto that I had not read hundreds of times before across my field sites. Importantly, these ideas and images of the white damsel have echoed throughout history and spurred white men to commit atrocious acts of violence. Take for example the following images. The first two are photographs taken during my 2018 trip to the Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism.

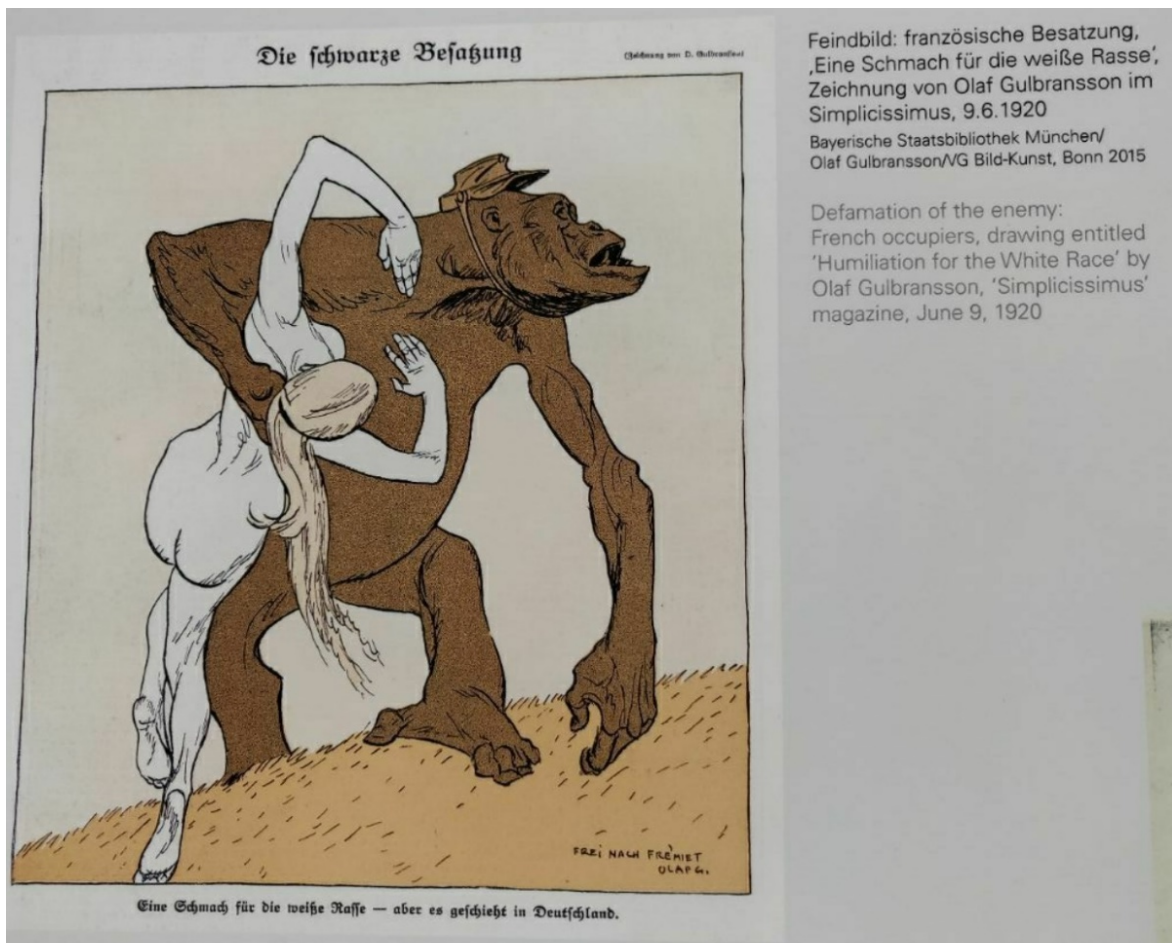


Figure 31. Photograph of museum display. Image includes an ape-like creature carrying a naked white woman with long blonde hair. She struggles against the creature. Text on the display reads “Defamation of the enemy: French occupiers, drawing entitled ‘Humiliation for the White Race’ by Olaf Gulbransson, ‘Simplicissimus’ magazine, June 9, 1920”

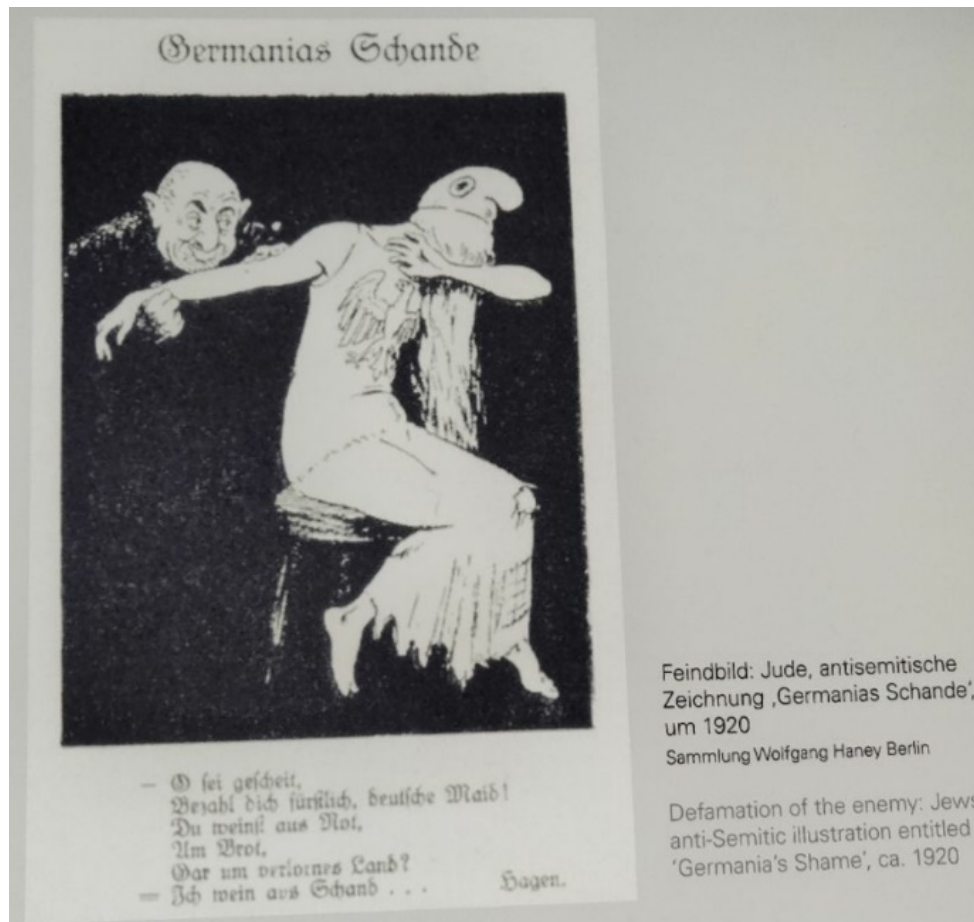


Figure 32. Photograph of museum display. Image includes an impoverished white woman turning away and hiding her face from a racist caricature of a Jewish man who is holding on to her arm. The museum’s caption reads “Defamation of the enemy: Jews, anti-Semitic illustration entitled ‘Germania’s Shame’, circa 1920.”

Both of these images depict the other as threatening weak and defenseless white women. The other is either ape-like, which invokes ideas of both violence and low intelligence, or sexually sinister. These images of perceived/anticipated/imagined transgression serve as justifications for violence against the other. Importantly, they were effective tools of propaganda that resulted in the death of millions, and the ‘care’ for white women was a central component of this rhetoric.

This historical treatment of white women as a damsel in distress that not only needs to be saved but avenged is not contained to the early 1900s. The third image I want to discuss here is a meme that circulated on Gab and was shared by a Canadian user despite the American message.



Figure 33. Screenshot of an anti-Black “stop the rapes” meme

The meme includes imagery reminiscent of the first two. First, the violent other is depicted as a Black man who is given exaggerated ape-like features, which is in itself a dehumanizing tactic. Second, the white woman is positioned as an unwilling participant as she tries to push away her attacker. In this image, however, the threat of rape is much more apparent than in the anti-Semitic image (Figure 32). The image is accompanied by the text,

STOP THE RAPES. Over 100 white women are raped or sexually assaulted by Black men every day in the United States. STOP THE CRIME. Blacks are 136 times more likely to commit a violent crime against Whites than vice versa. STOP THE MURDER.

Blacks commit 50% of all murders, despite being only 12% of the population. STOP THE BLACKS.

It also includes the text “bloodandsoil.org” which is a now defunct website. However, the phrase “blood and soil” is a clear reference to the Nazi slogan (“Blut und Boden”).

It is important to point out that the statistics here are not only provided without citations but are also not borne out in the literature on the subject. Beck (2021), for example, notes that the Black community does account for 12.5% of the population as the meme suggests. However, white people commit 55.7% of all rapes and sexual assaults. It is therefore interesting to me that a group that is so concerned with the safety of white women are not advocating for white men to stop raping and sexually assaulting women. Perhaps my interlocutors would argue that the women attacked by white men are non-white women and therefore not worthy of their protection or outrage, or perhaps they are white feminists who deserve assault (see Part II). Regardless, it is important to note the moments of hypocrisy and the inconsistent deployment of ‘care’ for white women within nativist rhetoric.

My discussion of memes and Nazi-era propaganda might seem like something of a tangent from the discussion of Christchurch. Yet what I am trying to articulate here is that both the Christchurch attacker and my interlocutors—and indeed myself as a white woman ethnographer—are all tangled up in the same global flows of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim rhetoric, and that these flows have the capacity to facilitate violence offline. Moreover, these flows stem from centuries of nativist sentiments that use white women as pawns, and these sentiments have repeatedly turned violent. The precedent here is concerning, or at least it should be. As a result, attempts to cleave the Christchurch attacker off as an aberration or illiberal racist (Mondon & Winter, 2020) denies the connections between his action and the discourse that permeates right-wing spaces. It is normalized and rendered ordinary in these spaces, and this was one of the most unsettling aspects of my fieldwork.

Another unsettling aspect of my fieldwork is the normalization of violent misogynistic rhetoric aimed at white women.

Part II: Feminist Sluts & Undermining Whiteness

In Part I detailed how white women and their bodies are linked with the Canadian nation state. If Canada is a white, European-descended nation, as nativists and ethno-nationalists claim, it therefore requires the participation of white women in the biological and cultural reproduction of said nation. As a result, any imagined or anticipated transgressions against white women are rendered threats against the nation itself and specifically against the white male nation fantasy. Both threats against women and the nation are used to justify liberal racism—including liberal Islamophobia and anti-Semitism—and occasionally acts of brutal violence. I have argued that this process of imagining threats and anticipating transgressions is a global phenomenon as well as a historical one, and it should therefore be taken seriously. Moreover, white women must understand our place within this process and push back against white supremacy in order for all people to be fully liberated. While this discussion has previously focused on whiteness—on its maintenance and cruelty—I want to spend some time on maleness, and specifically how male supremacism manifests in conversations around women and demographic replacement. Thus, this part is about the maintenance of white *maleness* and the victimization of white *men* in Canada.

Let me begin with a contradiction. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, my interlocutors are complicated, complex, walking contradictions. They often hold, as individuals and as collectives, ideologies that seem to be irreconcilable. This was most evident, to me at least, when it came to capitalism and women. For example, they critique the exploitive aspects of globalization, yet maintain that capitalism would work if only there were not so many brown immigrants. But what of their contradictory feelings towards women?

I spent the last part of this work on women and demographic replacement discussing how white men take up a position of ‘care’ for white women in Canada. Yet, I was met with misogynistic content every day during my fieldwork. This is something of a contradiction, no? Up until this point, when I have talked about Mondon and Winter’s (2020) approach to liberal racism, it has been to say that Islamophobic discourse is permitted if it is believed to be in defense of Western

values of gender equality. There is an important addendum to this, which Mondon and Winter note, namely that these notions of gender equality are only ever trotted out in instances of anti-Muslim rhetoric and never for the purpose of advancing gender equality in its own right. Put another way, Islamophobic men only advocate for women when it serves them and their hatred, not because they actually ‘care’ about women’s liberation via feminist change. In fact, they likely believe the exact opposite about liberation, and may even go so far as to hate women right alongside Muslims and immigrants. Take for example the following passages,

No surprise here. When your government and its politically religious Regressive leftists supporters do everything to import infinite numbers of an incompatible culture who view you as nothing more than a set of three rape holes...

And

Those whores will get into the position I tell them to.

Both occurred within the same Reddit forum dedicated to the Canadian right-wing. The first quote occurred in an exchange about why white women vote for right-wing parties and how these women are ‘demonized’ by feminists for doing so. It explicitly invokes the rape of a white woman even though this theme was not present in the news article that prompted the discussion. It also uses explicitly nativist language of an “incompatible culture” and demographic shifts (“infinite numbers”), both of which index that the user was referring to Islam. Through this exchange, the user defends the decision to vote conservative even if it is perceived of as racist or Islamophobic because it is in the interest of (white) women’s safety. It is a clear example of liberal Islamophobia. This, as I established in Part I, is a fairly common approach to talking about white women in relation to immigration. In contrast, the second quote expresses the desire to be sexually dominant and coercive *towards* a white woman. This view suggests that it is unacceptable to be sexually aggressive and violent towards a white woman if you are a Muslim man as this proves the accusations of cultural incompatibility. Yet, it is simultaneously acceptable if you are a white man. Why? Because male supremacism posits that even with racially homogenous groups, women are inferior to men.

As a result, we can see how hypothetical behaviours like sexual assault are framed as an affront to the white nation wherein it is a grave transgression to threaten or harm the white woman. This is not necessarily because sexual assault is a traumatic and horrible experience for women, but because white women are seen as property in need of protection (Daniels, 1997). Thus, an assault against white women is a slight against the white men who are entitled to them. This begs the question of what happens when men, who feel entitled to women, see their access to (untainted⁷⁸) white women as threatened? If one follows Manne's (2019) argument, that entitlement might become aggrieved, hostile, or threatening, it might result in rage against those who deny them their rightful property. I have already discussed at length the rage directed at Muslims, but what about women?

Situating Male Supremacism in Canada

As Perry (2004) notes, "it falls to the white woman to ensure the physical and social reproduction of the white race. This is her role and responsibility. Any deviation is an inherent threat to the continuation of the race" (p. 79). This process of blaming women for the declining status of white men has historical precedent in Canada. Here, I want to draw the reader's attention to the murder of 14 women at Ecole Polytechnique de Montreal on December 6, 1989. There has been a great deal written about this attack (Rosenberg, 2003), and many articles on male supremacism open with a discussion of it. It is almost cliché to begin with this moment in history. Yet, this moment has a particular resonance for me as a Canadian woman. It took place days before I was born and has, as a result, fundamentally shaped the way I grew up under the threat of both gun violence and violent misogyny. It also frames how I understand feminist progress in this world. As I detail in more depth in my reflection on the emotional impossibility of this work (see Epilogue), it is at times overwhelming to think of how little things have changed in the entire time I have walked this earth and lived in this country. So, I hope my readers will indulge me in spending some time discussing what other scholars have already discussed.

⁷⁸ See my comments about telegony later in this chapter. Or don't. It's really upsetting.

The attacker, a 25-year-old white man, entered an engineering class brandishing a rifle and hunting knife, ordered the men to leave, and proceeded to shoot six women. He went on to other classrooms where he murdered another eight women. He also injured nine women and four men (Rosenberg, 2003). During his rampage, the attacker reportedly screamed that the women were “a bunch of feminists,” and his hatred for feminists was made explicit in his suicide note,

Would you note that if I commit suicide today 89-12-06 it is not for economic reasons (for I have waited until I exhausted all my financial means, even refusing jobs) but for political reasons. Because I have decided to send the feminists, who have always ruined my life, to their Maker. For seven years life has brought me no joy and being totally blasé, I have decided to put an end to those viragos...

...Even if the Mad Killer epithet will be attributed to me by the media, I consider myself a rational erudite that only the arrival of the Grim Reaper has forced to take extreme acts. For why persevere to exist if it is only to please the government. Being rather backward-looking by nature (except for science), the feminists have always enraged me. They want to keep the advantages of women (e.g. cheaper insurance, extended maternity leave preceded by a preventative leave, etc.) while seizing for themselves those of men⁷⁹.

Like the Christchurch and Norway attacks, this was an extreme act of violence attributed to someone society deemed as mentally unwell. Here, the victims were not Muslims or cultural Marxists, but women. The Ecole Polytechnique de Montreal attacker was seeking out the feminists who had “enraged” him. Of course, the women killed were not necessarily *the* feminists who had wronged the attacker. Yet, as Manne (2019) reminds us, it is sufficient to merely fit the category of the wrong-doer, which in this case was university women.

The scholarly literature on this sort of “backlash” to feminism reminds one that this process of men feeling wronged and lashing out began decades before the massacre, and that it emerged alongside the father’s and men’s rights movement of the 1970s (Boyd, 2004; Messner, 1998).

⁷⁹ A full transcript of the note in French and English is available via the school shooters resource database: schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/lepine_note_1.1.pdf

This continued throughout the 90s and into the present-day men's rights movement. As de Coning and Ebin (2022) argue in their study of online men's rights movements in the 1990s, "women were largely viewed as rights-bearing subjects who received cost-free benefits and men were rights-less subjects, victimized by unfair obligations" (p. 148). Moreover, the "pervasiveness of perceived feminist power" stemmed from either women's "unilateral influence over social, political, and legal institutions" or their "inherent ability to manipulate men" (p. 152). The former explanation, which is what concerns my work here, evinces a sense of entitlement. If white men did not feel they were entitled to the control of the Canadian socio-political landscape, there would be no impetus for this level of backlash. But they do. They are the ones uniquely suited to build the nation, and they are the ones destined to control and govern it.

This entitlement and their rage also evinces the normative maleness of the white nation articulated by Hage (2000), and I therefore argue that it is a white *male* fantasy. This fantasy is one that (white) women are only allowed to occupy if they "stay in their own lane and perform their role as wives and mothers as defined for them by men" (de Coning & Ebin, 2021, p. 151). Any deviation is consequently viewed as a threat to the white male nation fantasy and is therefore vulnerable to the possibility of violence.

Male Supremacism in the Field

Given the longstanding history of violent misogyny in Canada and right-wing spaces, it came as no surprise that I encountered dozens of misogynistic and male supremacist comments each day, even if the relationship between feminism and immigration was not immediately apparent to me when I first embarked on this project. Many of these comments occurred on threads that seemed to have very little to do with gender, yet they all indexed the perceived inferiority of women and their complicity in facilitating demographic replacement.

In my discussion of nativism (Chapter 7), I explain that one of the things that immigrants do that really frustrates my interlocutors is to vote. They use the privileges afforded to them by the state, and this is a process which my interlocutors fear will undermine the state itself. Or at least

change it into something distinctly un-Canadian. When I asked my interlocutors about “real Canadian” identity in the wake of mass immigration, some pointed to the tenure of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act passed in 1988 marking the situation as one of race and culture. Yet others argued that the shifts in Canadian identity began with the women’s rights movement. A few went so far as to claim,

women shouldn’t have been given the right to vote. Plenty of bleeding heart men to go around, but women are even worse... White women are voting themselves into extinction like the good brainwashed ‘empowered’ women they are (Reddit user).

Here, users were specific in their critiques of feminism as a corrupting influence on women. To them, women have been tainted by waves of feminist discourse and this has turned us into a threat against the Canadian nation and identity (which, remember, is the straight, white male). Women were blamed for the demographic shifts because feminism had tricked them into voting against their own racial self-interest. They were somehow “worse” than the so-called ‘race-traitor’ men who also voted in favour of pro-immigration politicians and policies. When commentators linked demographic shifts and women’s liberation (“voting themselves into extinction”), they reinforced the narrative that Canada should be a white and male dominated society. Some were explicit in this,

Based but being Canadian does not mean respect gender equality, if fact, *women's liberation is one of the things that helped us get here.*

You know who built this country? Anglo-protestants that's who (notable exception are the French Catholics). And those values got us to what we have now. We may hate mass immigration, but as soon *as we threw away these fundamental values*, it was only a matter of time before our own culture would drift away (Reddit user, emphasis added).

Comments such as these marked a turning point in Canadian history, where the hardworking Anglo-Saxons—always presented as or presumed to be men—and their morals were forgotten in

favour of elitist and feminist ideologies. This was their lost ‘golden age’ where the white man was the cultural and political norm and which they seek to return to in their fantasy.

Women, for my interlocutors, had done real damage to Canada as a cultural and political entity and were therefore considered a threat alongside immigrants. Some interlocutors were particularly misogynistic in their comments,

Women want to fuck Trudeau. That’s why he’s PM. Women don’t care about debt. They care about spending other people’s money and getting lots of stuff, and fucking Trudeau. It’s not about policy or issues; it’s about women’s feelz, their ignorance, and their self-absorption (Gab).

In comments like the above, women were reduced to sexual creatures incapable of understanding or caring about the economy and were cast as the recipients of unfair and unearned benefits (de Coning & Ebin, 2022). Such discourse places women on par with the sexually aggressive, deviant, and “low IQ” immigrants discussed above in that both were inferior to white men who were not only intelligent and hardworking but also sexually dominant because they were entitled to be so. Here, the inferiority of both women and immigrants is inherent, biological, and inescapable. Even if feminism was abandoned, women would still be deemed inferior.

