Thinking Beyond Extremism: A Methodological Reorientation to Studying Right-wing Nationalism and the Far-right Movement in Canada

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Right-wing nationalist movements have gained traction in Westernized countries such as France, Greece, Hungary, Austria, the United States, and Germany, where political figures or groups have mobilized nationalist ideas and right-wing populist sentiment to gain governmental power and/or influence public policy (Mudde 2014, BBC News 2019, Perry & Scrivens 2018: 177). Contrary to Canada's benevolent international reputation, Canadians have demonstrated increasingly exclusionary politics in the last decade. Anti-Islam rhetoric, for instance, has substantial legitimacy in popular discourse and Canadians are increasingly skeptical of the country's federal multiculturalism policy (Angus Reid 2017, Braun 2018, Andrew-Gee 2015; Angus Reid 2010, Canseco 2019, Todd 2017). Academics, journalists, and public figures assert that Canada is experiencing "similar trends" to Western Europe's wave of right-wing populism, pointing to the "growing threat" posed by Canadian far-right groups, also referred to as "right-wing extremists", "hate groups", and sometimes the "alt-right" (Perry & Scrivens 2018: 177, Boutilier 2018, Mastracci 2017, McKenna 2019, Habib 2019). Upon closer scrutiny, dominant scholarly and popular discourse tends to reduce this discussion to a problem of white nationalist ideology and the public safety risks posed by these groups, such as terrorism, hate crime, threats and intimidation, and hate speech. Experts struggle to explain how right-wing and far-right groups operate as a social movement seeking mainstream legitimacy in Canada, and the dominant fixation on "extremism" in the form of white nationalism and criminality sometimes obfuscates significant trends in right-wing organizing.

Using Canada's yellow vests movement as a case study, this project identifies and critiques three broader trends in scholarship on right-wing and far-right social movements: 1)

the passive acceptance of the ambiguous concept "hate" as an explanation for right-wing mobilizing (chapter 3); 2) the growing popularity of criminological or security-centric methods for understanding how right-wing groups mobilize as a social movement (chapter 4); and 3) Eurocentric scholarship that defines right-wing populism as inherently ethnonationalist and illiberal (chapter 5). I use empirically informed analysis based on semi-ethnographic data to argue that the preceding three trends can hinder our understanding of right-wing politics and nationalist movements. My ethnographic approach involves 35 semi-structured interviews with 42 Canadian right-wing activists (RWAs) (ten of which I consider "far-right" or white nationalists), and over 40 hours of observational fieldwork at 20 right-wing political rallies and meetings in Alberta, almost all of which were organized by my participants. My findings show that, contrary to dominant expert narratives, the Canadian right-wing nationalist movement is not primarily white nationalist nor promotes vigilante violence. Instead, the most successful right-wing nationalist groups in Canada foreground liberal ideas and fetishize law and order politics (rather than being anti-state/anti-authority), with the objective of ultimately *delegating violence to the state*, such as demanding increased policing and surveillance of certain marginalized groups, such as Muslims and undocumented immigrants. Moreover, rather than right-wing groups being "anti-" or "ill-" liberal, my findings show how aspects of liberalism and liberal multiculturalism can serve as fertile ground for chauvinist nationalism and right-wing populism.

Dominant approaches to studying right-wing and far-right groups are rarely attuned to capturing the messiness of social movements (Plows 2008, Law 2006). By examining how right-wing nationalism is practiced on the ground and debated between and among groups, this

project shows how ethnographic methods are an effective tool for capturing the fluid structure, political contradictions, rapid changes, unanticipated elements, and mainstream appeal that characterizes contemporary right-wing nationalist movements.

Preface

This dissertation follows the journal-article format (sometimes called a "paper-based" thesis or dissertation by article) as specified by the Faculty of Graduate Studies at the University of Alberta.

The dissertation is composed of three articles (chapters 3, 4, and 5) along with contextual sections including the introduction (chapter 1), methods (chapter 2), and conclusion (chapter 6). Each article is a self-contained discussion of different conceptual and methodological problems in how we study and understand right-wing social movements. Chapters 4 and 5 are currently under review in academic journals and Chapter 3 appears as the following publication:

> Tetrault, J. E. C. (2019). What's Hate Got to Do with It?: Right-Wing Movements and the Hate Stereotype, *Current Sociology,* 1-21.

This dissertation is an original work by Justin EC Tetrault. The research project, of which this dissertation is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, project name "Nationalism and Rightist Activism in Canada", ID Pro00065590, October 26 2016.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of my friends, family, and colleagues. I would like to thank the staff and faculty of the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta for their support. I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Kevin Haggerty, for his invaluable guidance in scholarship, writing, and navigating the university. I could not have asked for a better mentor. I would also like to thank Dr. Sandra Bucerius for her advice and support throughout this process.

I want to thank my committee members, Drs. Dominique Clément, Rob Aitken, and Harvey Krahn. Thank you to Dr. Holly Campeau for chairing my defense, and to my external examiner, Dr. Sara Thompson, for her insights. Thanks to my friends and colleagues for their kindness and helpful comments over the years, especially Drs. Michael Granzow, Jonathan Simmons, Luca Berardi, Shama Rangwala, Ajay Sandhu, Marta Urbanik, Kelsi Barkway, and the UAPP crew. I also could not have done this without the support of Chyana Deschamps, Jean-Phillipe Crête, Ashley Kohl, Prof-Collins Ifeonu, and Miranda Pachal. Finally, thank you to Drs. Heidi Rimke and Kirsten Kramar for believing in me and encouraging me to pursue graduate studies.

I am deeply thankful to my family – Mom, Dad, Nana, and Granda – for their constant love and support throughout the years.

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Chapter One
Introduction

Social problem: thinking beyond extremism

For the last decade, right-wing nationalist movements have gained traction in Westernized countries such as France, Greece, Hungary, Austria, the United States, and Germany, where political figures or groups have mobilized nationalist ideas and right-wing populist sentiment to gain governmental power and/or influence public policy (Mudde 2014, BBC News 2019, Perry & Scrivens 2018: 177). France's National Rally, whose party slogan is "France first!" (previously "France for the French"), obtained 23.6 per cent of the vote in 2019 (Fogarty 2017; Baker 2019). In that same year, the Freedom Party of Austria, which proclaims itself the "protector" of Austrian identity, won 16 per cent of a snap election vote (down from 26% in 2017) (Gady 2019). While Greece saw the rapid rise and fall of the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn from 2015-2019, a new ultranationalist party, Greek Solution, garnered 4.18 per cent of the vote in 2019, winning one seat in European parliament. The group's leader, Kyriakos Velopoulos seeks to advance a vision of "a Christian Europe without Islamists" (Versendaal 2019). Alternative for Germany (AfD) is the largest opposition party in the national parliament, with 89 seats. The party's co-founder Alexander Gauland claims to be fighting an "invasion of foreigners" and its 2017 election manifesto contained a section titled "Islam does not belong to Germany" (BBC News 2017). These far-right movements have threatened liberal democracy and endangered

marginalized populations, especially Muslims and immigrants of colour (Kteily & Bruneau 2017, Stockemer 2017, Schmuck & Matthes 2018)[1].

Canada has seen a surge of right-wing sentiment manifesting in opinion polls, statements by mainstream politicians, and grassroots organizing. Contrary to Canada's benevolent international reputation, Canadians have demonstrated increasingly exclusionary politics in the last decade. For instance, while most studies report positive attitudes toward Canadian multiculturalism and immigration, recent findings have complicated this picture. A survey by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation found that 64 per cent of respondents viewed multiculturalism as allowing "for the pursuit of cultural practices that are incompatible with Canadian values" (Todd 2014). In a 2010 Angus Reid Poll, 54 per cent of respondents thought that Canada should be a "melting pot" rather than a "mosaic" yet, the same poll found that a majority, 55 per cent, thought multiculturalism was good for Canada, compared to only 30 per cent who thought it was bad. Selley (2010), reporting on the poll, stated that Canadians seem confused about multiculturalism and have "no idea" as to what multiculturalism is. Similarly, a 2019 Research Co. poll found that 62 per cent of Canadians think multiculturalism has been "very good" or "good" for Canada, but when asked to select between two different policies, almost half of Canadians (49%) say that Canada should be a "melting pot" and want immigrants to assimilate and blend into Canadian society (Canseco 2019).

Anti-Islam rhetoric also has substantial legitimacy in Canadian political discourse. A 2017 Angus Reid poll showed that almost half (46%) of Canadians think Islam is "damaging" Canadian

[1] Far-right nationalist groups such as the National Rally (previously Front National) in France have influenced public discourse and pulled conservative political parties further right (see Stockemer 2017).

society (Angus Reid 2017). A 2018 Forum Research Poll showed that half of Canadians disapprove of designating January 29th a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia[2] (Braun 2018). Another 40 per cent of respondents strongly disapproved of the designation. In 2015, the reigning Conservative Party vowed to establish a RCMP "barbaric cultural practices" tip line targeting Canadian Muslims (Andrew-Gee 2015), and their federal election campaign promoted a niqab ban, a policy proposal supported by 82 per cent of Canadians (Beeby 2015). In early 2016, a petition titled "Stop resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada" garnered almost 50,000 signatures (Care2 Petitions 2016). Opinion polls from the Angus Reid Institute showed that 44 per cent of Canadians opposed the plan to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees before the end of February 2016. The study also indicated that 42 per cent of respondents want Canada to stop receiving Syrian refugees all together, while 29 per cent said that Canada should stop at 25,000 (Reuters 2016). A 2019 Ipsos revealed that approximately three in ten Canadians believe that Muslims follow Shariah law instead of Canadian law, and that two in ten Canadians believe Jewish people control Canada's financial system and media (Elliot 2019).

While mainstream conservative parties seem hesitant to fully capitalize on the preceding developments, grassroots right-wing groups have been organizing more frequently from the mid-2010s until now. Academics, journalists, law enforcement officials, politicians, and public figures have drawn attention to the "growing threat" posed by the Canadian "far-right", also referred to as "right-wing extremists", "hate groups", and sometimes the "alt-right" (Boutilier 2018, Mastracci 2017, McKenna 2019, Perry & Scrivens 2018, Habib 2019). These

[2] January 29, 2017, was the date of the Quebec Islamic Cultural Centre shootings, where six men were killed.

experts typically articulate the far-right's threat as primarily criminal. In other words, popular discussion about the "far-right" centers on public safety risks in the form of hate speech, hate crime, terrorism, threats and intimidation, among other politically motivated crimes by groups and individual actors. Leading scholars Barbara Perry and Ryan Scrivens (2015) argue that the right-wing extremist movement engages in "violent, targeted activities" (39) and is represented by at least 130 "far-right extremist" groups in Canada, a 30 per cent increase between 2015 and 2019 (Perry interviewed in Habib 2019). Another major report by McCoy, Jones, and Hastings (2019) centers on the far-right movement's risk of vigilante violence, citing a 38 per cent increase in police-reported hate crimes in Alberta from 2016-17 and terrorism incidents causing Canada to rise nine places to 57th in the 2018 *Global Terrorism Index* (17). Major media outlets and non-governmental organizations such as the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, also foreground public safety concerns when reporting on these groups.

Many of the same experts assert that Canada is also experiencing "similar trends" to Western Europe's wave of right-wing populism (Perry & Scrivens 2018: 177). However, upon closer scrutiny, experts struggle to articulate how the "far-right" operates as a social movement mobilizing popular support. This issue stems from ambiguous terminology, particularly around what the Canadian "far-right" is, and what constitutes "extremism" and a "movement". In Canada's dominant discourse, the "far-right" (often used by experts synonymously with "right-wing extremism") is simultaneously a terroristic anti-state movement committing mass violence, white supremacist politicians seeking the legitimacy of office, an ideology promoted by mainstream politicians, and an inherent feature of a historically and systemically "hateful" society. When applied to political groups, the Canadian "far-right" movement encompasses

everything from Christian fundamentalists, media outlets (such as the Rebel and the Sun), Alberta and Quebec separatists, anti-Aboriginal sentiment, anti-Muslim groups, and social conservative parties, to the yellow vest movement, sovereign citizens, men's rights activists, incels, and neo-Nazis (Perry & Scrivens 2015, 2019, Perry 2018, Mastracci 2017, Press Progress 2018, Gerson 2015, Lindholm & Rosen 2017, Hays 2014, Audette-Longo 2017). Perry explains that while the far-right typically involves political groups, it can also take the form of drug gangs, biker gangs, and lone wolves (Quan 2016; Perry & Scrivens 2015: 22). Additionally, journalists and experts often include the "alt-right" under this banner, a term Kamel, Patriquin, and Picazo (2019) (in collaboration with the Canadian Anti-Hate Network) define as follows:

> The [Canadian] alt-right is a loose movement of white nationalists, white supremacists and neo-Nazis, self-styled militias and anti-government extremists; anti-immigration, closed-border activists and anti-Muslim fanatics; conspiracists, culture warriors, men's rights activists, anti-feminists and societal traditionalists.

In a media interview, Perry argues that the alt-right is different from the far-right, describing them as the "intelligentsia" and "ideas people" of the extremist movement (Small 2018). In another report, Perry (2018) states that "there is little to distinguish them [the alt-right] from the traditional far-right. The messaging is the same" (para. 4, see also Perry & Scrivens 2019: 155). Perry also tells CBC News that "alt-right rallies happen in Canada every week", representing "solidarity" and "a real movement with a shared vision" (Habib 2019). By contrast, Perry and Scrivens (2015) emphasize constant infighting and splintering among such groups: "to

refer to hate 'groups' or RWE 'groups' gives them too much credit. It implies the capacity to be or become disorganized" (54). The Canadian Security and Intelligence Service similarly states that "Right-wing extremist circles appear to be fragmented and primarily pose a threat to public order and not to national security" (Quan 2016).

Despite the myriad of concepts for sorting right-wing groups into ideological camps (such as white supremacist, militia, anti-Muslim, "mano-sphere", skinhead, alt-right, anti-authority, etcetera), the popular lexicon does not get us far in understanding Canadian groups' relationship to the status quo and how these groups capitalize on mainstream sensibilities. Conceptual ambiguity around the far-right "movement" and what constitutes extremism has led to conflicting reports of the Canadian far-right as simultaneously fringe yet mainstream, "absent" yet "thriving" or "flourishing" (Ambrose & Mudde 2015, Solyom 2018, Livesey 2017), united yet fractured, structurally hierarchical yet fluid, and sanitizing their ideology yet "spreading hate" (House of Commons 2019, Carranco & Milton 2019). Dominant discourse around right-wing groups centers on questions of "extremism" and struggles to address questions a social movement scholar would ask, such as: how do far-right groups define success? How does the movement mobilize Canadians? Which political messages are working or failing and why? Answering these questions is essential to understanding the how a right-wing populist movement might emerge in this country and requires a reworking of the lexicon on this subject.

Altogether, the current language has sometimes done more to obfuscate than clarify trends in Canadian right-wing organizing. Mainstream scholarly and popular discourse use the term "far-right" as a catchall for nearly all expressions of Canadian nationalism and often

conflate the circulation of right-wing ideas with a "movement". This dissertation seeks to develop a more precise language for discussing right-wing nationalist organizing in Canada and abroad. This involves dissecting many of the conceptual problems in dominant discourse, such as those concerning the terms "far-right", "extremism", and "hate", and interrogating how uncritical use of this terminology can negatively affect methods and analysis. My research questions are as follows:

> **RQ 1:** *Why do popular and scholarly discourse on Canada's right-wing nationalist groups repeatedly reduce the discussion to "extremism", particularly in the forms of "hate", white nationalism, and/or criminal violence?*
>
> **RQ 2:** *How important is "extremism" to the success and growth of the Canadian nationalist movement?*

While the preceding questions concern Canada, this project draws attention to various conceptual and methodological problems in the broader study of right-wing and far-right mobilization. For instance, chapter 3 shows how scholars across different countries often conflate right-wing politics with "hate", which can spur methodological and analytical errors. Chapter 4 critiques the dominant fixation with "extremism" and criminal violence in the study of right-wing politics. These security-centric approaches are increasingly influential and transnational, yet can discourage studying the nuances, fluidity, and local context necessary to understanding much of contemporary right-wing organizing. Finally, chapter 5 interrogates

dominant research on right-wing populism, showing how the phenomenon is often understood through Eurocentrism and liberal biases.

I define right-wing nationalism broadly as a political movement foremost concerned with national identity from a right-wing perspective, focusing on non-establishment or grassroots activist groups. In liberal democracies, right-wing nationalists promote a country's (perceived) traditional national values and culture, often by connecting social ills to those cultures (perceived to) deviate most from the dominant culture, such as the stereotype that Black culture causes crime, or that Islamic culture causes terrorism. This definition encompasses liberal-conservative (civic) expressions of nationhood (such as the idea that Islam is incompatible with "liberal values"), as well as more extreme ethnonationalism (such as the belief that race determines behaviours). As I will show, this definition is necessarily broad as Canada's right-wing nationalist movement, for instance, is made up of diverse nationalist groups with conflicting goals and ideas, encompassing ideologies from mainstream liberalism to neo-Nazism. In other words, the more popular (and loaded) concepts "far-right" or "right-wing extremism" fail to capture the Canadian movement's messiness, contradictions, and complexities.

I use ethnographic data to challenge popular arguments and assumptions concerning the "extremism" of Canada's contemporary right-wing nationalist movement. My data consists of 35 semi-structured interviews with 42 Canadian right-wing activists (RWAs) (ten of which I consider far-right activists)[3], and over 40 hours of observational fieldwork at 20 conservative

[3] I also conducted four interviews with ex-racist skinheads (not included in these numbers), two counter-extremist experts (one in law enforcement and the other in policy), and one anti-racist activist who runs a blog that surveils Canada's right-wing movements. This blog is mentioned in almost half of my interviews.

political rallies and meetings, almost all of which were hosted by my participants. My findings show that, contrary to dominant scholarly stereotypes, Canadian right-wing activists are not primarily white nationalists nor violent extremists. Instead, the most successful right-wing nationalist groups in Canada foreground liberal ideas and fetishize law and order politics (rather than being anti-state/anti-authority), with the objective of ultimately *delegating violence to the state*, such as demanding increased policing and surveillance of certain marginalized groups, such as Muslims and undocumented immigrants. Moreover, rather than right-wing groups being "anti-" or "ill-" liberal, my findings show how aspects of liberalism and liberal multiculturalism can serve as fertile ground for chauvinist nationalism and right-wing populism.

In short, this dissertation uses a semi-ethnographic case study of the Canadian nationalist movement to dispel popular myths and develop clearer conceptualizations of this phenomenon. Because these myths rely on popular transnational and scholarly assumptions, my critique requires engaging in a methodological critique of the broader discipline, where I show how researchers across Westernized countries sometimes rely on poorly defined, taken for granted, and politically charged concepts to reproduce questionable claims and generalizations about right-wing groups and actors. This includes popular terms such as hate, in/tolerance, extremism, ethnonationalism, and il/liberalism. This project calls for more fine-grained and contextual or "bottom-up" theorizing over the dominant top-down grand theorizing to which most of the preceding conceptual and analytical issues are found.

This study contributes to social movement studies, hate scholarship, critical security/terrorism studies, populism studies, political theory, and research concerning nationalism, ethnographic methods, extremism and radicalization, multiculturalism, and

Canadian politics. This chapter outlines the social problem I am addressing in this project; namely, how scholarly language and theory often relies on dated ideas and stereotypes of right-wing politics, such as overstating many groups' commitment to white nationalism, exaggerating the importance of crime and vigilante violence to the movement, and believing that "hate" is central to motivating collective action. I argue that a great deal of the dominant scholarship is currently limited for critically engaging with how right-wing nationalism manifests as a growing social movement, particularly in Canada. In this chapter I outline why I chose to pursue this project and review the existing literature on the subject. Chapter 2 outlines my ethnographic methods for studying Canada's right-wing nationalist movement. In chapter 3, I develop a concept called "hate stereotyping", which refers to how current scholarship reduces discussions of right-wing political movements to emotions and prejudice, particularly the ambiguous concept "hate". Chapter 4 interrogates the limits of security-centric research on right-wing nationalism, such as "countering violent extremism" (CVE) approaches, which present right-wing groups as foremost a public safety or crime problem. I use empirical ethnographic findings to challenge the notion that vigilante violence and white nationalism (articulated as "right-wing extremism") are significant to the success of the Canadian yellow vests movement. In chapter 5, I challenge the popular assumption that right-wing populism is inherently ethnonationalist, "illiberal", and "far-right". My ethnographic findings reveal how the yellow vests movement foremost mobilizes civic or liberal principles to advance hardline right-wing populist ideas to grow the movement, rather than ethnonationalist or "illiberal" ones. In chapter 6, I conclude that scholarship on right-wing nationalist movements often suffers from poorly defined political

concepts and from researchers overstating the generalizability of labels, findings, and/or theories across a severely understudied social phenomenon.

Development of subject matter

My interest in right-wing nationalism stems from my personal background and growing up in Winnipeg, Manitoba, which Maclean's magazine had dubbed "Canada's Most Racist City" (Macdonald 2015). Racial prejudice against Indigenous peoples was a normal part of living in Winnipeg among mostly non-Indigenous people. While I am a direct descendant of Louis Riel, the leader of the Manitoba Métis – a distinct French-Indigenous nation colonized by Canada – I was never the target of racial prejudice myself, due to my light skin and red hair. My family rarely discussed my Indigenous heritage growing up; I learned my father was a child of the Sixties Scoop in my late-20s. My childhood experience taught me that Indigeneity was a source of shame, leading me to disavow that part of my identity when I was young. Friends, family, students, and colleagues regularly described Indigenous people as "lazy", "criminal", and a "drain" on the system. The public schools I attended painted a rosy picture of colonialism without foregrounding its horrors and without connecting it to modern inequalities. One high school teacher taught us that the bison went extinct because Indigenous peoples led packs of them off cliffs (the extinction was caused by increased demand from the European fur trade). A childhood friend once wrote a high school paper on how Indigenous peoples don't contribute to society and that we should end the welfare state. While the school Principal explained to the

student why this was wrong, there was almost nothing in the curriculum that challenged this kind of thinking. At the time, I didn't understand why my friend got in trouble.

Learning about Canadian history and social inequality in university radically changed my thinking and I resented my public-school education. I felt that I had been lied to. Wanting to understand how and why nations sanitize their history and image, I became fascinated by political theory and social control. I pursed these topics during my M.A., where I wrote on how nation-states govern people using visualizations of the human face, such as wanted posters, passports, ID, and facial recognition technology. During my PhD program, I became less interested in top-down forms of social control and more interested in how people consent to and celebrate social control of themselves and of others, such as demanding more police and surveillance, or celebrating military power. This inevitably piqued my interest in nationalism and right-wing social movements during a resurgence of right-wing mobilizing in Greece with the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn Party and the National Front (now the National Rally) in France in circa 2014. Not long after, Donald Trump launched his presidential campaign. I was intrigued by the recent conservative trend toward critiques of government that continued to fetishize the nation-state – sometimes called "right-wing populism".

Since my background was in surveillance studies, I was initially hesitant to pursue research in a new field halfway through my PhD, namely social movement studies and political extremism. With my limited knowledge of the academic discipline, I initially believed there was nothing new or interesting to say about the subject. From the few pieces I read, right-wing or "extremist" groups were simply composed of angry, hateful, violent, and irrational people. Nonetheless, I pursued a deeper reading on right-wing extremism and became frustrated with

what I saw. While I could not articulate it at the time, many scholars made strong assertions unsupported by empirical data. Initially, I noticed that much of these claims centered on the concept "hate". To me, researchers' assumptions about "hate" revealed a certain naivety about racial prejudice. From my own experience, racial prejudice against Indigenous peoples was not an irrational and pathological "hatred", but a highly rationali*zed* way of thinking about the world through "Canadian values" concerning personal responsibility, hard work, law and order, and civility. In other words, my experience suggested that racist beliefs are not "unCanadian" but rather, widespread, passively accepted, and intimately tied to mainstream thinking about nation and social order – something rarely reflected in the work I was reading on right-wing groups, prejudices, and extremism. I was particularly disappointed that research on Canadian right-wing groups rarely discussed Canadian nationalism. Instead, some researchers advance a progressive vision of "multicultural" Canadian nationhood, implying that right-wing groups are unrepresentative of Canadian identity. In short, my anecdotal experiences made me skeptical that "hate" could adequately explain right-wing mobilization. As I show in chapter 3 – in the study of right-wing politics, "hate" is often little more than an appeal to "common sense" about right-wing groups, rather than an empirically-informed or well-reasoned concept.