Contradictions in Conceptualizing Traitorous Sluts

What is so interesting to me about this rhetoric is the contradictory status of women presented here, which to me seems as irreconcilable as every other contradiction I discuss in this dissertation. Within their 1990s MRA research context, de Coning and Ebin (2022) found that women are “simultaneously all-powerful manipulators of men and the state *and* weak dependents who parasitize men and the state” (p. 155). Within my context, women were so politically powerful that they reshaped the fundamental values of Canadian society and helped paved the way for mass immigration today through their ignorance and self-absorption. Yet, in other discussions, they are described as petulant children who are no longer worthy of white male

protection because of their transgressions against whiteness and men. Take for example the following exchange in a Canadian group on Gab,

Western women are “strong and independent.” Remember, she needs a western man like a fish needs a bicycle. Now waamens crying because they voted for every liberal cause under the sun, one of which has imported the violent, low IQ, third world shitskin. *They’re like petulant children* (Gab user, emphasis added).

While another responded:

yes and the dumb broads are not worth white knightng for, after going for shitskin cock their wombs are polluted and worthless. Telegany⁸⁰ is real, ask any dog or horse breeder (Gab user).

Here, women are blamed for demographic replacement and are reduced to children. Their inferiority is made obvious alongside the corrupting influence of feminism. They are also blamed for the very sexual assaults my interlocutors were railing against in Part I, and they are reduced to the same status as animals to be bred. In this discourse women are no longer a precious resource deserving of care. Rather, they are rendered the deserving victims of violence. Some even went so far as to claim that feminists would *enjoy* it if a Muslim man or immigrant sexually assaulted them as this would “prove how woke they are.” This exemplifies the limits of liberal racism within my research context. At times, my interlocutors were content to display violently misogynistic and racist discourse, and they felt no need to soften or hide their meaning in the name of optics.

This discourse is not unique to the Canadian context nor our contemporary era. Drawing on the work of Ivan Colovic, Zivkovic (2006) points to the “double bloodstream” of nationalism, which in my work manifests as a sort of “double hatred.” In the double bloodstream, a nation is sustained by blood in two ways. The first is through biological reproduction and the transfer of

⁸⁰ Telegany refers to the pseudo-scientific and widely debunked notion that the genetic traits of a female’s past sexual partners can be passed on to future offspring. See Daniels (1997) page 121.

culture and biology through this reproduction. The second way is through the blood of fallen war heroes who nourish the soil with their blood. As Zivkovic points out, however,

...women are involved in one out of two “bloodstreams,” but they are themselves *double* reproducers of the nation—as necessary wombs, but also as socializers, that is, conveyers of *culture* as tradition and *Volksgeist*. Since women are potential betrayers, yet indispensable (alas) for the biological as well as the “cultural” reproduction, they have to be controlled by men—their wombs protected from the racial other (so that the pure blood could flow through them as vessels), and their minds kept loyal to the nation so they can bring up new heroes to die for it (pp. 258-9).

For me, this contradiction reflects a double hatred amongst my interlocutors. They hate the immigrant, the “racial other,” who threatens the womb and by extension the nation. Yet, they also hate women and the possibility of betrayal. Moreover, they resent the sacrifice they feel men make in service of the nation. They become the betrayed and victimized.

This also reflects a growing rise of digital misogyny that spans platforms and nation states (Cockerill, 2019), which positions white men as the real victims because while white women may face sexual violence, which they brought upon themselves through their political actions, they still benefit from the state via feminist policies. As Keskinen (2013) notes, this allyship with other men is a difficult pill to swallow and “thus, these women are viewed as ‘traitors’ of, and within, the white nation, letting down their countrymen who would expect their support and adoration” (p. 229). Take for example this exchange on Gab that came out of a broader discussion of immigrant violence in Germany,

C1: Canadian women⁸¹ better stop being so damn stupid and selling out their country. But they won't and this is what's coming.

⁸¹ While the commenter uses the term “Canadian women” I think it is fair to assume he meant “white women” given the consistent use of whiteness as the normative standard in these spaces.

C2: Too late; the feminists took over the family courts and now way *too many men just really don't give a damn what happens to women any more* (with a few, very limited exceptions; e.g. I will look after my daughters). Pass the popcorn, this will be fun to watch.

C3: Exactly. Fight for what? The status quo? No thanks. *I have a very short list of exceptions myself.* My wife, who speaks even more harshly of women than I do, and maybe a couple of others. The rest can pound sand. Good luck, bitches.

Women are explicitly invoked as traitors of the nation who are “selling out” Canada. The respondents note that feminism has ruined key western institutions and as a result they argue that men as a whole have given up on women save for those who matter to them personally (e.g., biological kin). This brings me back to the notion of aggrieved or hostile entitlement (Manne, 2019) and anticipated transgressions.

Here, a broad and nebulous category of “white woman” is formed, which does not reflect individuals my interlocutors interact with, but instead represents an amalgamation of grievances towards feminism and leftist policies. The danger here is the ability for nearly every white woman, regardless of her politics, to fit this category and become a scapegoat for white male rage at the betrayal of the white nation. There is a sense that any white woman could be a race-traitor, a Liberal voter, or a feminist. The possibility of a transgression, indeed the anticipation that there will be one, is enough to justify hostility and resentment towards complete strangers. This should bring to mind the Ecole Polytechnique de Montreal massacre wherein women who fit the bill of feminists, whether or not they were feminists in practice, and were murdered because the attacker felt wronged. So, what does it mean that so many amongst my interlocutors spoke so violently about white women and their role in immigration policies? Disturbingly, the violence that my interlocutors expect white women to experience in the face of mass immigration will be “fun to watch” with a bowl of popcorn.

This discourse runs parallel to broader anti-women movements, such as Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), which advocates for men to segregate themselves from women and society as both have been corrupted beyond redemption by feminism (Wright et al., 2020). In this iteration, white Canadian women are unwilling to help reverse demographic shifts in Canada and are thus rendered a threat alongside immigrants. The discourse was also particularly misogynistic. Take these throw away comments from Reddit users, which I explored in greater detail in Chapter 2,

“Feminazis are always such gross looking people.”

“Lmao yeah they’re just angry cuz no one is grabbing them by their pussies.”

“Glad these people don’t make babies.”

Given the violent and intense nature of many of the comments I have amassed in my notes, comments like these are almost boring. Perhaps this speaks to the threat of desensitization that scholars of extremism and violence face. Yet, they evince common threads of everyday misogyny. They attack women for their physical features and their attractiveness under the male-gaze. They imply that women’s self-worth is and should be defined by how much men desire them as sexual partners. And, of course, they must portray women as vessels for reproducing cultural values.

Anxiety about the Future? Blame White Women!

Clearly some men were keen to write off most, if not all, white women as undesirable physically and politically.⁸² Yet, this distrust of white Canadian women ruined by feminism fosters a sense of anxiety in some of my young interlocutors about the future. This anxiety manifested strongly within conversations about reversing demographic replacement and the role of feminism:

⁸² Indeed, this bled into racist and sexist conversations about the suitability of Asian women for white men as the former were stereotyped as more likely to hold traditional family values (i.e., submissiveness), which was preferable to a white feminist despite the racial differences.

I'm a bit divided to be honest. In my heart I want to have kids. Right now I'm young (turning 24 in August) and need to save to get my own place and work on myself. Women are off the priority list right now. *Really the biggest reason for me not to have kids is shitty women.* Fuck it is such a gamble trying to find a decent woman.

...That said it's pretty obvious that men are treated like shit now a days. False rape/sexual assault allegations, divorces, and child custody are all things stacked towards women's favour. *Fourth wave feminism has also created a lot of ugly women (inside and out) and online dating is like playing Russian roulette with 5 chambers loaded (Reddit user, emphasis added).*

In this comment, the hopes of the nation are once again placed on white women, and the expected outcome does not feel particularly positive. My interlocutor wanted to have children to stem the tide of demographic change, but it was feminism that stood in his way. Feminism had created ugly people who not only challenged the white male nation but were unworthy of existing within it despite their racial status.

This once again reflects Berbrier's (2000) victim ideology of extinction and replacement wherein white nationalists feel anxious about their future and self-continuity (Wohl et al. 2020), and they seek a scapegoat to blame for it. While in his reading of the victim ideologies of white nationalists Berbrier focuses on the racialized scapegoats, my interlocutors made space for male supremacist thinking as well. In one such exchange on Reddit, which I quote below at length, the backlash to feminism and its role in destroying the country is clearly articulated.

The thread begins by quoting another user (C1) as follows,

C2, quoting C1: *"White women are breeding themselves into non-existence by having careers until their ovaries have dried up, being 'cat moms', and sleeping around but 'it's just opinions I disagree with'"*

Have you put any thought into why that is?

This prompts the original poster to respond at length, which I would like to spend some time unpacking as it reflects much of my research findings and connects to themes beyond women and gender. Let me begin,

C1: Their higher neuroticism. Lack of God in our societies.

The user responds with a clear attack on women's intelligence, which I have noted previously was used in male supremacist rhetoric to undermine women's position in society. Men are, under this framework, intellectually superior and therefore entitled to certain rights and privileges that should be denied to women and immigrants because of the latter's lower intellects (Ferber, 1999). They then point to the lack of God in Canadian society. This was a common trope in my research. Christianness was identified as a part of the ideal Canadian and the shift towards secularism and religious diversity is seen as an attack on this idealized national identity.⁸³ Religion was also a marker of spaces of belonging for my interlocutors who indexed rural spaces as the last bastions of whiteness and white culture, which included Christian churches (Chapter 7).

Opening up the labour market to women, flooding it with effectively double the workforce, thus lowering average wages and leading to a situation where most people feel like they need two wagies slaving away, per household, to make ends-meet.

This discourse is particularly interesting to me and reveals how my interlocutors work through exploitation under capitalism. One of the reoccurring threads in this work was an acknowledgement that globalization, neoliberalism, and capitalism was not working for my interlocutors. Yet, rather than seeing these systems as inherently exploitive as a Marxist might, they see them as corrupted by immigration and feminism. In other words, these systems would benefit them if only there were not so many women and immigrants in the work force.

⁸³ See Figure 33 for an example of the intersection of religion, family, gender, and nation. See also my discussion of the Protestant work ethic in both the Introduction and Chapter 9.

False belief that science will solve everything, that is thinking that fertility treatment is always an option to evading your biological imperatives. Not fulfilling their biological imperative and soothing their motherly instincts, thus redirecting them towards those seen as "have nots" (e.g. refugees).

Here the commenter doubles down on reductionist beliefs about women, namely that our primary goal in life should be reproduction. It is, in their words a "biological imperative." This is not a new line of discussion, but rather a very old trope seen throughout my fieldwork. What is interesting here is the connection this user makes between not having children and demographic replacement. If white women would simply have children as they were meant to, they would not need to outsource their "motherly instincts" and would be less likely to support refugee policies. Again, the user provides a "sensible" response to what they perceive of as a crisis. One that is incredibly misogynistic in nature.

Sexual promiscuity being seen as empowerment despite the fact that it ruins your ability to pair bond, the more partners you have. I think this stems from women wanting to act like men, as acting and having exactly what men have is often seen as something to reach for. Thing is men are biologically designed to be promiscuous, but institutions like the Church have helped curb such behaviours for the good of the children that would be seeing the light of day.

Again, there is nothing particularly new about this rhetoric. It is a common theme in male supremacist discourse that men are biologically designed to be sexually promiscuous, while it goes against biology and God for women to do so.

Propaganda. Again, plenty of "conservatives" helped pass policies like the Hart Celler Act. Propaganda has helped turn White women against their own interests, and against White men.

It is interesting that the user would post about an American immigration act meant to abolish discrimination against groups from non-northwestern European countries in a discussion on a

Canadian subreddit. It shows the fluency my interlocutors have with American history and politics, likely because of the time they spend in non-Canadian right-wing spaces. This remixing of global flows to fit a national context is interesting in its own right, but I find it particularly interesting that they frame this as turning white women against their own interests and against white men. And it is that last bit that matters here, I think. White men are the ultimate victims of feminism and the immigration policies it supports. While white women might also be victims of supposed self-sabotage (although I still argue that divesting from whiteness is key to our liberation), their betrayal renders them unworthy of care or sympathy.

True Victimhood and Intersectionality

So far in Part II I have explored how white women are conceptualized in contradictory ways within the white male nation fantasy. They are both the saviours and traitors, as well as powerful villains and petulant children. White women are also conceptualized as either biologically inferior to men or corrupted by feminism. Yet, despite this diversity in conceptualization, one thread remained clear: white men were the victims of white women (either through their child-like ignorance, or their feminist malice). As a result, I want to end with a discussion of ‘true’ victimhood narratives amongst my interlocutors that emerged from discussions of women. I have made the comment before that when my interlocutors talk about immigrants, leftists, women, or feminists, which they do a great deal, they actually reveal a lot more about their own self-image, feelings and emotions, and hopes for and anxieties about the future. Let me begin with the notion of white male decline, an area of study informed by the work of Ferber (1999) and Daniels (1997).

Combined with anti-feminist and anti-racial justice rhetoric, my interlocutors painted a picture of white Canadians as in a state of decline in part because of state actions. They argued that immigration policies—again enabled by “bleeding heart” men and traitorous white women—created a system in which white people could not reproduce biologically or culturally. Take for example the following comment:

Yep working aged Canadians don't need jobs! Low fertility rate? More immigrants instead of offering more incentives to bear children! (Reddit user).

Here, the ‘real’ working class Canadians were undermined by immigration policies that created an economic system that impeded their ability to gain employment and afford to raise families. The notion of immigrants taking jobs at the expense of white workers is, of course, a standard line in right-wing discourse (Daniels, 1997; Mancuso, 2010). But here this was about more than the economy; the future of the white race was threatened,

Don’t have kids! That will help preserve the foundation of our culture. We must pour in immigrants from overseas and discourage assimilation, that way we will achieve the erosion of western culture!! (Reddit user).

The sarcastic comment above indexes a few things. First, it explicitly notes the inevitable demise of western culture. As Berbrier (2000) notes, one aspect of the victim ideology is the belief that the end goal is the elimination of the subject group, in this case white Canadians. Second, it paints western culture, and specifically Canadian culture, as a function of race and ethnicity, rather than of cultural and civic belonging. Finally, it positions a “we” against the governments encouraging immigration.

Some users were more explicit in their disdain for a government they felt not only failed them, but actively wanted to harm them. Take this Reddit post, for example,

White? All we can offer you is a dose of morphine. Enough to kill an elephant. Now get out of line, real people need medical care. Don’t expect “care”, if you have to go to the hospital – you’ll be left to die. Here’s the pecking order for who gets the ventilator:

- Natives
- Muslim men
- Refugees
- White women

If you're not on the list, you're getting a one way trip to the crematorium. VOTE liberal, and continue sucking government cock. Because the government would never harm you, right? Retarded canadian bug people.⁸⁴

For my interlocutors, the struggle was not just about men or white people, but rather white men. Muslim and Indigenous men were ranked higher than them in terms of perceived privilege due to their race or religion (Berbrier, 2000). Additionally, white women are on the list of people who would receive help as well, although they are at the bottom of the list. This choice was likely made to highlight the way whiteness supposedly works against people in Canada. This shows the attention my interlocutors are giving to the intersectionality of their identities, albeit in a much different form than I take up. It is also an interesting inversion of the matrix of differentiation (Ferber, 1999) wherein their perceived superiority is now recast as being subject to oppression.

Following the anti-feminist argument that feminism has brought about such substantial change that women are no longer disadvantaged, any attempts to assist women comes at the disadvantaging of men (Messner, 1998). Similarly, my interlocutors argue that racial justice initiatives now function in an analogous manner (Mondon & Winter, 2020). Any attempts to uplift racialized groups is seen as an unfair disadvantaging of white people. As a result, any system that attempts to address inequities experienced by women and people of colour (and especially women of colour) are seen as unfair and biased. This evinces an abstract liberalism that assumes that true equality has been achieved and the world can function on merit alone. Therefore, my interlocutors argue, privileges should be bestowed on merit alone irrespective of race or gender. To do otherwise would be to subject white men, rather than women of colour, to a “double burden” based on race and gender (see Maskovsky, 2017).

Yet, the nativist and anti-feminist discourse that immigrants and women are “stealing” their jobs reveals assumptions that white people, particularly white men, are best suited to receive these privileges. After all, someone cannot “steal” something from a person if they do not already possess it or have a reasonable expectation of possessing it in the future (e.g., inheritance). When

⁸⁴ I confess I have no idea what they meant by bug people. If any of my reviewers know, do tell.

these privileges are not afforded to them, the rhetoric turns towards a misogyny that carries with it the very real threat of violence. Thus, while it is important to acknowledge the ways in which white men are hurting and are victims under capitalism, this threat of violence must be taken seriously.

Conclusions & Complicity

I have covered a great deal of ground in both Part I and Part II, but I want to end this discussion of violence by returning to white women not just as bodies strategically deployed in liberal racism, but as people with a stake in this process of imagining and anticipating transgressions and fantasizing about vengeance. I also want to end with this discussion because of the ways in which I am implicated in this discourse as a white woman.

It has become abundantly clear to me across this project that my interlocutors position white women as symbolic saviours of the white race, but more specifically an idealized Canadian identity. This is a global discourse that has found resonance at a national and even local level. This functions as not only a form of liberal racism, but liberal Islamophobia and anti-Semitism as well. White women need to be protected from the threatening other, whether he be an immigrant or globalist. This feeling of danger, of an imagined threat, towards white women (and by extension, Canada) provides a justification for violence. And for some, this process of imagining twists towards one of fantasizing about and finally committing physical violence. But, if the associations I am drawing here between the Nazis, Christchurch, and broadly anti-immigrant rhetoric causes my readers to chafe, perhaps this is a moment for reflection. I noted above the pushback that some of my interlocutors gave when confronted with Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and other forms of racism, and this gives me hope that shifts can occur in these spaces. Yet, much of the pushback has been out of fear of censorship (“don’t be too edgy”) and not because my interlocutors found the rhetoric, or the use of white women’s bodies, offensive. At least not consistently.

This has also been an uncomfortable process for me, as a white woman, whose body (and the bodies of my ancestors depicted in the propaganda) is strategically deployed to justify harm. This

renders me complicit in systemic acts of violence. Beyond being complicit in systems that cause harm, white women are also active participants in upholding white supremacy via liberal racism.

Let me conclude with one final piece of data from a Canadian group on Gab,

C1: Canadian women better stop being so damn stupid and selling out their country. But they won't and this is what's coming.

[Link to an article about a German woman assaulted by refugee after defending herself]

C2: oh trust me, I'm a canadian woman and honestly, I am sick of those who keep selling my home country out to these islamic invaders like this, its making me WANT to run for next election to make some needed changes. Mainly bring things back to how they were before the country started falling apart at the seams.

C1: that is what it will take to bring back Canada, strong patriotic women to talk some sense into these cheap sleavy [sleazy?] race mixing mutts

Here, a white woman participates in the belief that liberal Islamophobia will save her. She attributes her decline—and the decline of the country—to “Islamic invaders” who were accused of sexual assault in this comment thread. Yet, I argue that this process that claims to be about ‘care’ for white women actually constrains us in our struggles against patriarchy. Not only is it infantilizing, but it creates a context in which the harm we experience can be weaponized against historically marginalized groups (Dorr, 2004). However, an unsettling reality that I must reckon with is that some white women also fantasize about enacting violence and vengeance alongside their male counterparts.

When white women play into this system of care, we obscure the roots of our pain. When we believe that white men will save us and protect us from imagined and anticipated threats of sexual violence from men of colour, we focus on race and ignore the ways in which *men* harm us. Buying into white supremacy will not save white women from men, and especially not from

white men as we support the system that shields them from being accountable to us. As I make clear in Part II, white men can and will reach a point where white women are no longer valuable as people and as rhetorical or political strategies. When we are no longer useful to them, and indeed are imagined as possible transgressors and traitors, we become subjects of violence alongside Muslims and men of colour. We become threats to their fantasies.

I have explored in crushing detail the violent misogyny white men visit upon white women when they feel we (white women) have betrayed them. More importantly, I have demonstrated what happens when we become the “cheap [sleazy] race mixing mutts,” or, perhaps more accurately, what happens when we simply fit the image of a woman who *might* become one.

“Good luck, bitches” indeed.

Chapter 9 - Hockey, the North & “You People”

Hockey, as with most things to emerge within and alongside the Canadian national identity, is interwoven with longstanding socio-cultural issues. With its rampant racism, homophobia, misogyny and “man up” approaches to mental health, hockey is in many ways an exemplar of the very things I study. At its worst, it is a vivid example of white supremacy and toxic masculinity as evidenced by the ongoing allegations of sexual assault by and of players (Diaz, 2021; Johnston, 2021), as well as racist discourse from fans, coaching staff, and players alike (Rowe, 2022; Seravalli, 2019; Sound & Boggart, 2021).⁸⁵ These issues circulate throughout Canadian media outlets, and they often found their way into my interlocutors’ forum discussions. Before I dig into why I have a section dedicated to the sport and what it has to do with the white male victim ideology thread that runs throughout my dissertation, I must begin with a note around my relationship with hockey. After all, positionality and relationality matter in this sort of research.

I have a long and profound love for hockey. I was raised in a family that has watched hockey for the better part of a century, and it has become an intergenerational pastime. Every Christmas the IIHF World Juniors tournament plays in our home in lieu of carols, and we watch with glee as the Canadian players skate circles around the Europeans and Americans. The cultural importance of hockey extended beyond my family as I grew up in a small rural community where social status was ascribed to families with boys who were able to eke out even a modicum of success in the sport. I continue to consume hockey daily through a variety of mediums, from live games to podcasts and Twitter threads. Perhaps more importantly, I have actively incorporated hockey into my doctoral work as a facet of my self-care and mental health routines. When I was conducting fieldwork in Scandinavia (Fall 2019) and struggling with feelings of isolation and disrupted routines, I listened to the Hockey Central podcast during my downtime, and it brought me home for a few fleeting moments. I have a crystal-clear memory of running down a trail in the forest that borders Uppsala, Sweden, and listening to the *Sportsnet* commentators discuss Bo Horvat’s

⁸⁵ A reader with a keen eye may have noticed these articles are from 2021 and 2022. This was to show the issues in present-day hockey. A comprehensive overview history of racism, misogyny, and assault in hockey is out of the scope of this work and would likely include an incomprehensible amount of citations.

pending captaincy for the Vancouver Canucks. Somehow, this is more vivid than any other experience during that trip.