Before beginning fieldwork, I was skeptical of dominant claims about the Canadian far-right movement, which experts and media painted as violent extremists and white nationalists. While this was true of some groups, a preliminary scan of various nationalist groups' social media activity revealed most of their discourse (from my perspective) to be in line with common or average conservative or right-wing opinion. Of course, this depends on one's definition of "extremism" and "far-right". Nonetheless, I suspected that dominant opinions

exaggerated the vigilantism and white nationalist beliefs of these groups, distracting from more mundane yet widely held right-wing convictions, such as the championing of legitimate (state) violence. Moreover, if most nationalist groups were really made up of white nationalists sanitizing their image, Canadian scholarship was not explaining the finer details of this. Which softer messages are more appealing to Canadians? Which hardline messages turn people away? If liberal messages were more effective, what does that tell us? How much of activists' "true" beliefs were they holding back? What happens when people join certain groups and discover it to be more extreme? I wanted to conduct an ethnography to help answer some of these questions.

Scope and literature review

This project contributes to qualitative work on Canadian right-wing nationalist activist groups in Alberta.

What is Canadian nationalism? Nationalism is a broad and ambiguous political concept. Chennells (2001) argues that contemporary nationalism[4] involves 1) ideas embodying "loyalty to a way of life, and symbols of an existing nation-state"; and 2) as a call to action for negotiating the relationship between state and nation (4). Chennells (2001) definition is useful because he conceptualizes nationalism based on political objectives, rather than through descriptive national profiles and dominant narratives (8). As Anthony Smith (1982) argues,

[4] I am referring to right-wing nationalism of an existing nation-state. Chennells (2001) approach is less applicable to left-wing forms of nationalism.

fixating on nationalist doctrines, for instance, "risks attaching too much weight to the statements and declarations of a tiny minority of intellectuals", and fails to grasp the ideological heterogeneity of nationalism (208). Instead, scholars such as Smith (1982) and Chennells (2001) suggest that scholars focus on the sociological circumstances, actions, and political goals of nationalist movements. This approach draws attention to the highly contextual, fluid, and contested nature of national identity.

Since the country's inception, Canadian nationhood has been torn between conflicting loyalties to Britain, Quebec, and the United States, and more recently, by gestures toward Indigenous peoples and liberal cosmopolitanism (Grant 2017, Igartua 2006). Most scholarship on Canadian nationalism and nationalist movements are historical analyses or political critique. Methodologically, scholars rely heavily on polling data, media sources, political campaign records, archival sources, memoirs, and institutional documents to show how Canadian nationalism has circulated in public discourse. Igartua (2006) shows how, until the late-twentieth century, Canadian nationhood was defined by struggles over biculturalism and bilingualism between French and British[5] (white) Canada. Represented as the "founding races", ethnic definitions of identity spanned most of Canada's history, where people of colour and immigrants were typically represented as outside Canadian culture and urged to assimilate (Thobani 2007: 248-249, Igartua 2006: 58, Francis 1992). Similarly, dominant discourse portrayed Indigenous peoples as a separate entity, or dehumanized them by reducing them to a

[5] Igartua (2006) uses the term "British" to refer to "a set of ethnic, cultural, political, and symbolic markers considered to be obtained by birth and education into the British culture. British encompasses the more specific English, Irish, Welsh, and Scottish cultures that were transplanted to Canada, but retains an ethnic quality because it serves to define a specific "We" that excludes those not bred and raised in its culture" (4, 5).

part of the country landscape (Igartua 2006: 74, Thobani 2007). Grant (2017) shows how, as Canada became economically and culturally absorbed by the United States during the mid-twentieth century, Canadian nationhood came to involve struggles to distinguish itself from the superpower (see also Harrison 1995: 91).

Other scholars focus on French nationalism or Indigenous and left-wing nationalist movements, such as Mann's (2009[o.d.1982]) study of the political history of Quebec, or Francis' (1992) *The Imaginary Indian*, and Kalant's (2004) *National Identity and the Conflict at Oka*, which examine the construction of – and resistance to – Canadian nationhood among Indigenous peoples. Other data on Canadian nationalism come from studies centered on immigration, multiculturalism, and/or racism. For instance, historian Howard Palmer (1982) traces the history of nativism in the province of Alberta, defining nativism as "the amalgam of ethnic prejudice and nationalism"[6] (6).

Scholars generally agree that since the 1960s, Canada has yielded its ethnic binational character to a more civic and multicultural definition of Canadian identity (see Igartua 2006, Chennells 2001, Grant 2017). Today, Canada enjoys a reputation as a culturally, racially, and socially diverse society and haven for immigrants (Reitz, Phan, and Banerjee 2015). The country is often celebrated for its multicultural policy. Introduced in 1971, Canada's multiculturalism policy received constitutional recognition in 1982, and became statutory (federal) law in 1988. Canadian multiculturalism today functions as a symbolic gesture giving rise to sets of economic,

[6] Some historians argue that "nativism" is inapplicable to the Canadian context, due in part to the country's amorphous national identity (Palmer 1982: 8). While Palmer (1982) defends using "nativism" in his historical analysis of Alberta, he admits that prevailing conceptions of Canadian identity "now oppose rather than reinforce ethnic prejudice" (15). Indeed, nativism is less applicable to Canada's contemporary political climate (as I will show).

political, and social practices designed to maintain the ethnic and cultural identities of Canadians (Satzewich and Liodakis 2013:160, 161). It exalts diversity in the pursuit of national interests and encourages cultural pluralism. This is exemplified by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's comment that Canada could be the world's first "postnational state . . . there is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada" (Foran 2017) and by the motto inscribed on Toronto's coat of arms: "Diversity is our Strength".

Studies focusing on contemporary right-wing nationalism are sparse and few scholars have explored the right-wing's relationship to Canada's (seemingly) progressive national identity. Farney and Rayside's (2013) edited collection *Conservatism in Canada* is a robust examination of the mainstream Canadian Right and party politics. While the text does not focus on Canada's national mythology nor right-wing activism, certain chapters explore how the Conservative Party and its provincial counterparts mobilize populism and immigration as political strategies (see Marwah, Triadafilopoulos, & White 2017). Farney and Rayside (2013) argue that, apart from immigration (of which there is much support), general political opinion among Canadians falls between the position of Western Europeans and Americans: Canadians are more individualistic and drawn to populism than Europeans, but less so than Americans (347). Canadians also fall in the middle on "moral issues", such as sexual diversity. Farney and Rayside (2013) show that Canadian conservative parties increasingly resemble US Republicans, where politicians promote free-market radicalism and traditional family values, positions which, Farney and Rayside (2013) observe, are somewhat out of sync with Canadian public opinion (347, 348).

Harrison (1995) traces the rise of the Reform Party, a socially conservative right-wing populist movement which gained political power in the 1980s. The Reform Party proposed a new Canadian identity, rejecting the idea of French and English Canadians as the "founding races", as well as official multiculturalism, asserting that "equality" meant no group should be given "special status" (176). Jeffrey's (1999) *Hard Right Turn* shows how the neo-conservative movement of the 1980s and 90s – spearheaded by populist politicians and the Reform and Social Credit parties – influenced government policy and structure. For example, Mike Harris, a self-described populist premiere of Ontario who successfully convinced voters that "fat cats", "lazy overpaid bureaucrats", and "special interests" were the cause of their problems, managed to implement sweeping cuts to social and health services through what he called "the Common Sense Revolution" (Jeffrey 1999: 439). The Reform Party (which various far-right and extremist figures supported, especially anti-Semites) became the Official Opposition to the federal parliament in 1993, supplanting the Progressive Conservatives as the largest party in Western Canada. However, as Jeffrey (1999) argues, the Reform Party had no political future due to the party's insistence on the American brand of moral conservatism which is alien to Canadian political culture (445). Finally, Stingel's (2000) *Social Discredit* examines Alberta's Social Credit party and its anti-Semitic roots. Coming to power in 1935 (winning 56 out of 63 seats in the provincial election), Social Credit held Alberta's political leadership until 1971. Stingel (2000) argues that "Social Credit was the only democratically elected party in Canada whose political and economic philosophies were based on anti-Semitism" (p. 4)

Other studies focus exclusively on the extreme racist right in Canada. Pitsula's (2013) *Keeping Canada British* offers a historical analysis showing how the Canadian Ku Klux Klan

influenced mainstream politics in Saskatchewan in the 1920s. Kinsella's (2001) book *Web of Hate*, relies on news sources and investigative journalism to detail the activity of the Canadian far-right throughout the late-1980s and 1990s. Barrett's 1989 text *Is God a Racist?* is the largest anthropological work on the modern Canadian far-right, using a mixture of archival research and ethnographic interview data to develop a robust account of the far-right's activist culture and political influence in Canada.

Research on *contemporary* Canadian right-wing nationalist groups focuses almost exclusively on questions of security and terrorism, with some exceptions, such as McDonald's (2011) journalistic account of the Canadian Christian right, and Ambrose and Mudde's (2015) and Perry, Mirrlees, and Scrivens' (2018) pieces examining the potential for right-wing populism in Canada. Nearly all remaining academic works since 2010 focus on the political violence of "right-wing extremism", which is the subject of chapter 4.

This project critiques the recent scholarly trends toward security studies and instead builds on the tradition of Barrett's (1989) semi-ethnographic approach. While Barrett (1989) does not state the number of interviews he conducted, he gathered data on over 100 right-wing groups and spent five years doing fieldwork in right-wing circles, where participants threatened him, inquired about legal advice, and tried to recruit him. No qualitative work on this topic has matched the scope of Barrett's (1989) study, Barrett's access to the Canadian far-right, nor his attention to detail for context, terminology, and analysis. For instance, Barrett (1989) distinguishes between right-wing ideologies using the concepts "radical" and "fringe" right to separate racist fanatics from less extreme right-wingers[7](9). Barrett (1989) also

[7] 54% of Barrett's (1989) sample were "fringe right", and 46% were "radical right".

exercises caution when gauging the size and influence of the movement, distinguishing between “leaders”, “active followers”, and “supporting members”, and acknowledging that membership numbers likely exceed his “crude approximations” (30, 31). This study aspires to develop a similar level of caution and clarity for discussing contemporary right-wing mobilization.

Compared to Barrett’s (1989) study, this project faced certain barriers and advantages to conducting a semi-ethnographic study. First, Internet culture and political trends have arguably made it more difficult to classify different types of right-wing politics and groups. Since Barrett’s (1989) study, for instance, the racist-right has taken steps to make their language more palatable for average white audiences and the explosion of social media makes it more difficult to determine what constitutes “membership” or a “group”. It is also likely that today’s right-wing groups are more skeptical of academics than during the time of Barrett’s research, as Canada has strengthened anti-hate legislation since 1989 and scholars in the field increasingly advocate for stronger hate speech laws and surveillance of right-wing beliefs. However, social media has made it easier than ever for researchers to interact with nearly all public political groups. Another advantage I face compared to Barrett (1989) is the development of more robust social theory, such as significant advancements in ethnographic methods research, social movement studies, race scholarship, and political theory. There are also far more studies on right-wing groups since Barrett’s (1989) study. However, this dissertation shows how some theorizing on “right-wing extremism” has become a barrier to understanding the phenomenon it set out to understand.

Terminology and theoretical orientation

This study centers on debates around terminology and the consequences of using certain concepts, phrases, and theories uncritically. My analysis focuses on grand theories of "right-wing extremism" and the "far-right", particularly those that were developed within terrorism and security studies, and, to a lesser extent, political science. While my project centers on groups that many would describe as "far-right" and "extremist", I borrow little from disciplines focused on these topics. For instance, I do not find theories of "extremism" or "radicalization" helpful for my study (for the reasons I previously articulated). A celebrated theory developed by Berger (2019) defines extremism as "the belief that an in-group's success or survival can never be separated from the need for hostile action against an out-group" (45) and violent extremism as "the belief that an in-group's success or survival can never be separated from the need for violent action against an out-group" (46). It is hard to see how these base definitions differ from general organized hostility and violence, the former of which can be applied to most political groups and many everyday organizations and institutions. Indeed, Berger's base definition of "violent extremism" applies to police and military as well, if not the entire criminal justice system. Berger (2019) attempts to avoid including state and institutional violence or harm by adding that "the need for harmful activity must be unconditional and inseparable from the in-group's understanding of success in order to qualify it as extremist" (45). Berger does not define "un/conditional" nor "hostility" but his definition and examples seem to imply that groups such as ISIS or neo-Nazis are "extremist" because they designate the outgroup an *absolute* threat necessitating *only* hostility. Berger's (2019) definition still applies to nearly all

forms of organized violence and many mainstream institutions. Most organizations develop social categories identifying an outgroup warranting hostility, such as Amazon's absolutist hostility toward unions and union sympathizers, the police's absolutist hostility toward "criminals", or the border's absolutist hostility toward "undocumented immigrants". Moreover, at what point do politics become hostile? Are all animal rights groups "hostile" or "extremist" because they absolutely oppose meat consumption? Are pro-choice activists "extremist" because their political success depends on directly opposing anti-choice activists?

If instead Berger (2019) means by "unconditional hostility" that extremist hostility neglects or opposes laws or social regulation (where police violence, for instance, counts as "conditional" because it answers to the rule of law), this is simply inaccurate or at the least unhelpful. First, it is a defining characteristic of human groups that they exist and operate through rules, whether formal rules, such as law, or informal rules, such as those determined through socialization. The hostility or behaviours of groups such as ISIS are *intensely* conditional – identifying targets based on a strict set of religious laws adherents believe to be true. Their hostility or violence is arguably never "unconditional". Moreover, mainstream institutions such as police, military, corporations, and politicians (to name a few), regularly engage in hostility or violence outside of the legal "conditions" allegedly governing their actions. While Berger (2019) might well agree that such actions by mainstream actors constitutes "extremism" – how helpful is that label to understanding these problems? How much extremist activity must be present for a group to be labelled "extremist"?

As a critique of the field, this study takes little influence from disciplines centered on extremism and radicalization, such as "countering violent extremism" (CVE) research, and

policy-oriented political science and criminal justice approaches concerning far-right politics. Instead, I take an interdisciplinary approach borrowing from sociology, race scholarship, social movement studies, critical security studies, and research on nationalism.

I begin from the Foucauldian tradition of questioning dominant knowledge of social phenomena and interrogating why people (particularly researchers) privilege certain ideas or approaches over others. Investigating these questions often reveals how expert knowledge can be political and moralizing. For instance, Michel Foucault's (1978, 1988) work on psychology influenced my critique of scholars' widespread use of the psychological concept "hate" when discussing right-wing politics, representing a modern iteration of experts pathologizing people or groups deemed immoral or inferior (see also Rimke & Brock 2012). This also reflects Hannah Arendt's (1963) arguments in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Detailing the trial of Adolf Eichmann (a key architect of the Holocaust), Arendt (1963) challenged the media stereotype of Eichmann as a psychologically deranged monster. For Arendt (1963), the most terrifying aspect of Eichmann was his normalcy and mediocrity. I also borrow from Wendy Brown's (2009) tolerance theory to show how scholarly assertions of the right-wing's "hateful/intolerant/exclusionary", "anti-democratic", and "illiberal" nature are a form of liberal-secular moralizing to Other "bad" (intolerant) right-wing groups from the "good" (progressive) status quo.

As a study of Canada's right-wing nationalist movement, this project borrows from social movement studies theory, such as Polletta and Jasper's (2001) theorizing of collective identity, and Benford and Snow (2000), and Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford's (1986) work concerning framing and mobilization. I also draw from the closely related social problems literature, particularly Spector and Kitsuse (2009). These literatures allow me to better

articulate how my participants construct narratives about the world and tailor their political messages to increase the legitimacy of (and ultimately grow) the movement (i.e.: framing/claims-making).

I also borrow from race scholars such as Eduardo-Bonilla Silva and Matthew Hughey, who provide sophisticated theories of racism that address both its' systemic and individualized forms. Hughey's (2012) *White Bound* explores how American white nationalists increasingly use abstract liberalism to advance their interests, such as "equal rights" discourse and racial colour-blindness. Bonilla-Silva's (2014) *Racism Without Racists* famously outlines how average people need not be extreme racists to reproduce systems of racial inequality. Bonilla-Silva (2017) has been a critic of scholarship focusing on racist extremist groups, which he claims tends to individualize the problem and distract from racism's more systemic and passive manifestations. I borrow from Bonilla-Silva's critiques when discussing how scholars foreground the right-wing movement's violent extremism at the expense of more nuanced socio-cultural analysis.

My criticisms of CVE and related criminal justice and security research borrows from critical security/terrorism studies (CSS/CTS), particularly the theories developed in Neocleous and Rigakos' (2009) edited collection *Anti-Security* and recent pieces from Pettinger (2020), Kundnani and Hayes (2018), and McCluskey (2019). CSS examines how logics of security have proliferated beyond traditional state-centric military approaches and interrogates how new understandings of "threat" are constructed and how such ideas gain traction. As CSS scholars such as Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) argue, political elites construct threats by declaring an issue an existential threat. These figures produce an image of the enemy that resonates

throughout society (Bigo 2002: 63, McCluskey 2019: 10). Chapter 4 explores how academics have played a significant role in the "securitization" of right-wing nationalist movements.

Finally, how do I define right-wing and far-right politics? As I argue throughout this project (particularly chapters 4 and 5), a stronger and more nuanced understanding of right-wing social movements requires a higher attention to local and national context. Put another way "right-wing nationalism" does not mean the same thing in Germany as it does in the United States or Canada. Nationalism – and especially how it manifests in groups – is rarely generalizable across countries. I use "right-wing" as a loose umbrella term for the spectrum of conservative politics, which (typically) value a strengthening of – or return to – the cultural, economic and governmental traditions of Westernized societies (such as Christian morals, traditional gender roles, and/or nationalist-patriotism). "Right-wing" also encompasses the "far-right", referring to politics that demand an extreme or radical return to tradition (such as using the law to defend "whiteness" or advocating for Christian theocracy). While the right-wing/far-right distinction helps distinguish between more moderate and extreme political groups, there is often (if not always) overlap. A "right-wing" group or movement can still include far-right elements, but remain primarily "right-wing", and vice versa. For example, Canada's Social Credit Party (1935-1993) was a political home for far-right anti-Semites for decades, but the party's structure, membership, and official messaging remained predominantly right-wing and civic-populist. Conversely, many extreme racist groups (such as racist pagans) support progressive environmental protections and oppose capitalism but remain predominantly "far-right". When it comes to the specificities of Canada's right-wing

nationalist movement, my definitions of right-wing and far-right are based on my data and are as follows:

> **Right-wing activists (RWAs) (32 of 42 participants)**: Canadian RWAs view "globalism" as a conspiracy by self-interested and corrupt "liberal" politicians to undermine society through privileging foreign interests and global corporations over Canadians. They typically see Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as the catalyst for Canada's descent into "globalist" politics. RWAs view the "answer" to globalism as a return to nationalist policy making; that is, political decisions that privilege the concerns, safety, and well-being of Canadians. This involves clarifying what it means to be "Canadian", which RWAs define through a person's commitment to Canada's civic principles (such as liberal democracy), as well as civility and tolerance. Practically, RWAs demand "direct democracy", such as citizen referendums and stronger security to keep out "uncivil", "intolerant", or "un-Canadian" cultures, particularly those associated with Islam. RWAs fetishize state violence and reject vigilante violence (extremism), as they have faith in liberal democracy and electoral channels, even though they view mainstream parties as corrupted by "globalist interests". RWAs promote racially colour-blind politics and accept the basic principles of multiculturalism, particularly the idea that anyone can become Canadian so long as they work hard and share "Canadian values". However, they reject state efforts to "uplift" racialized groups in the name of multiculturalism, such as protecting Muslim Canadians or investing in Indigenous communities. RWAs strive for legitimacy in the public sphere.

Far-right activists (FRAs) (10 of 42 participants): Canadian FRAs reject racial colour-blindness and multiculturalism altogether and view "globalism" as a Jewish conspiracy to undermine white Canadian society. Unlike RWAs, FRAs have little interest in Trudeau and Islam, typically viewing the Liberal government and "Islamic immigration" as "more of the same". They view the "answer" to globalism as advocating for an ethnostate that legally privileges light-skinned people of French-European heritage and enforces the preservation of a predominantly white demographic. Some FRAs also include Indigenous peoples in their vision of Canadian identity. FRAs reject or are extremely skeptical of liberal democracy. While they see some value in electoral channels and will often support white nationalist politicians, FRAs tend to view such pursuits as mostly fruitless. Consequently, their activism tends to be more secretive and their political messages more pessimistic. Most FRAs I spoke with expressed how their mission is "hopeless" in Canada.

In sum, I reject concrete political definitions and distinctions, as well as the scholarly trend toward generalizing definitions or theories of "right-wing" or "far-right" mobilization across Westernized countries and continents. Instead, I begin with loose terminology and use data to show how some Canadian right-wing groups practice nationalism to advance their interests. I am not interested in contributing to grand theories about "extremism" or "the" far-right. Instead, this study contributes to multiple disciplines representing the breadth of right-wing nationalist organizing as a social issue. Consequently, while my definitions and theories of right-wing and far-right politics and mobilization are Canada (and especially Alberta-) specific and

therefore mostly non-generalizable, my *methodology for conceptualizing and studying* right-wing nationalist groups, their ideology, and practices are generalizable across research settings.

Chapter Two
Methods and Data

Introduction

As a methodological critique, this project rejects many of the conceptual and methodological traditions of research on the Canadian right-wing nationalist movement. I began this project in 2016 with a general interest in understanding Canadian nationalist and white supremacist groups, popularly termed together as "far-right". Considering the extremely limited data on the subject in Canada, I based my initial understanding of the contemporary Canadian "far-right" movement on news sources, activist intelligence (see the ARC Collective 2020), the few Canadian studies of the time (such as Perry and Scrivens (2015) *Right Wing Extremism in Canada: An Environmental Scan*), and international research on far-right movements. While the preceding sources sometimes served as a helpful starting point for my project, I found many works on far-right movements to be marred by taken for granted, imprecise, de-contextualized, and sometimes misleading core concepts, especially "hate", "far-right", "extremism", and "right-wing populism". I was also taken aback at the confidence to which many scholars asserted absolutist statements about right-wing politics, and the ease to which many writers generalized concepts and explanations across diverse right-wing groups and movements and across social contexts, countries, and continents. Finally, I was discouraged by the recent trend toward criminal justice research on right-wing nationalism in Canada, characterized by anti-terrorism logic, privileging interviews with law enforcement, and online surveillance of nationalist groups (see chapter 4). Altogether, I viewed much of the dominant scholarship on

right-wing nationalist groups as conceptually and methodologically ill-equipped for studying how these groups mobilize *as a growing social movement* (see chapter 4). Put another way, dominant anti-terrorism approaches to studying Canada's right-wing nationalist movement were not prepared to answer the (social movement) questions I was interested in, such as "can right-wing populism happen in Canada? What would that look like?" "how do right-wing nationalists appeal to a country defined by multiculturalism?" "how important is white nationalism to the nationalist movement?" "why is there no prominent far-right political party in the country?". As I conducted my fieldwork, it increasingly revealed that, not only are dominant methods and concepts often ill-equipped for analyzing the nuances and messiness of social movements but are sometimes a *barrier* to understanding such things. My research design is necessarily fluid and exploratory for the purposes of redefining Canada's right-wing nationalist movement in the hopes of future clarity and empirically-informed analysis on the subject.

Methods summary and analysis: ethnographic mixed methods

In the early stages of this project, I compiled dozens of research articles and major texts on right-wing nationalist movements in Canada and other Westernized countries (such as the United States and the United Kingdom) and conducted systemic literature reviews revealing the following three trends in this scholarship:

1) Passive acceptance of the ambiguous concept “hate” as an explanation for right-wing mobilizing (see chapter 3).
2) The growing popularity of criminological or security-centric methods for understanding right-wing nationalist groups as a growing social movement (see chapter 4).
3) Eurocentric scholarship that defines right-wing populism as inherently ethnonationalist and illiberal (see chapter 5).

This project uses empirically informed analysis based on semi-ethnographic mixed methods to argue that the preceding three trends hinder our understanding of how right-wing nationalist groups operate as a social movement in Canada and abroad. My ethnographic approach involves 35 semi-structured interviews with 42 Canadian right-wing activists (RWAs) (ten of which I consider “far-right” or white nationalists), and over 40 hours of observational fieldwork at 20 right-wing political rallies and meetings, almost all of which were hosted by my participants.