With this relationship in mind, I turn now to the use of hockey as a signifier of a particular kind of Canadian, one that is “at risk” in the face of immigration and shifting demographics. And, if it is not already clear from my personal anecdotes, it is a particular kind of Canadian that I have proximity to by virtue of my family and my own actions. Parts of my identity fit, if somewhat uncomfortably, into this mold even as I threaten it with my personal politics.

Here, I explore how hockey has come to not only unify a country but define it both within and beyond its borders since the nation’s early years. I show how this process of defining what it means to be Canadian has been put to work once again within the anti-immigrant and anti-feminist rhetoric of my interlocutors. I argue that they see hockey as a sort of canary in the coalmine warning them of their waning power and justifying their resentment towards women, people of colour, and queer folks. Any perceived changes or critiques to the game become challenges to their own identities as straight white men as hockey stands for the nation and they see themselves as the archetypal and true Canadian.

While hockey was a recurring thread throughout my research, I place at the center of this discussion the dismissal of Don Cherry from Hockey Night in Canada in November 2019 and the subsequent discourse it facilitated. It is with his initial comments, which were anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim in nature, that I wish to begin.

Don Cherry & “You people”: A Field Reflection

When: November 9, 2019

Where: Edmonton, Alberta (My living room)

Who: Myself, my partner, and a family friend

What: Watching hockey and sharing a meal

My partner and I had invited a friend to our home to watch the game together. I had just arrived home from my offline fieldwork in Europe where I had been trying—and failing—to watch the games at three or four in the morning, and I was excited to watch the game at a reasonable time. Fieldwork is always disruptive and overwhelming for me, and I welcomed a return to routine and normalcy.

Hockey had already figured prominently in my research by this point, especially when I asked people for things that made up Canadian culture and contributed to our sense of nationalism. People would talk about the Olympics and playing against the Americans, or if they were a bit older, they would mention the Summit Series in the 1970s where Canada violently squared off against the Russians. My dad, for example, is always keen to reminisce about the series. In every example my interlocutors gave, Canada beat the superpowers of the day and it was a source of pride for the country. However, I was woefully unprepared for the tangling up of hockey and anti-immigration rhetoric that was about to interrupt our evening and continue to ripple and re-emerge throughout my research for years to come.

It was the intermission, and I had left the living room to finish making supper. From the kitchen I could hear the intermission commentators, Don Cherry and Rob McLean, discussing the game when Cherry seemed to pivot to a new subject. This was not particularly surprising as the man often went off topic on a rant. I could not quite make out what he was raving about this time, and truthfully, I rarely paid attention to his ramblings. I saw him as a relic of an older era of hockey who should have retired decades ago. I was put off by many of his takes on the sport and in particular his takes on masculinity. I knew this was an unpopular opinion amongst my interlocutors, and indeed some of my family members, but I accepted the disagreement as a minor one.

Something nagged at me about the exchange. Perhaps it was a sort of hypersensitivity to certain language or my anthropological attunement, a term I borrow from Tsing et al. (2019), that caused me to stick my head into the living room and ask, “What did he just say?” My partner shook his head, “I don’t know, sorry, I wasn’t paying attention to his rant.” “Yeah, I never do anymore. Man should have retired years ago,” our friend echoed.

My partner and our guest were equally distracted and uninterested in Cherry, and the conversation shifted as we sat down to fill our stomachs before the game resumed. But before long, my phone began to go off with messages from a handful of friends through Facebook messenger, Twitter, and text messaging. At first, I ignored the messages. We did, after all, have a guest over and I was engrossed in the game. Yet, they persisted.

<beep!>

<beep!> <beep!>

<beep!> <beep!> <beep!>

I relented and opened my messages:

“Did you see what Don Cherry said about immigrants???”

“This probably relates to your research... sorry I always send you depressing news!”

“Holy shit! Don Cherry is off his fucking rocker.”

The messages continued. By this point in my project, my friends and family, and even colleagues overseas, had become my pseudo-research assistants, dutifully alerting me to important events within my area of research. In doing so, they became thin lines tangled up within my project. Our conversations at times thickened these lines as they provided their own take on the situation, fed me more memes, comments, and posts, and listened as I tried to make sense of the complex and contradictory people I was studying. This, it seemed, was one of those times.

I turned to the others and sighed, “Guys, Twitter is blowing up over what Cherry said during the last intermission...” For a few moments, the three of us sat captivated by our phones, scrolling through Twitter using the hashtag #DonCherry, which swiftly began to trend in Canada. Both my partner and our guest direct messaged me a number of comments they thought relevant to my work. Their personal Twitter accounts were already primed with hockey content and my temporary research assistants went to work. Many people over the course of the evening sent me clips of the rant, the gist of which was,

You people ... you love our way of life, you love our milk and honey, at least you can pay a couple bucks for a poppy or something like that... These guys paid for your way of life that you enjoy in Canada, these guys paid the biggest price (Don Cherry, November 9, 2019, Hockey Night in Canada).

For what seemed like the millionth time, my fieldwork drew me in during my off hours. It interrupted meaningful moments of self-care and joy deliberately designed to keep my mind and spirit from collapsing under the weight of my research subject. Could I have ignored my messages and left Twitter for the next morning? Certainly. Yet, the lines looped themselves around me, my messages bundled me up in the conversation, and my in-person company pulled tight the knot of ethnographic curiosity.

There is also, I argue, something about becoming immersed in the flow of online discourse in the moment while it lives, which differs from scrolling through archives of dead threads and abandoned conversations. The emotions feel more intense and vibrant. There is an effervescence experienced when the comments are pouring in right *now*. The embodied experience is one of anticipation and anxiety. What will come next? Will *Sportsnet* respond? Will Cherry?

Oh god, what are my interlocutors saying?

Unsurprisingly, they had a great deal to say about the subject and the discourse continued in spurts over the next year. But allow me to back up to the true beginning of this story, the formation of Canada as a nation and the use of hockey in defining not only the Canadian identity, but the un-Canadians as well.

The New “Us”: Hockey and Shaping Early Canadian Identity

I want to begin with a quote from an interlocutor. It is one that immediately points to the relationship between hockey and nationalism,

I know we mostly discuss politics, but this is our national winter game. This is OUR game (r/metacanada user).

This notion of hockey as “our” game, where our is taken to stand for Canadian broadly, is a common enough statement where I grew up. It is what sports sociologist Kristi Allain (2008) calls Canadian common-sense: a taken for granted, even if it does not truly fit every scenario, statement of fact about being Canadian. Indeed, for much of my life I have considered it a facet of *my* Canadian-ness. This was one arena where Canada could stand against European and American pressures and excel. Yet, who is the “our” in the quote above? Does the user mean all Canadians, or only some of “us”? I wonder, does he mean me?

My experience and love of hockey is certainly not universal—indeed many in my maternal family have little interest in the sport and many of my friends prefer to watch American football—yet it is demonstrably clear that we have, as a nation, bought into the power of hockey as a national symbol since the turn of the 20th century (Rich, 2021). Before I turn to how hockey is weaponized in anti-immigrant rhetoric, I want to spend some time setting up hockey as a symbol of a particular kind of Canadian-ness, and one that a particular kind of Canadian can become invested in preserving. In doing so, I argue that Canadian/un-Canadian binaries can emerge easily within this discourse because my interlocutors are building on a binary that stretches back to the 19th century. Precedents of exclusion make contemporary exclusion seem easy and even justifiable. It is tradition, after all.

In his work on Canadian identity and hockey, folklorist Michael Robidoux (2002) invokes Benedict Anderson’s (2006) imagined community to understand the struggle of the early Canadian nation. He notes that the process of constructing and circulating a national identity to be imagined by all is, in actuality, the work of a select few individuals whose interests are placed at the center. Put plainly, the notion of Canadian-ness was never meant to fit or serve just anyone, and indeed it excluded as many as it included if not more. This is an important thread to keep in mind throughout this chapter.

For a country as physically large, demographically diverse, and geographically dispersed as Canada, creating a sense of national unity is a seemingly insurmountable task. Yet, hockey has managed to remain a consistent expression of Canadian national identity and is responsible for the propagation of a particular kind of hegemonic Canadian-ness that privileged a rugged, aggressive, unrefined straight white maleness (Allain, 2008). What follows is a brief discussion of the use of the north, the landscape, and European heritage in forging a fledgling Canadian national identity rooted in these norms. This provides a framework for better understanding the role hockey played (and indeed why it was hockey and not another sport) in this process and the precedent this set for my contemporary interlocutors in their anti-immigrant rhetoric.

Canada, like the rest of the north, has a mythos derived from the rugged landscape (Chartier & Ísleifsson, 2011). In the 1800s, northerners were seen as a “hardy, progressive, and democratic” people and the north was contrasted with the south, referring mostly to the Mediterranean, which was “attractive and seductive but at the same time weak, old-fashioned, autocratic, corrupt, and inconstant” (Ísleifsson, 2011, p. 14). The north became the birthplace of humanity, science, and scholarship, while the south was rendered a space of opulence and slavery. The north had a celebrated landscape; it was terrifying and brutal, but it was also magnificent, awe-inspiring, sublime, raw, and pure. Importantly, it was a place of freedom and potential. For Canadians, by which I mean the white Christian men in the early years of the nation who had any degree of power and capital, these ideas of the north presented an opportunity to create and control a particular kind of masculinity and identity across a multitude of platforms and media including politics, art, and literature. Take for example the following piece of poetry,

Hail! Rugged monarch, Northern Winter, hail!
Come! Great Physician, vitalize the gale;
Dispense the ozone thou has purified,
With Frost and Fire, where Health and age reside,—
Where Northern Lights electrify the soul
Of Mother Earth, whose throne is near the Pole.

Why should the children of the North deny

The sanitary virtues of the sky?
Why should they fear the cold, or dread the snow,
When ruddier blood thro' their hot pulses flow?

...

We have the Viking blood, and Celtic bone,
The Saxons' muscled flesh, and scorn to groan,
Because we do not bask in Caylon's Isle
Where Heber said, that "only man is vile".

...

But we, as laymen, must get down to earth,
And praise the clime which gave our nation birth.
Kind winter is our theme.

William Henry Taylor (quoted in Berger, 1966, pp. 3–4)

It evokes a sense of a brutal landscape and a people capable of surviving it, while clearly playing up the racial supremacist ideologies of the day. It is with this poem, by William Henry Taylor (b. 1906 – d. 1965), that Berger (1966) opens up one of the most well-cited pieces on Canada and the north. Entitled "The true north strong and free," the verse captures a great deal of Berger's chapter: Canada is said to be born of the north and made stronger by her. The Canada First nationalist movement was deeply invested in the relation between "stock" and environment. In their writings, the Aryan and "ancient Scandinavians" were held above all as a superior stock.⁸⁶ In contrast, countries that were more southern were considered inferior and fit for subjugation. These regions were described as ones of "effeminacy and disease" while the north could cure "decayed function and wasted tissue" (Berger, 1966, p. 7).

⁸⁶ See also Higham (2002) for a nuanced discussion of when and how certain European heritages were considered inferior, including the Celts who are often invoked in contemporary discourse as a "founding" heritage for Canada and the US. This evinces changing ideas of in/out-groups over time and the projection of these ideas back onto history.

The emphasis on *effeminacy* in early Canadian nation building work is interesting, and I want to argue here that despite positive treatment of the British people throughout the literature Berger discusses, there was a lingering sense of disdain for Victorian sensibilities amongst white men in Canada. While the British stock may be desirable relative to Italian or Spanish, the British preoccupation with gentlemanly behaviours was at odds with the lives and struggles of early settlers. Thus, rather than aspiring towards Victorian sensibility and gentlemanly qualities, early Canadian settlers doubled down on the harsh realities of the Canadian landscape. This was exemplified by the rejection of cricket in Canada and the subsequent uptake of hockey. Unlike cricket, which embodied a more civil expression of masculinity, hockey and lacrosse better represented the harsh realities of settler life. With their emphasis on rugged aggressiveness and brutality, both hockey and lacrosse ran counter to “British bourgeois sensibilities that understood sport to be refined and gentlemanly and serve as a breeding ground for proper British mores and values” (Robidoux, 2002, p. 214). Importantly, hockey gave settlers the opportunity to create and display a new and emergent form of masculinity that took hold in the Canadian imagination.

This emergent form of Canadian masculinity has taken root in the nation’s consciousness and continues to inform perceptions of belonging and exclusion in ways that intersect with race, class, and sexuality. As Watson (2017) notes, hockey has also been explicitly used by the state to “overcome regional, linguistic and cultural differences” and promote a “pan-Canadian sense of community” (p. 294). It has become an archetype for the Canadian man, specifically, and it is increasingly linked with patriotism and normality (Scherer & McDermott, 2011). Yet, what began as a raced, classed, and gendered project represents a particular brand of Canadian-ness that, while upheld by my interlocutors in the wake of the Don Cherry firing, has never comfortably fit all Canadians. Indeed, according to Robidoux (2002),

The Canadian penchant to understand itself through hockey repeats masculinist formulas of identification that reflect poorly the lives of Canadians. The physically dominant, heterosexist, and capitalist associations of this specific identity are certainly exclusionary but for that matter, all nationalist expressions cannot suitably speak for the polyphony of a nation. Despite the obvious fallibility of nationalistic representation, the legitimacy of

nationalistic expression remains. Canada's history is located firmly in patriarchy, heterosexism, and capitalism...

Playing hockey is a means of constructing an image of a nation in the manner in which dominant forces within it wish to be seen. With this, hockey does not merely symbolize the need to define a national identity, it offers insight into the actual imaginings of what this identity entails (p. 222).

It is this insight into the imaginings of identity that I want to turn to now in my discussions of hockey and anti-immigrant rhetoric amongst my interlocutors. What do their imaginings tell us about their conceptualization of the 'real' or 'true' Canadian? What does it tell us about their sense of self and belonging in Canadian society more broadly? How does this discourse create and reify the Others and the un-Canadians?

Our Game: Re-Defining Us and Them in 21st Century Canada

Hockey helps construct and maintain a hegemonic masculinity that privileges an aggressive straight white version (Allain, 2008). This was, as I argue above, taken to stand for Canadian-ness more broadly, despite the total erasure of women as well as men who did not conform to this idealized version of masculinity. While my research certainly affirms these perspectives, what is interesting for my purposes here is how hockey was frequently positioned as a reflection of the *state* of straight white men in Canada. Thus, while I spend the remainder of this chapter analyzing the discourse surrounding Cherry's dismissal, I also attend to how this maps onto larger issues that my interlocutors focused on in their conversations. This may have been about hockey for many, including myself, my partner, and our friend, but for my interlocutors, it was about the state of Canada and their sense of belonging.

Before I turn to my data, a brief note on the analytical framework I adopt here to aid my discussion would be beneficial. It is influenced by the notion of collective nostalgia and imagined communities. As Wohl et al. (2020) argue, collective identity and feelings of homogeneity with regards to in-groups tends to bring a sense of stability and security for

individuals. When this homogeneity is threatened or disrupted, this can result in feelings of distress and anxiety. This is quite clearly the case for many of my interlocutors who worry about the nation's future in the wake of shifting racial and religious demographics. As a result, they lament the changes and yearn for a bygone era. This collective nostalgia is a “sentimental longing or wistful reflection for their groups' past” that “can result in action taken against those deemed to be outsiders or outgroups deemed to be threatening the group's stability” (Wohl et al., 2020, p. 1).

In practice, this framework allows me to understand the role hockey has played in the process of creating an imagined community and national identity in Canada, and how this idealized and imagined form of Canadian-ness is routinely invoked in moments of anxiety by my interlocutors. As a result, when hockey is challenged or threatened—whether by women, queer folks, people of colour, or any combination thereof—this in-group also feels threatened. Due to this connection between nation, hockey, and identity, discussions of racism, sexism, homophobia, and mental health in hockey produce spaces for discussing the threats to “real” Canadian-ness more broadly. This was certainly the case when members of the hockey community began talking about racism and xenophobia in the sport, and these discussions showcased how Cherry's comments were indicative of a larger issue.

Following the departure of Don Cherry from Hockey Night in Canada, Cherry's longtime co-host Ron MacLean spoke on the prejudices in hockey including racism and sexism. On r/metacanada, a user posted a screenshot taken from Twitter. The tweet included a comment stating, “Ron MacLean explains how racist and sexist Canadian hockey is...” and a link to the video of MacLean. The post received an average amount of upvotes (68), with a 92% upvote rate, and a substantial number of comments for the community (50). This is markedly less engagement than the original Twitter post, which at the time it was screenshotted and posted to Reddit had amassed 348 “likes” and 695 comments.



Figure 34. Screenshot of r/metacanada post regarding Ron MacLean’s apology for Don Cherry’s actions. Entitled “Ron MacLean explains how racist and sexist Canadian hockey is...”

The comments were highly critical of MacLean for taking this position. This was unsurprising, yet the way MacLean’s comments in the video functioned like discussion prompts that my interlocutors connected to other common grievances was illuminating. The comments expressed frustrations I have noted elsewhere: That white men are unfairly persecuted, devalued and accused (Berbrier, 2000), that white culture is under threat by cultural Marxists and globalists (Campion-Vincent, 2005), and that this is a sign that Canada is cucked and, according to many, fucked as well (Green, 2019). The post itself even included the tag “Ron MaCuck” to emphasize the betrayal they felt at the hands of one of the most iconic figures in Canadian hockey history.

Now, I want to demonstrate how these comments wove together threads about hockey and Canadian identity with anti-feminist and anti-immigrant rhetoric by quoting some of the exchanges at length below. In doing so, I illustrate the back and forth, the building of ideas, the

ways in which other users shaped the conversations, and how they always came back to this disdain for the diversity that challenges the hegemonic white hetero masculinity of both hockey and Canada. While not a traditional vignette, it is how I experienced these asynchronous entanglements.

C1: What in the God Damn fuck? That was one of the most cringe things I've ever seen. Hockey is lost.

C2: It was a lot worse than what I was expecting. How are they expecting this to go over with their audience?

C3: They don't care. It's like all the race-mixing commercials and gender-swapping movie franchises, they just plan to keep shoving it down our throats and gloat that we can't do anything to stop it.

C4: Which is ironically creating more racism and extremism.

C5: You gotta break some institutions to build a new society. It's time for people to stop being complacent about their future and notice what is happening to everything they value.

C6: I [does] seem like they're mocking us.

C7: This shit is disturbing, especially to kids.

This exchange was exemplary of the frustration my interlocutors felt with regards to controlling the narrative and definition of Canadian-ness. To return to Robidoux (2002), nation building and identity meaning-making has always been the work of a select few to their benefit, namely straight white men. Here, my interlocutors work through frustrations that they no longer occupy that position, or at least do not perceive themselves as having this power even though white men

still occupy most positions of power in Canada (Bhambra, 2017). What is interesting here is the sense of pessimism regarding the state of Canada, and by extension the white masculinity embodied in hockey throughout history. The initial poster laments that “hockey is lost” which is echoed in other places with “Canada is lost” and “Canada is cucked (fucked).” Does that also mean that the straight white male in Canada is lost (cucked, and fucked), too?

As the conversation continues, another commentor remarks, however, that some institutions need to be broken to create something new. This notion that Canada as it stands needs to be scrapped entirely—whether through reverse immigration⁸⁷ or violent conflict—is also a common theme within my research (see Chapter 7). In these instances, my interlocutors lament the complacency of their fellow Canadians in the destruction of “everything they value” whether that be hockey as a sport of white domination, statues of John A. MacDonald, or the traditional family.⁸⁸ This connects with a broader sense of pessimism towards their status as exemplified by misogynistic movements like the Red and Black Pill movements, as well as the Men Going Their Own Way communities (see Carian et al., 2022 for a comprehensive volume on male supremacist movements). In this ideological thread is the notion that white men have been so completely betrayed and denied what they are owed—whether women, jobs, or political power—they might as well give up on the system entirely. Again, this is about hockey, yet it links to, and invites commentary on, so much more.

To return to the exchange, it also gives the impression that hockey is something produced by and for white men. The use of “their audience” when talking about a negative reaction to anti-racism and feminism seems to preclude women and people of colour from the audience. After all, would most women and people of colour (outside of those with internalized misogynistic and racist views) not herald a less racist and sexist space as a good thing? This discussion, however, can and will destroy the sport (“hockey is lost”). Again, here one can easily replace “hockey” with “straight white men” and the conversation is the same. It is also worth noting the construction of

⁸⁷ The notion of reverse immigration is also a common thread in European rhetoric, and this reflects the interconnected nature of Canadian and European rhetoric (see Zuquete **).

⁸⁸ There was a consistent theme of “care” for children that plays on decades of anti-LGBTQ rhetoric that positions queer people, particularly men, as pedophiles. A rich discussion of the “gay panic” in my fieldwork is out of the scope of this work.

a binary within this exchange, which Watson (2017) notes is a common theme within hockey's history as a nation and meaning-making project. Watson argues that hockey becomes an internal-external dialectic which produces the us/them binary responsible for crafting the Canadian national identity in opposition to the US, Europe, and Russia. Out of this opposition, an "us" emerges, which elevates the identities I have repeatedly identified: white, straight, male.

This dialect of "us" and "them" can also be directed within the nation to produce what Scherer and McDermott (2011) see as "ordinary Canadians" and un-Canadians. Here, the second commentor uses a vague "they," yet it would make sense to assume they are referring to those who produced the HNIC script given the use of "their audience." However, the third commentor takes this "they" and applies it more broadly to those who advocate for "race-mixing commercials and gender-swapping movies" and those who "plan to keep shoving it down our throats and gloat that we can't do anything to stop it." The "they" here becomes the un-Canadians: the cultural Marxists, the feminist leftists, the Social Justice Warriors, and quite likely the Jewish community, who were criticized in every other part of my fieldwork. In response, the second commentor responds "It [does] seem like they're mocking us" confirming the conflation of audience—who are presumed to be, based on historic precedence and stereotypes white men—and "us."

This frames feminists and anti-racists as enemies to both hockey and their conceptualization of our national identity. Moreover, my interlocutors connect this lack of control over hockey to other areas of society, like popular culture and the media, where they feel disempowered and erased in a space where they have previously been entitled to power and presence. This thread was picked up elsewhere in the discussion. In response to the comment that Hockey Night in Canada often featured white people in their coverage, one user responded,

C8: That may be because white people like hockey. Is that a problem? If Latinos like soccer, Indians like cricket, and black people like basketball, is that a problem? That question is never answered; and of course it doesn't have to be. The lack of a conversation around it implies what is left unstated: There is only a problem if something is "too white". There is never a problem [if] something is "too other colour". In other words,

“white” is the problem. According to the Social justice Warriors, in order to eradicate “racism” from society we need to eradicate “whiteness”. In order to eradicate racism from society, we need to engage in racism against white people. It is appalling by any measure. It is absurd beyond belief. It is reprehensible in its utter disregard for equality. These shitbags have now descended upon our great game of hockey. These people need to take a fucking step back.

C9: That’s correct. Most of the comments said here are accurate. But, this our climate so to speak. Most western countries are “cucked.” You have brainwashed cultural marxist societies in which freedom of speech is changed to anti-white rhetoric or it’s called “hate speech.” There are certain people and groups who you can’t criticize. You know who they are or should know. This has been a steady progression. If you want to describe it as “1984” or a totalitarian cultural marxist indoctrination, it’s all the same concept. But, they need enough cuckolded white people and liberals to “join” this BS because it is only white people who will resist it. For e.g., read the comments here.

I want to highlight the comment “If Latinos like soccer, Indians like cricket, and black people like basketball, is that a problem?” because this discourse indexes two interesting and reoccurring sentiments. First, that ethnic groups can be corralled into specific spaces, places, and apparently culturally defined interests, and that this segregation is acceptable and even desirable. This is reminiscent of the ethno-nationalist discourse that argues “Africa for Africans, China for Chinese” (see Chapter 7). In this line of argument, ethno-nationalists claim that they are not racist, but rather recognize that people want to be around others who look like them and belong to the in-group (Sahdra & Ross, 2007).

Second it indexes a belief that collective ethnic self-determination is not afforded to white people. My interlocutors often asked, “why is it that white countries always have to be diverse?” As this commentator (C8) noted, “There is only a problem if something is ‘too white.’ In other words, ‘white’ is the problem.” The dubious nature of their critique of diversity initiatives as “appalling, absurd, and reprehensible” aside, it is not unsurprising that a group would exhibit

hostility (“take a fucking step back”) at the unwanted changes brought about by people they consider to be the out-group (Wohl et al., 2020). In this case, the rejected changes are the feminist and anti-racism initiatives in hockey in addition to the demographic shifts in Canada. The link between the two is the belief that immigration and refugee resettlement programs are the work of Social Justice Warriors, alternatively referred to as cultural Marxists, leftists, and feminists (Massanari & Chess, 2018). Because both issues stem from the same threatening, nebulous group, it makes sense for my interlocutors to bring the conversations together in this space. If these traitors were not so keen to bring about demographic shifts, hockey would be just fine (read: white and male). And so would Canada.

The responding user (C9) takes this conversation beyond Canadian borders, which again, is a common practice amongst my interlocutors. They note that “most western countries are ‘cucked’” and that these societies are brainwashed by cultural Marxists who have effectively turned free speech into “anti-white rhetoric.” What I want to highlight here is the use of cuckold to describe the “race-traitor” white people in Canada (and western countries) who are undermining white (male) Canadian identity. This manifests often in the anti-women and anti-feminist discourse (Chapter 8), as well as in critiques of immigration policies from the Liberals and Conservatives. Here, these white Canadians are rendered un-Canadian given their disloyalty to hockey, Canada, and whiteness, and this speaks to the populist “us versus them” and in-group/out-group binaries that emerged throughout my research.

These comments exemplify repeatedly expressed concerns and anxieties over the perceived need to “eradicate” whiteness, yet it bears repeating that my interlocutors hold these beliefs despite the overwhelmingly straight-, white- and maleness of hockey. However, as Smeekes and Verkuyten (2013) note, the continuity of both self- and collective-identity are key to psychological wellbeing, and this identity is rooted in a past/present/future continuum. Thus, regardless of empirical reality, the fact that my interlocutors felt fear for the current state of hockey, and the future of whiteness in general, was sufficient in producing a hostile response. Again, this is about anticipated and imagined threats and transgression even in contexts where such actions are unlikely to ever manifest. Moreover, this contributes to ongoing fantasies of victimhood and legitimized retaliatory violence.

The final comment that I have included in this chapter also brings to the forefront the role of work ethic and class, as well as the notion of a meritocracy,

The only privilege I have experienced was the privilege of growing up in a non shit hole country filled mainly with my fellow white people. People who worked hard, played hard, and built things including enough prosperity to help other nations.

Strange how all this immigration hasn't brought us just boatloads of prosperity. I would say the average Canadian is worse off now than they were 20 years ago and much worse off than they were 30 and 40 years ago.

What has this brought us?

More crime. More terrorists. More whiners. More bottom feeders living off the government handouts and more tax evading shitheads.

Yeah lets keep it up. It sounds good to say oh we are just letting doctors and other highly skilled people immigrate but then you let them bring in everyone related to them because you don't want to break up families. Well you aren't breaking up families the people that came here are so let them go back home if they miss mommy and daddy and uncle jerkoff.

As Lorenz (2015) argues, hockey “offered opportunities for men to forge, display and demonstrate their ‘manly’ qualities, and [sic] the game’s celebration of rugged, aggressive – even violent –versions of masculinity embodied middle-class and working-class ideals” (p. 2109). It is interesting that in a discussion of hockey as it pertains to racism and sexism, a commentor would create an image of a previous Canada wherein “people [sic] worked hard, played hard” which brings to mind the work of Robidoux (2002) on how hockey best reflected the difficult work of early Canadian settlers and their need for a physical outlet to compensate for the hard living and working conditions. Moreover, this emphasis on hard work played into a sort

of Protestant work ethic wherein those who worked hard (and played hard) were morally superior to the soft and lazy. This discourse, of course, played out in early immigration policies that portrayed certain ethnicities as undesirable given the brutal climate and hard work that Canadians faced (see Introduction; also Massey, 1948).

This discourse is also interesting because it shows the complex nature of my interlocutors. When it came to capitalism, there was an unevenness in its reception. Some argued that capitalism was the way forward for Canada, as socialist policies would bankrupt the nation and encourage people to shirk their responsibility to work in favour of “living off government handouts.” This was particularly true in conversations regarding immigrants and social welfare (“gimmigrants”). Others were critical of capitalism in its current state and saw globalization and neoliberalism as undermining forces. Here, my interlocutors and I found a moment of commonality (Pasieka, 2019), where we could agree that there was something oppressive happening with our economic system. Yet, here, the Redditor chose to use this opportunity not to critique the companies that exploit them and immigrants, but to rail against the immigrants themselves. It was as if my interlocutors (here and elsewhere in my work) were reaching back in time to an era where capitalism *worked* for people like them. It was an era—albeit one that likely never existed exactly as described if we take Wohl et al.’s (2020) discussion of collective nostalgia seriously—where one could “work hard, play hard” and be successful as a straight white man.

Other comments focused on the allocation of “stars”⁸⁹ at the end of the game and how these should be awarded via merit to who were the “outstanding players of the night – regardless of race” and they reduced serious accusations of misogyny—from sexual assault to pay gaps and hiring discrimination—to locker room talk,

And boys talking about how much they like girls? The horror!

Comments like these doubled down on the belief that Canada is supposedly unencumbered by systemic racism, and it minimizes the role of masculinity and patriarchy within both hockey and

⁸⁹ At the end of the broadcast, three players are recognized for their gameplay and are award one, two, or three stars. These might be players who scored the most goals or a goalie who had a number of great saves.

Canada more broadly. Moreover, the comments refute the notion of privilege and instead express the firmly held belief that they, as straight white males, are in a state of decline just like Canada.

Them: The Un-Canadians

I return now to the quote that hockey is “our” sport and the notion of the un-Canadian. After all, “our” implies a corresponding “their,” does it not? From my discussion above, it should come as no surprise to my reader that I understand the “they” in this scenario to be those who threaten the whiteness of hockey—those who push “race-mixing” and “race-swapping” and want the talents of players of colour recognized. However, as many scholars have argued previously (Allain, 2008; Watson, 2017; Rich, 2021), hockey is also about gender, sexuality, class, and rurality. This renders hockey a rural, Christian, conservative, straight, white male project, and it can therefore be threatened by “corrupting” ideologies like feminism. Take the following comment for example,

Anything that is a White people only thing or dominated by White people is being targeted to be destroyed or diversified. Your very existence is unacceptable and they will take your culture and erase your history, and your going to let them, yes, your going to let them because your brainwashed girlfriends, wives, and mothers won't let you do otherwise (Reddit user).

Here, the commentor doubles down on the feelings of powerlessness in the face of white destruction (see Berbrier, 2000). They note that “anything that is a White people only thing or dominated by White people is being targeted to be destroyed or diversified” because the ultimate goal of this process is to “eradicate whiteness.” Again, we can see how the changes to hockey are linked to their sense of self- and collective-identity and the continuity of both, as well as the hopelessness of the situation (Smeekes and Verkuyten, 2013). Interestingly, they argue that it will be the “brainwashed” women who will destroy white culture. They will first destroy hockey with their feminism and then, left unsatisfied in their quest to destroy Canada, move on to white men themselves. This positioning of white women as betrayers is common throughout my field work, and I explore it in depth in Chapter 8. This once again leaves white men alone in their

quest to defend a version of Canada and hockey that they hold dear, which is another trope throughout male supremacist discourse (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012). Beyond race and gender, sexuality was also a point of frustration for my interlocutors,

Alright everyone. Let's go pick out the handful of people at the hockey game who aren't white and make everything about them so we're not racist anymore. – no no they have to be chicks too. But make sure they're not straight. Fucking ridiculous. Grow a set of nuts MacLean you walking, talking, giant, fucking pussy. Jesus Christ this is getting out of hand.

This anti-queer discourse reflects an anxiety around masculinity and sexuality, and it doubles down on derogatory and misogynistic language. From this we can glean a belief that in hockey, as elsewhere in Canada, the *straight* white male is under threat.

To be un-Canadian is also to be communist. According to my interlocutors, those amongst the Canadian hockey media had “copied Mao’s Cultural Revolution where comrades are encouraged to confess to crimes that they never committed” and in doing so self-flagellate and capitulate to the forces pushing for diversity at the expense of the everyday and ordinary Canadian. Others were much more succinct in their claims that MacLean, and those he represented, was “such a fucking globalist cuck.”

What started as a conversation about the state of hockey became something much larger: a scathing reflection on the state of Canada. “More crime. More terrorists. More whiners. More bottom feeders living off the government handouts and more tax evading shitheads.” This comment, when understood within the broader discourses of right-wing social media (and in particular *r/metacanada*) is referencing specific groups. More crime invokes people of colour in urban centers like Vancouver and the GTA, as well as in rural areas that are part of the rural immigration project (See Chapter 7 on nativism). This ignores the rise in violent misogyny and Islamophobic attacks perpetrated by white men, of course. Whiners and bottom feeders refers to the cultural Marxist leftists and feminists who want diversity, justice, and equality, as well as

UBI and other pandemic supports.⁹⁰ The tax evading shitheads is an indictment of the elites in power across the country, which indexes a growing rural and populist frustration (Taggart, 2000). These are the things hockey was initially set up against in its homogenous and exclusionary straight white masculinity that played up rurality and working-class sensibilities. The frustrations with the elite, however, sits uncomfortably here as hockey has increasingly become an arena for the wealthy (Allain, 2015).

What this discourse on the true and real Canadians versus the un-Canadians demonstrates, however, is what Wohl et al. (2020) describes as the malleability of collective memory. The Canadian nation state and national identity, like hockey, have always been contested. They have always been challenged by those who are not straight white men and chafed at the stereotypical renderings of what it means to be Canadian. Yet, those who engage in this kind of anti-immigrant discourse through the vehicle of hockey actively remember a version of Canada that suits their purpose in much the same way as those who imagined Canada into existence did in the 1800s. My interlocutors reach for positive representations of the country in which they see themselves reflected, and many already had a positive and idealized identity thanks to the nation building work of hockey (Robidoux 2002).

Unlike those advocating for change, my interlocutors are less willing to acknowledge the problematic aspects of hockey and Canada more broadly because they have a positive collective memory when it comes to the sport and the nation. This is what Sahdra and Ross (2007) refer to as collective censorship of negative histories, and it brings to mind the “just play hockey” and “leave politics out of the rink” comments that fill any social media post made by an NHL team on issues of diversity and inclusion. These connect as well to the comments in this thread about why white folks are seemingly not allowed to have things for themselves while people of colour can (e.g., cricket, soccer, and basketball). Again, this is about an unwanted change (i.e., things are not broken) and the anxiety it produces. Of course, one can understand feelings of anxiety, instability, and uncertainty about the future and one’s place within it. As a millennial, I certainly spend an inordinate amount of time stressing about the job and housing markets, and my ability to build a future that is both fulfilling and secure. Yet, as Wohl et al. (2020) note, these unwanted

⁹⁰ See Introduction for further discussion of this language

changes and the threats to stability can often manifest as antagonisms towards those who are deemed the source of the problem (Siapera, 2019). As I explore further in my Introduction, my frustrations are directed towards capitalists. For my interlocutors, however, this frustration is directed towards the un-Canadians who are more than just the elites.

Conclusion

While this chapter was prompted by the firing of Don Cherry and the discourse that rippled out from this rupture, once again my interlocutors told me a lot about themselves, their fears, frustrations, and assumptions. Despite this rupture, hockey can still be an important national symbol and tool for creating unity—albeit inconsistently and temporarily—even if Canadians are not unanimously hockey lovers. The Olympics is a prime example of this phenomenon. Yet, when paired with collective nostalgia, this ill-fitting symbol can be used to divide and alienate rather than unify. Take for example the imagery of the Freedom Convoy members playing hockey on the streets of Ottawa (Figure 35), and their claims that you “can’t get more Canadian than this” while others commented that the liars (opponents to the convoy) should spend “some time in the penalty box like a life time” while another said this was “big Canadian energy.” On Twitter one user described the scene as the “most important hockey game” in Canadian history. This imagery and corresponding comments attempted to create a sense of cohesion and ‘real’ or ‘true’ Canadian-ness to give credibility to the movement. Yet, many Canadians were markedly opposed to the convoy, including members of the right-wing who saw it as futile, fringe, and even counterproductive.



Figure 35. Screenshot of public Facebook group for the Freedom Convoy. It includes an image of protestors playing hockey with commentary from Facebook users.

Clearly the power of nostalgia to create a positive self-image and evoke an idealized past was not lost on the protestors. This is also effective when contrasted with a negative portrayal of current and possible future events (“Hockey is lost” and “Canada is fucked”). Within this conflict immigrants, leftists and feminists are positioned as threats and bringers of unwanted change. With this process of unity and nationalism through collective nostalgia in mind, I want to conclude this chapter with a return, a question, and a possible answer.

First, the return. Earlier in this chapter I pointed to some comments about how women, through their adherence to feminist and anti-racist principles, would be the ones to destroy hockey and, by extension, the Canadian nation state. My interlocutors were frustrated (here and elsewhere) that these ‘brainwashed’ white women could not see the world as they did because if they did, surely, they would join white men against the changes to hockey and Canada’s demographic makeup. This leads to the recurring theme of my dissertation in which the white male victim is the only one aware of the betrayal and decay of Canada, and the only one with the will to fight back—if they have not given up entirely on the nation, of course.

It is here that I want to insert myself as a ‘brainwashed’ woman given my Marxist beliefs who is also a hockey fan. This brings me to my question: How is it that I can be a fan of hockey and also recognize the issues within the sport? Moreover, how can I be a fan and see how it reflects the systemic and oppressive structures in our nation today?

This brings me back to the work on collective nostalgia and censorship above (Sahdra and Ross, 2007; Wohl et al., 2020). As I have argued throughout this chapter, hockey works as an example of the idealized Canadian identity, one that is straight, white, and male. Bonus points if they are also rugged, rural, and Christian. It played a role in shaping this identity in Canada’s early years, and it has served as a mechanism for reinforcing it, and now functions as a reflection of white male victimhood narratives.

As Robidoux (2002) so aptly argues, the image created by and through hockey has never been a well-fitting identity. It has always excluded some members of society. So, here is my proposed answer: Perhaps the reason my interlocutors find themselves alone in this fight is they are championing an image of Canada and hockey that never truly fit the rest of Canada. Perhaps women are not brainwashed, but rather we have a different idea for what the country and the sport could look like. Perhaps people of colour, particularly Black and Indigenous people, and queer folks are not looking for special recognition, but recognition that they exist in general (and have *always* existed in Canada since time immemorial). Perhaps we are simply trying to make hockey reflect the country as it stands today, not as it was idealized in the early 1900s by Canadian ethno-nationalists and poets like William Henry Taylor.

So, perhaps my interlocutors are right to feel as though their socio-political power to unilaterally define what it means to be Canadian, and to play and enjoy hockey, is not entirely secure. What is secure, however, is their ability to choose how to respond to this shift towards shared power and representation. I have articulated here their responses, as well as how the responses fit into broader conversations about immigration and feminism. Yet, I remain hopeful that hockey can continue to function as a unifier and perhaps a space for reconciling harmful pasts and dismantling oppressive structures for a better future.

Chapter 10 - Conclusion(s)

I have covered a lot of ground in this dissertation, and I have ignored and sidestepped even more. What I want to do in this conclusion, is discuss the broader implications of what I introduced here. What does my dissertation say about the field of anthropology as a discipline? What does it say about the messiness—and the process of unpacking said messiness—that comes with being human? These two questions frame Part One of this discussion. In Part Two, I turn to what my dissertation says about an anthropology that attempts to understand and engage with the issues I have confronted throughout my research. What does it mean to work with the unlikable and the unsavory (de Coning, 2021; Pasieka, 2019)? What does it mean to seek out and find points of common curiosity? I conclude with a discussion of the Freedom Convoy in hopes that this final ethnographic moment showcases the importance of an engaged anthropology of the right-wing in Canada.

Part One: Reflections on Anthropology and being Human

What contribution does my work make to the anthropology as a discipline?

My work is repeatedly upheld as pioneering, innovative, and cutting-edge in the nascent and emerging field of digital ethnography. While I certainly appreciate the accolades, I often find myself wondering why it is framed in this manner. After all, Christine Hine wrote her groundbreaking book, *Virtual Ethnography*, in 2000. Miller and Slater also published their manuscript, *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*, the same year. Bonnie Nardi and Tom Boellstorff published their brilliant ethnographies in the following decade, as well as their handbook of methods in 2012. Indeed, one can reach even further back in time to the 1992 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association where Gary Lee Downey, Joseph Dumit, and Sarah Williams (1995) made the case for anthropology to take seriously the “cyborg” nature of our field and world. Even they were standing on the foundation built by Sherry Turkle (1985, 1995) who, in the late 1980s and early 90s was exploring how the human spirit and digital technologies were increasingly intertwined. Writing *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* in 1985 and *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* in 1995, Turkle

challenged anthropologists to consider the digital as a site for interrogating what it means to be human. She argued that the internet was a space to rethink relationships, politics, sex, and the self. In other words, the internet and digital technologies were exciting spaces for anthropological inquiry about the realities of being human.

Yet, in the decades since Turkle, Hine, Miller, Slater, Nardi, and Boellstorff, digital anthropology and virtual methods remain at the margins of the discipline. While science and technology studies has enjoyed increasing acceptance in the discipline, I contend that this is in part because STS relies heavily on traditional ethnographic methods. It is ethnography *of* science and technology spaces (e.g., medical and robotics labs). It is not ethnography *in* virtual spaces. As a result, training in digital methods, from participant-observation to video-based interviews, remains limited if available at all.⁹¹ Conversations around ethics and rapport continue to privilege the offline experience of ethnographers to the detriment of those of us who find ourselves in spaces where we must grapple with settings that do not reflect our training. Methodologically, what does it mean to lurk? What are the ethics of researcher pseudonyms? Do my interlocutors pose a threat to me via doxing, and does this outweigh the harm I pose to them through my writing? How do you build rapport in a space of forty thousand users? How do I manage the disorientating nature of simultaneously multi-sited research? How do I balance fieldwork expectations while at home? These are not necessarily unique to digital anthropology or ethnography, yet the experience of the digital provides different perspectives. To ignore these is a detriment to the discipline, and especially to graduate students.

As I explore in my chapters on methods, field sites, and fieldwork, there are a series of tropes that our discipline upholds that foster an environment that is suspicious at best and hostile at worst towards digital anthropology. Yet, to maintain these tropes denies the field the possibilities of the digital and new spaces for anthropological curiosity. Our lives have become increasingly mediated by and experienced with digital technology. To borrow the language of cyberpunk writer William Gibson (1984), our “meat suits” are “jacked-in” whether we like it or not. So why should anthropology continue to ignore this part of being human? I suspect, as well, that this is a

⁹¹ Some institutions do provide courses on digital anthropology (see MIT) and degrees in the field (see UCL). However, these remain exceptions.

question increasingly asked by younger anthropologists who have grown up in the era of the internet. It has always been an intrinsic part of their being. Indeed, many of our undergraduate students were born after the works of Turkle, Hine, Miller, and Slater were published! Throughout my graduate career, I have been asked to give lectures and supervise directed readings for undergraduates who are interested in digital anthropology as they are unable to find the resources at their institutions. Given the ongoing neoliberalization of post-secondary education and the need for enrolment numbers, it seems prudent for anthropology to attend to the interests of the new generation of scholars.