Chapter 3 differs from chapters 4 and 5 in that I do not use original data. In chapter 3, “What’s hate got to do with it?”, I conducted a systematic review of research on right-wing movements that utilize the concept “hate” as an explanation for activist motivations and broader mobilizing. I compare this literature to research on hate itself, revealing the concept to be taken for granted in much scholarship on right-wing movements. In other words, many researchers accept “hate” as a common sense explanation for what attracts people to right-wing political movements. Chapters 4 and 5 center use my ethnographic findings to challenge the trends I have identified. In chapter 4, “Thinking beyond extremism”, I review anti-terrorism and criminal justice scholarship interested in surveilling and policing right-wing nationalist

groups, which I call “security approaches”. I then use my ethnographic data to reveal how security approaches – by fixating on criminality and white nationalist hate speech – can obfuscate the empirical reality of right-wing collective action, which, in Canada, has little to do with crime and overt racism. In chapter 5, I review dominant research on “right-wing populism”, which defines it as foremost ethnonationalist and illiberal. My ethnographic findings show how right-wing populism in Canada foregrounds civic nationalism and liberal principles to grow the movement.

Choosing ethnographic methods and identifying a sample

Contemporary scholarship on the Canadian right-wing nationalist movement tends to be methodologically unvaried and relies heavily on data in the form of hate crime statistics, social media postings, law enforcement intelligence, anti-racist activist and community intelligence, and media reports on lone wolf terrorist attacks and instances of public hate propaganda. In other words, Canada’s right-wing nationalist movement is understood almost exclusively through textual analysis of the “public transcript”; that is, what is immediately visible, or discourse that is mostly stable and where consensus has been reached (or at least perceived as such) (McCluskey 2019: 18). Consequently, recent scholarship rarely examines *the social world in its making*, such as controversies and dissentions within the Canadian nationalist movement (McCluskey 2019: 18). We have little primary data, for instance, showing how nationalist groups struggle for political legitimacy and influence in Canada. This includes questions about: what are the struggles in representing Canadian nationhood? Which nationalist ideas resonate with

Canadian audiences? How do nationalist groups manage political extremism and navigate Canada's hate speech laws? Textual analysis alone cannot demonstrate what motivates people to become activists, nor explain why movements grow or weaken.

My interest in how right-wing nationalists strategize as part of a larger Canadian social movement necessitated an embedded ethnographic approach involving interviews with activists and participant observation at political rallies. According to Creswell (2017), the goal of ethnography is to contextualize individuals' narratives in their culture. By investigating how nationalism is expressed, practiced, and debated, ethnographic research within activist communities can shed light on the internal dynamics of movements, such as how they struggle, adapt, and grow. Such methods are also effective for investigating personal motivations and how beliefs can manifest in action (Blee 2007). I outline the benefits and limitations of ethnographic methods in the final section of this chapter (see also chapter 4).

While ultimately privileging ethnographic methods, I began my study with a discourse analysis of right-wing groups' social media presentation, online activities, and webpages to help identify a sample population. The Canadian right-wing is diverse in their interests and objectives. While I focus on nationalist groups, most participants in my sample belonged to multiple groups and supported a variety of conservative issues. While anti-choice and pro-oil politics can reasonably be connected to nationalism, I did not recruit from groups or rallies focused solely on those issues (such as Christian evangelical groups or groups focusing on the resource economy). I determined an initial sample population based on two criteria. First, my potential participants were to be people affiliated with named groups that self-identify as "nationalist" or "patriot" and/or named groups to which community activists, academics,

and/or media have described as "right-wing extremists". While nationalist sentiment manifests in most contemporary right-wing movements in Canada[8], I recruited from groups that foreground nationalist grievances, defined as a concern with maintaining or restoring Canadian values, principles, identity, culture, and/or heritage. Such groups characterize Canadian society as a culture in decline and advocate for a return to certain traditions, such as "law and order", "democracy", "Judeo-Christian heritage", or – in more extreme cases – "European racial heritage". Second, my potential participants were to be people affiliated with named groups that promote *in-person* events, such as "meet and greets" or rallies.

While I began the project with open-ended definitions of "right-wing" and "nationalist", how I classified my sample changed and sharpened as I accumulated ethnographic interactions, interviews, and observations. For example, I relied on political self-identification for the purposes of recruitment, but necessarily developed my own conceptual distinctions for differences within the right-wing nationalist movement, as participants' personal understanding of their politics were highly inconsistent or vague (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw 2011: 131). For instance, almost all respondents – including racist extremists – accepted the label "conservative". Other participants refused all labels and/or rejected the "left-right" distinction entirely. For example, one RWA explained that his group was "simply patriots speaking truth to

[8] For instance, pro-gun activists (or Canada's militia movement) are, in-part, mobilizing defenses against a perceived "Islamification" of Canada, which they connect to decaying nationalist values encouraged by the Trudeau government's "pro-globalist" and multicultural ideology. Similarly, the religious Right often frames issues like abortion rights as evidence of Canada's departure from its Christian-national heritage. As one participant explained to me, Trudeau's post-national cosmopolitanism has left a moral void once filled by Judeo-Christianity. Without the right to self-determination through traditional Western-religious values, post-nationalism creates opportunities for "authoritarian ideologies" like communism, corporatism, or Islam. Nationalist grievances are also shared by Alberta's carbon tax and pro-pipeline movements, where climate change policy and environmentalism are often viewed as part of a globalist agenda working against Canada's national interests (sometimes called the "war on Canada").

power". Some respondents could not articulate how their ideas fit in the Canadian context. For instance, one participant asked me if he was "more radical" than other participants, to which I agreed, explaining that I would characterize his views as "far-right". He responded that his politics would be not be considered so extreme if he were living in Europe.

Altogether, the Canadian nationalist movement is primarily made up of grassroots groups defined foremost by right-wing anti-Islam and nationalist-patriot ideologies and, to a lesser extent, ethnonationalism and extreme racism (far-right ideologies). While the right-wing/far-right distinction helps distinguish between more moderate and extreme political groups and actors, there is often (if not always) overlap. A "right-wing" group or movement can still include far-right elements, but remain primarily "right-wing", and vice versa. For example, Canada's Social Credit Party (1935-1993) was a political home for far-right anti-Semites for decades, but the party's structure, membership, and official messaging remained predominantly right-wing and civic-populist. Conversely, many extreme racist groups (such as racist pagans) support progressive environmental protections and oppose capitalism but remain predominantly "far-right".

Access, recruitment, and positionality

I recruited all participants over the Internet or at rallies and events that I attended. For the online component, I created a new personal Facebook profile (using my real name) to observe and communicate with right-wing groups. While I already had a personal Facebook account, a separate profile helped distance the project from my personal life. I also adjusted my privacy

settings to hide the conservative groups I followed, and to anonymize my Facebook "Friends", some of which became participants. I also found that creating a new account reset Facebook's tailored algorithms. In other words, by following various conservative organizations and figures, Facebook's "suggested groups" algorithm was helpful for identifying additional groups that fit my sample criteria. Facebook became invaluable for identifying and recruiting prominent activists, and for following rally events. Almost all rallies that I attended were advertised publicly on social media (except for three secretive far-right meetings). Social media was also helpful for identifying issues and stories important to my participants, such as "sanctuary cities", President Trump's "Muslim ban", and the Omar Khadr case in 2017.

While Canada's right-wing movement has a vibrant online presence, this did not equate to easy access. My first recruitment attempt with a right-wing nationalist group, The Western Defense League (WDL) [pseudonym], failed. The group had recently been featured in various news articles, which they perceived as a smear campaign. I contacted the group over Facebook outlining my project, and shortly after received a friend request from "Elvis Presley" (using the singer's likeness in their photo), which I accepted. This was likely a vetting process to determine whether I was a left-wing activist or a fake Facebook account. Elvis, representing the Alberta WDL chapter, began chatting with me about my project. While Elvis agreed to meet me, he was unenthused about the project and did not respond to my follow-up requests for an interview. Another nationalist group I contacted in the early stages, Storm National [pseudonym], was similarly unresponsive to my requests. I also failed to recruit participants at the first rally I attended with a patriot group called Provinces United [pseudonym]. I spoke with the group leader, who seemed receptive of my study. I emailed him the next day, re-iterating the project,

but he never responded to my interview request. I also attempted to recruit members of a neo-Nazi group over email, who declined to participate, citing my book reviews and online persona. They characterized my research as "law and order type stuff" and described me as the "type to influence policy", implying that I would strengthen Canada's anti-hate legislation.

These failed recruitment attempts made me consider my positionality and language both online, and in person. For instance, I reflected on how I stood out at rallies. I did not hold signs, sign petitions, nor join in chants. I was also noticeably younger than most attendees – speakers sometimes commented at the lack of young supporters at their events. I also dressed differently, as most male supporters wore loose-fitted jeans and work boots. In short, I didn't look like the average supporter, and RWAs were sometimes skeptical of my intentions. Activists occasionally mistook me for a journalist, even though I avoided taking pictures or jotting notes at events. Moreover, my affiliation with the University of Alberta seemed to evoke perceptions of third-party interests behind my research (skepticism and distrust of universities has been found in other work on right-wing activists). One participant explained to me how universities were promoting "hate groups" (referring to Black Lives Matter) and "civil unrest". Another asked me why I wasn't studying antifa, "obviously they're the real problem". Consequently, I began emphasizing my independence from political groups, institutions, or media in my interactions. I also used more informal language when introducing the project. For instance, I initially stated that I was "researching conservative groups", which sometimes evoked the response "for who?". For some participants, "researching conservative groups" suggested I was gathering intelligence for political or institutional purposes. Simple adjustments such as saying I was "doing a study" instead of "research" appeared to make a significant difference in my

interactions. I also refocused the recruitment pitch on my participants' experiences, explaining that I was "trying to understand what its like to be a conservative activist in the Trudeau era". Based on the political discourse used in rallies and interviews, "the Trudeau era" implied that Canadian conservatism is under siege by cultural and legal censorship (like "political correctness" and bill M103). Using "insider" language helped me establish rapport while highlighting my research interests (the challenges and risks of being a conservative activist).

Attending rallies was key to establishing rapport early in the project, as – despite the movement's thriving online presence – Alberta's on-the-ground right-wing activist community is small and tight-knit. I quickly found that most local group leaders knew each other and had strong opinions of others' political strategies (detailed in chapters 4 and 5). By spring of 2018, I was acquainted with most of the core organizers in Edmonton (and some in Calgary), who increasingly recognized me at rallies. While I was never an "insider", I was often surprised that RWAs trusted me enough to chat and be interviewed (Bucerius 2013).

After re-framing my pitch, participants rarely questioned my intentions. On rare occasion, participants asked about my political leanings. I became skilled at deflecting these questions as I disagreed with my participants on nearly every issue. My typical response to questions about my politics was: "it depends what issue you're talking about". For instance, I sometimes explained how my experience interviewing prisoners (in a different research project) made me oppose "tough-on-crime" policies, which RWAs consider a "lefty" position. I then followed up with vague explanations about how I "support free speech", as to not draw suspicion about my progressive leanings on other issues. Another useful strategy was asserting my position as a "neutral observer" or explaining how I am a social scientist "striving for

objectivity". Altogether, I actively avoided drawing attention to myself and my opinions. These questions from my participants prevented me from pursuing full emersion into right-wing nationalist culture characteristic of traditional ethnography (see chapter 4). While I attended various loosely structured meetings and events, such as "meet and greets", I rarely attended informal events, such as going for drinks (to which I was invited on multiple occasions)[9]. My access to these groups felt extremely fragile throughout my fieldwork and I felt that informal meetings could jeopardize my relationships by exposing my personal beliefs. For example, one organizer explained to me how the Canadian patriot community on Facebook has a "blacklist" for "ideological" journalists and other figures viewed as a threat to the movement. RWAs circulate the list widely with other groups (even groups who disagree with one another), who can also add names. Elaborating on the list, she remarked "so, we know about you". Jokingly, I responded: "so I guess I'm not on there?", "not yet, haha". Altogether, semi-structured interviews and participant observation at rallies allowed me to maintain my distance and minimize skepticism, as participants rarely had the opportunity to interrogate my personal opinions.

While I became a (mostly) "trusted outsider" among the right-wing nationalist community, it was sometimes difficult to appear neutral at political events (Bucerius 2013). At one rally, for instance, the organizer asked me if I wanted to "say something" after completing his speech, drawing the crowd's attention to me. I politely declined. At a different rally, the same organizer (now a participant) asked me to operate a camera for live-streaming on Facebook. Fortunately, another supporter stepped in to do the work before I could decline his

[9] I joined a group for coffee one time.

request. Helping my participants prepare rallies could strongly imply my allegiance to their cause, something I wanted to minimize as to not deceive them. Snowball sampling became more effective after I completed around eight interviews and attended six rallies.

Ethnographic data

Semi-structured interviews with right-wing activists

I conducted 40 semi-structured interviews in total and over 40 hours of observational fieldwork at 20 conservative political rallies and meetings, almost all of which were hosted by my participants. 35 interviews featured 42 Canadian right-wing activists (RWAs) (ten of which I consider far-right activists (FRAs)). I also interviewed three ex-racist skinheads, and two counter-extremist experts (one in law enforcement and one in policy). Finally, I interviewed one anti-racist activist who runs a blog that surveils Canada's right-wing movements. This blog is mentioned in almost half of my interviews. My interviews with ex-racist skinheads and experts are not included in my data for this dissertation, as I felt that their experiences did not reflect my sample population of RWAs nor FRAs. Two ex-racist skinheads, for instance, were involved in Canada's extreme racist movement in the early 2000s, which I felt was too far removed from the contemporary movement.

Four interviews featured two people, and one interview featured three people. Of my sample, three participants were women, and 39 were men. All RWAs were white, except for three who identified as Indigenous (two of the three were white passing and identified as

Métis). I usually conducted the interviews in coffee shops or restaurants but organized four interviews over the phone, and one over the video conference call application Zoom. On occasion, I purchased food and/or beverages for my participants. However, many RWAs refused my offer to buy them lunch, usually refraining "you're a student!". Interviews ranged from one hour to over three hours, but typically lasted around 90 minutes.

Before each conversation, I outlined that I was a PhD student conducting the study as part of my dissertation. I assured participants that my research was independent, and that I was not affiliated with any political group or institution. I explained that the purpose of my project was to "understand what it's like to be a conservative activist in [year]" and that I was interested their politics, and their personal experiences as an activist. After explaining the project, I outlined the interview process, describing it as an "informal conversation" that usually lasts around one hour. I asked participants if I could audio-record the conversation for note-taking purposes and then outlined the transcription process. I explained that transcribing the interview verbatim allows me to represent their statements as fairly and as accurately possible. All participants, except for two, consented to being audio-recorded[10]. Finally, I explained that participants' identity and group affiliations would remain anonymous. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematically coded using Nvivo Pro 11. Some themes for which I coded included topics such as "race and ethnicity", "organizing rallies", "globalism", "law enforcement", "antifa", and "Canadian identity".

[10] One participant declined to have a conversation, opting instead to respond to my questions in writing (through email).

I used a generalized prompt guide to ensure consistency in my interviews. My questions were open-ended, allowing me to gauge participants' interests, especially in the project's early stages. While my questions were open-ended, interviews centered on participants' personal beliefs, and their experiences in Canada's right-wing movement. More specifically, I asked participants about how they became involved in activism, how they labelled their politics, and which political issues were most important to them. I probed about the risks of being an activist (such as those related to hate speech laws, and how their activism affects personal relationships), and how participants navigate negative representations of their ideas, and unwanted labels of the groups that they belong to (such as "racists", "Nazis", etcetera). Discussions about negative labels often revolved around the perceived failures of Canadian news media, and rampant political correctness. This allowed me to inquire about which information sources my participants trusted. Finally, I asked about Canadian identity and values, which allowed me to probe about race and multiculturalism, Canada's political parties, and right-wing populism abroad (such as France's National Rally and the Trump administration).

Interviewing two participants at once was sometimes challenging (this only occurred with RWAs). These discussions tended to focus more on political issues and evoke surface-level responses for personal beliefs and experiences. Oftentimes, questions directed at both participants received a single response, as they tended to affirm each other's answers, with statements like "I agree with Mike, I don't have anything to add to that". Moreover, it was sometimes difficult to ensure that one participant did not dominate the conversation. In one interview with a husband and wife, the husband spoke on behalf of her. In another two-person

interview with a movement president and co-president, the president did most of the talking. Most of the co-president's responses affirmed the president's opinions.

Participant observation at rallies, events, and meetings

I conducted over 40 hours of observational fieldwork at 20 rallies in Edmonton and Calgary from 2017-2020[11]. These rallies were advertised publicly on Facebook and allowed me to recruit activists, establish rapport through informal conversations, identify political issues important to my sample, and better understand strategies and movement issues (such as infighting). After the rallies, I took ethnographic fieldnotes detailing the events. These notes sometimes informed the content of my interviews, where I often asked participants about their rallies and what took place. Attending rallies also served as an opportunity to confirm what was said in interviews. In other words, did participants practice (at rallies) what they preached (in interviews)?

Throughout 2016 to 2018, activists organized rallies in Alberta on roughly a bi-weekly basis in the spring and summer months. The highest frequency of rallies occurred from November of 2018 to April of 2019, stoked by the momentum derived by the movement's yellow vests strategy (see chapter 5), as well as the 2019 Alberta general election, to which the United Conservative Party successfully defeated the liberal-progressive New Democratic Party.

Rallies lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to three hours, but most rallies were two hours long. I found that recruiting participants at rallies was far more effective than recruiting over

[11] I ended my fieldwork shortly before the COVID-19 outbreak.

the Internet. Most events were organized by multiple conservative groups (often lead by my participants), and covered issues like motion 103, Islamic extremism, the Trudeau administration, carbon tax, Canadian nationalism and patriotism, sanctuary cities, freedom of speech, and freedom of (Judeo-Christian) religion. All rallies featured guest speakers, which always included organizers and group leaders (many of which were participants). Featured speakers sometimes included conservative politicians, right-wing media figures, and local religious leaders. Many supporters brought brightly coloured home-made signs, and sometimes organizers handed out mass-produced signs to onlookers, including me (I always declined to take one). Organizers and guest speakers frequently encouraged chants[12], and many of the events began with the singing of the Canadian national anthem. I did not participate in chants nor sing the anthem.

Crowds at the rallies ranged from 20 to 100 people (including organizers, supporters, police, and counter-protestors). Winter rallies were less frequent and typically drew less attendees than those hosted in the spring and summer months. Almost half of the events I attended featured counter-protesters. On two occasions, the counter-protest involved a single person, who tried to shout-down the speakers. Sometimes counter protestors were organized, and twice outnumbered the event organizers and supporters. This happened at the largest event I attended, which involved a police line separating the opposing groups. Having contacted the event organizer in advance (who later became a participant), I was able to go behind the line and interact with rally supporters. Rallies with counter protestors were always heated and

[12] For example: “Patriots united will never be defeated”.

three times lead to minor fistfights and scuffles. These fights typically happened before the police arrived and were broken up quickly.

Most rally organizers and attendees were white, but I was often surprised at the racial diversity of the supporters in Alberta, particularly after the nationalist movement co-opted the yellow vests aesthetic in December of 2018. While most speakers and organizers were men, women were prominent at all rallies and most events featured at least one female speaker.

I describe my approach as "semi-" ethnographic because I did not engage in the "deep immersion" typically characteristic of traditional ethnography (Haggerty, Bucerius, & Berardi, forthcoming). Ethnographers often spend many hours with their participants to gain a better understanding of the culture in question, especially the mundane and seemingly unimportant elements, such as how culture manifests in everyday life and through informal social interactions and events. While I regularly had informal conversations with participants by arriving early and staying late at rallies, and in attending one informal gathering (joining a group for coffee), I found these conversations put my access to the movement at risk. Additionally, unlike traditional ethnographies, the research site of right-wing organizing in Alberta is fluid and sporadic, manifesting in multiple and disjointed individuals and groups, and through online discussions and social media forums, as well as in-person rallies and meetings. In other words, there was no consistent and concrete research site, nor a single group or person that I thought was representative of the broader movement and culture. Altogether, the fluid nature of my sample population and field site, combined with the risks of deep immersion, were not conducive to "deep hanging out", necessitating a semi-ethnographic approach.

Limitations of methods

A limitation of my methodology is that my respondents could simply be lying about their politics, such as presenting themselves as more moderate than they really are. This is not an issue for a few reasons. First, even my most extreme participants were candid about their controversial beliefs and motivations. As other researchers have found, instead of "hiding" their beliefs, even the most extreme racist activists often rationalize and moralize their politics, such as exclaiming "I don't hate [group X], I'm just a race realist" or "a white ethnostate would also benefit non-white races" (Swain 2002). While critics might respond by saying that these are sanitized versions of what they "really believe", that is precisely what interests me, as my project concerns how Canadian nationalists decide on messaging to attract support and grow the movement. Knowing activists' "true" intent is impossible and would do little to explain how and why these groups appeal to average Canadians. Even if my participants do not sincerely believe in their own messaging, ethnographic interviews can help reveal activist strategizing. As scholars such as Jerolmack and Khan (2014) argue, ethnographic methods are perhaps the most effective tool for overcoming the "attitudinal fallacy", in other words, the error of inferring behaviour or reality from what people say in interviews. By observing and interacting with participants over time and in different social situations and contexts (in this case, political rallies and meetings), ethnographers can yield more valid data about behaviour and how ideas are practiced (Jerolmack & Khan 2014: 195) (see also chapter 4).

Ethnographic studies emphasize social situations and contexts and are consequently limited in generalizability. Right-wing groups in other parts of Canada, for instance, may have

completely different rally and messaging strategies. Moreover, I interviewed activists in Alberta[13], a province with an arguably unique political culture: research shows that Albertans are considerably more right-wing than other Canadians, as they are more likely to support capital punishment and stricter welfare eligibility rules, and are more hostile to unions, government subsidies, affirmative action, and environmental regulation (Jeffrey 1999: 106). The province is a conservative stronghold, having a 44-year history of Progressive Conservative rule prior to the NDP's 2015 win and a long-established tradition of Albertans voting conservative in most federal elections (Graney 2019, see also Palmer 1982). Additionally, Perry and Scrivens (2015) argue that the province's reputation appears to attract right-wing extremists (68), and McCoy, Jones, and Hastings' (2019) study found that Alberta produced a "disproportionate number" of right-wing militia groups. Alberta conservatism is also more staunchly anti-green, due to the province's oil-rich resource economy. For instance, a poll by Abacus Data found that 70 per cent of Canadians believed climate change is caused by humans, but only 54 per cent of Albertans responded this way. The remaining 46 per cent of Albertans believed that global warming is natural. Sixteen per cent of Albertans said there is little or no evidence that the Earth is warming (Ramsay 2018). However, while climate change denial and anti-green sentiment are more pronounced in Alberta, such politics can be found across the right-wing nationalist movement[14]. For instance, the Canadian yellow vests organized rallies in every Canadian province, protesting the carbon tax and showing support for the Trans

[13] Four participants were from Ontario and BC. Three of these participants were far-right activists.
[14] Despite Andrew Scheer's comments that Trudeau is instigating an "all-out attack" on the Canadian oil industry (Tasker 2019a), the Conservative Party of Canada officially recognizes that climate change is caused by humans and is a real and present danger (Boutilier & Ballingall 2019)

Mountain Pipeline. Additionally, the People's Party of Canada, a right-wing populist alternative to the reigning Conservative Party of Canada, as well as the Rebel Media, a popular right-wing news outlet (sometimes called Canada's Breitbart News or "Breitbart North"), deny climate science and have a notable following across the country (Hagi 2017, Warnica 2017, Peoples Party of Canada 2020, Taub 2017).

Even where ethnographies fall short in representation and general explanations of behaviours, they make up for in validity, providing a firsthand account of how people respond to social situations and how beliefs can translate into action (Jerolmak & Khan 2014: 202).

Ethical considerations

This research required I submit a research ethics application, which the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office (REO) approved in 2016. I did not make initial contact with the right-wing nationalist community until I received this approval. I also took several steps to ensure ethical research behavior throughout my fieldwork. Following REO approval, I began recruiting participants and provided them with an information sheet detailing the purpose of the study and the protections in place to protect my participants' identities. I maintained the anonymity of participants using pseudonyms as well as pseudonyms for the groups they belong to. I also have limited identifying contextual material throughout the dissertation. Throughout my fieldwork I kept an encrypted file matching names, ages, and other relevant demographic content to the pseudonyms. Whilst most participants were not concerned about their anonymity, those who where required extra assurances before they consented to an interview.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed how an exploratory semi-ethnographic approach was the most appropriate method for addressing my research interests about Canada's right-wing nationalist movement. Ethnographic interviews and participant observation allowed for access into the understudied dynamics of the movement, such as ideological nuances and image management, strategic disagreements, un/successful protest tactics and messaging, how RWAs appeal to average Canadians, and the personal motivations of right-wing activists. While my Alberta-centric findings may not be generalizable across provinces, the study contributes knowledge to the largest regional subset of Canada's right-wing nationalist movement. My critiques of certain methodologies and concepts are also applicable outside of Canada, such as chapter 3's critique of "hate stereotyping", chapter 4's critique of security-centric studies of right-wing nationalism, and chapter 5's critique of Eurocentric understandings of right-wing populism. Through these critiques, this project develops a groundwork for scholars to pursue social movement research on the Canadian Right in other parts of the country while providing general conceptual and methodological guidelines for studying right-wing nationalism more generally.