What does my work say about being human?

Pragmatics aside, an anthropology of the digital reveals many things about being human, which is the primary concern of anthropology. Allow me to highlight a few of these here based on my work.

The second half of my dissertation is largely about anti-immigrant and anti-feminist rhetoric, which reflects beliefs about belonging and exclusion. Anthropology has long been concerned with these issues as evinced by our early obsession with kinship and alliance. We understand the power of in-group and out-group dynamics in terms of politics, warfare, and economics. We unpack the role of identity in maintaining the boundaries between “us” and “them” in the societies and cultures we study. We have also contributed to the formation and maintenance of the boundaries between “us” and “them” given the relationship between the discipline and the projects of colonialism (Asad, 1973). I argue we continue this trend when we uphold the hierarchy of purity (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997), which I return to below. What, then, does my digital ethnographic work contribute to the discussion?

In my chapter on censorship, I introduced the feeling amongst my interlocutors that they were restricted from “speaking the truth” about immigration in certain spaces. The family dinner table and breakroom at work were commonly cited spaces where my interlocutors bit their tongues and were forced to listen to leftist propaganda. Take this comment from Reddit,

My work is the same. We have a politics discussion area, all leftist complaining about right wingers. I'm calling them out slowly and carefully but society let's lefties beat on righties.

We have a politics discussion area, all leftist complaining about right wingers. I'm calling them out slowly and carefully. Do not engage with these people at work. You're not going to 'educate' them. You'll be blacklisted and reported to HR for bad feels or worse. It's a danger to your livelihood and personal safety.

They'll eat themselves. Just let it happen. Just remain vigilant to a point so that we don't devolve into Soviet Union levels of "oppressor" punishment. I'd rather my children have a future that doesn't involve executing anyone productive.

Yes, it fucking sucks. Every family dinner something comes up, and it's a massive leftist circle jerk of course, and then suddenly everyone stops and looks at me. I explain my viewpoint, and then we're in an argument. Some people agree with me, other people don't, I'm a pariah. I'm like suddenly this lightning rod between of "saying the right thing" and "saying what you want to say". Canadians really are leftists. And more than that, we're scared into even considering different points of view.

Digital spaces, particularly the alt-tech platforms, became the last refuges for what they felt were open and necessary discussions without becoming “pariahs.” As a result, a space like r/metacanada becomes a place for nearly 40 thousand Canadians (and interested international peers) to discuss who belongs in Canada and what sort of people and ideas should be excluded. Both my chapters on nativism and women explicitly outline the boundaries my interlocutors have erected between themselves as settlers (and settler descendants) and new waves of immigrants (see also my Introduction on settler colonialism). In my chapter on hockey, it becomes clearer the categories of identity that inform these ideas of belonging: straightness, whiteness, maleness. It is further amplified by political and religious views, as well as perspectives on the moral superiority of certain types of labour. These conversations combine to produce the image of the idealized and imagined Canadian, which of course is grounded in our

history as a nation (Robidoux, 2002). To deviate from this image is to be marked for exclusion whether that be from sport, the city, or the nation.

These digital spaces give insight into the emotions wrapped up in conversations around demographic changes and increased diversity, which quantitative analysis might miss. A poll on attitudes towards feminism and gender diversity in the workforce across the provinces or political parties is certainly useful. Anthropological curiosity invites us to look at the underlying processes that cause feelings of alienation, anxiety, and resentment. Like para-ethnographers (Holmes & Marcus, 2006), my interlocutors are analyzing the changing world around them and coming up with (folk) theories to explain their experiences (Campion-Vincent, 2005; West, 2018). By taking these emic theories seriously, as anthropologists have claimed to do throughout our discipline's history, we can unravel the assumptions about belonging and stability held by our interlocutors. For example, I am certain that some of my interlocutors simply hated women, and that their hatred was rooted in an intense sense of male superiority and entitlement to subservient and sexually available bodies. Yet, for many, I think they were just faced with the possibility of loss of power and control, and this is unsettling. This by no means excuses the ongoing rhetoric of digital misogyny or its accompanying violence. Rather, it demonstrates the need to attend to the intellectual processes that make misogyny a viable and even desirable response. What can we learn from the caricatures of feminists as angry, ugly, and unfuckable women? What does this tell us about notions of femininity, care, and even property? How does this caricature maintain boundaries of exclusion and inclusion? All of these are deeply anthropological questions, which I argue can be thoroughly examined in digital spaces.

The digital nature of this work also illuminates broader societal beliefs around violence and hate, and specifically Canadian tolerance for acts that are violent or hateful. The platforms that made up parts of my field sites have terms of service and community standards related to violent and hateful rhetoric. As I explore in my censorship chapter (Chapter 6), these are typically based on legal frameworks related to discrimination. What is permissible within these spaces therefore reflects hegemonic attitudes towards discrimination. Take rhetoric that advocates for violence against women. In my chapter on women and demographic replacement (Chapter 8), I provide many examples of extremely violent comments about women and extremely dehumanizing

comments about Muslim men, which are permitted to exist online. These reflect a level of societal tolerance for violence against women and Islamophobia. Similarly, my interlocutors' engagement with, and resistance to, these policies reflect community-level perspectives. Take for example their belief that any comment that is critical of Black people is censored, that is not available for discussion, yet the so-called "anti-white" comments are allowed in digital spaces. This plays on the trope of the white victim (Berbrier, 2000), and I explore it further in my chapter on hockey. But what paying attention to this folk theory illuminates are feelings of exclusion from social spaces. The socio-technical infrastructure of these platforms is purportedly shaped by leftist and feminist ideology for the purpose of silencing and excluding white conservative male voices. These folk theories are then used to extrapolate their experience beyond the platform to society at large. So, once again, attending to the digital gives anthropologists insight into worldviews of the right-wing in Canada, which we might miss if we only attend to the offline.

Why should we care about the dangers of purity?

If an anthropologist takes only one thing away from my dissertation, I hope it is my claim that anthropologists should continue to question the hierarchy of purity we have constructed around field sites (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). There is a normative assumption within the discipline that distance is preferable. By distance I mean the geographic space between the anthropologists home and field site, but also the cultural space between the anthropologist and her interlocutors. To be close in any meaningful way is still looked at with suspicion and doubt. Anthropologists of "home" or "self" are required to explain and justify our work in ways that anthropologists of "distance" and "others" are not.

As I explore in Chapter 5, part of this process has to do with our disciplinary conceptualizations of a field. Many of the classic ethnographies I was exposed to as a budding anthropologist included the iconic map of the geographic location where field work was conducted. It showcased the villages visited, the neighboring communities, and perhaps other features of geographic importance. This is, in fact, how Malinowski (1922) opens his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. This process rendered the field as bounded and discrete spaces where an

anthropologist could travel to and conduct work in. Again, there is a sense that the further the distance she travels, the more anthropological the project. Anthropology, then, happens somewhere else. Of course, this trope has been thoroughly dissected since Gupta and Ferguson's (1997) edited collection on the nature of the field. Yet, it persists, and it is introduced early on in our training. Allow me to share a short anecdote on the subject.

After completing my master's degree, I was invited to give a short lecture on my fieldwork experience to a group of introduction to cultural anthropology students. I gave what I thought was a well-received overview of my field sites and their richness, as well as my methods and the ways in which I was able to adapt traditional methods for the digital world. Another recent graduate gave a lecture about his fieldwork in the Andes. He had boarded a plane to get there and had to learn another language to do his work. His presentation was filled with beautiful images of the landscape, the rural-ness of his field site, and the subsistence practices of his interlocutors. It was, in Gupta and Ferguson's (1997) conceptualization of the field, an anthropologically pure one peopled with appropriate ethnographic subjects.

Years later a student from that class told me that they still remembered the lecture and that I had inspired them to do digital work. I was elated at this news! However, they also mentioned that after the presentations, one of their classmates loudly proclaimed, "well, Amy didn't do *real* ethnography like [the other anthropologist] did." In the blink of an eye, I was deflated. Here, a student who did not even have introductory anthropology under her belt felt qualified to dismiss my ethnographic work. While I try not to ascribe any sort of authority to her position, it has caused me to wonder where this perspective came from. I suppose it could have been a lack of exposure to digital ethnographies, or comments made by those in the department who had more traditionalist perspectives on fieldwork, or even a function of popular culture. Part of me wonders, however, if it was the romanticization of a certain kind of field that made my colleague's work so recognizably ethnographic and mine less so.

As Gupta and Ferguson (1997) note, "going to the 'field' suggests a trip to a place that is agrarian, pastoral, or maybe even 'wild'; it implies a place that is perhaps cultivated (a site of culture), but that certainly does not stray too far from nature" (p. 8). This fit my colleague's

presentation perfectly. For me, however, neither my master's nor my doctoral work fit this description, and I am confronted with this reality whenever I engage with other anthropologists. Despite the fact that my work did not involve a trip or a literal field, these other anthropologists try and seek out the ways in which my work was wild. As I noted in Chapter 5, these conversations often revolved around the ways in which my subjects or sites could be classified as "extreme" in some way. That is, not recognizable to them as "home." What I want to suggest here is that this disciplinary search for the "wild" pushes graduate students towards harmful spaces that are more easily read as wild.

During one of my interviews with a self-professed ethno-nationalist, the topic of alternative and more extreme platforms came up,

Interviewee: MC has turned into a sort of safe haven catch all for the remaining ethnonationalists on Reddit, so discussion about the same 3rd world invasion happening in Western Europe ends up on there... I think perhaps you don't see as much discussion in American conversations might be because Americans are classically sort of in their own world and not as interested in the on goings of the rest of the planet. **Or maybe you didn't check out some of the other (edgier) forums on the internet where Americans are actively discussing these things, such as 4chan.org/pol (I wouldn't go there if I were you).** Also, you should check amren.com and listen to the podcasts or watch the videos. Sadly, Jared Taylor was recently purged from YouTube. He is a gold mine of ethnonationalist talking points.

ACM: You raised another issue in your last answer, which was about censorship. Since 2018, my research has moved from FB/Instagram & Twitter to Reddit/Gab and then also onto Minds/Voat/Telegram/Parler because of censorship policies/bans on the various platforms and user frustrations (not unlike those expressed in meta)... Thanks for the really thoughtful answers. You've summarized a lot of the frustrations and ideas I've seen across social media platforms. **And no, I don't spend a whole lot of time on 4chan or /pol/ unless my research leads me there organically. Mostly because I'm not**

actually interested in the edgy folk, but “ordinary” or mainstream ideas about immigration and demographic replacement. And I don’t hate myself that much.

Interviewee: There aren't many forums left though for ethno-nationalists. **And you might misunderstand the 4chan/8chan culture. Those ARE ordinary people, but the forum discussion is intended to be as offensive as possible as a rule. You are supposed to take it on the chin in exchange for the benefit of brutal honesty.**

Admittedly, pol is a dump now and I don't know where to turn. Voat isn't that bad but it's a quiet place... (emphasis added throughout).

A few things happened in this exchange that are worth highlighting. First, my interlocutor took stock of my field sites. Had I selected the correct ones? I responded with a defense of looking for the more mainstream and less ‘edgy’ spaces (his words) and the importance of an organic approach in my work. I had mentioned that “I don’t hate myself that much” as a sort of joke in the moment given the reputation that 4chan and many sites have for being, as he later noted, “a dump.” His response, however, was also to point out that sites like 4chan are filled with ordinary people, but the platform itself encourages ‘brutal honesty’ at all costs. This was, in general, a welcome reminder that my interlocutors are ordinary people offline with fully complex, complicated, and contradictory lives.

Where this exchange relates to notions of wildness and danger is in my resistance to sites like 4chan. My research was already a deeply uncomfortable enterprise often marked by physical and psychological distress, and this was research conducted on the so-called ‘mainstream’ and less ‘edgy’ sites. That is, the more “cultivated” sites to borrow the language of Gupta and Ferguson (1997). What would my experience of fieldwork be like if I tried to immerse myself in a place that was trying to be as offensive and wild as possible? My body and mind recoiled at the thought of spending hours on 4chan conducting participant-observation. How on earth would I participate in a space that held some of the most violently misogynistic, racist, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, and homophobic views? Even my self-proclaimed ethno-nationalist interviewee considers it a dump! If I could barely stomach—literally and figuratively—Gab, how could I manage fieldwork in these other spaces?

Yet, I cannot help but wonder: Should I have mustered up the resolve, taken the brutality of fieldwork on the chin, and worked in these edgy spaces?

This brings me back to Gupta and Ferguson's (1997) notion of the hierarchy of purity when it comes to field sites and fieldwork. They argued that within the field of anthropology, some sites were considered better suited for ethnographic work because they were positioned further away geographically and culturally from the ethnographer (who was always a white, Euro-American man). Presumably, these spaces would also include greater levels of physical, emotional, and psychological discomfort. My musings here build on my discussion of the hierarchy of purity in Chapter 5. Here, however, I want to explore my internalization of this hierarchy and how I mapped it onto the digital world.

I had endured a great deal of distress over the nearly three years I had spent in these spaces, yet I chastised myself for not going further into darker spaces. Clearly, I still do. This was all in the name of both distance and discomfort. Without this, could I call my work ethnographic? Would I have earned my right to call myself an anthropologist? Of course, it is easy to say that anthropology is more than ethnography, and that ethnography need not be uncomfortable and unfamiliar. Yet, these clichés, tropes, and norms *linger*. They are internalized by graduate students during our training and interactions with others from our discipline.

In preparing to write this dissertation I revisited some of the literature I had read on fieldwork in the first year of my program. I returned to a piece by Jewish anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker in which she reflected on her long career as an anthropologist. In it she described her work in the Deep South of the US among lower-middle class white and Black communities, and she contrasted it with her previous ethnographic work in Melanesia. The latter was arguably the more 'plausible' and 'authentic' field site by the standards of her day. However, she described how one evening in the South, she encountered a group of 'redneck' whites who were hunting a Black man accused of assaulting a white woman. She feared the hunt would end with a lynching but felt unable to do anything to stop it. The next day she put on her anthropologist hat and began talking to white folks about what had happened. While the vignette itself was

disturbing to read—even if it did not end in a lynching—what upset me the most as an anthropologist was her reflection that,

I felt I had won my spurs as a field worker. I had interviewed, observed, and gotten data in a situation that deeply disturbed me (Powdermaker, 2012, p. 101).

It was not journeying to a foreign land, learning a new language, or making the unfamiliar familiar that made Powdermaker an anthropologist, but rather her resilience in a moment of horror. In my work, I began to wonder if discomfort, resilience, and distance could compensate for the impurity of digital ethnography. Such a line of thought, however, is problematic given the lack of supports for graduate students doing this sort of work (e.g., mental health, security training).

This is not to say that anthropologists should avoid distressing work. In fact, I think the work that my colleagues and I do is vital, especially those who work in the darkest spaces. Yet, I think it is important for researchers in my field to be honest about the brutality of this work, and to reflect on *why* we choose to do the work in the ways and spaces we do, and importantly how our experiences influence the anthropological knowledge we produce. Do we pick sites because they are the best suited to our research interests? Because they are intriguing spaces or perhaps ones that we are already fluent in? Or is it because these are conceptualized as purer and more appropriate spaces for the production of anthropological knowledge? Are the edgier and wild spaces with the more uncomfortable and unfamiliar content a new, digital version of Gupta and Ferguson's (1997) appropriate sites? Is it not worthwhile to interrogate why we seek out trauma as a discipline?

I want to make the argument that a more “cultivated” ethnography still has value and merit if one defines such things through the metric of discomfort. I did not journey to the darkest and edgiest parts of the internet in search of the purest digital field site in my field, yet I still experienced deep uneasiness in the field. This experience undoubtedly affects how I have come to understand the spaces I worked in, avoided, and now write about. Privileging my lived and felt experience both limits and expands my ways of knowing.

While some may see my physical and emotional revulsion to my field sites as a sign that I was not objective or neutral, I understand this lived experience as part of my process. Acknowledging this as I do necessitates a greater degree of care and reflection in my analysis and dissemination. Rather than ignoring this tension, I prefer to think of the ways in which it can be intellectually productive. As Alexis de Coning (2021) notes in her work on male supremacism, scholars of extremism may experience debilitating anxiety and fear on one hand and blasé numbness on the other. Some may even become seduced by the ‘charm’ of their interlocutors. The former experiences hinder research goals as fear and anxiety are unsustainable long-term, while the latter are susceptible to intellectually lazy analysis (see discussion of Teitelbaum, 2019 below). Like de Coning, I have opted to sit with the messiness and accept the complex and contradictory nature of both my interlocutors and myself.

I want to conclude this discussion with a perspective from Dr. Joan Braune, whose work on the far-right has guided me through the last two years of my fieldwork and now through the writing process. Following a shooting in Boulder, CO on March 22, 2021, footage of the shooting began to circulate on social media. It had been shared by people in my professional network and I failed to realize what I was watching until it was too late. It was my experience with the Christchurch attack footage all over again (see Epilogue essay). Unsurprisingly, this left me deeply upset. Later that day I saw a tweet by Braune which read, “You don’t have to watch the video of the shooting for research purposes.” This simple comment has stuck with me because there are scholars in my field who do feel they “need” to subject themselves to violent, traumatizing, and deeply upsetting content in order to establish their authority to speak on a subject. As was the case for Powdermaker, the greater their discomfort, the greater their credibility. It was as if their (only) way of knowing was defined by trauma rather than immersion and reflection. Yet, I would rather build my field site and knowledge with the bricks of Braune than Powdermaker as I resist a new hierarchy of purity.

Sometimes I think there are two kinds of people in life. First, are those who went through something terrible, and feel it becomes a rite-of-passage that everyone else must go through. Ethnography can certainly be this sort of ritual. Second, however, are those who went through

something terrible and will do everything in their power to make sure others do not. If nothing else, I hope that this dissertation has been an example of why we must rethink the hierarchy of purity and the valorization of fieldwork trauma. Not to sanitize the discipline and ethnography of pain and discomfort, but to acknowledge why we seek it out. And, importantly, to create space for those of us who cannot and will not go to the dark and edgy places.

Part Two: Towards an anthropology of the Right

How do we study the far-right as anthropologists?

“Amy, I just don’t know how you do it...”

This is a common comment I receive when I talk about my research. Academics, activists, and layfolk alike struggle to understand why I took on a project like this one. They would ask “How do you deal with the hatred? How are you not angry or sad or numb all the time?” In response, I would often jokingly quote the Hulk and say, “that’s my secret. I’m always angry” or just talk about therapy, running, and finding a good support network. Others inquired about how I stayed “sane” and “unaffected” by the radicalization power of these spaces. I am white, after all, and am therefore susceptible to the discourse of my interlocutors even as their misogyny and homophobia repel me.

The truth is this work is extremely difficult to confront and negotiate, and I think it is made more difficult by disciplinary expectations. While I have explored how ethnography as a research method is difficult in these spaces in my methods chapter, I want to spend some time here unpacking how anthropology as a way of thinking is a difficult thing to carry into this field. In doing so I want to pivot from a discourse that centers my discomfort as a person, to the disciplinary constraints that foster some of these feelings in me as an anthropologist.

In 2018, I attended a workshop on extreme speech in Munich. The workshop brought together scholars from across the world and many disciplines. Together, we contributed to an edited collection on digital hate and extreme speech (see Udupa et al., 2021). I spoke to one of the other

contributors about my struggles with participant-observation. I felt that I had to stifle my activist voice and allow some upsetting discourse to pass in the name of maintaining field relations and access. If I seriously upset them by pushing back on their discourse, I could get banned from the community. Then what? How would I finish my dissertation? He responded by saying that is why he scrapes data from social media sites like Facebook and Twitter rather than engage directly with users. He does not have to “care” what the research subjects think about him or his work. I realized in this moment that my problem was that of an anthropologist. Let me begin this discussion of our disciplinary problem with a rather fascinating debate.

In 2019, Benjamin Teitelbaum published “Collaborating with the Radical Right: Scholar-Informant Solidarity and the Case for an Immoral Anthropology,” in *Current Anthropology*’s forum on theory in anthropology. In the piece, Teitelbaum advocates for a solidarity comprised of collaboration, reciprocity, and advocacy. This, he argues, will lead to “ethnographic knowledge unlikely to be gained through other forms of research” (2019, p. 414). He situates this argument within anthropology’s history of political advocacy on behalf of our subjects, informants, and interlocutors (Lamphere, 2018). He goes so far as to claim that anthropologists “extend a charge to prioritize the interests of research participants that is all but mandated throughout the human sciences by institutional review (IRB) regimes” (p. 414). While I find this to be something of a hyperbole, anthropologists have for decades acted as activists and advocates. Indeed, the work of Lamphere (2018) points to the two-pronged approach of an engaged anthropology. First, anthropologists began to see their interlocutors not as “subjects” but as equal partners. Second, they saw their role as increasingly activist or advocacy oriented.

In her work on activist anthropology and gender-based violence, Backe (2020) argues that feminist anthropology has a long history of “troubling” the line between scholar and activist, and that care has become central to the methodological and analytical process (see also Supernant et al., 2020 for a discussion of heart and care work). Goldstein (2014) also explores the role of the anthropologist in politically fraught spaces in his reflections on immigrant rights and his use of activism as a way of understanding his research,

While doing ethnography I have also done activist work, usually consisting of such mundane tasks as driving injured workers to physical therapy and helping immigrants to initiate legal complaints. In December of 2013, however, I joined a group in a civil disobedience action to protest the detention and deportation of the undocumented. We planned to get arrested and, by doing so, to publicize the injustices of the deportation regime. My motivations for joining this action were complex and included both research goals (getting arrested seemed a great way to learn about the situation) and personal beliefs (a deep anger over the impacts of deportation and a desire to do something about it). In my ordinary consciousness, the personal and the professional were inseparable (p. 840).

This approach points to the disciplinary divide between “engagement” and “activism” and the production of “theory” and “action” respectively. Theory, or cultural critique, contributes to understandings of social inequality, whereas action and activism make space for new ways of thinking and acting in the world (Goldstein, 2014). Such an approach points to the possibility of solidarity that moves beyond traditional scholar-informant relations, as well as solidarities that some might find immoral (i.e., illegal), but are informed by the anthropologist’s own conscience rather than the ethical code of the discipline. Where I think the work of Lamphere (2018), Backe (2020), and Goldstein (2014) perhaps falls short is in their consideration of what engagement looks like with the unsavoury or the morally questionable. Yes, Goldstein was arrested for his work, which is legally questionable, but he is unlikely to receive harsh criticism from the discipline for standing up for his likeable interlocutors. In her overview of the “challenges” of collaborative and activist research, Lamphere does not explore the fraught nature of collaborations like Teitlebaum’s.

I argue that the notion of immoral solidarities and blurred disciplinary lines, particularly those that must consider scholar-informant relations within the legal system, is best illustrated in the work of Scheper-Hughes (2001, 2004) on organ trafficking. She asks, “How does one investigate covert and criminal behavior as an anthropologist? To whom does one owe one’s divided loyalties?” (Scheper-Hughes, 2004, p. 41). And I think the use of “loyalties” here is interesting.

This points to the difficulty that those who align themselves with an engaged or activist anthropology might encounter. To whom are we loyal? To what extent? What does that loyalty look like? These are questions I grappled with as I moved between loyalty for my interlocutors (despite a rhetoric that suggested the loyalty would not be reciprocated) and the legal framework of Canada that criminalizes hate speech. Was it my role to report what I *felt* was hate speech, and to whom would I report it? Would that report be recognized given the bias of the platforms towards whiteness and maleness (Nurik, 2019)? Or was my role to intervene and try to change the minds of my interlocutors via participant engagement? As Blee (2007) notes, scholars of the far-right are called to balance fairness and the political or moral imperatives in our work. We must represent our interlocutors fairly and ethically even as we as political actors seek to intervene in their movements. For Scheper-Hughes (2004), these decisions were patchy and uneven,

But as I became privy to information on criminal practices regarding the trafficking of desperate people as well as of purloined organs and tissues into the US, I shared some of this data, selectively, with criminal investigators... The information I gave concerned only the traffickers and surgeons and not the people who had been trafficked. The decision to do so was not easy. Anthropologists are not detectives and we are trained to hold anthropologist–informant relations as a kind of sacred trust. But in discovering that bodies of the poor were being strip-mined in an academic hospital mortuary in South Africa and shipped to Korea for ‘processing’ and then to the US where they were resold to biotech companies I felt I had no other option except to collaborate with investigators. Similarly, when I found that some Russian and Eastern European workers were being trafficked into the US as involuntary kidney sellers by violent, gun-wielding brokers, I shared this information with police and FBI agents. But I had no precedents to follow and had to rely on my conscience and on the values of social justice, equity and human dignity that I hold as the bedrock of anthropological humanism, as quaint and as antiquated these may seem in the posthuman age (pp. 43-44).

What resonates here for me is her lack of precedents and need to rely on her own personal morals. For me, my interventions were limited. When I felt there was the possibility of discourse,

I pushed back, asked for deeper explanations and reflections, and even used the local tradition of trolling. In almost every instance I was met with downvotes and vitriol. Occasionally, another user would contribute alongside my perspective and continue the debate. More often than not, my quibbles and queries were met with silence. I was probably read as some “leftist troll” who should not be fed as the saying goes. When I felt that the threshold for reporting had been met, in other words when the comments moved from banal sexism to advocating for violence against women, I used the platform-based reporting tool. This process was an interesting one for me because for Reddit communities, the moderators receive a notification of the report, and they would occasionally comment on these. It also revealed how these platforms reflect broader societal attitudes towards violence against marginalized groups in that not a single one of my reports for racism, misogyny, homophobia, Islamophobia, or anti-Semitism was found to have violated the terms and services or community standards of the platform.

But let me return to anthropology as a discipline for a moment, and to my original assertion that anthropology’s tropes about itself makes this work more difficult for graduate students and how Teitelbaum’s piece connects to this process. The primary reason many of us find this work difficult is the discipline’s long held belief that we have good, ethical, and even friendly relationships with our interlocutors.

Under normal conditions anthropologists proceed with a kind of ‘hermeneutic generosity’ toward the people they study. We tend to accept at face value and not to second guess much of what we are told, out of respect for the people who are our hosts. We tend to see our anthropological subjects as friends rather than as ‘informants’, and as collaborators and co-conspirators in our work. We expect resistance at first, but expect to win people over to what we believe can be a mutually rewarding experience. (Scheper-Hughes, 2004, p. 41)

Again, Scheper-Hughes is instructive. Throughout my graduate training, and especially when I was working on projects with Indigenous communities, this notion of care and friendship was central. Rapport and friendship almost became interchangeable. Indeed, the notion that dislike

must be the function of miscommunication, and therefore a product of ethnocentrism, has become a dominant position in the field (Pasieka, 2019).

When Malinowski's personal field diary was published posthumously, it felt as though a wave of collective shock ripped through the discipline. How could the father of ethnography be so miserably racist and condescending towards his interlocutors? Well, it is actually quite easy to believe when one considers the racial relations of the day, but anthropology is very much invested in the notion of the kind and friendly (and therefore ethical) ethnographer. This trope exists even as we acknowledge it is likely more myth than reality (see Fine, 1993 on the ten lies of ethnography).

So, why is this so difficult for anthropologists? Pasieka (2017) notes that one of the issues lies in the politics held by many anthropologists, which places far-right, and even mainstream conservatives, on the opposite end of the political spectrum. This carries with it the assumption that anthropologists are incapable of empathizing with these "repugnant others," a process which has been foundational for the anthropological tradition. Indeed, it is this empathy, which Teitelbaum demands from the discipline.

In his piece, Teitelbaum provides three case studies in which he provided collaboration, reciprocity, and advocacy for his interlocutors, which he describes as white nationalists. That he and Nazis sympathizers could form such friendships was heralded as an anthropological victory,

Practicing reciprocity with Magnus hardly left me with a sense of smug self-satisfaction. But did the episode at least improve my research? It might have strengthened our collaboration, sending him a signal that I was unafraid to engage with him closely and that he in turn could approach me with the same openness. But though to this day he has been a reliable source for information and scrutiny about race revolutionary activities and culture in Europe, I cannot link that with my having done him a favor. Rather than being an impetus to future interaction, the significance of my reciprocation with Magnus lies more in what it responded to. He felt comfortable making his request and I felt uncomfortable declining it because of the rapport we shared with one another. Instances

like these—troubling as they were—served for me as a barometer of my general success in fieldwork (2019, p. 420).

While Teitelbaum's piece was met with criticism from the respondents, I cannot help but wonder if part of what he is suggesting here accurately evinces the double bind of anthropologists who study the right. We are supposed to care for our interlocutors, reciprocate, advocate, and collaborate as anthropologists, but not if they are the unlikable, unpleasant, or unsavory sort (de Coning, 2021). But even then, to be overtly critical runs the risk of losing field access and is also open to criticisms that the work is too political, engaged, or activist-y, and therefore not theoretical enough.

In response to Teitelbaum's piece, my colleague Sindre Bangstad argued that some scholars had, indeed, opted for a "more disinterested and neutral approach to the study of far-right activists" and their ability to generate "richly textured and deep ethnographic knowledge" (see response in Teitelbaum, 2019, p. 423). After the piece was published, Bangstad and I met at a coffee shop during my 2019 trip to Norway where we discussed his preference for taking an anthropological eye to far-right literature. It was less ethically fraught (see also Chapter 3).

As insightful as this conversation was, I left feeling like Scheper-Hughes: precedent-less, relying on my own morals and conscience, and pulled in multiple directions by disciplinary expectations. I felt that I *had* to engage or else my ethnography would be shallow, thin, and indefensible. This points to another kind of purity, one of methods, alongside the discipline's perspective on field sites. It was as if I had Boellstorff et al. (2012) on my shoulder that I had to be a consequential social actor, that I had to participate, that I had to be friendly, in order for it to be "real" ethnography.

I find myself somewhat frustrated as I look back on my fieldwork. The expectations I was subjected to, and simultaneously internalized, foisted upon me an impossible scenario. It felt as though my options were Bangstad or Teitelbaum. Finding myself lost somewhere in the middle, I began to do my own imagination work. I envisioned the criticisms of my politics undermining my ability to understand my interlocutors or "take seriously" their claims. I imagined concerns

that I had forsaken my feminist principles for not pushing back harshly in every ethnographic moment. Every time I reflected on my work I felt like I had let someone down: myself as a woman, the multiple communities I care for, my discipline, and even my interlocutors. In trying to please everyone, I feel that I have run the risk of pleasing no one.

My anxiety and guilt have become near constant companions. Take for instance this field note from my first foray into the field,

I don't know how to engage in these spaces. As someone committed to feminist, anti-racist and decolonizing work how would/should I engage? Do I argue and troll? Such an approach is an accepted part of Reddit culture but carries with it the risk of being banned from the community—and ending my ethnographic engagement. Which would obviously suck. Do I ask open ended questions, which may elicit responses that are tangential to my interests? Do I engage as one of interlocutors would? This would breach my personal ethics and expectations of self and come dangerously close to covert ethnography. And, frankly, lying.

Okay. I'm going to try an open-ended troll-ish comment. I don't feel great about this. But this what I'm going to say:

What identity? Hockey and Tim Hortons? Didn't the whole 'Canadian identity' thing go out the window when immigration moved beyond the British with waves of German/Scandinavian/Eastern European immigrants?

Maybe they'll get riled up enough to answer.

Okay, I hit the comment button. Now to wait, I guess. Maybe no one will respond...

Well, here are the responses:

C1: If there is no identity, why come to "Canada". Or even bother commenting in a Canadian sub. Would you do this to an Australian sub? Or A Vietnam sub...because they have other ethnic groups, but certainly have an identity. Maybe not one you like, but they [like] it nonetheless. It's pretty disingenuous of you to tell individuals to immigrate to a country if you feel the country doesn't exist. That's quite a lot of hate. You might want to relax, take up yoga. I would encourage you to volunteer to make your community a better place, but unfortunately you don't feel it exists. Sad.

You know what, I probably would ask an Australian about this. Maybe I will next time I'm in Banff or Jasper or some ski hill town. Also, no amount of yoga has prepared me for this work, tbh. But thanks for caring, I guess?

C2: At least we had a solid European identity, as fractured as it may be. I'm Portuguese and I can tell you that I have way more in common with a Welshman, a Dane and a Greek than I do with a Pakistani, a Nigerian or a Malaysian.

Idk. Those Danes are pretty out there. (I kid, Grandma).

C3: If you had half a brain Tim Hortons isn't remotely Canadian now. Look at the workers and who bought out Tim Hortons. It's the perfect metaphor to showcase Canada as a country. We sell off everything and don't keep anything in house anymore. I will chime in on the "What identity" part, in the future even I couldn't tell you. Have fun letting your daughter out in the street at night.

Lol. I am someone's daughter. But I forgot when you're online, no one knows you're a woman, right? Also LOL at the idea that I should be more scared of immigrant men than the drunk white dudes who filter through my neighbourhood at night on their way home from the bars. Whatever.

C4: No, I don't think so. I grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, and I was certainly aware of what Canada's identity was then.

C5: Remember the anthem being sung before events? Even in school? Imagine that being as regular an occurrence now. Even Pierre Trudeau knew what being a Canadian was and what it stood for. He was very adamant about it in fact.⁹²

C4: I remember that we had a quiet, understated patriotism. I remember that even at a young age I felt kind of smugly superior to those weird Americans who were always waving flags and wrapping themselves in flags, and painting their faces. The way they celebrated July 4th was sooo much different from our quiet celebration of July 1 - Dominion Day. Now Canadians do the same thing because the Liberals launched a propaganda campaign to turn July 1 into some big, rah-rah exercise in flag waving.

C5: We lived in the US for two years, 67-69. Very very different experience to what the time before and after that was like growing up.

Boomers are here after all. That's interesting!

C6: What identity? Hockey and Tim Hortons?
Just wholesome values like not setting your wife on fire because she disobeyed you. You know, the basics and stuff.

I feel like I should want to laugh at these responses. Laugh them off. I mean, it would be bad if they weren't jerks, right? You don't want people who say racist things (like the second and third guys) being nice to you.

⁹² I would go on to conduct an interview with this user.

Why do I still feel like fucking shit after reading them?

This is how most of my fieldwork went. I would draft a comment, agonize over my language, post it, get all worked up, then completely unravel at the responses. The overtly racist and misogynist ones were in some ways easier to handle because I knew the relationship between myself and interlocutors. That is, I knew the difference and the distance between us. It was easier to see myself as anthropologist and them as subject for ethnographic inquiry. The comments where users tried to engage with or reflect on my comments were more difficult (C4 and C5, for example). Were we maybe closer than I had initially thought? What is possible through that closeness? What does that mean for me and my understanding of self? As I have argued previously, distance and difference are meant to be the unsettling features of ethnography. Yet, for me it was closeness and similarity that prompted moments of discomfort. I suppose I longed for the distance and difference I was promised during my training.

My interviews with self-proclaimed ethno-nationalists were also, for lack of a better word, cordial. Perhaps a better word is academic, or maybe thoughtful. My interviewees responded to all of my questions at length and with what I can only describe as generosity in terms of time and knowledge. They were patient with my follow up questions and were decidedly polite—the Reddit messenger troll notwithstanding, of course (see Chapter 3). It was as if we had found a place where we could speak across the spectrum knowing full well neither would walk away with a changed mind. We certainly were not interested in becoming friends, a la Teitelbaum. Yet, this left me as uncomfortable as the troll encounter. What did it mean to have a “civil” or “polite” conversation with someone who has political and cultural views that are incompatible with my own? What did it mean to have a pleasant, or at least non-antagonistic, conversation with someone who saw my activism (indeed my being) as a fundamental problem in Canadian society? What did it mean to engage with someone who contributes to rhetoric that harms people?

Of course, unpacking the complexities we experience in the field is a primary concern for anthropology. So, in an effort to unpack this feeling of “shit” and “discomfort” further, I sought out literature that could make use of what seemed to be near constant discomfort.

Pasieka (2017) helpfully nudged me to shift from a place of “love” towards one of “curiosity.” Where are connections possible? When can we speak to one another? Where do we overlap? Can (should?) these become spaces and moments for intervention? She also asks anthropologists to take seriously the notion of ‘complicity’—particularly for those of us who share commonalities with our interlocutors by virtue of race, gender, or religion—without the slippery sanitization of “over familiarizing” that Teitelbaum (2019) evinces. She argues that,

the path towards presenting extremists *not* as exotic others, does not lead through a ‘people like us’ frame, but through recognizing the often troubling ‘commonalities of reference, analytic imaginary, and curiosity that fieldworker and subject so productively share – each for different purposes’, and hence, through recognizing a sort of conceptual/intellectual rather than a moral affinity and complicity (Pasieka, 2017, p. 6).

This perspective allows scholars to note the moments of contact and similarity while acknowledging moments of distance and disjuncture, and to be curious about what this patchiness means. I also found comfort in the work of de Coning (2021) on critical empathy, which implores the ethnographer not to try and ‘fix’ the discomfort, but rather to acknowledge it for what it is, what it evinces, and what it teaches us about humanity.

I recognize now that my interlocutors likely felt discomfort, vulnerability, and anxiety when engaging with me. How would I present them in my writing? Would I cast them all as a “bunch of fucking racists”? Would I change my mind as some hoped and “see the truth” of the university system? Dislike, when acknowledged and critically reflected on, can be a productive space for anthropological inquiry (Pasieka, 2019). Perhaps this experience of speaking with someone they (likely also) disliked was productive for them as well.

At least, I hope it was.

Concluding with the Convoy; Or, why anthropologists are necessary

“A dissertation is never finished. It is abandoned.”

This was a piece of advice given to me by a member of my supervisory committee, and this is likely true for most, if not all, doctoral students in the social sciences. But I also think it is true of our field sites too. When anthropologists return from the field to write up our findings and publish, the world(s) we left continue to move, change, and grow without us. They are never finished, only abandoned. Sometimes this abandonment is temporary, and we return as post-doctoral fellows or professors. Other times the abandonment is permanent.

In December 2021, I had a lingering sense that if I did not formally and symbolically abandon my field sites, *something* would happen to pull me into these spaces again. I knew that I needed something “real” that would inhibit me from slipping into the field to check something as this would inevitably lead to me tumbling down a rabbit hole only to emerge disoriented hours later. The dissertation would never get finished that way. So, I elected to abandon my field sites by allowing my human research ethics to expire, and this proved to be the wisest course of action of my entire dissertation. Not that this is a particularly high bar, and a curious reader can see the subsequent Epilogue for discussion of my less-than-wise actions. But I digress.

Sometimes I wonder if it was an ethnographer’s intuition back in December that made me so nervous about continuing to have active research status. I certainly felt the rising tide of resentment, anger, and hostility from my interlocutors—and indeed the people around me in my everyday life—over the on-going Covid-19 safety precautions. The backlash against Prime Minister Trudeau, which has been a theme throughout my research, was growing. Right-wing voters had also begun to turn against conservative politicians at the provincial and federal levels. I was worried about the trajectory of my country given everything I had learned during my fieldwork.

In mid-January I began to hear rumblings of a convoy through my personal Twitter account where I follow many Canadian political activists and academics. The convoy was initially meant

to protest the vaccine mandate for cross border travel. Despite the high rates of vaccinations amongst truckers, a movement grew around their supposed right to work. I began to see threads of the rugged masculinity I saw throughout my research—real men drive big trucks, remember?—and the moral superiority of those who work difficult jobs. These became tangled up in broader resistance amongst the right-wing over vaccinations and personal autonomy (Mah, 2022), and with frustrations regarding the supply chain delays felt across the world. I initially brushed it off as another United We Roll, which was mostly a flop. Yet, the January 6 coup attempt in the US gave many of us pause. Would this be Canada’s January 6?

No, it was not our January 6 as some news outlets claimed, but in many ways, it was worse.

On January 22, 2022, vehicles began to leave from cities across the country with the goal of converging on Ottawa a week later. Reports of the convoy’s growing numbers continued to filter into my Twitter feed. It was hard to gauge accurate numbers as the right-wing media influencers⁹³ inflated both the actual and anticipated numbers, while the left attempted to downplay the movement. On January 29, 2022, the convoy converged in Ottawa. Many of us assumed they would make a ruckus in the downtown area and then leave. The right-wing prioritizes work, so they must have jobs to get back to, right?

They did not leave.

The convoy members hunkered down and made life very difficult for the residents of downtown Ottawa. They blasted their horns at all hours of the day, blocked roadways, and made citizens feel unsafe. The local police were largely ineffectual. They stayed for three weeks during which videos and images emerged that were shocking in their darkness and absurdity. Images of protestors with swastikas and confederate flags floated across my Twitter timeline alongside those of hot tub and dance parties. A woman was videotaped dancing on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Someone urinated on the National War Memorial while others parked their vehicles on the site (Pringle, 2022). A statue of Terry Fox was given a sign supporting their

⁹³ See former hockey legend Theo Fleury’s Twitter account for an exemplar case study in anti-vax and pro-convoy media influencer work. Also fascinating given the intersection of hockey in this example.

movement, despite the fact that Fox was both immunocompromised and, according to the Twitter account for the Terry Fox Foundation, “Terry believed in science and gave his life to help others” (Gollom, 2022)

It was a spectacle built on violent rhetoric.

It appeared the protestors were unprepared for the logistics of a long-term protest. Reports began to emerge on Saturday that bathrooms were scarce, and people were defecating in public—what was that about “street shitters,” again? Some truckers started tweeting about being hungry and unable to feed their children. Indeed, the use of children was a widely criticized and contentious decision (Osman, 2022). Some worried about where they would sleep and shower, and how they would afford to get home. Before the trucks began rolling, the movement began a GoFundMe, which raised nearly 10 million dollars from over 120,000 donors. Purportedly, the money was to pay for food, gas, and lodgings for the truckers. However, controversy soon erupted over misuse of the funds as the organizer became unreachable after one million dollars were released by the web-based fundraising platform (Debusmann, 2022). An “Adopt a Trucker” movement began circulating on Twitter so people could send individuals money to buy food. A second fundraiser began circulating on GiveSendGo, which was subsequently hacked and the donor list shared widely across the internet (Thompson et al., 2022).

Conservative politicians further agitated the protestors when they lent their support and criticized the Trudeau government’s response. Former Conservative leader Erin O’Toole met with protestors after tweeting out support for the truckers (Boisvert, 2022). Interim Conservative leader, who assumed the position after O’Toole lost a non-confidence vote, reportedly argued that there are “good people on both sides” when referring to the convoy, which is a clear reference to Trump’s infamous comments on the Unite the Right rally (McGregor, 2022).