Chapter Three
What's Hate got to Do with It?: Right-wing Movements and the Hate Stereotype

*This chapter has been published in the journal *Current Sociology*:

Tetrault, J. E. C. (2019). What's hate got to do with It?: right-wing movements and the hate stereotype, *Current Sociology,* 1-21.

Introduction

Hate is a contentious concept. Compared to other emotions, people are less willing to admit that they hate someone and denouncing a person as "hateful" is a serious accusation (Rempel and Burris, 2005). While hate is traditionally defined as an emotional extreme, the concept is regularly used. We can hate certain foods, songs, activities and celebrities, without ever being accused of being "hateful". As a folk concept, hate encompasses everything from differences in taste, to motivations for genocide. This ambiguity also extends into the social sciences, where there is no consensus as to what constitutes hate (Brudholm and Johansen, 2018). Nevertheless, "hate" is prominent in scholarship on prejudice, extremism, crime, war and genocide. Hate is sometimes accepted as an affective motive for all such behaviours. For instance, genocide is "mass hate" (Kressel, 2002; see also Brudholm and Johansen, 2018), domestic terrorism is "organized hate crime" (Ronczkowski, 2004), bigotry is "hate language" (Brindle, 2016) – or "cyber hate" and "viral hate" when on the Internet (Awan and Blakemore, 2012; Foxman and Wolf, 2013). Challenging prejudice is about "combatting hate" (De Santis, 1998). Some authors expose the "world of hate" (Bubolz and Simi, 2015; Ryan, 2004) or the "web of hate", as though hatred is exotic or alien (Barnett, 2007; Kinsella, 2001; Levin, 2015).

Perhaps most common is associating hate with right-wing politics[15] (especially white supremacist groups), where many researchers insinuate that prejudice and negative emotions are the chief rationale for individual and collective action in right-wing politics. These claims are not supported by recent scholarship on hate or political extremism, yet this language persists, exemplified by the notion "hate group". In this article, I critique research on right-wing movements that uses hate uncritically. While media, think tanks and public institutions are the main propagators of hate narratives, many scholars also foreground hate with little attention to its empirical, theoretical, or methodological implications for studying right-wing groups. As a "common sense" idea, thus both arbitrary and conventional, scholars sometimes confuse the affect of hate with right-wing ideology and reinforce the unsupported notion that negative emotions (and the ideologies that stoke them) are of primary importance for motivating right-wing movements. I conceptualize this tendency to conflate hate with right-wing politics as the "hate stereotype".

In the first section of the article I review modern hate scholarship, focusing on early pathological narratives to contemporary explanations of outgroup hate[16]. Current theories suggest that hate is an umbrella concept, making it difficult to observe, quantify, or test. Moreover, "hate" is increasingly considered a common feature of group dynamics, as emotions

[15] I use right-wing interchangeably with 'rightist' and 'the Right'. 'Right-wing' is an umbrella term for the spectrum of conservative politics, which (typically) value a strengthening of – or return to – the cultural, economic and governmental traditions of Western society (such as Christian morals or nationalist-patriotism). 'Right-wing' also encompasses the 'far-right', referring to politics that demand an extreme or radical return to tradition (such as using the law to defend 'whiteness'). I use 'far-right' primarily when discussing white supremacist movements, to which the hate stereotype is most often applied (although the term 'far-right' is not limited to such groups).

[16] Versus hatred of an individual or intimate Other. While the distinction between intergroup and interpersonal hatred can be blurry, the latter more often focuses on the psychological aspects of intimate relationships (such as anger, envy and self-esteem) (see Beck, 2000). I am more interested in the social or 'macro-level' dynamics of intergroup hate (such as how group stereotypes materialize through dominant culture).

research shifts from the "psyche to the situation" (Tygstrup, 2012: 196). As a common symptom of ingroup socialization and politics, hatred is universal to political action, and labels such as "hate group" make little sense within contemporary debates around hate.

The second section then outlines the hate stereotype, showing how hate is conflated with right-wing politics in public policy research and social science. The hate stereotype overstates emotions and ideologies as motivating factors for collective action in right-wing activism. Hate is overstated because – apart from its methodological ambiguity – research overwhelmingly shows that hatred is insignificant for attracting and retaining members in right-wing groups. Nonetheless, various studies on right-wing politics continue to foreground hate, and hate theories sometimes replace or eclipse data on motivations and meaning-making for right-wing activists.

My point is not to justify or absolve right-wing prejudices. Rather, I am calling for conceptual clarity and critical analysis through minimizing unfounded assumptions about hate and motivations. Researchers reproduce the hate stereotype to varying degrees and many have analysed right-wing politics without hate discourse: Hughey's (2012) ethnography *White Bound* identifies shifts in white nationalist ideology by investigating how white power activists conceive of white identity through abstract liberalism (such as "equal rights" discourse) (pp. 198, 200). Hochschild's (2016) *Strangers in Their Own Land* shows how lost dignity and honour are key emotional drivers behind Tea Party supporters. Simi et al.'s (2016) article "Parenting as activism" shows how parenting helps sustain participation in the white power movement, where activists use parenting as a process of identity extension. Gardell's (2003) *Gods of the Blood* connects ideological trends in racist paganism to feelings of economic and cultural

marginalization among far-right activists. Historical analyses of the Ku Klux Klan by Cunningham (2013), Pitsula (2013) and McVeigh (2009) connect the group's rise at different points in history to popular anxieties and national politics of the period.

"Hate" is frequently a floating signifier: it exudes much symbolic power, but lacks substance (Lévi-Strauss, 1987: 63–64). However, researchers need not abandon "hate" when studying the Right, rather, using "hate" requires heightened methodological attention to the concept's philosophical debates and cultural implications. Some scholars, for instance, position hate at the centre of analysis. Simi et al. (2017) show how former white supremacists can become "addicted to hate". The authors engage with hate scholarship, arguing that former white supremacists can have an emotionally fraught period after leaving the far-right, entailing a struggle against embracing previous behaviours and attitudes (which they connect to hate) (p. 1171). This piece, among others (Blee, 2017b; Cunningham, 2018), foregrounds hate for analytical purposes, overcoming some of the trappings of hate stereotyping. Hate narratives persist because of their cultural purchase, rather than their scholarly merit, offering a clear, quickly grasped, emotionally and psychically comfortable explanation for right-wing intolerance and violence (Brown, 2006; Whitlock and Bronski, 2015). When employed uncritically, "hate" or "hate group" tend to trade rhetorical power for analytical precision – an impediment to understanding both prejudice and rightist politics.

Defining hate

The banality of hate[17]

Hate scholarship is increasingly interdisciplinary, encompassing empirical linguistic studies of emotional semantics, political theoretical studies of post-war justice, historical-philological studies of the history of hatred in ancient rhetoric (Konstan, 2006), and many philosophical investigations (Ben-Ze'ev, 1992; Brudholm and Johansen, 2018; Hadreas, 2007; Kolnai, 1998; Murphy and Hampton, 1988; Vetlesen, 2005; Yanay, 2013). Scholarship on hate is diverse in its scope and objectives, and a formal theory of hate has yet to be proposed (Rempel and Burris, 2005: 300). Nonetheless, psychology remains at the forefront of popular discourse about hate, even though most scholars view pathological approaches (or "drive theories") as dated and inefficient (Sternberg and Sternberg, 2008: 22; see also Blee and Creasap, 2010: 271). Instead, recent scholarship favours sociological explanations, drawing attention to how hate is implicated in structure, discourse and meaning-making. Without attention to these debates, "common sense" hate narratives have ambiguous implications and risk reproducing dominant ideas about pathological hate. Considering the magnitude of hate scholarship, I necessarily limit this discussion to post-war theories and contemporary trends in the literature.

[17] Arendt's Eichmann in Jerusalem (1963) was an early inspiration for this work. Detailing the trial of Adolf Eichmann (a key architect of the Holocaust), Arendt challenged the media stereotype of Eichmann as a psychologically deranged monster. For Arendt, the most terrifying aspect of Eichmann was his normalcy and mediocrity.

Most scholarship on hate treats it as a by-product of other constructs, and only a few theories deal directly with the topic (Sternberg and Sternberg, 2008: 43). Consequently, conceptions of hate have always been incomplete, to the extent that most psychological works lack an entry for the term (Opotow and McClelland, 2007: 73; Sternberg and Sternberg, 2008: 16). Additionally, the notion of hate is so unstable that many neurosci-entists have abandoned the concept entirely. Glaser (2009), for instance, argues that there is a disconnect between current investigations of hate and neuroscientific studies of emotion (p. 11). Scientists have struggled to develop hate as a definable entity to be probed and examined scientifically (Glaser, 2009: 10, 17).

Psychological approaches to hate feature three traditions: psychoanalysis, social psychology and basic emotions research (Rempel and Burris, 2005). Early psychological theories focused on the pathology of the individual "hater". Here, hate is connected to negative emotions such as anger, fear, rage, aggression, frustration, indignation, con-tempt, disgust, powerlessness, guilt and envy, but remains something distinct from these experiences (Opotow and McClelland, 2007: 71, 82). Gaylin (2003) offers a contemporary theory of pathological hate, arguing that hatred is both an emotion and a mental disorder (or pathological mental mindset) stemming from delusional perceptions and personal deficiencies (pp. 8, 14, 28).

Despite their popularity in mainstream discourse, pathological narratives have not held up to academic scrutiny. There is no evidence that hatred is a mental disorder. Gaylin's (2003) claim that hatred is delusional or irrational is widely disputed, as scholars such as Sternberg and Sternberg (2008) contend that hatred may be an adaptive and rational response if you believe someone is on the verge of destroying you or your loved ones (p. 16). The decline of

pathological narratives is partially attributed to the difficulty of quantifying hatred (Glaser, 2009; Sternberg and Sternberg, 2008).

While most scholars agree that hate consists of conflicting and sometimes contradictory emotions, there is debate over whether hate itself can be described as an emotion. This dispute has influenced the shift away from individual pathology in favour of socio-cultural explanations. Rempel and Burris (2005), for instance, see emotional hatred as simplistic and imprecise: "emotion" does not capture hate's longevity and stability. They compare hate to love, which, they argue, also cannot be characterized by a single unified emotional experience (p. 298). For them, love is a motivational state with the goal of preserving and promoting the Other's well-being (p. 299). Similarly, they conceptualize hate as a motivational process, but involving a desire to hurt or destroy the devalued Other (p. 300). In this sense, hate takes on a mission-like quality. However, as Rempel and Burris (2005) acknowledge, empirical research demonstrating hate's stability (as a negative commitment) is almost non-existent (p. 299). These arguments also raise the question: Can people hate without being motivated to harm the hated person or group? And what counts as harm?

Nonetheless, the stability and longevity of hate are ongoing themes in the literature and have been taken up in post-structuralist theories. Johansen (2015), for instance, theorizes hate as an assemblage. Her argument revises Bauman's famous contention that hate and emotions played a marginal role in the Holocaust (Johansen, 2015: 48). In Bauman's (2012 [1989]) words, Hitler's victims "were killed in a dull, mechanical fashion with no human emotions – hatred included – to enliven it" (p. 517). Johansen (2015) sees this approach to emotions as dated and simplistic, as Bauman suggests that hatred is a private phenomenon. For Johansen (2015), hate

is not just an emotion, nor is it located exclusively in the individual. Hate can manifest itself in knowledges and discourses separate from any experiencing subject (p. 52) (such as texts, media, systems and institutions). For Johansen (2015), hate can be a social process that devalues a particular identity or being, reducing persons or groups to their intolerable trait(s) (p. 51). As a social process, hate is fluid and sporadic – it surfaces in emotions, actions and experiences, but also in systems and structures, which suggests that hate can be outsourced or delegated to materiality.

Consequently, while Johansen (2015) agrees with Bauman that personal emotions were insignificant for administering genocide, emotions are culturally embedded and socially patterned, and thus transcend the individual (p. 49). Johansen (2015) argues that emotions make the world significant to us (p. 50), and that systems and institutions necessarily have an affective dimension. For instance, while hate may not have enlivened the individual truck driver during the Holocaust, Johansen's (2015) point is that hatred of Jews – that is, the process of devaluing and exterminating the Jewish Other – became delegated to the cold and mechanical bureaucracy. Put another way, the Nazi security apparatus did the "work" of hate, making individual emotions inconsequential. Hate became located in the social fabric of Nazi Germany, materializing in scattered flows of knowledge, symbols and actions (see Johansen, 2015: 54).

The hate assemblage represents a shift in affect studies from the "psyche to the situation" (Tygstrup, 2012: 196; see also Johansen, 2015). In short, there is a growing consensus that hate is foremost a social phenomenon, rather than an individual pathology. Hate's social dimension is not just emphasized by sociologists and social psychologists (Craig, 2002; Harrington, 2003), but also includes evolutionary and psychological theorists and

psychoanalysts, who view hate as an ordinary or essential feature of group dynamics (Fishbein, 2003; Recalcati, 2012; Weisel and Bohm, 2015). For instance, Fishbein (2003) argues that ethnocentrism and xenophobia are rooted in the nature of human subsistence groups (p. 114). From this evolutionary perspective, humans are pre-disposed to show ingroup favouritism, and tend to be biased against those with whom "we" share the fewest genes and least culture (Waller, 2003: 128). This phenomenon is commonly known as ingroup love and outgroup hate. However, there is debate as to whether "hate" should be a synonym for prejudice and intergroup aggression. Some scholars have attempted to nuance this terminology. Weisel and Bohm (2015), for instance, describe outgroup hate as a function of negative attitudes toward the outgroup (p. 112). For them, hate is most likely to occur if there is high enmity between the groups, a heavy use of stereotypes, and if the conflict is morality-based (p. 119). Similarly, Fishbein (2003) sees hate as a symptom of intergroup hostilities (p. 115). While "hate" remains a contested concept, the evolutionary perspective suggests the prejudices associated with it are common in group life.

These theories complement psychoanalytic and post-structuralist approaches that view hate as a negative projection of reality upon the Other. Borrowing from Freud, Recalcati (2012) argues that hate helps constitute reality itself, producing the exteriority of the subject or object (p. 156). Similarly, Sternberg and Sternberg (2008) conceptualize the "duplex theory of hate", dividing hate into two theories: (1) triangular theory; and (2) storytelling. The former theorizes emotional hatred as made up of three intersecting components: the negation of intimacy, passion and negative commitment. The latter theorizes the development of hate, which involves stories that exaggerate or maximize differences to create a perception of injustice

perpetrated by the “bad” outgroup against the “good victim” (pp. 83, 85). War propaganda is an obvious example, as it is designed to make hatred into something reasonable and morally justified (Sternberg and Sternberg, 2008: 101; see also Yanay, 2013).

Emotions research has much to offer to social movement studies, and researchers should not abandon “hate” as an analytical concept, including when studying right-wing politics. Instead, hate’s complexity warrants close attention to its philosophical, methodological and cultural implications. Generally, we can define (outgroup) hate as a com-mitted negative passion based on perceived threats toward one’s ingroup(s). Emotional attachment to ingroups and outgroups materializes through discourse and socialization, while ideologies organize and solidify group prejudices, and delineate threats.

Diagnosing injustice or threat is inherent to politics, along with group prejudices and negative emotions. As Klandermans (2013) and Taylor (2013) argue, outrage, anger and fear are inherent to constructing political grievances. The shift toward social and post-structural explanations of hate should also not be mistaken for abandoning or devaluing the subject. For instance, Johansen’s (2015) position that hate can be located in texts and materiality does not discount hate as an individual experience or bodily arousal (pp. 52–54). Moreover, post-structuralist theories are not a substitute for data. As Johansen (2015: 55) explains, the hate assemblage invites researchers to trace empirically how hatred “makes its occasional decomposition and disappearance into other shapes and forms” (see also Brudholm and Johansen, 2018). Consequently, post-structuralist theories of hate may be useful for explaining how right-wing prejudices become delegated to mainstream discourse and institutions.

More evidence is needed showing how political narratives affect emotion. Researchers cannot assume that prejudices and negative emotions are more significant for motivating the Right. Hate is not exclusive to a political fringe, but rather a general human experience and a regular symptom of group prejudices across the political spectrum. However, dominant narratives tend to associate hate with right-wing politics and conflate hate with overt prejudices (expressed through ideology). Hate and prejudice are related, but differ conceptually and methodologically. Prejudice is typically defined as a negative biased perception held toward a social group or individual. Unlike hate, which is always an affective force, prejudice can often be dispassionate, passive and unconscious (Brown, 2010). Much contemporary scholarship on prejudice focuses on these implicit or "automatic" forms of bias, such as how people internalize or project negative stereotypes without realizing it (Brown, 2010: 83–89). Distinguishing between overt prejudice and hate is more complicated and involves determining whether expressions qualify as occurrent emotions or attitudes (Brudholm and Johansen, 2018: 95). Yet scholars studying prejudice tend to acknowledge that group attitudes are not indicative of group members' cognition, motivation and emotions, components that require individual-level analysis. As Brown (2010) puts it, scholars should distinguish between individuals acting as group members, and individuals acting as individuals (p. 9). Ignoring this distinction has lead to dubious generalizations about the emotions and motivations of right-wing actors.

The hate stereotype

Stereotyping right-wing movements through "hate" happens frequently in public dis-course, and periodically in academia. "Stereotyping" occurs when within-group differences are assimilated into a dominant or "common sense" narrative about the group. Stereotypes homogenize the represented group, exaggerating certain traits to fit dominant ways of thinking (Brown, 2010; Pickering, 2001).The popular expression "hate group" epitomizes the "hate stereotype", in which negative emotions (especially hate) are foregrounded as the motivation behind rightist movements. Such accounts are a "stereotype" because they exaggerate and homogenize hate as a trait of right-wing activists[18]. In the following, I outline studies refuting the idea that hate is central for right-wing mobilization and demonstrate the varying degrees that scholars stereotype rightist politics through hate. Hate tends to be mis-taken for ideology, which can spur generalizations about motives and distract from empirical evidence.

Popular expression: The "hate group" stereotype

Among the most popular and controversial uses of "hate" is the legal category "hate crime". Scholars such as Perry (2001, 2005), Goldberg (1995) and Ray and Smith (2001) critique hate crime laws, focusing on the legal portrayal of "hate" as irrational, deviant, or random (hate crimes are considered a "rare" phenomenon in legal dis-course). As Perry (2005: 124) argues, to

[18] For instance, researchers may use 'hate' or 'hate group' without defining these terms, or addressing current debates around hate and emotions.

reduce hate to a problem of personal dislikes misses its connection to broader culture (see also Blee, 2004: 96; Perry, 2001)[19]. Instead, Perry (2005) asserts that such violence is a natural extension of the racism, sexism and homophobia already present in dominant culture (pp. 127, 136) (see also Whitlock and Bronski, 2015).

The same is roughly true for the label "hate group". While its origin is unclear, "hate group" is frequently used by legal advocacy organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). The label is also operationalized by law enforcement agencies such as the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI, 2017a, 2017b), the Chicago Police (2017) and the Toronto and Calgary Police Services (Calgary Police Service, 2017; Toronto Police Service, 2015). Additionally, the concept can be found in United States military policies discouraging service members from participating in right-wing groups. Hate group policy exists in the Pentagon (Hudson, 1999), the Department of Defense (Hudson, 1999) and the Department of the Navy (Sims, 2008).The SPLC defines "hate groups" as organizations with "beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics" (SPLC, 2017). Sociologist Randy Blazak (2009) borrows from numerous watchdog groups and law enforcement agencies to develop the following definition:

> A hate group is a named entity that holds a common disdain for one or more large categorizations of people, desires to oppress those people based on historical circumstances, and acts on that desire. (p. 159)

[19] While Perry (2001, 2005) and Blee (2004) critique the reliance on individualized hate as an explanation for what motivates far-right actors, they do not problematize the concept's prominence in the literature. Perry (2001, 2005) also focuses her critique of hate in relation to hate crime, rather than 'hate groups'.

While some hate group definitions could encompass forms of left-wing politics (such as radical anti-Israel, animal rights, or environmental groups), "hate group" remains a popular expression primarily for right-wing movements. Leftist publications and the main-stream news frequently use the concept in this manner (see Allen, 2017; Ganim et al., 2017; Nelson, 2016; Posner and Neiwert, 2016).

"Hate group" is a cultural and political concept, unlike hate crime, which is typically a legal or policy category. Whereas the latter tends to be critiqued for its narrowness, the hate group debate concerns overbroad definitions of hate (see Jonsson, 2011). This con-troversy often centres on the SPLC and its hate group list[20], which charts far-right movements like neo-Nazis, the KKK and other white nationalist organizations (sometimes referred together as the "hate movement") (SPLC, 2017). While anti-gay, anti-choice, and "male supremacy" movements are recent additions, "hate group" usually refers to organized racism. Critics of the SPLC say the list ignores leftist groups and casts the "hate group" net too wide on conservatism (see Chokshi, 2016).

Recent developments in rightist politics have further muddied the "hate group" concept. "Hate groups'" analytical shortcomings become palpable when examining right-wing populism. What does it mean, for instance, when traditionally "hateful" ideas become mainstreamed? Can France's National Rally Party – notorious for its nationalism ("France for the French") and anti-Semitic history – be considered a hate group? What about the

[20] Today the SPLC's list refers to far-right groups as 'extremist groups', but they are referred to synonymously as 'hate groups' throughout their website and publications. Previously, the 'hate map' was called the 'hate groups map' listing 'active U.S. Hate Groups' until the SPLC updated its website circa 2009 (see SPLC, 2008).

inflammatory rhetoric and exclusionary policies of the Trump presidency and the Republican Party? Moreover, does the recent popularity of right-wing ideas signal a growing "hatred" in the population, and is that a useful approach to understanding this development?[21] Alternatively, does the rising anger toward police in the United States warrant the label of hate? Many conservatives and police groups argue that it does. Thousands of people have signed petitions arguing that Black Lives Matter be designated a hate group, a position supported by various police leaders and conservative commentators (see Hanson and McCormack, 2015; Mettler, 2016). But at what point does "hate" become the defining feature of a group? How much hate must exist to warrant the label? Are hateful qualities like "common disdain" and "oppression" (as per Blazak's [2009] definition) really absent in moderate political groups or everyday institutions?

These ambiguities signal a conceptual failure, illuminating the central concern: is "hate" a fruitful way to categorize or compare political groups? The short answer is *no*. Hate has motivational implications (Rempel and Burris, 2005: 300) and classifying "hate groups" encourages preconceptions and generalizations by researchers, and risks reproducing outdated ideas about pathological hate. Altogether, "hate group" should be discarded in favour of well-reasoned concepts that do not presume a motivation. While terms such as "right-wing

[21] The 'mainstreaming of hate' is a position advanced by numerous politicians, authors, experts and organizations following the recent surge of right-wing populism across the West. For instance, Hillary Clinton accused Donald Trump of 'taking hate groups mainstream' (Barrón-López, 2016). 'Mainstreaming hate' suggests that right-wing politicians are somehow reintroducing racism and other prejudices into Western society. This reinforces the 'post-racist' discourse critiqued by scholars such as Bonilla-Silva (2014) and Hughey (2012), which imagines racism as a historical problem of overcoming individual prejudices. For Bonilla-Silva (2014), this mindset was epitomized during the Obama presidency: 'Although little has changed in the fundamentals of the racial order, having a black man "in charge" gives the impression of monumental change and allows whites to tell those who research, write, talk, and organize against racial inequality that they must be crazy' (p. 282).

extremism", "far-right", "radical-right" and "fringe-right"[22] have become more common in contemporary studies on rightist movements, hate remains a prominent concept, where "hate group" often serves as short-hand for such movements.

What's hate got to do with it? Current knowledge about right-wing movements

Many scholars studying the Right connect "hate" to the emotions and prejudices purportedly inspired by right-wing ideologies (if they delineate hate at all). Yet, recent studies on political extremism and hate crime cast doubt on the centrality of hate and ideology as motivating far-right actors. The hate stereotype is most often applied to white supremacist groups (and white conservatism more generally), which I focus on here.