Pat King, a well-known white supremacist whom I first encountered in my fieldwork back in 2020, was in the national spotlight, and people were rallying behind a movement that allowed him to lead. There were explicit white supremacists at the top and bottom of the movement with the full spectrum of right-wingers in between. What did this say about the state of the

mainstream right-wing in Canada? I have, after all, been primarily concerned with the mainstreaming of the extreme, far, and radical right in this work. What does it mean for someone who is fed up with having to show a vaccination card at the pub to march shoulder to shoulder with a person wearing a 6MWE shirt?⁹⁴ In a very real way, the convoy became a physical manifestation of my field sites, namely a space where people from across the right-wing spectrum existed together despite the vast difference in their political frameworks. It was surreal to see that in my nation's capital.

A parallel occupation began to form at the Sweetgrass-Coutts border crossing between Alberta and Montana. This stalled the flow of people and goods across the border as many non-protestors found themselves stuck at the border, including truckers on the American side, who simply wanted to go home and do their jobs. Criticisms of this on-going blockades came from all sides. The protestors argued that if Trudeau and all the premiers would drop the mandates, they would all go home peacefully. Many of us were skeptical of these claims. This also ignored the fact that the border mandate was upheld by the United States, and not simply the Prime Minister. Some called on Trudeau and Premier Jason Kenney to order the RCMP to remove the protestors by force as it had brought parts of the Alberta economy to a standstill.

Trudeau did, eventually, invoke the Emergencies Act, which began the process of dismantling the occupation in Ottawa (Tunney, 2022). In particular, the ability for FINTRAC to freeze the accounts of those financing the convoy—and the threat that it would freeze the accounts of general protestors and donors—was an effective means of slowing the convoy.⁹⁵ The blockade at the Coutts border continued until February 15 after the Alberta RCMP arrested 13 people and seized weapons and body armor (Collins & Grant, 2022).

As these occupations stretched out, I found myself increasingly glued to the news reports and my social media feeds. I was not conducting research at this time, but I was somehow consumed by fieldwork. It was all around me both on- and offline. Like the night of the infamous “you people”

⁹⁴ 6MWE is an anti-Semitic hate slogan that is short for “six million wasn’t enough,” which clearly articulates the desire to kill Jewish people.

⁹⁵ Readers interested in the intricacies of the financial intelligence world should look to J.M. Davis’ work on the subject.

comment from Don Cherry, my partner and I had invited a friend over to watch the hockey game, yet I could not tear myself away from my phone to be social. My partner pleaded with me to put my phone down and be present, but I found it difficult to disengage.

Everything I had been researching for half a decade was playing out in front of me.

The Coutts blockade brought the convoy and its discourse closer to home, as the border was only a short drive from where I grew up and I have crossed it repeatedly throughout my life. One of the men arrested at Coutts was from my hometown, and I knew him through a previous job. Schisms formed in my family over both occupations, and I had tense conversations with loved ones and friends online over vaccines and protests. Support for it was manifesting on my personal Facebook and Instagram pages as people shared videos and photos of their time at the blockades. They made it seem like a party.

For years I had often commented that my interlocutors could be my neighbors or my kin. Turns out I was right.

After the convoys and occupations had largely quieted down, a dear friend told me, “It’s like you had a crystal ball when you started this project.” She meant it as a compliment, and I take it as one, but I also cannot help but think about my role as an anthropologist in all of this chaos and the years leading up to this event.

I have been vocal about my research through my social media networks. I have shared my writing, my public lectures, and my commentary over the last four years. I have explained repeatedly that there is a growing frustration amongst right-wing Canadians, particularly those who are a combination of Christian, straight, white, and male, with the state of Canada. They are upset that they cannot get the jobs, homes, and families that previous generations had and who, as a result, had left my interlocutors with a sense of entitlement. They are, for lack of a better word, aggrieved (Manne, 2019), and they feel unheard and uncared for. They have turned their frustration towards immigrants and people of colour (Chapter 7), women and feminists (Chapter 8), and leftists, anti-racists, and the political elite (Chapter 6). Throughout my research, and as I

coded my data, the notion of betrayal resurfaced time and time again. While some blamed capitalism and globalization for this betrayal, they did so with an anti-Semitic frame (Introduction).

I have spoken repeatedly with pessimism at the possibility of progressive change in the country as people seemingly became more polarized. After each violent attack across the world, I warned those closest to me that this would happen in Canada too. We have experienced male supremacist and Islamophobic violence repeatedly over the last decade, why would this not continue? At times I felt as though I was screaming into a void. Yet, I continued this work hoping that it reached even a handful of people.

When the convoy began, I shared resources and credible sources about the occupations through my social media in an attempt to counter the misinformation I knew my social network was ingesting. I provided critical commentary based on my research to help give context to what was happening in our country. People began to reach out to me as a so-called expert on the far-right in Canada, including people I have not spoken to since high school; they were shocked that something like this could happen in Canada. Many wanted to believe this was an American thing—and there certainly is an American influence as well as American money—but I found myself gently explaining how this was deeply and unequivocally a Canadian manifestation of anger, resentment, and entitlement. Others reached out to thank me for the work I was doing, and to tell me they were sharing it with their friends and family. Months later, I am still helping people to deconstruct what the convoy means for Canada. I have had lengthy back-and-forth conversations over Facebook with friends of friends explaining why the convoy was radical, why Pat King evinces a level of comfort with white supremacy, and why it should be concerning that the language parrots anti-Semitic talking points.

A particularly lengthy conversation with a convoy member on Facebook made the rounds in my rural hometown. The father of a childhood friend stopped my parents to let them know they really appreciated my perspective and thought it was well written. Turns out, their daughter had shown them the conversation. The mother of another childhood friend “liked” the post. This has been an interesting process for me as the people who have engaged with my work in recent

months were somewhat unexpected. This was not because I assumed they were all white nationalists by virtue of their ruralness, but because I had not previously enjoyed their visible support. This gives me something approaching hope that perhaps people are willing to have a conversation around the right-wing in Canada and the future we envision for ourselves. It is as if the convoy stripped away the illusions we have built in order to hide the dark history and aspects of Canadian nationalism. People have expressed frustration that they can no longer find pride in the Canadian flag, and that it “means something else now.” Some of the people I speak to hesitantly note that maybe it meant something different all a long (Bate, 2022). There is a growing acknowledgement that this is a Canadian issue, and that it is one worth taking seriously.

I argue that this is why an engaged anthropology of the right-wing is necessary, and that now is the time to make scholarly interventions. Anthropology makes visible the complex and contradictory nature of political movements like the convoy and situates it in a broader socio-political context, which Canadians sorely need. I have managed to do this work amongst those in my social network, but what of broader and farther-reaching conversations? I have published book chapters on my research, which again have made the rounds within my circle, but academic scholarship is rarely taken up by the general population. Similarly, during the pandemic, I gave public lectures via video conferencing, which allowed for a broader audience. But even the most well attended lectures had less than a hundred viewers.

While I do not aspire to the levels of Mead or Geertz with regards to public scholarship, I think there is a need for anthropologists to leverage their knowledge of the right-wing beyond academic publishing and conferences. There is also a need to intervene in the moment, and not three years after the fact when the book chapter or article is finally published. This is also a necessary counter to the pseudo-intellectual work of academics, like former University of Toronto professor Jordan B. Peterson and former University of New Brunswick professor Ricardo Duchesne, who use intellectual prose to repackage far-right talking points for mass consumption.

An anthropology that is willing to grapple or sit with the discomfort of this work provides a foundation to have discomfiting conversations as a society. If we follow the calls of Pasieka

(2017) and de Coning (2021) to be curious and critically empathetic, to think through the need to balance fairness in our writing with our political aims (Blee, 2007), and to think deeply about our multiple and divided loyalties (Scheper-Hughes, 2004), anthropology can provide much needed nuance and insight into the realities of Canadian society.

This work can and should respond in the moment. Media coverage of both the Unite the Right rally and the Freedom Convoy would have greatly benefited from an anthropological perspective. Indeed, months and years later, it will still benefit from our insights because as I found myself saying repeatedly over the last few months, the convoy was never *just* about the mandates. It was, like the rest of my research, a complex web of ideas about how the world works and how it has worked in the past, which people are trying to make sense of. Importantly, anthropologists can help untangle these ideas. We can help situate the palpable anger of protestors with the quiet anxiety and simmering resentment of my interlocutors within broader social, cultural, political, and historical contexts. This is vital as the power of existing political parties wanes and new leaders emerge espousing nativist and populist rhetoric. As anthropologists, we can understand not only this cultural moment, but see the patterns of past moments of crisis as well (Higham, 2002). Our methods and our anthropological curiosity can create spaces for discourse and dialogue that are productive even if they are marked at times by mutual dislike and hostility.

This work, and indeed ethnography in general, is difficult from the first foray into the field until the last word is written. But it is good work.

And good work is worth doing.

Epilogue: Three Essays on the Work

This epilogue is a collection of short essays and stories from the field. It contains many of the unruly threads that emerged during my writing process. Often, I would find myself talking about the experiences I had in the field in places that did not quite make sense. Yet, these pieces of writing reflect the messy process of working through my field experiences. To that end, I present three essays on this process. In the first essay, I explore the impact of “being there” as a disciplinary “gold standard” had on my experience in the field and at home, as well as the lingering and lasting effects of the approach. In the second essay, I present the brutality of this work through a highly emotional and reflective piece on the Christchurch attack. Finally, in the third essay, I explore the possibility of hope. This dissertation has been primarily one of discomfort and pain, but it is impossible to do this work without an orientation towards hope and healing.

Tethering and Being ‘Always On’

One of the pieces of anthropological literature I wish I had read in the first year of graduate training is Fine's (1993) piece on the 10 lies of ethnography. Reading it was a moment of validation for me as I realized some of the things we, as anthropologists, tell ourselves about our time in the field are idealized illusions. The first of the lies is the kindly ethnographer, which implies that anthropologists are always a *sympathetic* researcher who cares about their interlocutors. Certainly, this is the case for many anthropologists, particularly those who also play the role of advocate. Similarly, the friendly ethnographer implies that we *like* all of the people in our research, yet this is entirely unlikely. For my colleague Gabriele de Seta (2020), there are similar lies that follow the digital ethnographer. Three, to be exact. These include

- 1) the network field weaver: the multi-sited ethnographer who manages and ever-expanding network of ethnographic rabbit holes and rhizomatic movements.

2) the eager participant-lurker: the ethnographer who is always engaging rather than observing despite the large role observation plays in social media (e.g., reading blogs, watching videos).

3) the expert fabricator: the ethnographer who is an expert at representing the strange and obscure internet, even though we rely on patchy, messy, and pieced together knowledge ourselves.

For me, these lies were evident in my work, and I explore my navigation of them in Chapters 3-5. There were times where I felt my multiple field sites would overwhelm me, and I opted to prune my sites and focus on Reddit. There were also times where observation was more appropriate than “eager” participation, and truthfully there were times where I could not bring myself to participate. However, I have also been very open about the patchy and ‘messy’ approach of my research. That, I think, is one of the fascinating things about digital ethnography, and indeed ethnography in general, and I feel no need to lie about this fact.

For me, one of the most profound lies was that of being “always on and always in” the field. This lie is rooted in traditional approaches to fieldwork that valorized long-term and immersive fieldwork. During my training, my mentors and colleagues would often share stories of their time in the field. Throughout these periods of field work they were, as one noted, “all-in,” meaning they were fully in the field day in and day out. One of my former colleagues lamented how at times she desperately wanted to just shut the door to her room in her host’s home for a moment of privacy and solitude, yet that would be considered rude. She was never able to turn *off*. This is, perhaps, a more extreme example as many others voiced that they were able to cleave off time to themselves while in the field, yet the expectation was that they always had to be “on call” in case something of ethnographic importance occurred. This was my first glimpse through the crack in the illusion—the lie—of always being on. Yet, something about that lie lingered. Or maybe festered.

Digital ethnography has the capacity to diverge from this trope of always on, and in a recent lecture I gave on digital ethnography, I pitched the method as one that could address some of the

work-life balance issues in academia and ethnography more specifically. With a digital approach, one can create “field time” to suit family and professional responsibilities. This approach was useful for anthropologist Bonnie Nardi (2010) who was able to spend time in the video game World of Warcraft and balance her home life. Additionally, through the game, she was able to bring her family into the field with her through group play. For myself, I told my audience that I was particularly keen to shape mine around my partner’s 9 to 5 as part of my emotional well-being. The idea was if we had time off together, I would be better equipped to deal with the strain of my research content. Digital ethnography also meant I would not have to travel extensively offline for fieldwork, although I still spent many months abroad in Europe for networking and conferences.

Unfortunately, my interlocutors were not aware of my working hours. Not that I can lay the blame solely at their feet. Despite the claims of work-life balance I made during presentations, I still carried the lie of “always on and always in” with me.

I had decided after the disintegration of Soldiers of Odin and the censorship of ID Canada that I would engage much more consistently on Twitter, Gab and Reddit (see Chapter 4). I began every morning with a cup of coffee and the “trending” content of the day. This was the content at the top of Reddit and recommended by the Twitter algorithms. By attending to content that was “trending,” “hot,” or “popular,” I was entering into a space of greater degrees of engagement. Of course, I also engaged with posts and comments that were not rising in popularity and engagement if they were closely aligned with my research areas. This engagement helped me feel like I was “doing” ethnography in the Boellstorff et al. (2012) sense. This was good work and the conversations helped me better understand my interlocutors and take seriously things like their linguistic approaches, the social norms of the community, and my own personal and professional ethics. What I was not prepared for, however, was the lingering feeling of being tethered to my research at all times.

Every day at 5pm I would leave the field. This looked like closing my internet browsers, shutting my laptop, and getting up off my couch. What I realized, however, is that while my offline self was back “home”—that is not physically interfacing with my field sites through my screen,

mouse, and keyboard and therefore free to go on with my regular life—my digital self was still stranded in the field. She was always there and available to be interacted with through my comments. She was split into a hundred versions of herself as she remained at each site of engagement simultaneously, like a ghost haunting where I had once been. It was as if she was holding up a hundred signs with my thoughts on them, and any passerby could respond at their convenience.

Now, if I had truly abandoned the lie of “always on, always in” this would not have been an issue. But, see, I had internalized it. And, because I was so keen to be engaged in a “deep” way that would validate my work in the eyes of these “always on” anthropologists, I had set my smartphone to receive push notifications at all hours of the day. If I could not be “always on” and “always there” in a traditional and physical sense, part of me would be always “jacked in,” a term I borrow from prolific cyber and sci-fi writer William Gibson. This “jacked in” implies a sort of tether between the internet and the user. In Gibson’s classic, *Cyberpunk* (1984), this was a literal cord that uploaded the users consciousness into the web, rendering their bodies nothing more than dull “meat sacks” that they sought to escape. For me, the tether became a combination of an internet connection and the push notifications. However, instead of uploading myself onto the web and into my field, it felt as if I was downloading my field into my body and self.

This process of “always on/jacked in” produced a rich ethnography full of thick description and embodied experiences. I am extremely proud of the work that I have done since I first stepped into the digital field in late 2018. Yet, there have been times that I have regretted and even resented this tethering I thought was so necessary. I regretted it when, after a rejuvenating run through the river valley, I would look at my phone to see my workout statistics, and instead see notifications that someone on Reddit had responded to my comment and others had downvoted it. I regretted it when my phone buzzed at the pub while I was with friends trying to enjoy some cheap wings and a hockey game. I came to resent my phone, and every time it buzzed my body began to tense.

Is this an interlocutor or my mother messaging me?

The anticipation—and corresponding dread—built up in my body like little blocks of nervous energy. It became a lingering fatigue that I could not shake. I was miserable and I came to reject and resent the field sites I worked in. Reddit, a space I have used since the first year of my undergraduate degree, holds little appeal. Even now, years after r/metacanada shuttered its forum, I have no interest in using it via my personal account on my phone or computer. It is like a meal once loved but eaten too many nights in a row during a period of economic precarity that is now repulsive. The daily repetition and reminder of unpleasant memories sullies the flavour. This emphasis on being “always on” in an attempt to be “really there”—itself an act of self-imposed misery in pursuit of disciplinary acceptance—has remapped my understanding of digital and physical spaces. And I know this is the case for other digital scholars of white and male supremacism.

One of the greatest joys of this dissertation project was the time I spent mentoring other students who are interested in this work. In particular, the work of Kathleen Mah (2022) at the University of Lethbridge. Mah produced a brilliant piece of digital and analogue ethnography on the anti-vax movement in Alberta in summer 2021. During her defense, I was given the opportunity to ask a question. So, I asked, “how are you navigating the disciplinary tradition of leaving the field given that you still live in the place you researched and still have digital connections to the field?” Mah gave a measured response that can be summed up with a simple “I’m not.”

I nodded into the video camera, understanding all too well what she meant, but I suspect many of the traditional anthropologists in the crowd were confused at the sentiment. For those of us who study the right-wing, particularly those of us who forge digital connections to the field, we do not have the capacity to leave. It will continue to go on around us and seep into our digital and analogue lives. We will continue to experience more convoys, coup attempts, and senseless massacres. How we choose to respond to these moments, of course, can change. I do not have to engage with the protestors outside my door with the constraints of an anthropologist.

But being “always on and always in” the field profoundly shaped my experience in the field and it reoriented my understanding of my country. It amplified the change possible in the liminal space that is ethnography. It created thick and enduring lines of connection between me and the

field both on- and offline, and these will be difficult if not impossible to sever. That was the point of my methodological choices, though, right? Did I not want the enduring and immersive field experience of my mentors?

Despite my own advice, I bought into the lie.

I suppose this is the consequence.

Christchurch

March 17, 2021

I set out to write this reflection two years and two days after the March 15, 2019 attack in Christchurch, which left 51 people dead and 40 wounded. The man responsible was motivated by violent Islamophobia and Great Replacement conspiracies shared widely across mainstream and alternative media platforms. He shared a manifesto outlining the reasons for his attack, and successfully livestreamed via Facebook his massacre. He was arrested and tried peacefully.

I have been thinking a lot about ethnography as a method and a writing practice. About how the “field” as a bounded space simply doesn’t work on or offline (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997) within the global and historical systems of capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy (Beliso & Pierre, 2019). About how there is an embodied experience in ethnography (Pink, 2015), and how this embodiment is affected by the work I do and in turn affects the work I *can* do. About how writing ethnography is an act of power that relies in part on distance. I have also been thinking about this as I struggle to write a chapter on the symbolic role women play in my interlocutors’ discourse. This chapter has been particularly difficult to write—indeed it is a process that began shortly after the Christchurch attacks, and I have still yet to finish it—as I am greeted each day with reminders of the violent misogyny and racism of my fieldwork. Even clipped, copied, and pasted into fresh documents does little to soften the blow of extreme hatred. There is still a feeling of closeness between the words and the wounds inflicted by them.

In classic conceptualizations of ethnographic fieldwork, the ethnographer goes away. They go to the field where they write fieldnotes about the process of *doing* ethnography. When they return home, after traveling thousands of miles, they begin *writing* an ethnography (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). The passing of time and space allows them to abstract, to reflect, to get at the richness, the vividness, the ethnographic sensibility that makes anthropological work distinct (McGranahan, 2018). Yet, I have always wondered about distance in digital ethnography, and my reader may, in turn, wonder why I am bringing this issue up in a document titled “Reflections on Writing

Fieldwork: The Christchurch Mosque Attack.” The short answer is I can’t bring myself to write such a reflection just yet in part because distance matters in ethnography.

I set out to write this reflection as an attempt to bring out that feeling of “being there,” which remains the “gold standard” in ethnography (McGranahan 2018). The notion of being there implies a closeness with the “culture” one is studying, and this is achieved through engagement and often participation that closes the distance between ethnographer and interlocutor. In ethnographies, this closeness is reflected in the ethnographic sensibility, in thick description, in vignettes and conversations.

My goal here was (*is?*) to show what the day was really like, how it was embodied and experienced, and how I was entangled through participation. And, perhaps, to say something smart about how my methodological choices revealed something insightful about anti-immigrant rhetoric and its potential for offline violence. Or perhaps to reflect on my positionality as a white woman who is both shielded from and subjected to white male violence.

The problem is distance is complicated when entanglements stretch on beyond specific times and places. Despite the temporal and spatial distance, I cannot access that liberating distance between myself and my fieldwork that my colleagues so fondly discuss (Mack & Newberry, 2020). I struggle to extricate myself from the field and abstract from my data something worth saying. I become caught up in the violence of the day—not just the attack, but the violent rhetoric of my interlocutors—and I wonder what is necessary to share and what would simply do more harm than good to myself and my reader. My body remembers the day, and my embodied memories drag me back in despite my protests.

It seems that in my attempts to prove my ethnographic experience by “being there” and closing the distance between myself and my research subject through immersion and engagement, I have found myself “trapped there” and immobilized while writing. This feeling of being trapped in the field is not limited to when I engage with my data. Despite the temporal and spatial distance, there is still a thriving connection between my experience that day and my continued existence living under the white supremacist capitalist cishetero-patriarchy.

It's been less than one day since a white man shot to death eight people, including six Asian American women, because of his racialized sexual fantasies in Atlanta, Georgia. He was arrested peacefully. It's been two days since a white man stabbed a white girl to death in a high school in Leduc, Alberta. He was arrested peacefully. It's been two weeks since a judge found the Toronto van attacker guilty of 10 counts of first-degree murder, an attack motivated by the fact that he couldn't get laid. He was arrested and tried peacefully. I could continue to count backwards – the days, weeks, months, years – to the beginning of this dissertation project and have a dizzying number of violent examples of why my work is never given distance. New entanglements link my experiences in a never ending, always growing temporal, spatial, and emotional web. And I know I can count forward into the future, because this violence – online and offline – continues to fester and poison and kill. How many more violent attacks will I sit with and witness while writing this dissertation? How many more days will I spend staring at my screen trying to make sense of violent rhetoric while fighting off the urge to spend the day doomscrolling⁹⁶ through Twitter in a fit of collective grief? How many mornings, usually dedicated to writing, will be spent checking up on my friends and colleagues who have the audacity to be anything other than a white man in our society?