In a series of interviews with racist hate crime offenders, Gadd and Dixon (2009) found that most participants were not motivated by "hateful feelings" (p. 80) and that racism was almost never the sole factor motivating their violence or political activism (p. 87). Similarly, Perry (2001) argues that many racist attacks have as much to do with gender, age and sexuality as they do with "race". These ideas are echoed by scholars studying white supremacist groups, where many contend that gender dynamics of participation are equally (if not more) important than racial dynamics. For example, Hamm (2009) posits that "hegemonic masculinity" has been the cornerstone of white supremacism since its inception. For white power groups such as the KKK, racist paramilitary mythology functions as a pathway to redemption for alienated young

[22] While these concepts are also highly contested, most authors address or acknowledge the debates around terminology.

white men keen on self-aggrandizement (Hamm, 2009: 99, 106). For Hamm, racist ideology is secondary to feelings of powerlessness, alienation and emasculation. Similarly, research on neo-Nazi movements found that, prior to joining, recruits were not necessarily more racist or anti-Semitic than other similarly situated youths (Blee and Yates, 2015: 131). Instead, Blee and Yates (2015) suggest that members learn racist and anti-Semitic views during their time in the movement (p. 131). For racist skinheads, violence is viewed as more closely tied to youth subculture, rather than a dedication to protecting the Western way of life (Hamm, 2009: 98, 101; see also Tanner and Campana, 2014: 28). Blee (2005) adds that the tendency of far-right actors to switch ideologies and commit to multiple movements with conflicting aims indicates more an overriding commitment to violence than to racist ideas (p. 429). Finally, many scholars argue that far-right movements have been softening their discourse and presentation for decades, which suggests that directly "promoting hate" is not an effective recruitment strategy.

Far-right groups are a burgeoning topic in terrorism studies, a discipline embroiled in similar debates about motivation. Many terrorism scholars see ideology as overdetermined as an impetus for extremism. Snow and Byrd (2007) call this the "homogenizing tendency", in which researchers passively accept ideology as the rationale for collective action among terrorist groups. By applying ideology monolithically, researchers overlook ideological variation and fluidity among individual extremists (Snow and Byrd, 2007: 120), and gloss over the complexities of diverse and intersecting motivations. Motives are never a given, especially when several studies underscore the secondary role of politics in terrorist activity. Abrahms (2008), for instance, argues that most people join terrorist organizations not out of ideological or political commitments, but to avoid or reduce alienation and to maintain or develop

relationships with friends and family (pp. 97, 98). Consequently, the oft-cited role of "hateful ideology" in motivating terrorists (see Guitta, 2015; Politico Staff, 2016) has increasingly come into question[23]. Abrahms (2008) concludes that terrorist organizations behave more like "social solidarity maximizers" rather than "political maximizers"[24] (p. 101).

The increased scholarly interest in radicalization and extremism has yielded much empirical support refuting the stereotype that far-right actors are motivated chiefly by hatred and its ideological manifestations. These findings challenge pathological theories of political extremism and have encouraged scholars to adopt a social-structural lens when researching right-wing movements (see also Blee, 2017a; Blee and Yates, 2015: 128).

While scholarship on rightist movements is progressing, similar findings surfaced almost two decades ago from Swain (2002), Kaplan and Weinberg (1998) and Dobratz and Shanks-Meile (2000 [1997]: 6–9). Focusing on American white supremacist movements, these authors dismantled familiar stereotypes about psychological deficiencies, emotional instability, lack of education and ideological commitment. Hate stereotyping risks sustaining these caricatures.

Hate stereotyping in research and social science

Like all stereotypes, stereotyping of right-wing groups is varied – scholars rely on hate's rhetorical power to different degrees, and conceptualize hate in different ways (psycho-

[23] According to Abrahms (2008), many terrorists and even terrorist leaders never develop a basic understanding of their organization's political purpose (see p. 99).
[24] I am not suggesting that ideology is unimportant. A person can be committed to a political cause or ideology with a rudimentary understanding of it. It is up to researchers to investigate how ideologies manifest themselves among group members.

logically, sociologically, legally). However conceived, "hate" approaches to studying right-wing politics are often theoretically and methodologically ambiguous, and researchers tend to conflate hate with ideology.

Many studies on right-wing politics in the United States and Canada[25] continue to feature "hate" and/or "hate group" prominently (Blee, 2017b: 64). As Brown (2010) asserts, stereotypes impart a sense of certainty, regularity and continuity in their representation, where certain characteristics – in this case "hate" – appear as natural and given. Foregrounding hate is the most common way that scholars reproduce right-wing stereo-types. "Hate" headlines various scholarly works on right-wing movements: *Hate on the Right, Tabernacle of Hate, Home-grown Hate, Spaces of Hate, The Violence of Hate, Healing from Hate, Beyond Hate, Hate Unleashed, The Language of Hate, The Management of Hate, Hate on the Net, Untangling the Web of Hate, The Aesthetics of Hate, The Communication of Hate, The Hate Handbook, Into a World of Hate, Theology of Hate*[26] (not including articles and individual chapters). Hate is often foregrounded as a topic, even when hate is tangential to scholars' core arguments or findings about right-wing groups. In *Healing from Hate*, for instance, Kimmel (2018) argues that shame, not hate, is the key emotional driver behind right-wing extremism, where ideology serves as a theoretical prop for young men looking to redeem their masculinity. Yet Kimmel rightly concludes that scholars studying political movements need to pay more attention to how movements transform emotions such as shame, humiliation, despair, or anger, into political

[25] English-speaking European scholars appear altogether less interested in 'hate' as an explanation for right-wing politics (see Mammone et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2013: 17). However, the hate stereotype is still prominent in English pop culture, and among advocacy groups, such as Hope Not Hate (2017).

[26] Respectively, Waltman (2015), Noble (2010), Ferber (2004), Flint (2004), Levin and Nolan (2002), Kimmel (2018), King and Leonard (2014), Dunbar (2018), Brindle (2016), Shoshan (2016), Roversi and Smith (2008), Barnett (2007), Sanos (2012), Waltman and Haas (2011), Oppenheimer (2005), Ryan (2004), Michael (2009).

mobilization. Ironically, in the field of "hate movements", few studies on right-wing politics draw empirical attention to emotions. Instead, right-wing ideas are often viewed as "evidence" of hatred, which sometimes leads scholars to conflate hate with ideology, and view ideology as motivation. An example of this is the stereotype that people join white supremacist movements because they share racist ideas.

Various scholars foreground hate with little attention to its methodological or theoretical implications, especially as an emotional concept. The "hate group" term illuminates this trend, as it suggests hatred is essentialized in deviant groups, a hallmark of pathological theories of hate that most scholars reject. Nonetheless, "hate group" saturates the literature on right-wing movements. Many researchers rely on definitions of hate and "hate group" developed by think tanks, law enforcement and/or the legal system. For instance, in his study of far-right websites, *Untangling the Web of Hate*, Barnett (2007) borrows from hate speech law and the SPLC to define "hate sites" as those "maintained by an organized hate group residing in the United States on which hatred is expressed" (p. 18). With no empirical or theoretical attention to emotions, hate becomes nearly synonymous with far-right politics. Consequently, Barnett's (2007) book reveals a lot about ideology, but little about hate. Similarly, some scholars do not define hate and use it synonymously with far-right politics (see Michael, 2009; Sanos, 2013; Shoshan, 2016).

An alternative to institutional conceptualizations of hate are sociological approaches that view hate as both individualized and structural (see Perry, 2009). However, when applied to right-wing groups, scholars rarely demonstrate empirically how "structural hate" is created or internalized by individuals. Instead, hate becomes disembodied from the subject and located

almost exclusively in discourse and structure. For example, in their article "A climate for hate?", Perry and Scrivens (2018) critique hate's conception as a "simple emotive state" (p. 171) and argue that racist movements are "empowered" by "systemic" hatred, "embedded in broader patterns of subjugation and oppression" (p. 173). In other words, popular prejudices help legitimate far-right discourse, although the extent and consequences of this are unclear. The authors show that far-right activists try to capitalize on certain public grievances (such as anti-immigrant attitudes), but this does not explain how public sentiment affects recruitment in far-right groups. Consequently, Perry and Scrivens (2018) seem to equate political opportunism with movement growth, arguing that "cultures of hate" increase "the ability of hate groups to extend their ideologies of hate and intolerance to the broader public and to thus recruit into the movement" (p. 174). The authors foreground hate and ideology as the causes of right-wing extremism and suggest – without evidence – that this framing strategy is inherently effective. Cunningham (2018) has similarly shown how conceptual ambiguities around "hate mobilization" have led researchers to conflate increases in right-wing organizations with increases in "hate activity".

Without empirical attention to emotions, it is difficult to see why scholars privilege "hate" over more methodologically precise, theoretically developed and empirically informed concepts, such as racism. In *The Violence of Hate*, for instance, Levin and Nolan (2011) argue that racists "internalize a culture of hate" (p. 5), where hate is both individual and structural, normative and deviant (they argue that most people are not "hatemongers"), and intersects with stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and violence. This conception of hate resembles contemporary approaches to racism, but with less theoretical richness and precision.

Hate too often functions as a placeholder for missing knowledge about right-wing movements. We cannot assume, for instance, that people join racist political groups because of "hate". Even if a movement explicitly communicates its hatred of another group, researchers should avoid equating the official goals or motivations of an organization with the goals and motivations of its members (Barnard, 1938). Hate stereotyping distracts from more accurate and nuanced explanations for collective action. Focusing on "hateful ideologies" draws empirical attention away from differences, easing generalizations across potentially distinct – and often understudied – movements. One question that arises from my analysis is the extent to which the label "hate group" has served as an easy shorthand to casually lump together groups that may fundamentally differ in terms of their motivations, organizational structures, memberships, recruitment, and the like. It is wise to spend more time interrogating the extent to which these groups are indeed alike. Finally, hate theories of the Right tend to divorce hatred from the subject and thus ignore (or assume) how texts resonate with audiences. Motivations and meaning-making need to be studied, not posited in advance. These are problems that demand and deserve a complex mode of enquiry and should not be reduced to a single concept nor presupposed by theory.

Conclusion: Why hate?

"Hate" terminology persists because of its symbolic currency as a stereotype, rather than its methodological integrity for studying right-wing movements (Pickering, 2001: 26). As Pickering (2001) argues, stereotypes have power because they suit dominant narratives, lending them a

sense of certainty, regularity and continuity (p. 4). Reinforced by the status quo, stereotypes tend to resist contradicting information, serving as a shortcut for representing a sense of order (pp. 3, 26). By foregrounding right-wing prejudices, hate stereotyping risks contributing to liberal tolerance discourse (Brown, 2006). As Brown (2006) argues, tolerance is a moral-political language of anti-prejudice used to regulate aversion in liberal democracies. This discourse frames political issues as a problem of personal responsibility, rather than a systemic problem. Brown (2006) puts it best in the following passage:

> . . . political conflicts rendered as matters of intolerance reframe inequality or domination as personal prejudice or enmity. *The depoliticization occurs both through personalizing a politically produced problem and through attributing cause to attitude. Power disappears as individuals are treated as the agents of the conflict and attitude is treated as its source.* The prejudiced individual becomes the cause of and the tolerant one becomes the solution to a variety of social, economic, and political ills. (p. 142, italics added)

Foregrounding hate risks sustaining the political and analytical tradition of "hunting for bigots"[27] (Bonilla-Silva, 2017); that is, scholarship resembling intelligence reports for discerning and policing intolerance. As Bonilla-Silva (2017) puts it, fixating on individual racists, for

[27] Bonilla-Silva (2017) is referring specifically to racism in the original context. The full quote is as follows: 'Fourth, politically and analytically, we must be careful not to return to the comfortable yet erratic sport of hunting for the "racists".'

example, “has not allowed us to appreciate that racial domination is never the product of few bad apples, but the collective effect of the actions and inactions of the many”.

How we understand a phenomenon affects how we respond to it (Houge, 2016: 435). By drawing attention to the difficulties associated with hate stereotyping, I am not excusing rightist prejudices, nor suggesting that all ideologies are equally “hateful”. Differences matter, but “hate group” or “hateful ideologies” are clumsy tools for understanding and articulating the diverse manifestations and roles prejudice can play in group dynamics (especially groups determined to conceal their prejudices; Swain, 2002: 77). Practitioners can better address the specificities of right-wing groups – while encouraging historically grounded and systemic analyses – by replacing “hate” with more precise, nuanced and reflexive terminology. Individual researchers are free to seek out their own more accurate and useful alternatives, but some possibilities include “prejudice”, “radical”, “extremist”, “nationalist” and “white supremacist”,8 each of which draws analytical attention to slightly different aspects of the dynamics characteristic of these groups. While the hate stereotype’s individualizing tendencies may befit reactionary policies for containing segments of the far-right, hate narratives are ill-suited for addressing the sociological realities of right-wing movements and populism. Instead of “hate”, advocates and scholars can foreground the broader socio-cultural aspects of right-wing movements to stimulate interdisciplinary approaches and cross-institutional collaborations, and to promote pro-active counter-measures, such as media and political literacy, and community learning programmes.

Researchers need not abandon thinking about the dynamics of “hate”. Some researchers rightfully connect hate to sociality and structure, but without empirical attention to

emotions, scholars studying the political Right should avoid privileging hate theories over disciplines like race scholarship or social movement studies. Emotions are foundational to political action, and more scholarly attention is needed to understand how movements transform emotions into action (Taylor, 2013: 46; see also Jasper, 2011; Klandermans, 2013). Future research should, however, re-evaluate hate's role for studying right-wing groups. Blee (2017b), for instance, revisits hate's relationship to racist activism, and calls for decoupling the "intergroup hate" of far-right groups from the feelings and motivations of individual members (pp. 70, 71). Cunningham (2018) similarly calls for conceptual clarity around "hate" to help differentiate between "hate organizing" and "hate incidents". We need a more rigorous approach for enquiring about right-wing movements and their relationship to everyday inequality. This question has become urgent with the surge of right-wing populism across the West, an issue that should not be signified as a "growing hate problem" in the population (see Noack, 2016; Spiegel Staff, 2015).

Chapter Four
Thinking Beyond Extremism and the Canadian Yellow Vests: Security Approaches Versus Ethnographic Research on Right-wing Nationalist Movements

Introduction: securitizing right-wing nationalism

Researchers increasingly analyze right-wing nationalist movements through the lens of security. This is evident in the popular explosion of counterterrorism research, which is rooted in security strategizing and increasingly centers on right-wing and far-right social movements, where researchers advocate for increased surveillance and criminalization of such groups, particularly right-wing nationalist and extreme racist groups. While this style of research can be useful for understanding and policing openly racist and violent nationalist organizations, scholars increasingly extend security concepts, methods, and logic to analyze and explain how right-wing and far-right groups operate *as social movements that strategically appeal to mainstream sensibilities to grow the movement*. Security-centric approaches are limited for analyzing this phenomenon as their research tends to be designed around preconceived operationalized concepts for mitigating public safety risks related to extreme politics (neo-Nazism, hate speech, threats, etcetera) and vigilante violence (such as hate crime and white terrorism). While risk-oriented approaches can be appropriate for political groups with a history of crime (such as hate speech or terrorism), such methods are not attuned to the fluidity and contradictions that characterize right-wing social movements, to which extreme racism and criminal acts typically have little importance. Moreover, on the ground ethnographic studies of the right-wing and far-

right increasingly reveals the problems with characterizing right-wing nationalist groups through a stable set of markers, attitudes, and actions. I dub counterterrorism and other security-related research and analysis as "security approaches". As right-wing nationalism sees growing successes across westernized countries, security approaches sometimes reduce this phenomenon to a crime problem and are consequently limited for understanding right-wing nationalist movements' relationship to the status quo and why these politics can appeal to mainstream political sensibilities.

Critiques of counterterrorism approaches almost exclusively concern studies on radical Islamist movements, and many critics argue that such research rarely focuses on right-wing radicalism, although this is beginning to change. In this essay, I use an ethnographic approach borrowing from critical security studies (CSS) (also known as critical terrorism studies) to reveal the limits of CVE and other security approaches for understanding the social movement dimension of right-wing nationalist groups, using the Canadian yellow vests movement as a case study. Security logic dominates popular and scholarly discourse around right-wing nationalism in Canada, where journalists and researchers often reduce discussion of Canada's nationalist groups to extremist threats in the form of vigilante violence and extreme or "risky" politics, especially white nationalism. Foregrounding extremism often overlooks how most Canadian nationalist groups strategically appeal to mainstream sensibilities and consequently downplays the power and presence of mainstream views in the movement, such as liberalism, statism, and racial colour-blindness.

In this paper, I define right-wing nationalism broadly as a political movement foremost concerned with national identity from a right-wing perspective, focusing in this essay on non-

establishment or grassroots activist groups. In liberal democracies, right-wing nationalists promote a country's (perceived) traditional national values and culture, often by connecting social ills to those cultures (perceived to) deviate most from the dominant culture, such as the stereotype that Black culture causes crime, or that Islamic culture causes terrorism. This definition encompasses liberal-conservative (civic) expressions of nationhood (such as the idea that Islam is incompatible with "liberal values"), as well as more extreme ethnonationalism (such as the belief that race determines behaviours). As I will show, this definition is necessarily broad as Canada's right-wing nationalist movement, for instance, is made up of diverse nationalist groups with conflicting goals and ideas, encompassing ideologies from mainstream liberalism to neo-Nazism. In other words, the more popular (and loaded) concepts "far-right" or "right-wing extremism" fail to capture the Canadian movement's messiness, contradictions, and complexities.

In section I, I define "security approaches" and compare them to ethnographic approaches to understanding right-wing nationalist movements. I show how security logic influences dominant narratives of the Canadian yellow vests, representing them as foremost a violent white nationalist movement. In section II, I interrogate this portrayal and attempt to answer the following research question using ethnographic methods:

> *How important are vigilante violence and extreme politics (such as white nationalism) to Canadian yellow vests organizers and on-the-ground supporters?*

My data include over 40 hours of participant-observation at 20 right-wing rallies in the province of Alberta, 35 interviews with current leaders and members of prominent on-the-ground nationalist groups, and analysis of online political content, such as groups' public social media and websites. Based on these data, my findings suggest that vigilante violence and white nationalist politics play a marginal role in the yellow vests movement. Instead, Canada's major nationalist groups: 1) fetishize law and order politics (rather than being anti-state/anti-authority); and 2) attempt to maintain legitimacy by rejecting vigilante violence and policing extreme messaging among their supporters. In section III, I argue that my interpretation of the yellow vests differs from the dominant view because of differences in security versus ethnographic methods. Security approaches – while valuable for policing political violence – are limited for understanding right-wing nationalism as a social movement with broader political appeal.

While I focus on Canada, my methodological critiques apply to the broader scholarship on right-wing and far-right groups, which is increasingly influenced by security-centric thinking and research. This piece also contributes to the small but growing ethnographic literature investigating the internal workings of far-right movements (see Blee 2007). By examining how Canadian nationalism is practiced on the ground and debated between groups, ethnographic research within activist communities can shed light on the logistics of how right-wing groups overcome disagreements and manage their image and legitimacy to grow the movement. My aim is to encourage heightened methodological reflexivity, attention to context, and critical thinking when researching and discussing right-wing nationalism and populism in Canada and abroad.

Methodology: semi-ethnographic mixed methods

My findings section relies on ethnographic data consisting of 35 semi-structured interviews with 42 Canadian right-wing activists (RWAs) (ten of which I consider "far-right" or white nationalist activists)[28], and over 40 hours of observational fieldwork at 20 conservative political rallies and meetings, almost all of which were hosted by my participants. I also used content analysis of social media pages to help identify my sample population as well as for recruitment.

Four of 35 interviews featured two people, and one interview featured three people. My sample included three participants who were women and 39 who were men. All RWAs were white, except for three who identified as Indigenous (two of the three were white passing and identified as Métis). I usually conducted the interviews in coffee shops or restaurants but organized four interviews over the phone, and one over the video conference call application Zoom. Interviews ranged from one hour to over three hours, but typically lasted around 90 minutes.

My fieldwork took place between 2016 and 2020[29]. I describe my approach as "semi-" ethnographic because I did not engage in the "deep immersion" typically characteristic of traditional ethnography (Haggerty, Bucerius, & Berardi, forthcoming). Ethnographers often spend many hours with their participants to gain a better understanding of the culture in question, especially the mundane and seemingly unimportant elements, such as how culture

[28] I also conducted four interviews with ex-racist skinheads, two counter-extremist experts (one in law enforcement and the other in policy), and one anti-racist activist who runs a blog that surveils Canada's right-wing movements. This blog is mentioned in almost half of my interviews. These interviews are not included in these numbers.

[29] I ended my fieldwork shortly before the COVID-19 outbreak.

manifests in everyday life and through informal social interactions and events. While I regularly had informal conversations with participants by arriving early and staying late at rallies, and attended one informal gathering (joining a group for coffee), I found these conversations put my access to the movement at risk[30]. Additionally, unlike traditional ethnographies, the research site of right-wing organizing in Alberta is fluid and sporadic, manifesting in multiple and disjointed individuals and groups, and through online discussions and social media forums, as well as in-person rallies and meetings. In other words, there was no consistent and concrete research site, nor a single group or person that I thought was representative of the broader movement and culture. Altogether, the fluid nature of my sample population and field site, combined with the risks of deep immersion, were not conducive to "deep hanging out", necessitating a semi-ethnographic approach.

To identify my sample, I began with a fluid definition of "right-wing" and "nationalism". I define my sample population as right-wing activists (RWAs), referring to people who identify as "conservative" or "right-wing', "nationalists" or "patriots", and who I identify as "activists"[31]. I began by examining social media groups which self-identified as "nationalist" and "patriot", or groups identified as "right-wing extremists" or "hate groups" in mainstream discourse (such as news stories or scholarly reports). While I relied on participants' self-identification as "conservative" for the purposes of recruitment, I developed my own conceptualizations of their politics based on scholarship and participants' relationship to Canadian political culture. For

[30] Participants sometimes interrogated me about my own politics, which risked revealing that I was not aligned with them on political issues.

[31] While there were hundreds of Canadian nationalist groups on sites like Facebook, my definition of activism does not include people or groups that operate exclusively online. All RWAs in my sample had recently organized or attended rallies or other political events associated with their online group.

instance, almost all respondents accepted the label "conservative", despite sometimes *radical* variations in their philosophies. Other participants refused all labels and/or rejected the "left-right" distinction entirely[32].

My method for conceptualizing Canada's nationalist groups can be called a "bottom-up" approach. I develop categories of groups or activists through accumulating ethnographic interactions, interviews, and observations, rather than the top-down method of sorting activist groups and figures into ready-made and inflexible categories (see also Plows 2008). This was ideal, as my participants do not fit neatly into terms such as "conservative" or "far-right", which I explore in the findings section (section III).

Before each interview, I outlined that I was a PhD student conducting the study as part of my dissertation. I assured participants that my research was independent, and that I was not affiliated with any political group or institution. I explained that the purpose of my project was to "understand what it's like to be a conservative activist in [year]" and that I was interested in their politics, and their personal experiences as an activist. After explaining the project, I outlined the interview process, describing it as an "informal conversation" that usually lasts around one hour. I asked participants if I could audio-record the conversation for note-taking purposes and then outlined the transcription process. All participants, except for two, consented to being audio-recorded[33]. Finally, I explained that participants' identity and group

[32] For example, one RWA explained that his group were "simply patriots speaking truth to power". Additionally, some respondents could not articulate how their ideas fit within Canadian political culture. For instance, one participant asked me if he was "more radical" than others I had interviewed, to which I agreed, explaining that I would characterize his views as "far-right". He responded that his politics would be not be considered so extreme were he living in Europe.

[33] One participant declined to have a conversation, opting instead to respond to my questions in writing (through email).

affiliations would remain anonymous. All individual and groups names in this essay are pseudonyms. I transcribed the interviews verbatim and thematically coded them using Nvivo Pro 11. Some themes for which I coded included topics such as “race and ethnicity”, “organizing rallies”, “globalism”, “law enforcement”, “antifa”, and “Canadian identity”.

I used a generalized prompt guide to ensure consistency in my interviews. My questions were open-ended, allowing me to gauge participants’ interests, especially in the project’s early stages. Interviews centered on participants’ personal beliefs, and their experiences in Canada’s right-wing movement. More specifically, I asked participants how they became involved in activism, how they labelled their politics, and which political issues were most important to them. I probed about the risks of being an activist (such as those related to hate speech laws, and how their activism affects personal relationships), and how participants navigate negative representations of their ideas, and unwanted labels of the groups that they belong to (such as “racists”, “Nazis”, etcetera). Discussions about negative labels often revolved around the perceived failures of Canadian news media, and rampant “political correctness”. This allowed me to inquire about which information sources my participants trusted. Finally, I asked about Canadian identity and values, which allowed me to probe about race and multiculturalism, their views on Canada’s political parties, and right-wing populism abroad (such as France’s National Rally and the Trump administration).

Attending rallies helped to affirm (or disaffirm) what my participants stated in interviews, such as the common claim that their movement promotes non-violence. In other words, did participants practice (at rallies) what they preached (in interviews)? It also served as an opportunity to recruit participants. After each rally, I wrote ethnographic fieldnotes detailing

the events. These notes sometimes informed the content of my interviews, where I often asked participants about their rallies and what took place. The findings section is informed by both interview data and my ethnographic fieldnotes from the rallies.

Altogether, my analysis compares dominant arguments found in systematic literature reviews on Canadian "right-wing extremists"[34] to my ethnographic findings on qualitatively similar groups that make up my sample population.

SECTION I: security vs. ethnographic approaches

Security approaches: risk management of right-wing groups to movements

The increased cultural and governmental attention to terrorism since the 9/11 attacks in 2001 has led to a growing academic subdiscipline concerned with counterterrorism. As Thompson and Bucerius (2020) explain, counterterrorism research can be divided into "hard" approaches, which advocate for coercive legislative, military, and/or law enforcement strategies, and "soft" approaches, which emphasize preventative, proactive, and community partnership strategies. While this distinction is sometimes blurred in scholarship on right-wing nationalist groups, most work on this subject fall under "soft" approaches, dubbed "countering violent extremism" (CVE) research. As the name suggests, CVE research is foremost interested in the potential for

[34] I compiled research on right-wing nationalist groups in Canada from the late-1980s to the present and engaged in a systematic literature review of this content. I also reviewed dozens of mainstream news articles on right-wing nationalist groups since 2015. Through these reviews I identify the trend toward security-centric research in the 2010s, which I conceptualize as "security approaches" in Section I.

criminal violence and other "risky" behaviours among political groups and individuals. As Pettinger (2019) and others argue, CVE research is about managing "supposed future risk" (122). Kundnani and Hayes (2018) describe the discipline as "pre-emptive criminal regulation" (2). A distinct feature of the discipline is its policy-oriented approach, where researchers often propose better ways to police and surveil certain political ideologies, groups, and actors. Consequently, CVE researchers often work alongside civil servants and government agencies, especially law enforcement.

CVE research has exploded in popularity and influenced dominant scholarship on right-wing nationalist groups, especially in Canada (Perry & Scrivens 2019: 122). Two of the largest contemporary studies on this topic: Perry and Scrivens' (2019) *Right-Wing Extremism in Canada* and McCoy, Jones, and Hastings' (2019) *Building Awareness, Seeking Solutions*; center on nationalist groups' risk of vigilante violence. Both analyses are couched in the language of "risk" and use operationalized concepts such as hate crimes, extremism, violent extremism, extremist activity, extremist ideas, radicalization leading to extremism, terrorism, terrorist violence, mass casualty terrorism, white terrorism, hate extremism, hate-motivated violence, and "crimes related to terrorism and hate". Both studies rely on data in the form of police interviews. For instance, McCoy, Jones, and Hastings' (2019) study is based on interview data from 170 police officers, 21 former extremists, 50 community groups, and 120 people whose communities have been victimized by "hate-motived violence" (Wakefield 2019). Perry and Scrivens (2019) study draws from interviews with 40 police and intelligence officials, 30 community activists, and 3 interviews with "former/current" members of hate groups. These studies also rely on document analysis, such as social media postings, and secondary data such as hate crime

statistics, anti-terrorism intelligence, anti-racist activist and community intelligence, and media reports on lone wolf terrorist attacks and instances of public hate propaganda.

The preceding two studies provide mix of “hard” and “soft” security recommendations to reduce violent extremism in Canada, such as raising awareness of the problem, preventing recruitment into extremist groups by identifying risk factors and surveilling at-risk youth, protecting marginalized communities, strengthening hate speech laws to target “cyberhate”, increasing police surveillance of charismatic leaders, empowering victims of hate-motivated incidents and violence, and encouraging community collaboration programs that promote diversity and anti-racism.

Traditionally, counterterrorism researchers focus on individuals, groups, and communities, and are typically less interested in explaining broader issues, such as cultural and political movements (Stephens, Sieckelinck, & Boutellier 2019). McCoy, Jones, and Hastings’ (2019), for instance, adopt a more traditional CVE approach and are explicitly interested in the potential for violence from right-wing politics. Their analysis disregards the broader political implications of right-wing organizations in Canada. Perry and Scrivens’ (2015, 2016, 2018, 2019), by contrast, analyse Canadian nationalist groups as both a security risk and as a social movement. Their approach represents a broader trend in security-driven scholarship toward explaining right-wing social movements and connecting right-wing political violence to bigger cultural developments, such as the Trump presidency. A growing body of literature analyzes right-wing political movements from a security perspective, such as how the Trump Presidency increases hate crime (Koski & Bantley 2020), how right-wing populism has “mainstreamed” hate speech (Waltman 2018), how right-wing commentary can influence terrorism (Harwood

2019), and how some right-wing groups ought to be thought of as criminal gangs (Reid & Valasik 2020). While most of these studies are not counterterrorism research in the traditional sense, public safety and counterterrorism logic increasingly informs dominant scholarship about right-wing political movements. I conceptualize counterterrorism and related security-oriented and criminal justice research broadly as "security approaches".

Because counterterrorism research focuses on risky political ideas that are (allegedly) opposed to society's core values (Stephens, Sieckelinck, & Boutellier 2019), counterterrorism scholars' conceptualization of far-right "movements" tend to remain centered on explicitly racist ideology, especially white nationalism. For instance, Perry and Scrivens provide the following definition of the Canadian far-right or "right-wing extremist" movement:

> . . . a loose movement, characterized by a racially, ethnically and sexually defined nationalism . . . often framed in terms of white power and is grounded in xenophobic and exclusionary understandings of the perceived threats posed by such groups as non-Whites, Jews, immigrants, homosexuals and feminists. As a pawn of the Jews, the state is perceived to be an illegitimate power serving the interests of all but the White man. To this end, extremists are willing to assume both an offensive and defensive stance in the interests of "preserving" their heritage and their "homeland" (2015: 5; 2018: 170; 2019: 5).

Perry and Scrivens (2019) use this definition in their book, *Right-wing Extremism in Canada* and numerous articles discussing the broader movement (Perry & Scrivens 2018, Perry & Scrivens 2016). Other counterterrorism research on Canada, such as Manz (2018), Meyers (2018), and Davey, Hart, and Guerin (2020), also use Perry and Scrivens' definition (see also Project

Someone 2019). CVE scholars Campana and Tanner (2019), in their report for the Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security, and Society (TSAS), similarly conceptualize the Canadian far-right movement as foremost concerned with the "preservation of whiteness" (14). Altogether, many Canadian counterterrorism studies uses a criminogenic understanding of the far-right movement centered on white nationalism and the movement's potential for political violence.

In Canada, security approaches inform Canadian think tanks interested in racism and right-wing groups, such as Canada's Anti-Hate Network and, to a lesser extent, The Canadian Race Relations Foundation and The Canadian Anti-racism Education and Research Society (CAERS). For instance, Barbara Perry sits on the advisory committee of the Canadian Anti-hate Network (2020), and their mission is to "monitor, research, and counter hate groups", stating that Canadian police and security services have not "invested anywhere near the sufficient resources to combat [right-wing extremism]". Government institutions dealing with anti-racism and terrorism also borrow from the same experts and NGOs. Perry is currently working with Public Safety Canada in "efforts to counter [right-wing] radicalization to violence", and John McCoy is the executive director of the Organization for the Prevention of Violence, which is part of the government's National Strategy on Countering Radicalization to Violence plan and is partnered with Edmonton Police Service (EPS), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and the Government of Alberta, among other agencies (Public Safety Canada 2019).

Security approaches dominate contemporary scholarship on Canadian right-wing groups and inform government initiatives on issues such as racism and right-wing terrorism. These narratives are also found throughout popular discourse, such as media outlets that routinely

feature these experts when reporting on right-wing organizing in Canada. Since 2015, dozens of news reports on right-wing organizations feature Barbara Perry and Evan Balgord of the Anti-Hate Network (sometimes including both experts, see Britneff 2020, Habib 2018, Somos 2019). As I show in Section II, security-centric thinking informed the dominant narrative of the Canadian yellow vests movement.

The advantages of ethnographic methods to studying right-wing nationalist movements

Ethnography involves scholars immersing themselves in a research site, where they conduct field observation of a social practice or group (Plows 2008). Ethnographies work to illuminate the activities of often hard-to-reach populations and subcultures, including criminal organizations, police, and political groups (Haggerty, Bucerius, & Berardi forthcoming). Ethnographers typically foreground what participants say and support their findings through repeated systematic observations during fieldwork (Haggerty, Bucerius, & Berardi forthcoming).

Ethnographic methods are well suited for studying social movements, as ethnography can help us understand the operational dynamics of an organization while investigating the social world *in its making* (Bucerius forthcoming, McCluskey 2019). As Blee (2007) argues, ethnography's unique "internalist" perspective (where the researcher is "inside" of the social movement) can reveal aspects of right-wing activism that are impossible to discern through non-ethnographic methods (126). Scholars such as Blee (2007), Goodwin (2006), and McCluskey (2019) observe that most studies of right-wing movements are "at a distance" or "externalist", meaning they analyze the structural conditions of political groups, rather than the internal

dynamics of the movement or groups themselves[35] (Blee 2007: 120). Security approaches to studying right-wing nationalist groups, for instance, focus almost exclusively on publicly available data or the "public transcript", meaning discourse that is mostly stable or where consensus has been reached, such as in the form of activists' public social media posts, speeches, websites, and/or official narratives, reports, and policy (McCluskey 2019: 18). While these data can be useful, they may not accurately reflect the goals of right-wing groups and their members and reveal little about the internal dynamics of the movement, such as tensions, contradictions, and strategies. Moreover, as Blee (2007) argues, scholars cannot infer motivations from analyzing the social conditions to which far-right groups or movements emerge (121). Ethnographic approaches can offer insights into a movement's internal dynamics.

Ethnographic approaches are fluid and exploratory, making them capable of capturing the notoriously "messy" nature of social movements (Plows 2008). For instance, theory and data collection share a symbiotic relationship in ethnography, whereby fieldwork and theoretical development inform one another (Plows 2008: 1524, 1528). Moreover, ethnographic approaches, by definition, involve mixed methods, as field observation inevitably leads, for instance, to ethnographers asking their participants questions, whether formally or informally (Fielding, forthcoming). Consequently, scholars can adapt their ethnographic

[35] Few studies of social movements focus on right-wing groups, and those that do are rarely ethnographic (Blee 2007). In Canada, Barrett's 1989 text *Is God a Racist?* is the largest (semi-)ethnographic work on the Canadian far-right, using a mixture of archival research and interview data to develop a robust account of the movement's activist culture and political influence in the country. While Barrett (1989) does not state the number of interviews he conducted, he gathered data on over 100 right-wing groups and spent five years doing fieldwork in right-wing circles. No qualitative work on this topic has matched the scope of Barrett's (1989) study, his access to the movement, nor his attention to detail for context, terminology, and analysis.

approach to suit their field site and research questions, such as incorporating semi-structured interviews or surveys into their fieldwork. As Fielding (forthcoming) explains, ethnographic researchers have the unique ability to "pursue, rebut, and refine analytical hunches, testing hypotheses against different sources of data". This kind of methodological flexibility is particularly valuable when researching severely understudied populations, such as right-wing nationalists.

Finally, by engaging more holistically with a social group or phenomenon, ethnographic approaches can account for methodological problems that sometimes arise from qualitative methods such as non-ethnographic structured interviews, questionnaires, surveys, and discourse analysis (Plows 2008, Bucerius forthcoming). Most notably, scholars such as Lyman and Scott (1989), Fielding (forthcoming), and Jerolmack and Kahn (2014), highlight the common scholarly error of inferring behaviour from verbal accounts or attitudes, or what Jerolmack and Kahn (2014) call the "attitudinal fallacy". Sociologists often rely on methods that privilege individual-level accounts or self reports (such as surveys or structured interviews) and assume their generalizability to unobserved situations – in other words, they assume that people will behave based on what they say (Jerolmack & Khan 2014: 200). This problem is particularly relevant to the study of extremism and terrorism, a discipline largely reliant on the assumption that verbal accounts serve as guides for action (Jerolmack & Khan 2014: 189). As Jerolmack and Khan (2014) argue, studying individuals and their statements in isolation (such as what people say on the Internet) does not account for social relations and situations, and is therefore not representative or predictive of social action (Jerolmack & Khan 2014: 192). Action is contingent upon situational conditions and scholars should ideally support (rather than assert) claims

about how people act through empirical evidence gathered within those situations (Jerolmack & Khan 2014: 201). Ethnography is perhaps the most effective tool for studying the relationship between meaning and action. By observing and interacting with participants over time and in different social situations and contexts, ethnographers can yield more valid data about behaviour than self reporting (Jerolmack & Khan 2014: 195).

Altogether, how are ethnographic approaches to studying right-wing nationalist movements different from security approaches? While there can be overlap – such as shared interest in movement strategies and growth – ethnographic methods are not inherently concerned with risk or criminality, nor do ethnographic scholars prioritize policing, censorship, surveillance, and control in examining right-wing nationalist groups. Both approaches aim for a greater understanding of the movements they study, but a security approach (as an ideal type) produces knowledge of activist groups with the intent to police risky ideas and behaviours associated with that group. For instance, security researchers often study extreme groups such as ISIS or neo-Nazis with the intent to prevent recruitment into those movements. Consequently, a pre-determined policing or "countering" logic informs their methods and analysis, such as identifying risks related to recruitment. By contrast, ethnographies are not outcome-driven – ethnographic work is exploratory and less reliant on rigid or operationalized concepts.

SECTION II: social context and findings

Introduction: critical security studies

My critique of security approaches borrows from critical security studies (CSS), also known as critical terrorism studies (CTS). From a CSS standpoint, academics have played a significant role in the "securitization" of right-wing nationalist movements. CSS examines how logics of security have proliferated beyond traditional state-centric military approaches and interrogates how new understandings of "threat" are constructed and how such ideas gain traction[36]. As CSS scholars such as Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) argue, political elites construct threats by declaring an issue an existential threat. These figures produce an image of the enemy that resonates throughout society (Bigo 2002: 63, McCluskey 2019: 10). When studying Canada's right-wing nationalist groups, scholars use narratives focused on intolerance or "hate" and violent extremism to construct right-wing ideas, figures, and/or groups as a threat. Put another way, the issue of right-wing prejudices in Canada has become "securitized", meaning, as McCluskey (2019) argues, the issue is "lifted from the realm of ordinary politics to a type of emergency or panic politics where exceptional measures are justified" (9).[37] Altogether, a CSS analysis identifies how security approaches have influenced dominant understandings of right-

[36] McCluskey (2019), Neocleous (2008), and Neocleous and Rigakos (2011) were particularly influential to my analysis.

[37] Rely on "anti-hate" theories to develop risk management approaches and punitive responses to Canada's nationalist movement.

wing nationalism and the limits of security logic, methods, and analysis for understanding this issue.

Social context: dominant representations of the Canadian yellow vests movement

The yellow vests movement (YVM)[38] is a leaderless grassroots and populist political movement that began in France in November of 2018. Initially, the French movement protested a fuel tax, which they argued would disproportionally affect the middle- and working-class (Willsher 2018). The YVM's first demonstration attracted around 300,000 people across the country and, in 2019, the movement widened its demands for economic justice, attracting support across the political spectrum, including the extreme- left and right (McPartland 2018; Krivokapic & Ganley 2019)[39]. Following weeks of protests, President Emmanuel Macron scrapped the fuel tax and promised tax cuts for pensioners and to increase the minimum wage (France 24 2019). The YVM continues to pressure the French government and has inspired "yellow vests" campaigns in many westernized countries, including Canada (Krivokapic & Ganley 2019).

Canada's yellow vests movement emerged in December of 2018. While the Canadian YVM is grassroots, leaderless, and populist, it lacks the political diversity of the French movement and is exclusively right-wing. The movement represents discontent with establishment politics, is anti-Muslim, promotes Canadian nationalism, and has right-wing extremist elements (such as a neo-Nazi presence). The Canadian YVM is made up of dozens of

[38] Sometimes called the Yellow Jackets Movement.
[39] Business Insider reports that 50,000 people joined the French movement in January 2019 (Krivokapic & Ganley 2019).

on-the-ground grassroots right-wing groups and has attracted thousands of online supporters[40]. During March of 2019, Canada's YVM was represented through over a dozen Facebook groups, which differed in political strategies, priorities, and objectives. Most groups had thousands of online members, and the largest Canadian yellow vests Facebook page once sported 110,000 members[41].

The Canadian Anti-hate Network, as well as several experts and media outlets, have characterized the Canadian yellow vests as foremost a "far-right" or "extremist" movement. While some news reports explore the YVM's political implications and their relationship to mainstream opinion – such as Hames' (2019) report for the CBC titled "Don't dismiss them as 'crackpots'" – most writings on the movement center on public safety risks posed by its supporters, such as hate speech violations, death threats to the Prime Minister, and the YVM's potential to inspire vigilante violence or terrorism. Experts and journalists tend to point to social media comments and white nationalist affiliations as evidence of the movement's violent potential. In multiple reports, Evan Balgord of the Canadian Anti-hate Network foregrounds the YVM's violence, describing the movement as carrying the "greatest potential for radicalization leading to violence" (Mussett 2019), and that they promote "death threats targeting Muslims, politicians, and other Canadians". Balgord explains in another report that "If you go through

[40] Hames (2019), for instance, observes the "muddled message" of Canada's yellow vests rallies, which are organized by multiple and often unconnected right-wing groups. Hames points to how one rally was organized by Rally 4 Resources and Canada Action, advancing a pro-pipeline message, while other rallies were organized by nationalist groups advancing more xenophobic sentiment. Put another way, the yellow vests has no central leadership nor message, instead representing general right-wing discontent with the status quo. I elaborate on these points in the "findings" section.

[41] As of June 20th 2019, the "Yellow Vest Canada" Facebook page had 106, 614 members. The page was in constant battles with Facebook over members posting "hateful" content. The page is also regularly reported and challenged by left-wing activists, especially the group "Yellow Vests Canada Exposed". As of November 8th, 2020, the group's members shrunk to 2,108, likely due to the page being taken down by Facebook and remade by activists (Yellow Vest Canada 2020).

[the YVM's Facebook page] at any given moment, you're going to find anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, you're going to find death threats, you're going to find other calls to violence, racism directed to Muslims — and it doesn't take very long…I found my first death threat in five minutes" (Mosleh 2019). The Canadian Press (2019) explains how one of the YVM's Facebook pages "has been rife with messages advocating or hoping for the prime minister's death" and outlines an incident where a radio host received threats after accusing the Canadian yellow vests of racism. Additionally, multiple news sources cite "Yellow Vests Canada Exposed", a "team of anti-racist researchers" who surveil yellow vests Facebook pages for extreme content (Press Progress 2019). Vice News, for instance, interviewed one of the page administrators, who states that the Canadian YVM is "calling for [the] mass death of an entire religion [Islam]", pointing to Facebook comments (Mussett 2019, see also Bell and Stephenson 2019a, Press Progress 2019). Several other reports present the movement as foremost promoting far-right and extreme racist ideology. The Canadian Anti-hate Network states that the movement "has been entirely co-opted by the far-right including [the] most extreme anti-Muslim groups in Canada" (Blewett 2019, see also Orr 2019). In another report, terrorism analyst Jessica Davis states that "the YV movement in Canada is dominated by the extreme right and has the potential to spin off violent subgroups" (Bell 2019). In a report from *The Star Edmonton,* Balgord states that Canada's yellow vests movement is "a meeting ground for all of the far right … acting like a 'unite the right' kind of thing here in Canada" (Mosleh 2019). Balgord is referring to the American "Unite the Right" event, an openly white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, where marchers brandished Swastikas and chanted "Jews will not replace us" (Wildman 2017). Ameil Joseph, a professor of social science, describes the yellow vests as "a

revisioned white nationalist, white supremacist movement", citing racist online sentiment, and support by anti-Muslim groups and far-right figures (such as white nationalists) (Beattie 2019).

Narratives about right-wing nationalist groups in Canada center on criminal risks and foreground the movement's extreme politics, especially white nationalism. As I have outlined here, this trend is visible in how experts and media discuss the movement's co-opting of the yellow vests aesthetic at the end of 2018. This focus on criminal violence and extreme racist ideology is connected to the dominance of security approaches for understanding right-wing organizing in Canada.

Findings

Canada's yellow vests are an aesthetic rebranding of the Canadian nationalist movement, which represents the entire right-wing spectrum, including far-right and mainstream liberal-conservative viewpoints. During my fieldwork in Alberta, well-established right-wing activists (my participants among them) suddenly dubbed their nationalist protests "yellow vests rallies" and started running "Yellow Vests Canada" social media pages (or similar iterations of that name). These changes caused conflict in the movement while attracting significantly more supporters to my participants' on-the-ground rallies and increased (in some cases, dramatically) their online following. Eight of the twenty rallies I attended mobilized the Yellow Vest aesthetic. Near the end of my fieldwork, the YVM had become a defining feature of right-wing protest in Canada and mostly indistinguishable from the broader Canadian nationalist movement.

This section is guided by the following research question:

How important are vigilante violence and extreme politics (such as white nationalism) to Canadian yellow vests organizers and on-the-ground supporters?

I. Managing vigilante violence (violent extremism)

Contrasting the dominant criminogenic narratives of Canada's yellow vests, my findings suggest that the major nationalist groups organizing these rallies fetishize law and order and are pro-state, pro-police, pro-military, and sometimes even pro-hate speech laws. In other words, violent extremism is antithetical to their goals. Recognizing their role in a broader social movement, right-wing nationalist groups emphasize a narrative of "non-violence" to maintain political legitimacy, with the objective of ultimately *delegating that violence to the state*, such as demanding increased policing and surveillance of certain marginalized groups, such as Muslims or undocumented immigrants. "Non-violence" narratives were common at the yellow vests rallies I attended, where activists handed out pamphlets listing their collective beliefs and demands; at the bottom it reads: "PEACE: This is a peaceful uprising and will not tolerate any abuse or racism, mistreatment or ignorance by authorities, individuals, or other violent groups". In short, Canada's right-wing nationalist groups promote "legitimate" (state) violence but tend to vilify illegitimate (vigilante/criminal) violence.

Of my participants, Mark was the most prominent on-the-ground organizer within Alberta's yellow vests movement, coordinating monthly (and sometimes weekly) rallies in Edmonton and elsewhere. Mark took pride in the lawfulness of his rallies, where he boasted

about notifying the city police of his plans, about how his supporters were nonviolent and respected Canadian law, and about getting city permits for his events. At most rallies, right-wing speakers took the stage to thank the local police for giving up their time and for keeping everyone safe[42]. On cold rally days in the winter, RWAs sometimes offered officers coffee (which they declined to accept). Most of my RWA participants boasted that police, military, ex-police, and ex-military were proud supporters or members of their groups.

Alex was a prominent and controversial figure in the right-wing nationalist movement, having led two different groups during my fieldwork. While his groups were universally described as "extremist", he explained that questions of security were one of the most difficult aspects of organizing a rally, which often involved collaboration with local police:

> I talk to law enforcement, whether it's every second day, every day, and … our rally has a minute-to-minute breakdown of what our schedules are. All of this information gets passed onto law enforcement. And you know, they're well aware of our every move. And I've got a relationship with them that if we have something in our agenda that could cause us legal repercussions *or* as simple as it just being something that could put us on the radar, and not quite be illegal, he [police contact] informs me of that. [. . .] he had suggested that you know, it's not that I, he doesn't like the idea of us protesting a mosque because it could create a hostile environment. Do we have the right to do it? Yes we do.
>
> [. . .]
>
> So, the reason why we didn't [protest] that mosque that day was because of recommendations from law enforcement. So we work with them, we support our law enforcement. We support

[42] Police were present at about half of the 20 rallies I attended.

> the laws and regulations of Canada. So like, even [at the April 30th rally], we had an agenda set – an itinerary set – but, when we showed up there, the situation, the environment was very different from what we expected. So we kind of had to change our plans to [. . .] help public safety. But to also make it like, an easier job on the law enforcement as well, so that … cause they had intel that there was going to be violence brought to us [by antifa].