My work is on digital white and male supremacy as it manifests as anti-feminist and anti-immigrant rhetoric, which leads to offline violence. I cannot help but sit in my current context when reflecting on my fieldwork experience. I cannot help but draw all the parallels and connections between that day two years ago and that day two weeks ago, two days ago, and yesterday. As a result of this ongoing immediacy and lack of distance, the following is a temporally disjointed, truncated, redacted, and at times thin description of the day because thickness is asking too much today (and every day).

March 15, 2019 – Reflections and Recollections on the Christchurch Attack

⁹⁶ A social media term for when individuals spend long periods of time online scrolling through news articles and commentary that is pessimistic or negative in nature

I woke up to my alarm at 7:30 with plans to head to campus. I normally wouldn't go to campus on a Friday, but it was Northern Research Day and my colleague was presenting at the conference and I wanted to support her. She researches dogs, which seemed like a nice change from the kind of work I was doing at the time. We were going to get beers afterwards too, and I am always down for a trip to the pub.

I checked my phone while I made my coffee and started my morning routine. I had a new message from a friend, "I think something related to your research happened in New Zealand." I put my phone away and made a mental note to check into it once I got to campus and continued to drink my coffee. My partner walked into the room shortly after I had settled into my breakfast to tell me he had received a CBC news alert about a shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand. Reports were saying it was at a mosque. I didn't wait to get to campus.

I sat on our couch scrolling through reports. A gunman had opened fire on a mosque and many people had been killed. My coffee grew cold as I continued to scroll. Eventually I realized I needed to reorient myself and focus not only on the news reports, but my interlocutors' reactions online. *Oh god. What are they making of this?* I thought as I messaged Stenette to tell her I would still be on campus, but I would need to watch her presentation online. We agreed to still go for celebratory beers after the conference wrapped up.

I walked the thirty minutes to campus trying to stay off my phone while I walked. I got to the office and sat down at my computer. The office was cold, as usual, and the lights florescent. It isn't my most comfortable space, but it's one that I've coded as a "work" space. I set up my laptop to have several desktops available for use and I had a different site located in each, as well as my field notes program. This was one of the ways I tried to keep track of my multi-sited and multi-modal field. I would fail miserably and repeatedly at that throughout the day.

I logged onto Gab. It was flooded with comments about the shooting. Many brought up how last time this happened, Gab had been shut down because the Tree of Life Synagogue shooter (Pittsburg, October 27, 2018). This time it seemed the attacker had chosen to use the Facebook Live streaming function to broadcast his attack to the world. Indeed, it was uploaded to

Facebook millions of times, despite Facebook's best attempts to censor and remove the video. It is *still* accessible via alternative video hosting websites like BitChute.

Comments were flooding my field spaces, which were usually more mundane and mainstream expressions of xenophobia and misogyny (Campana & Tanner, 2019). These were the vilest comments I had seen at this point in my research, and I cannot bring myself to include most of the comments here. They were constantly populating across the groups and topics I had subscribed to. I had to frequently refresh the thread page in order to stay up to date with upvotes, reposts, and comments. I took hundreds of screenshots knowing that at any moment the comments could be censored. The users could be banned. The platform could go dark.

At some point my phone went off with a reminder of Stenette's presentation and I logged into the Northern Research Day live feed. I was numb at this point, but a part of me knew I needed a break and there would still be data when I logged back onto Gab. Stenette spoke about her work with Greenlandic sled dogs and her theorizations of multispecies productions of cultural landscapes. She shared images of ice and snow and dogs, and figures of her models. I remember loving the photos of dogs and thought about my own family pets. For a time, it was once again a typical academic day. Then I returned to Gab.

Users had begun circulating the shooters so-called Manifesto and asking for new links as it was taken down in some spaces. After clicking on a number of broken and dead links I located a copy and began to read in short intervals, shifting back and forth to Gab, if only to keep up with the rapidly shifting fallout from the attack.

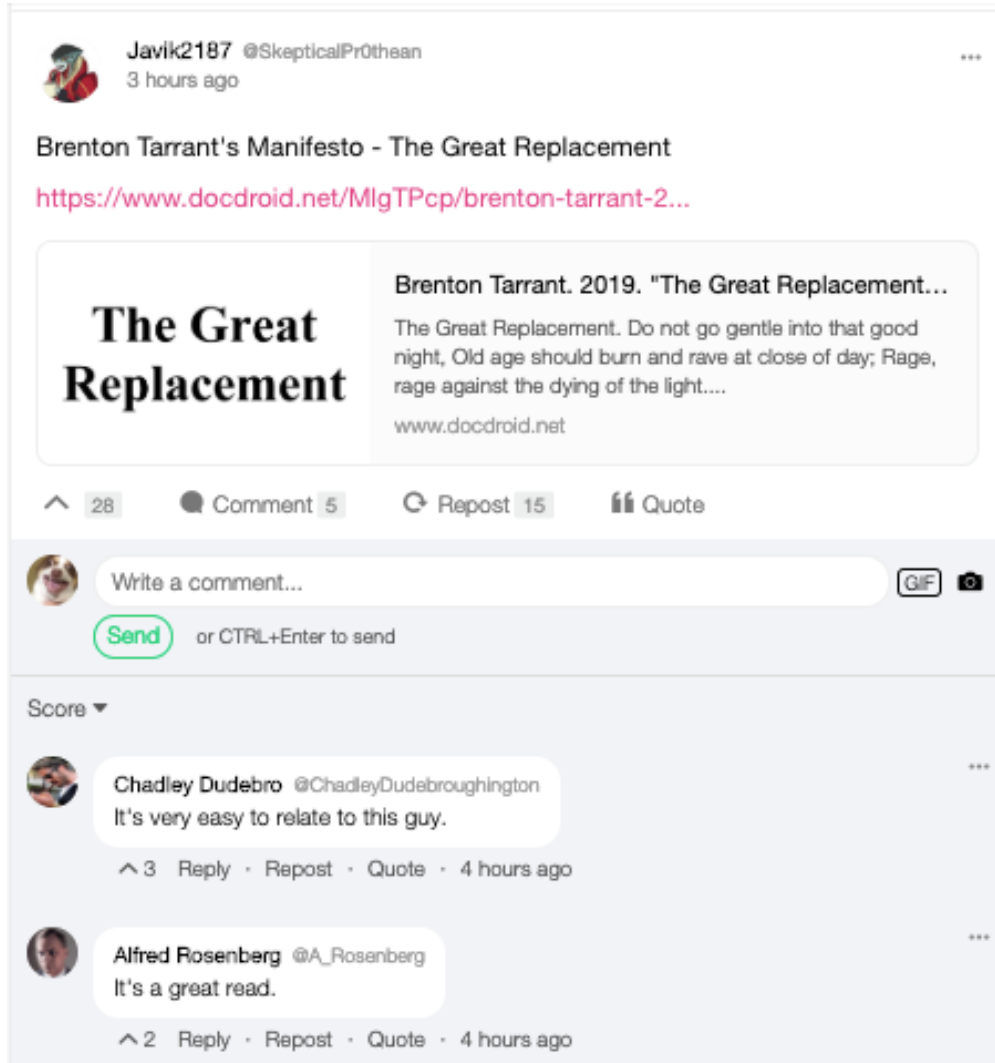


Figure 36. Screenshot from Gab of the link to the manifesto with commentary from users

I left Gab for my personal Facebook account where I made an angry post about its content. I needed to vent, to share my experience. I had a number of sporadic conversations in the comments and my direct messages about it with my colleagues working on extremism. Some even reached out and asked me to send them a copy.

I switched over to Twitter to see what they were saying. I knew it would be terrible, but Twitter had stricter policies on hate speech and were slightly more likely to enforce these. Perhaps it would be a reprieve. It was not.



Figure 37. Screenshot of Tweet saying “my heart goes out to the white community of Christchurch NZ who will no doubt face bigoted, anti-white backlash in the wake of a horrible event perpetrated by a lone, self-radicalized individual.



Figure 38. Screenshot from Twitter that includes an Islamophobic Sound of Music meme

Back on Gab, I clicked a link. It was a stupid thing to do. But my Tor browser and a VPN had made me a bit careless when it came to my safety. My capacity to think clearly was also fading with every comment I read and meme I saw.

The video opened with a scene that my brain read as a first-person-shooter video game. Maybe it was because I was already a bit numb from reading the news reports and user comments, or maybe it was because I was just so so very naïve, but after a few moments I realized my error.

Holy shit.

This is the video.

Fuck fuck fuck.

I slammed my laptop shut. Which was a silly thing to do because it would start playing again as soon as I opened it again. With eyes squinting I opened the laptop and pressed Control + Q to shut down all of my internet browsers across all my desktops. I lost the threads I was on in other windows, but I didn't care. I knew I would find an equally horrible space within minutes of searching.

The memes had started to circulate on Gab mocking the attack, using still images from the video. I could not escape the visual renderings of death and violence. Other users started to argue over whether or not this was all fake news or a red flag to take away gun rights. Others saw it as a “psy-op” meant to paint white people in a bad light and justify retaliatory violence against us. I remember distinctly holding my head in my hands trying to fathom why people would react this way. Real people were dead and injured and grieving.

Rereading these comments and reviewing the memes now as a means of piecing together the day makes me feel absolutely ill. I wish I had taken better field notes, so I didn't have to look at my data because even now I succumb to a sense of overwhelming helplessness, and I find I zone out for minutes at a time or reach for my phone and social media connections. My therapist has helpfully flagged this as a trauma response.

But there was one exchange I had flagged as “exemplar”:

C1: I've watched the footage a few times. I felt nothing for the people shot. Just as I feel nothing for the American hikers caught in Iran. We should stay in our separate countries. This isn't hard.

C2: Felt nothing?? I got a raging hard on.

C3: It was awesome. I'm buying some beer and watching it again later.

C4: Where can I watch it?

This, I hope gives my reader a sense of the kind of commentary that was dominating my Gab spaces. Spaces that were typically more reserved, concerned with optics, strategic in their racism and misogyny. Here, users discussed in great detail their glee, their indifference, their investment in Islamophobic violence. I reported the countless comments as violations of the platforms hate speech policies. I know that some anthropologists would take issue with this action, as it is supposedly *not our place* to intercede in the communities or make judgment on their morals. (After all, don't we all have to write a paper on what we would do if we knew headhunters were planning to kill someone in our methods and ethics class?) Yet, how could I just let this dehumanizing and incitements to violence pass unchecked?

Canadians were quick to use this as an opportunity to discuss the media's bias around hate speech. "Used 'illegal weapons doing illegal things' ... but when muslims do it all we hear from ctv is crickets. Does ctv tell Canadians what kind of hate speech spews forth every day in the mosques of Mississauga and the GTA?" Another user responded, "Paid propaganda." Once again, my interlocutors recontextualized an international issue and made it a Canadian one. I was too caught up at the time to think too much about what this process meant for my research. My field notes simply include a comment to "come back" to this idea. A hopeful note, in a way, one that thought this might be easier sometime in the future. Other posts were flagged with "recontextualizing" or "international connections":

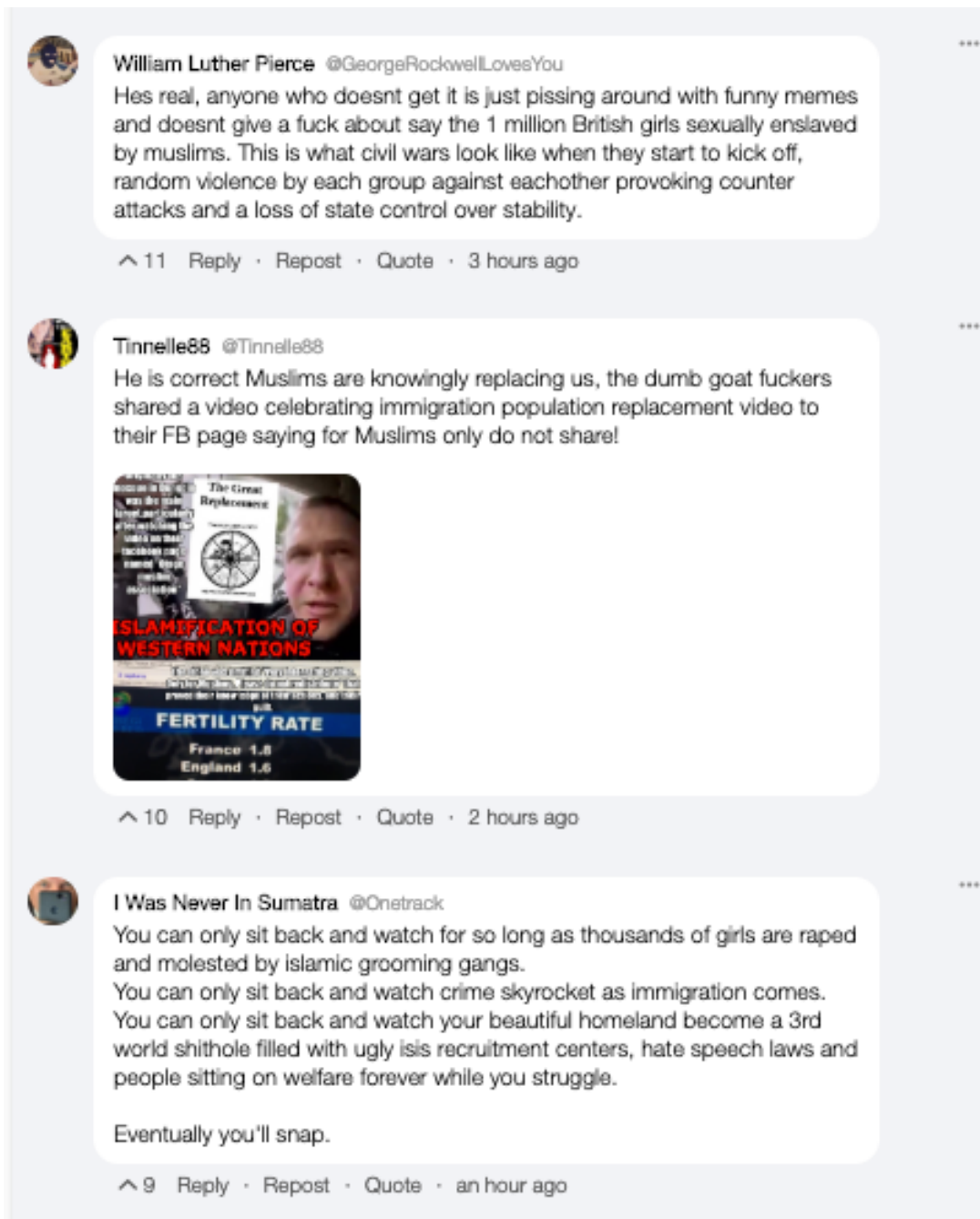


Figure 39. Screenshot from Gab evincing international connections & recontextualizing commentary

I spent close to 12 hours that day consuming various media reports, user comments, and messages. My direct engagement was limited to the less violent comments and posts where I left a handful of comments and responses. I spent much of my time up and downvoting content, a passive form of participation. But it was all I felt comfortable doing. As I have discussed at

length with my colleagues who work on far-right, white supremacis, and violently misogynistic movements, it is vital that researchers consider our impact on the metrics of these spaces. How do our page view impact their numerically-oriented credibility? This was a day where I was even more cautious about the impact of my engagement. This wasn't some sad Keanu Reeves meme or a shitpost complaining about how dating is so difficult for right-wing men—although both of these operate in a system of violence that contributes to the horrific acts noted earlier—this was real, immediate, and devastating violence. On one hand I was pulled by methodological commitment to immersion and ethnographic sensibility to close the gap through participation, but on the other what I was witnessing was so horrific the thought of participation made my skin crawl.

When Northern Research Day wrapped up, my colleauge met me in my disheveled and numb state at the Rutherford library. Together we walked across campus to a local pub and she told me about the conference and about her winning an award for her presentation. I tried to formulate the words to describe my day, but I was so tired. And I didn't want to monopolize our time together and ruin it with the horrors of my day. After a few rounds I walked home and continued to work. My interlocutors were not done with the discussion, although it would die down over the following days.

Since that day, I have thought a lot about Christchurch, about the impact of engaged fieldwork, of immersing oneself in the vitriol and rhetoric, and the limits of ethical and emotional participation. I have tried to write this reflection so many times and failed. I have tried to write it alongside my methods chapter, as well as my women and gender chapter, as the comments embedded in those pieces bleed into my memories of Christchurch. Indeed, it has taken me nearly 8 hours to write less than 3000 words, and I think it has to do with my lack of distance. These ongoing connections and entanglements beyond my work trap me in spaces and moments in time I would rather not embody or revisit. And I'm reminded each time there is a violent attack of the most unsettling comment—to me—made on Gab during the attack:

Don't piss off the white men. We're nice, until we aren't.

It's unsettling because it makes me realize that I'll likely never be able to extricate myself from my field or abstract away my data to make it less painful. At least I won't be able to so long as this is the truest statement I have heard in my life.

Ending with Hope

I have left this essay for last. Not just the last essay, but the last piece of writing in this dissertation. I have already finished my introduction and conclusion, which are always the last things I write. Part of my procrastination is, I'm sure, the fact that I do not know what to say. What can I say about "hope" when this dissertation project has made me feel so much despair and disappointment? So, in lieu of something creative or artistic or thought provoking, let me present something easy to write and (hopefully) easy to digest: a listicle of all the times I felt something approximating hope or joy in my fieldwork.

1. The time another r/metacanada user called out his fellow Redditors for being so reactionary in my call and pointed out that I was actually "trying" to understand their viewpoint and "wasn't this what they wanted all along?" That someone recognized and understood my process was also validating. I have never claimed to agree with or uncritically platform their beliefs. I have, however, agreed to listen and try to understand their analytical work (that is, how they make sense of the world). It felt good to have someone else see the value in this aim.
2. Every time someone else pushed back against something that was in some way hateful. They were always downvoted into oblivion and crushed by dozens of comments calling them derogative things, but their presence and perspective was noticed by me and likely many others. That means something. Disrupting echo chambers means *something*. Especially in a space that is meant to foster "free speech" and "rational dialogue." It also pointed out how complex and contradictory the community could be, and this was important for me to remember. Again, it added to my intellectual curiosity.
3. Everytime I got called King, brother, or some emasculating term like soyboy or simp. For some reason their assumptions regarding my gender always made me laugh. Also whenever a really horrible "fuck Trudeau" meme made the rounds. There was something about their obsession with the man (and, as one committee member pointed out, fucking him) that just amused me to no end.

4. Explaining internet terms to my committee members and colleagues. Who knew a conversation about “cucks” could breathe life back into my fatigued body?
5. When a student I mentored presented at the American Anthropological Association’s AGM in Vancouver, 2019 on Christian far-right nationalism and Donald Trump, and when they stood up to a condescending anthropologist who didn’t “get” digital ethnography.
6. While I’m on the digital, it has felt so validating to see the uptick in students and colleagues interested in digital ethnography. I have found so much joy and value in guiding them through this (not so) nascent field and setting them up for success (or at least helping them to not make all the mistakes I made).
7. When another student wrote an incredible undergraduate thesis on far-right anti-vaxers, presented on it at CASCA in 2022, and got into graduate school with a similar project. And when she co-wrote a chapter with another student of mine (who also got into graduate school!) that will appear in an edited collection alongside myself and other members of the IRMS.
8. Speaking of the IRMS, finding the Institute for Research on Male Supremacism was the most joyful thing to come out of my research. Knowing that there is a group of badass, intelligent, and diverse scholars working on dismantling the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy alongside me made me feel less alone. Moreover, being able to lean on them when times were less hopeful—in terms of research and the academic job market—has made all of this more bearable.
9. Also, collaborating with some of the IRMS early career scholars to form the Canadian Institute for Far-Right Studies has been extremely joyful. We are carving out space for this kind of work in academia and supporting each other along the way.

10. The time I got into a Facebook argument with a friend of my sister. It wasn't the fact that I had an argument that brought joy. In fact it kind of derailed my morning. But the number of people who reached out about how much they appreciated my perspective and how it made them think made me realize that I can have an impact. This sort of work creates ripples! Ripples are joyful.
11. When my friends and family read my work and shared it with their co-workers, and when they attended my virtual events. It is nice to see that others valued my work.
12. When people in my life started coming to me for help with making sense of the convoy. Part of this is certainly ego—it feels good to be recognized for ones hard work!—but it has, at times, felt like I was screaming into a void. It feels good to know that people were listening, and it feels even better to know they are ready to do something about the state of Canadian society. Maybe we weren't at this point collectively back in 2018 when I started this project, but feeling this shift (thanks, convoy!) has brought me great hope.
13. Writing about hockey. That was enjoyable.

This list feels short, but each of these moments were profound in shaping my field experience. If I had to distill these down further into some sort of snappy takeaway, or a list of advice for surviving this kind of work, it might look something like this:

- 1) to find community and space for collaboration,
- 2) to be generous in mentoring the next generation,
- 3) to share your research beyond the academy, and
- 4) to create space for curiosity and dialogue.

Without the first, I wouldn't have survived this project. Graduate school is already an isolating experience where our value and capacity is constantly called into question by a system that was designed to weed out those who do not fit specific moulds. Without the second, the field wouldn't survive. It certainly would not thrive. Without the third, I question the purpose of such

a project. For me, my aim was in response to Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre's (2020) call for an anthropology that seeks to dismantle white supremacy (and all the other modes of oppression that work in tandem). Without the fourth and final point, I'm not sure there would be a path forward for the nation. Curiosity and dialogue do not mean uncritical sympathy and platforms. Rather, through critical empathy and reflexivity, curiosity and dialogue create space for change and growth.

I'm sure there are other memories that I cannot quite recall and other nuggets of wisdom to be gleaned, but there is enough here to keep moving forward with this work.

For now, at least.

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