During rally speeches and interviews, RWAs often contrasted the lawfulness and "civility" of their rallies to the perceived violent, criminalistic, and "uncivilized" protest tactics of their alleged opponents, such as Black Lives Matter and antifa (the latter of which appeared at nearly half of the twenty rallies I attended). RWAs also foregrounded law and order politics to challenge the Canadian media's accusations of violent extremism.

The groups in my sample claimed to reject "extremist" tactics: they did not promote vigilante violence and viewed such strategies as threatening the legitimacy of the Canadian nationalist movement or the "yellow vests". RWA leaders I interviewed vilified other right-wing group's behaviours that were seen to cross the line of Canadian law and civility. In the following excerpt, Alex critiques another group for conducting "surveillance" on a local mosque:

> Justin: So watching the mosques, you didn't think it was effective [for the movement]?
> Alex: Well I just don't think that, you know, you're well aware that we ride a fine line with being a – well we call ourselves a nationalist group. Sometimes we're called far-right, extreme right, whatever. We're constantly facing an image thing. And to me, standing in front of a mosque is more of a bully tactic. Do they deserve that treatment? Absolutely they do. But, is it actually

> helping our movement? Is it helping get the word out there? I personally don't think it's doing anything. I think it's just bringing some negative attention against the whole movement.

Nearly all RWAs frowned upon vigilante and intimidation tactics, which they viewed as ineffective and harmful to the movement. While Alex originally criticized such strategies, yellow vests organizers later barred his group from events for intimidating a local mosque. At a rally days later, Gani, a central organizer and one of the few prominent people of colour in the movement said to me: "I don't know why [Alex] and those guys do stuff like that. We're not here to threaten people. This is a nonviolence movement. That's the job of the police, not us".

While violent extremism is certainly not absent within the nationalist movement, vigilantism was relatively unimportant if not irrelevant to my sample. Ethnographic approaches can reveal how nationalist movements do boundary work, such as setting the parameters for legitimate protest tactics. Exploring how nationalist groups frame illegitimate tactics used by affiliated groups (such as intimidation and threats) is also revealing of how movements imagine themselves, and their successes and failures. In this case, the broader movement's rejection of the mosque intimidation tactic furthers the movement's ideological commitment to statism and legitimate (state) violence.

My findings also reveal how security discourse is central for helping legitimize right-wing intolerance. Participants rationalized their fear of groups such as Muslims, immigrants, Black Lives Matter, and antifa using security logic, as they constructed such groups as a criminal risk to Canadian society. Moreover, RWAs sometimes pointed to hate crime and hate speech laws to disavow their proximity to the "real" hate groups, stating that "Canada has a whole system

for dealing with that sort of thing". In other words, RWAs mobilized law and order politics to explain how the "actual" right-wing racists were extremists committing hate crimes and hate speech violations. Put another way, RWAs rationalize their intolerance of Islam and other groups as "common sense" if we want to "protect" women, Jews, LGBTQ* people, and Canadians generally. Shawn led at least two different nationalist groups throughout my fieldwork, and as he put it: "I'd be tolerant of Islam but Canadians are dying [being killed by Muslims]".

II. Managing extreme ideas and the yellow vests shift

While many scholars and media outlets foreground the Canadian nationalist movement's extreme politics, such as white nationalism, my findings suggest that far-right, ethnonationalist ideas are not generalizable across the movement (at least in Alberta). Instead, there are stark ideological tensions and most nationalist groups – especially the more successful ones – reject ethnonationalist expressions (such as white nationalism) as morally wrong, "un-Canadian", and as counter-productive.

Of my participants, 10 of 42 supported explicitly ethnonationalist groups that promoted far-right ideas, such as racializing globalism as a Jewish conspiracy against White Canadians. I dub these participants "far-right activists" (FRAs). FRAs differed significantly from the "mainstream" right-wing nationalist movement in their structure and framing strategies. FRA groups in my sample were insular, intensely skeptical of other activists and groups, and much less visible or public. The three FR events and meetings I attended were highly secretive.

Participants shared the location of such events with me hours before it started as to prevent unwanted attention by leftist activists and (to a lesser extent) law enforcement. One event was held in a hotel in a small town roughly two hours outside of Edmonton. FRA participants supported fewer groups (if any), and instead favoured individual far-right figures (such as certain authors, far-right journalists or personalities, or political candidates). While some FRAs attended "the odd [right-wing] rally" in Alberta, they constantly expressed their disappointment with the Canadian nationalist movement and did not identify with any RWA group. All far-right participants expressed how Canadians are not receptive to white nationalism. I discussed this with Jean, an extremely talkative forty-nine-year-old French-Canadian man working in a unionized trade. He asked me if he was "more radical" than others I had interviewed, to which I agreed, explaining that I would characterize his views as "far-right". He responded that his politics would be not be considered so extreme were he living in Europe. Most FRAs viewed Canada as "beyond saving", a sentiment which translated into their activism. Jean, for instance, did not trust "public" right-wing groups, believing them to be infiltrated by Jews. Instead, Jean viewed his activist-role as an "educator", converting people through conversation or other means – such as leaving anti-Semitic materials, such as *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, in public places. Preston, a life-long FRA, shared similar skepticism of public groups and preferred influencing people through online forums and his personal website. He too, would hand out business cards directing people to his content.

A handful of RWA leaders I interviewed sympathized with ethnonationalist views, but did not foreground such ideas through their group communications nor at rallies. Dylan, for example, was involved in activism for two years upon me interviewing him and founded the

anti-Muslim group, Rebel Infidel Federation[43] (RIF). The RIF was one of the largest and most prominent nationalist groups predating the yellow vests, hosting regular rallies in Western Canada and with over 13,000 Facebook members. Dylan was one of the only participants to (explicitly) identify as a white nationalist. Despite his beliefs, he expressed the futility of growing such a movement in Canada, telling me that "we need to deal with Islam before we start talking about that kind of stuff". A major aspect of right-wing activism and source of frustration for my participants involved managing extreme content and policing users on their yellow vests' social media pages (particularly on Facebook). I asked Dylan about how he handled "extreme views" on his group's Facebook page. He responded as follows:

> Dylan: Ugh [I have to deal with that] all the time. All the time man. Like, the worst is the hardcore white supremacist Nazi types that are in there [our Facebook page]. That just hate Jews. And then there's a lot of pro-Israel people and people from Israel posting Israel stuff. And then they start attacking them. You know? Or people that, you know, there's some people that don't like Hindus either, they'll say "Hindus are bad". And they [white supremacists] just attack them [Hindus]. So a lot of the time, I just try to tell them to just forget all that shit. Like, look at what's your main threat right now. Focus on that. Because for example, the KKK, if they channeled all of their hatred on Islam, they'd be pretty useful. But it's because they hate all these other people too, it's like, you can't really work with them, right?
>
> [. . .]

[43] Group and participant names are pseudonyms.

> Some of these groups are just too extreme and that's why they never go anywhere. Nobody takes the KKK seriously anymore because they're not, you know. And there's not enough white people in the world to fight Islam alone, you know? That's the way I look at it.

Dylan embraced ethnic diversity within his group as a political tool to gain supporters. He explained how the RIF garnered support from a local Nigerian Christian church, and how the RIF collaborated with a Canadian Zionist group and a conservative Chinese Canadian group. Nearly all RWAs dismissed extreme-racist groups as "a joke", "useless", "completely out of touch", and/or "giving us a bad rep". While RWAs tended to allow white nationalists into their online pages (although this is sometimes beyond their control), most expressed how they rejected such ideas and discouraged their members from voicing such opinions in public and online, as it repelled potential supporters such as moderate conservatives, LGBTQ* people, and people of colour.

The increased public and media attention from the yellow vests shift heightened existing tensions within the movement, particularly around gatekeeping and managing ethnonationalist expressions. Yellow vests rallies served as both a source of unity and infighting. Nationalist groups created coalitions under the yellow vests umbrella, which also led to factional disputes, as groups constantly fought over which coalitions represented the "official" yellow vests movement in Alberta. For example, my participants organized a well-attended yellow vests rally during December of 2018, which featured multiple local conservative groups united under the yellow vests umbrella, including rally newcomers, the Patriotic Canadians Party (PCP) [pseudonym]. When handed the microphone, the PCP leader

made explicit ethnonationalist and anti-immigrant comments, which – drawing cheers from a few – stirred palpable discomfort in the larger audience. A bystander near me turned to her friend: "yeah, this is a little extreme, let's go". Multiple supporters and onlookers walked away during the speech. Organizers, such as Benjamin, made a habit of standing in the audience, among "the people", and commented on this moment:

> I mean it's [the yellow vests shift] been good for us, but also a mess, you know? Like, now we have all these new pages and people and thinking they're leaders and that. And some of them are great, don't get me wrong, but like, some of them don't know what they're doing, and yeah. So I've had to do a lot more micromanaging and all that … ton of work.

Major media outlets also covered the rally, highlighting the PCP's anti-immigrant rhetoric. Local organizers demonized the PCP and barred them from attending further yellow vests rallies. For example, one of the most prominent leaders in Alberta, Larry, accused the PCP of trying to sabotage the movement and told his followers that Jared, the PCP leader, has affiliations with the Muslim Brotherhood, alluding to the conspiracy theory that globalists are working with Muslims to undermine Westernized countries. I asked Jared about this accusation against him:

> Jared: Yes, the far-right has been attacking us for over two years now, they attacked us at the last rally.
>
> Justin: Right, and can you explain that to me? How did that happen?

> Jared: Well they were calling us names. And the one guy [Larry] did a video, and he's tied to Scheer [leader of the Conservative Party of Canada], the globalist conservatives, which I think is pretty accurate. And now they're trying to paint us as white supremacists. Before they were trying to paint us as Muslim Brotherhood. They view [the PCP] as a threat to them. So our biggest threat right now is far right. Because some of these people are not mentally stable. And they're violent. Antifa is nothing compared to them.

While Jared accused Larry and others of being "far-right", his group's politics were more extreme than his opponents, as he openly promotes the "white genocide" conspiracy theory and the PCP seeks to "preserve" Canada's European heritage. The PCP incident served as a catalyst for tighter management of the yellow vests' image in Alberta. For example, in my early fieldwork, organizers offered an "open mic" at the end of their events but stopped doing so to prevent random supporters from making controversial or explicitly racist statements that could attract negative media attention.

Altogether, the yellow vests shift exacerbated the movement's ideological tensions and the management of those tensions. In other words, it became clear to leading organizers in Alberta that mainstream ideas around civic nationalism were the best way to grow the movement, as opposed to appealing to far-right ethnonationalism.

SECTION III: discussion and conclusion

Discussion: thinking beyond security

Researchers should apply the labels "violent extremist" or "far-right" with caution. Outlining a movement's connections to extreme ideas, figures (such as white nationalists), and vigilantism might be helpful for practitioners, but it says little about mobilization and what draws people to participate in the movement.

While security approaches can be appropriate for policing extreme politics and violence, they are methodologically limited for analyzing right-wing groups *as a larger social movement*, for the following reasons:

1) ***Security approaches analyze movement protest tactics with risk management in mind, which can exaggerate the importance of violence and criminality to the broader movement.*** By design, security approaches are interested in the risk of criminal activity by members of the right-wing groups they study. While politically charged crimes such as hate speech, threats, hate crime, and white terrorism are valid concerns, such acts are likely insignificant if not antithetical to the broader movement's goal of attaining public legitimacy. Moreover, my case study reveals how fixating on violent extremism can obfuscate significant trends in the movement, such as how right-wing nationalist groups in Canada embrace law and order politics and use such ideas to grow the movement.

Ethnographic approaches do not privilege the study nor prevention of any protest tactic. An ethnographic approach inquiring about violence as a protest tactic would interrogate how that act is interpreted by members of the broader movement, rather than developing ways to prevent that violence. As my case study shows, discussing protest tactics (such as intimidating a mosque) can reveal how movements do boundary work, as well as how they understand their successes, failures, and their intended audiences.

2) ***Security approaches interpret right-wing political ideology through the lens of risk, making their analyses focus more on overtly prejudiced statements and symbols characteristic of more extreme (that is, "risky") politics, such as white nationalism. This can distort analysis by exaggerating the role of far-right ideas in the movement.*** Security approaches are interested in risk management and pre-determined policy outcomes related to extremism and consequently rely on "top-down" pre-conceived, operationalized concepts and typologies that are useful for practitioners, such as using legal or law enforcement definitions (hate speech, hate crime, hate group, terrorism), and/or broad scholarly or CVE conceptualizations of "far-right" or "right-wing extremism". Critics of counterterrorism research have made similar critiques of what they call "identity-fixing", where security researchers impose suspicion-laden identities on their subjects, indicating their potential for risky behaviours (Pettinger 2020: 133). This can encourage writers to lump right-wing and far-right politics and groups together based on their ostensible "risk" of extremism (such as analyzing sovereign citizens and

neo-Nazis together, see Perry & Scrivens 2019). Moreover, the combined practices of scanning for risky statements, relying on operationalized and inflexible concepts, and focusing on the public transcript can encourage textual poaching and question-begging. In other words, writers and researchers can scour right-wing groups' public transcript to justify a "far-right" or "extremist" label and/or affirm established trends in the literature or in media narratives. Altogether, security research is more likely to overlook contradictions and unexpected aspects of right-wing movements that challenge dominant understandings of extremism and other core concepts. My case study illustrates how security experts inform mainstream discourse on the Canadian nationalist movement, where experts and journalists struggle to discuss the movement outside of extreme racism.

Ethnographic approaches (ideally) interpret right-wing politics without preconceived objectives or outcomes, facilitating a more exploratory approach that is ideal for understudied movements. Ethnographic approaches develop concepts and theory through data collection, rather than sorting data into pre-existing categories and ideas. This fluid method of analysis and conceptualization might not satisfy all practitioners, but leaves room for the nuances, trends, and surprises that emerge in data collection and fieldwork.

Despite the growing scholarly and media attention to right-wing nationalist groups in Canada and abroad, right-wing organizations are severely understudied. Even more nebulous is how

and why these groups coalesce as a broader social movement, and the consequences of such a development. This phenomenon resists the neat classifications (such as "violent extremist" and "far-right") and generalizable theories characteristic of security approaches.

As my case study illustrates, foregrounding the movement's extreme elements and labelling the YVM "far-right" or "extremist" somewhat obfuscates the political successes of the movement, which arguably have little to do with violent extremism and white nationalist ideology. Identifying the movement's connections to extreme racists does not explain why the YVM's messages have cultural resonance. Moreover, the effort to highlight the most extreme statements of the movement rather than the more common prosaic elements also fits into a media template focused on outliers and sensationalism, giving extreme voices a more significant profile than they might otherwise have.

Conclusion: understudied and over-theorized

My case study of the Canadian yellow vests reveals how dominant narratives and research – by fixating on security threats – can overlook important nuances in how right-wing social movements work. In Canada, most active – and especially influential – nationalist (or yellow vests) groups are not violent extremists nor white nationalists, despite nearly all being labelled as such by security-centric experts and media narratives. By contrast, my semi-ethnographic approach suggests that (perhaps ironically,) security discourse is central to the Canadian nationalist/yellow vests movement, with RWAs using law and order politics to legitimize their views as "non-violent" and racially colour-blind, while calling for increased legitimate (state)

violence against Muslims, refugees, and other marginalized groups. As McCluskey (2019) argues, nationalist politics can be highly attractive not because of fringe ideologies such as Nazism, but more mainstream reactionary logics, such as securitization. Security logic – as an extension of hegemonic legal discourse and the status quo – has the added benefit of being represented as neutral, natural, or "common sense", rather than ideological or "far-right"[44]. More attention is needed to the mundane and liberal politics of right-wing nationalist movements.

There is a growing tendency among scholars of right-wing politics to *presuppose* the political ideology and criminal potential of the groups they are studying, a trend which I have partially attributed to the growing influence of security approaches. For instance, there is a significant methodological difference between research that declares "I am going to study right-wing group X" versus security approaches that declare "I am going to study right-wing extremist groups". More and more researchers rely on the explanatory power of loaded concepts such as "far-right" and "extremism", and many writers appear more committed to reproducing dominant theories rather than challenging or complicating them. This is a problem because most right-wing groups are understudied, increasing the chances for empirically unfounded and thus inaccurate statements, generalizations, and theories. Is it intellectually fruitful, for instance, to analyze Canadian anti-Muslim groups and neo-Nazi groups together when they

[44] For example, there is mounting evidence that far-right politics are attractive to people with security-based careers, such as police, corrections, and military – and far-right recruiters are aware of this (Lamoureux 2017, Lamoureux & Makuch 2019, Speri 2017, Bell & Stephenson 2019b, Waterfield 2019, Associated Press 2019, Rahim 2019). In a media interview with Beau Welling, the (ex-)leader of the Alberta III%, an anti-Muslim militia group, Hutter (2017) reports that Welling maintains contact with the RCMP about policing Islamic extremists, that the militia group has "close ties to law enforcement" and that some members are police. Hutter states that the RCMP refused to address the claims of its involvement in the III% when approached by CBC news.

have different political goals, activism styles, movement structure, and public appeal? Neo-Nazis' objective of "re-taking" the Canadian government from "Jewish control", for instance, typically begins from a different political foundation and demands different types of activism than groups advocating for a government crackdown on Muslim immigrants. Canadian neo-Nazi groups also attract less diverse supporters than anti-Islam groups, the latter of which can include mainstream politicians, people of colour, and Zionists (PEGIDA Canada 2019). Finally, anti-Islam rhetoric has substantial legitimacy in Canadian political discourse compared to neo-Nazi ideology, raising the question: can overstating extremism be politically harmful? It is politically useful to present Canadian anti-Muslim groups as "far-right" and "right-wing extremist" when nearly half of Canadians hold anti-Muslim attitudes[45]? By representing almost all expressions of Canadian right-wing nationalism through the criminogenic language of "extremism", scholars risk reproducing the nationalist fiction of Canada's moral exceptionalism: that Canada has mostly conquered racism and need only concern itself with a handful of risky white nationalist fringe groups and individuals. A more diverse and non-loaded lexicon is required to better understand and respond to right-wing nationalism in all of its forms.

Security approaches, such as CVE research, can be useful for policing right-wing political violence. However, because such approaches are inherently interested in risky ideas and

[45] A 2017 Angus Reid poll showed that almost half (46%) of Canadians think Islam is "damaging" Canadian society (Angus Reid 2017). A 2018 Forum Research Poll showed that half of Canadians disapprove of designating January 29th a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia (Braun 2018). Another 40% of respondents strongly disapproved of the designation. In 2015, the reigning Conservative Party vowed to establish a RCMP "barbaric cultural practices" tip line targeting Canadian Muslims (Andrew-Gee 2015), and their federal election campaign promoted a niqab ban, a policy proposal supported by 82% of Canadians (Beeby 2015). In early 2016, a petition titled "Stop resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada" garnered almost 50,000 signatures (Care2 Petitions 2016). Opinion polls from the Angus Reid Institute showed that 44% of Canadians oppose the plan to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees before the end of February 2016. The study also indicated that 42% of respondents want Canada to stop receiving Syrian refugees all together, while 29% said that Canada should stop at 25,000 (Reuters 2016).

actions articulated as “extremism” – they are limited for understanding how right-wing groups operate as a political movement seeking legitimacy. Ethnographic methods are an effective tool for capturing the fluid structure, contradictions, rapid changes, unanticipated elements, and mainstream appeal that increasingly characterizes contemporary right-wing nationalist movements.

Chapter Five
The Liberalism of Right-wing Populism: A Semi-ethnographic Case Study of Canada's Yellow Vests Movement

Introduction

Popular discourse in many Westernized countries present Canada as a "political utopia" or "progressive paradise" (The Intercept 2019). In 2016, the Social Progress Index rated Canada the second most progressive country in the world, lauding its tolerance and "multicultural model" (Canada is currently ranked 7th as of 2020, Social Progress Index 2020) (Cecco 2016, Sundstrom 2016). The US News and Report's "Best Country" list has ranked Canada in second place for three years in a row, similarly citing the country's reputation for welcoming immigrants and how Canadians "pride themselves in encouraging all of their citizens to honor their own cultures" (Joseph 2018). Many writers also celebrate Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's agenda and celebrity. Beauchamp (2016) of *Vox* writes that Trudeau represents the vision of Canada as "an open, tolerant, progressive beacon for the rest of the world". Writing for *France 24*, Trian (2019) describes Trudeau's reputation as the "poster-boy" of progressives.

Many have cited Canada as a "moral leader", "beacon of multiculturalism", and "shining example" of how to resist the rise of right-wing populism represented by figures such as the USA's Donald Trump, France's Marie La Pen, and the UK's Nigel Farage (Kristof 2019, Immigration.ca 2016). Political scientist Woodfinden (2019) writes in *The American Interest*: "Canada's post-national identity makes it immune to populist politics". McParland (2019) of the *National Post* argues that "reactionary populism will fizzle in Canada". Taub (2017), writing for the *New York Times,* points to Canadian multiculturalism and the country's geographical

location as being an effective deterrent against the right-wing populist wave (see also Thompson 2018). Some also point to the Trudeau administration as a source of hope. Writing for *The Washington Post*, Tharoor (2016) calls Trudeau the "anti-Trump". Wherry (2017) of *CBC News* describes the Prime Minister as "perhaps the last major progressive leader on Earth" (Wherry 2017). Experts on right-populism echo some of these sentiments. Leading Canadian scholars Perry, Mirrlees, and Scrivens (2019) argue that Canadians are "averse to the kind of cultural chauvinism and xenophobia" characteristic of Trump supporters and other RWP movements (67). Ambrose and Mudde (2015) proclaim the "absence" of a right-wing populist and racist movements in Canada, championing federal multiculturalism as a bulwark against the kind of politics that typically define contemporary right-wing populism.

Is Canada's civic and multicultural identity really the antithesis of chauvinist nationalism and right-wing populism? Contrary to Canada's benevolent international reputation, Canadians have demonstrated increasingly exclusionary politics over the last decade consistent with right-wing populist thinking. According to at least one poll, roughly half of Canadians hold anti-Muslim attitudes and oppose refugee resettlement in the country,[46] feel "fearful and

[46] A 2017 Angus Reid poll showed that almost half (46%) of Canadians think Islam is "damaging" Canadian society (Angus Reid 2017). A 2018 Forum Research Poll showed that half of Canadians disapprove of designating January 29th a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia (Braun 2018). Another 40% of respondents strongly disapproved of the designation. In 2015, the reigning Conservative Party vowed to establish a RCMP "barbaric cultural practices" tip line targeting Canadian Muslims (Andrew-Gee 2015), and their federal election campaign promoted a niqab ban, a policy proposal supported by 82% of Canadians (Beeby 2015). In early 2016, a petition titled "Stop resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada" garnered almost 50,000 signatures (Care2 Petitions 2016). Opinion polls from the Angus Reid Institute showed that 44% of Canadians oppose the plan to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees before the end of February 2016. The study also indicated that 42% of respondents want Canada to stop receiving Syrian refugees all together, while 29% said that Canada should stop at 25,000 (Reuters 2016). According to a 2019 Ipsos poll, almost half of Canadians (47%) believe it's okay and normal to have racist thoughts. The same poll revealed that approximately three in ten Canadians believe that Muslims follow Shariah law instead of Canadian law, and that two in ten Canadians believe Jewish people control Canada's financial system and media (Elliot 2019).

frustrated" about their future prospects (45%) (Proudfoot 2019), consider scientists "elitist" (44%) and only trust science that confirms their beliefs (30%) (Weber 2019), and are increasingly critical of immigration (Subramanian 2020) and federal multiculturalism (Todd 2017, Selley 2010, Canseco 2019). While most writers remain optimistic about Canadian progressivism, some have speculated about a potential wave of right-wing populism in the country. Most pieces measure Canadian politics against Western European trends and/or present right-wing populism as a *foreign* threat, characterizing it as a "toxic" "political virus" that Canada is not "immune" from and is in danger of catching from other countries (Kolga 2019, Woodfinden 2019, McParland 2019, Geddes 2019, Thomson 2019). Writing for *The Star*, Kolga (2019) writes that the right-wing nationalist People's Party of Canada "seems to be ripped directly out of the European populist playbook" and that the Canadian Soldiers of Odin (a far-right nationalist group) "has links to Russian government backed terrorists operating in Eastern Ukraine". Writing for CTV News, Aiello (2021) warns that right-wing extremism is "migrating north". Many writers and experts characterize Canadian right-wing populism as "Trumpism", as though such politics exist outside of Canadian culture. Bulgutch (2019) of *The Star* asks Canadians to "resist importing toxic Trumpism" (see also Geddes 2019). In a piece for *Al Jazeera,* Mitrovica (2018) argues that the "Trump virus" has spread to Canada. Experts such as Perry, Mirrlees, and Scrivens (2019) and Dunsworth (2016) characterize right-wing populism in Canada as synonymous with "Trumpism". Continuing with the virus metaphor, Perry and Scrivens (2018) characterize Trumpism as: "when the US sneezes, Canada catches a cold" (184).

While discussions about Canada's relationship to international trends is important, popular and scholarly discourse tends to implicitly disavow how right-wing populism can stem

from Canadian culture and political traditions, such as civic pride and multiculturalism. With the discussion centred on Donald Trump and/or Western Europe, few experts and journalists interrogate what is different or unique about Canadian right-wing politics. The dominant fixation on global political trends has obfuscated how right-wing populism in Canada is foremost a grassroots movement that relies heavily on liberal ideas, including tolerance and multiculturalism. This contrasts the dominant scholarly and popular narrative of right-wing populism as inherently ethnonationalist, illiberal, and as a "top-down affair", where right-wing political parties lead the movement to reap electoral benefits (Aslanidis 2017). In other words, writers and experts tend to rely on a characterization of right-wing populism premised on Western European party politics, sometimes failing to capture the unique situation in Canada (and likely other national contexts).

My research question is as follows:

How do right-wing yellow vests organizers and supporters in Alberta represent Canadian nationalism and nationalist grievances?

In this essay, I use an ethnographic case study of Canada's right-wing nationalist movement and its co-opting of the "yellow vests" aesthetic to show how the "Canadian values" of civic pride and tolerance can be used to advance right-wing populist politics. My findings reveal 1) how dominant understandings of right-wing populism are Eurocentric (hence the fixation on ethnonationalism); and 2) the popular affinity for liberal ideals among scholars affects their

ability to interrogate how liberalism and civic pride manifests in right-wing populist movements (which is essential for understanding the Canadian movement).

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork among Canada's right-wing nationalist movement in Alberta from 2017-2020[47], and the groups I interacted with co-opted the yellow vests aesthetic in December of 2018. Well-established right-wing activists in Alberta suddenly dubbed their nationalist protests "yellow vests rallies" and started running "Yellow Vests Canada" social media pages. These changes attracted significantly more supporters to my participants' physical rallies and increased (in some cases, dramatically) their online following. My findings on the yellow vests demonstrate the primacy of civic nationalism over ethnic nationalism in Canada and the potential power of civic nationalism to advance right-wing interests (such as anti-refugee, anti-green, and anti-Muslim politics). My data consists of 35 semi-structured interviews with 42 Canadian right-wing activists (RWAs), and over 40 hours of observational fieldwork at 20 conservative political rallies and meetings, almost all of which were organized by my participants. Eight of those rallies mobilized the yellow vests aesthetic.

Section I of this paper reviews dominant conceptualizations of right-wing populism and research on right-wing populism in Canada. In Section II, I outline 1) the "thin ideology" of populism in the yellow vests movement; and 2) the "thick ideology" of Canadian civic nationalism, showing how right-wing activists mobilize liberal civic principles, particularly "tolerance". In Section III, I discuss how my findings reveal the ethnocentrism and liberal biases around dominant theories of right-wing populism.

[47] I ended my fieldwork shortly before the COVID-19 outbreak.

My findings suggest that, contrary to scholarly theories and popular belief, multiculturalism and civic pride can serve as fertile ground for chauvinist nationalism and right-wing populism. Canada's nationalist movement represents a long tradition of right-wing and fascist groups successfully capitalizing on the real inequalities of society while co-opting nebulous liberal ideas to grow the movement, such as mobilizing discourses of free speech, free press, freedom, democracy, in/tolerance, security, human rights, inequality, and justice. My findings reveal the limits of using liberal terminology to both study and challenge the contemporary political Right, suggesting a stronger need to interrogate liberalism's role in right-wing movements and how liberal hegemony affects scholarship on the topic.

Methodology

I compiled contemporary and dominant research theorizing right-wing populism and engaged in a systematic literature review of this work. Through these reviews I identify the trend toward defining right-wing populism as inherently ethnonationalist, illiberal, and far-right, which I outline in Section I.

My findings section relies on ethnographic data consisting of 35 semi-structured interviews with 42 Canadian right-wing activists (RWAs) (ten of which I consider "far-right" or white nationalist activists)[48], and over 40 hours of observational fieldwork at 20 conservative political rallies and meetings, almost all of which were hosted by my participants. Four

[48] I also conducted four interviews with ex-racist skinheads (not included in these numbers), two counter-extremist experts (one in law enforcement and the other in policy), and one anti-racist activist who runs a blog that surveils Canada's right-wing movements. This blog is mentioned in almost half of my interviews.

interviews featured two people, and one interview featured three people. Of my sample, three participants were women, and 39 were men. All RWAs were white, except for three who identified as Indigenous (two of the three were white passing and identified as Métis). I usually conducted the interviews in coffee shops or restaurants but organized four interviews over the phone, and one over the video conference call application Zoom. Interviews ranged from one hour to over three hours, but typically lasted around 90 minutes.

To identify my sample, I began with a fluid definition of "right-wing" and "nationalism". I define my sample population as right-wing activists (RWAs), referring to people who identify as "conservative" or "right-wing', "nationalists" or "patriots", and who I identify as "activists"[49]. I began by examining social media groups which self-identified as "nationalist" and "patriot", or groups identified as "right-wing extremists" or "hate groups" in mainstream discourse (such as news stories or scholarly reports). While I relied on participants' self-identification as "conservative" for the purposes of recruitment, I developed my own conceptualizations of their politics based on scholarship and participants' relationship to Canadian political culture. For instance, almost all respondents accepted the label "conservative", despite sometimes *radical* variations in their philosophies. Other participants refused all labels and/or rejected the "left-right" distinction entirely[50].

[49] While there were hundreds of Canadian nationalist groups on sites like Facebook, my definition of activism does not include people or groups that operate exclusively online. All RWAs in my sample have recently organized or attended rallies or other political events associated with their online group.

[50] For example, one RWA explained that his group were "simply patriots speaking truth to power". Additionally, some respondents could not articulate how their ideas fit within Canadian political culture. For instance, one participant asked me if he was "more radical" than others I had interviewed, to which I agreed, explaining that I would characterize his views as "far-right". He responded that his politics would be not be considered so extreme were he living in Europe.

My method for conceptualizing Canada's nationalist groups can be called a "bottom-up" approach, where I develop categories of groups or activists through accumulating ethnographic interactions, interviews, and observations, rather than the top-down method of sorting activist groups and figures into ready-made and inflexible categories. Many of my participants do not fit neatly into terms such as "conservative" or "far-right", as I explore in the findings section (section III).

Before each interview, I outlined that I was a PhD student conducting the study as part of my dissertation. I assured participants that my research was independent, and that I was not affiliated with any political group or institution. I explained that the purpose of my project was to "understand what it's like to be a conservative activist in [year]" and that I was interested their politics, and their personal experiences as an activist. After explaining the project, I outlined the interview process, describing it as an "informal conversation" that usually lasts around one hour. I asked participants if I could audio-record the conversation for note-taking purposes and then outlined the transcription process. All participants, except for two, consented to being audio-recorded[51]. Finally, I explained that participants' identity and group affiliations would remain anonymous. All individual and groups names in this essay are pseudonyms. I transcribed the interviews verbatim and thematically coded them using Nvivo Pro 11. Some themes I coded for included topics such as "race and ethnicity", "organizing rallies", "globalism", "law enforcement", "antifa", and "Canadian identity".

[51] One participant declined to have a conversation, opting instead to respond to my questions in writing (through email).

I used a generalized prompt guide to ensure consistency in my interviews. My questions were open-ended, allowing me to gauge participants' interests, especially in the project's early stages. Interviews centered on participants' personal beliefs, and their experiences in Canada's right-wing movement. More specifically, I asked participants how they became involved in activism, how they labelled their politics, and which political issues were most important to them. I probed about the risks of being an activist (such as those related to hate speech laws, and how their activism affects personal relationships), and how participants navigate negative representations of their ideas, and unwanted labels of the groups that they belong to (such as "racists", "Nazis", etcetera). Discussions about negative labels often revolved around the perceived failures of Canadian news media, and rampant "political correctness". This allowed me to inquire about which information sources my participants trusted. Finally, I asked about Canadian identity and values, which allowed me to probe about race and multiculturalism, their views on Canada's political parties, and right-wing populism abroad (such as France's National Rally and the Trump administration).

Attending rallies served as an opportunity to recruit participants and to supplement my interview data. After rallies I took ethnographic fieldnotes detailing the events. These notes sometimes informed the content of my interviews, where I often asked participants about their rallies and what took place. Attending rallies also served as an opportunity to confirm what was said in interviews. In other words, did participants practice (at rallies) what they preached (in interviews)? The findings section is informed by both interview data and my ethnographic fieldnotes from the rallies.

Altogether, my analysis compares dominant arguments found in the literature reviews on "right-wing populism" to my ethnographic findings on the Canadian yellow vests movement.

SECTION I: literature review

Dominant definitions of right-wing populism: ethnonationalist, illiberal, far-right

The most popular definition of populism by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), conceptualizes it as a political discourse defined by antagonism between "the elites" and "the people" (5). They argue that populism is a "thin ideology" that complements "thick" political ideologies such as socialism or right-wing nationalism (6). I adopt this basic definition of populism in my analysis. While much work on populism centers on Western Europe, scholars have adapted theories of populism to suit international differences, such as left-wing populist presidents and right-wing ethnonationalists in parts of Latin America, to Trump-style right-wing populism in the United States. Nonetheless, Western European models tend to serve as the foundation for theorizing right-wing populism. Dominant narratives also tend to view populism as an "exclusively top-down affair" where political parties use anti-elitism to reap electoral benefits (Aslanidis 2017, see also Meade 2020). Scholarly work on grassroots or "bottom-up" populism is extremely limited and existing works on grassroots organizing center on left-wing populist social movements (de Cleen 2017).

Research on right-wing populism centers on ethnonationalism and is typically intertwined with discussions about extreme racist groups. Crowley (2020) characterizes right-

wing populist leaders as “ethnonationalist entrepreneurs” (137). In de Cleen’s (2017) analysis of right-wing populism’s relationship to nationalism, he argues that at “the very core of radical right politics is an exclusionary ethnic-cultural nationalism” (de Cleen 2017: page). The most popular academic definition of RWP comes from Dutch political scientist Cass Mudde (2019: 25), who argues that right-wing populism makes up one of two major subgroups under the umbrella concept “far-right”, the other subgroup being extreme racist organizations (such as fascists, neo-Nazis, etcetera). Mudde (2019) argues the “ultimate goal” of the populist radical right is an “ethnocracy”, meaning:

> . . . a democracy in which citizenship is based on ethnicity. It wants to (re)create this monocultural state by closing the borders to immigrants and giving “aliens” a choice between assimilation or repatriation. Those who are unwilling to assimilate, that is, become “native,” must be expelled to the country they (or their ancestors) came from (27).

While Mudde (2019) acknowledges disagreements as to what constitutes “ethnicity” in the movement, this definition posits ethnonationalism as the foundation of RWP. Mudde (2019) also suggests that RWP is ill/anti-liberal as it “fundamentally challenges key institutions and values of liberal democracy, including minority rights, rule of law, and separation of powers” (28, 29).

Many scholars use the concept of ethnonationalism to distinguish right-wing populists and extreme racists from the liberal or civic centre, reminiscent of the traditional ethnic versus civic nationalist dichotomy. Civic nationalism is a liberal interpretation of nationhood, asserting

that the nation be composed of people who subscribe to a political creed, thus (in theory) transcending race, ethnicity, and religion, etcetera. As liberal philosopher and former leader of the Liberal Party of Canada Michael Ignatieff (1993) explains: "This nationalism is called civic because it envisages the nation as a community of equal, rights-bearing citizens, united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values" (6-7). Historically, scholars used the concept to characterize the "good" nationalisms of Western Europe as completely civic, liberal, and democratic, contrasting the "bad" "Eastern" nationalisms as ethnic, irrational, and authoritarian (dubbed "ethnic nationalism") (Trautsch 2019: 7). Today, many scholars use the concept "ethnic" or "ethno-" nationalism to present right-wing populism as deviating from – if not antithetical to – civic nationalism. For example, in the concluding chapter of *Civic Nationalisms in Global Perspective*, Beiner (2019) explains how the "rise of the populist right" represents "subordination of the civic by the ethnic" (200, 209). He explains that "nativism and tribalistic cultural and ethnic animosities are a perennial threat to civic life" – suggesting such conflicts are separate from civic principles (209). Similarly, Trautsch cites the Trump Presidency, Brexit, and other right-wing movements as evidence of "ethnic animosities … trump[ing] civic solidarity" (1). Altogether, much dominant scholarship suggests that right-wing populism inherently opposes or exists outside of civic principles that define mainstream liberalism.

Social context: right-wing populism in Canada

Unlike other westernized countries, Canadian right-wing populist movements do not have a strong tradition of mobilizing ethnonationalist sentiment (apart from Quebec politics), likely

due in part to the country's commitment to civic national identity and multiculturalism. While ethnic definitions of Canadian identity spanned most of the country's history, characterized by struggles over biculturalism and bilingualism between white French and British Canada, since the 1960s the country has yielded its ethnic binational character to a civic definition of Canadian identity (see Igartua 2006, Chennells 2001, Grant 2017; see also Harrison 1995: 91). Canada's commitment to civic nationalism is epitomized by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's statements in 2015, declaring that Canada could be the world's first "postnational state . . . there is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada" (Foran 2017)[52].

Compared to Trudeau's statements, Canadian conservatives tend to acknowledge the reality of "Canadian values" as privileging Westernized (Judeo-Christian) cultures, liberal ideology, and capitalism. Canada's conservative parties support federal multiculturalism but also tend to be more chauvinistic about national identity, promoting their values as morally superior. For instance, conservatives often connect Canadian multiculturalism to their moralizing of core liberal principles, particularly racial colour-blindness, economic success, individual freedom, and meritocracy. In other words, they believe that Canada's civic institutions make it possible that anyone can succeed based on merit, regardless of that person's ethnicity, cultural background, or other immutable characteristics (Scheer 2019).

[52] While writers and scholars have commented on Canada's "post-national" character since the 1950s, Trudeau is the first Prime Minister to advance a "post-national" Canadian identity, and public opinion polls tend to demonstrate strong support for cosmopolitan ideals and immigration generally (Reitz 2011). While the appeal of Trudeau's progressive statements is understandable, Canadian leadership advancing a "post-national" identity is little more than a symbolic gesture that arguably obfuscates or disavows the country's inequalities and biases, as Canada evidently privileges a historic territory, civic institutions, and Western-liberal culture and ideology (Igartua 2006: 3). Indeed, critical work on multiculturalism asserts the impossibility of liberal states attaining the cultural and linguistic neutrality to which civic nationalists aspire (Stilz 2009: 263). Under the guise of "ethnocultural neutrality", most nations simply promote the majority language and culture (Kymlicka 1996).

Altogether, both mainstream parties heavily romanticize Canada's national identity. While there are differences in how they view the government's role in promoting multiculturalism, civic nationalism dominates popular understandings of what it means to be Canadian. Some research has shown that most Canadians take pride in multicultural policy and its ideals, and that Canadians generally support immigration (Reitz 2011: 18, 21; Reitz & Breton 1993, Neuman 2018). Compared to Westernized nations such as Germany or the United States, immigration is rarely a debated topic in Canadian electoral politics (Reitz 2011: 4). A survey by Focus Canada shows that 86 per cent of Canadians feel that multiculturalism is either "very important" or "somewhat important" to Canada's national identity (Reitz 2011: 15). Environics pollster Michael Adams (2007) argues that multiculturalism has become part of the Canadian identity and the "the Canadian Dream" (2007, 41). A 1985 Environics poll asked Canadians to describe what made them most proud of their country and found that multiculturalism ranked tenth on the list. Asking the question again in 2006 determined that multiculturalism had climbed to second place (Adams 2007, 20, see also Dasko 2005). Similarly, a November 2010 Angus Reid poll found that 55 per cent of respondents regard multiculturalism as good for Canada and 30 per cent regard it as bad (Angus Reid 2010).

While most studies report positive attitudes toward multiculturalism and immigration, other studies complicate this picture, showing that many Canadians are skeptical of multiculturalism and confused about what it means for the country. A survey by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation found that 64 per cent of respondents viewed multiculturalism as "allowing for the pursuit of cultural practices that are incompatible with Canadian laws and norms" (Todd 2017). In a 2010 Angus Reid Poll, 54 per cent of respondents thought that Canada

should be a “melting pot” rather than a “mosaic” yet, the same poll found that a majority, 55 per cent, thought multiculturalism was good for Canada, compared to only 30 per cent who thought it was bad. Selley (2010), reporting on the poll, stated that Canadians seem confused about multiculturalism and have “no idea” as to what multiculturalism is. Similarly, a 2019 Research Co. poll found that 62 per cent of Canadians think multiculturalism has been “very good” or “good” for Canada, but when asked to select between two different policies, almost half of Canadians (49%) say that Canada should be a “melting pot” and want immigrants to assimilate and blend into Canadian society (Canseco 2019). This suggests that while most Canadians are accepting or tolerant of diverse cultures, they also want people to assimilate to the country’s civic values.

While right-wing populist movements have seemingly failed to mobilize ethnonationalist sentiment in Canada, they have nonetheless significantly impacted mainstream conservatism throughout Canada’s recent history, the most prominent being the Social Credit (1935-1993) and Reform (1987-2000) movements, beginning as grassroots groups representing discontent with establishment conservativism, and eventually becoming federal political parties (see Harrison 1995, Jeffrey 1999). Mainstream conservative parties absorbed notable members of these movements, the most famous being Stephen Harper, a founding member of the Reform Party of Canada who later became Prime Minister of the country from 2006-2015.

Since the Liberal’s rise to power in 2015, Canada has seen a surge in grassroots right-wing organizing culminating in the Canadian yellow vests movement (YVM) at the end of 2018. The yellow vests movement (YVM)[53] is originally a leaderless grassroots and populist political

[53] Sometimes called the Yellow Jackets Movement.

movement that began in France in November of 2018. Initially, the French movement protested a fuel tax, which they argued would disproportionally affect the middle- and working-class (Willsher 2018). The YVM's first demonstration attracted around 300,000 people across the country and, in 2019, the movement widened its demands for economic justice, attracting support across the political spectrum, including the extreme- left and right (McPartland 2018; Krivokapic & Ganley 2019)[54]. Following weeks of protests, President Emmanuel Macron scrapped the fuel tax rise and promised increases for minimum wage earners and tax cuts for pensioners (France 24 2019). The YVM continues to pressure the French government and has inspired "yellow vests" campaigns in many westernized countries, including Canada (Krivokapic & Ganley 2019).

While the Canadian YVM is grassroots, leaderless, and populist, it lacks the political diversity of the French movement and is exclusively right-wing. The movement represents discontent with establishment politics, is anti-Muslim, promotes Canadian nationalism, and has right-wing extremist elements (such as a neo-Nazi presence). The Canadian YVM is made up of dozens of on-the-ground grassroots right-wing groups and has attracted thousands of online supporters. During March of 2019, Canada's YVM was represented through over a dozen Facebook groups, which differed in political strategies, priorities, and objectives. Most groups had thousands of online members, and the largest Canadian yellow vests Facebook page once sported 110,000 members[55].

[54] Business Insider reports that 50,000 people joined the French movement in January 2019 (Krivokapic & Ganley 2019).

[55] As of June 20th 2019, the "Yellow Vests Canada" Facebook page has 106, 614 members. The page has been in constant battles with Facebook over members posting "hateful" content. The page is also regularly reported and challenged by left-wing activists, especially the group "Yellow Vests Canada Exposed".

As Ambrose and Mudde (2015) observe, there is "virtually no academic research" on contemporary right-wing populism in Canada. Research on the subject tends to explore how Canadian politicians make populist appeals, rather than discussing right-wing populism as a widespread issue or coherent movement. Kelly and Puddister (2017), for instance, explain how Prime Minister Stephen Harper (2006-2015) promoted "penal populism", a common sense, tough on crime, and "us versus them" discourse where politicians purport to defend the "the people" (especially victims of crime) from the dangerous criminal class (see also Prince 2015). Scholars such as Budd (2020), examine the populism of Conservative Premier of Ontario, Doug Ford. Budd (2020) challenges the popular idea that Ford "imported" populist rhetoric, and instead situates Ford's techniques within Canada's political history, describing his style as "neoliberal" or "market" populism. Other scholars have attempted to theorize a Canadian right-wing populist movement. Using a standardized Western European definition of right-wing populism as characterized by ethnonationalist political parties that oppose liberal democracy (214), Ambrose and Mudde (2015) declare the "absence" of a "far-right" movement in the country[56]. Canadian scholars Perry, Mirrlees, and Scrivens (2019) limit their discussion of right-wing populism in Canada to political campaigns and white nationalism while couching their analysis in American trends. In what the authors term "the Trump effect" (68), they argue that the election of President Trump influenced certain Canadian politicians to adopt populist rhetoric and that Trump's success "galvanized" Canadian white supremacists to commit more violence and hate speech. Citing Ambrose and Mudde (2015), Perry, Mirrlees, and Scrivens (2019) optimistically conclude that Trump-style right-wing populism will have little success in

[56] For Ambrose and Mudde (2015), "far-right" encompasses right-wing populism and racist extremism.

Canada, asserting that "the Canadian public is averse to the kind of cultural chauvinism and xenophobia expressed by Trump and the alt-right" (Perry, Mirrlees, & Scrivens 2019: 67).

Altogether, recent research and discussion about right-wing populism in Canada borrows from the European model and centers on the "top-down" populist techniques of individual political campaigns and the alleged Trump-inspired hate speech and violence of racist extremist groups. Few experts have identified a coherent right-wing populist movement, nor examined its grassroots manifestations outside of questions concerning white terrorism. Popular and expert discourse, for instance, represents the Canadian yellow vests as foremost a criminogenic white nationalist extremist movement (see chapter 4). Dominant reports on the Canadian YVM center on public safety risks posed by its supporters, such as hate speech violations, death threats to the Prime Minister, and its' potential to inspire vigilante violence or terrorism (Mussett 2019, Bell 2019, Beattie 2019). While some news reports and experts explore the YVM's political grievances and their relationship to mainstream opinion (Hames 2019), most writings on the movement center on its potential to inspire racist vigilante violence. Like the Social Credit and Reform movements, the YVM warrants a closer analysis of their political mobilization strategies and successes[57].

[57] The Social Credit and Reform movements were also political homes to some right-wing extremists, particularly anti-Semites in Social Credit.

SECTION II: findings

Introduction

The following sections are guided by the question: how do right-wing yellow vests organizers and supporters in Alberta represent Canadian nationalism and nationalist grievances? My fieldwork began in February of 2017. During this period, the Canadian nationalist movement in Alberta was defined by informal collaborations and coalitions between a dozen or so grassroots groups and spearheaded by a handful of prominent organizers with an online and offline presence. The movement adopted the yellow vests aesthetic at the end of 2018.

While ethno- and white nationalist sentiment has a notable presence in the movement, I show how Canadian nationalist/yellow vests groups privileged civic nationalist politics throughout my fieldwork. Adopting the yellow aesthetic solidified the movement's commitment to a civic nationalist image over an ethnonationalist one. In other words, it became clear to major organizers in Alberta that populist civic nationalism (not ethnonationalism), is the best way to grow the movement. The first section explains the populism of the movement. The second section shows how nationalist groups police ethnonationalism, and how activists connect their right-wing populist ideas to mainstream (civic) Canadian values, particularly ideas around tolerance.

I. "Thin ideology": the populism of Canada's nationalist movement pre-yellow vests

> You're either a globalist or a nationalist. [Gary, right-wing organizer and "yellow vester"]

While political disagreements were common in the movement (outlined in the next section), all participants were united on their diagnoses of the core problem in Canada: Prime Minister Trudeau's alleged role in promoting "globalism". The fixation with "globalism" distinguishes my sample from mainstream conservatism and serves as the foundation for RWAs' populist grievances. While in academic discourse globalism is nearly synonymous with globalization (as the increasing interconnectedness of people across the world), in right-wing politics globalism takes on a related but different meaning. Hope Hicks, the Trump administration's White House Communications Director from 2017-2018, provides a useful starting point for understanding how the Right views globalism:

> [Globalism is] an economic and political ideology which puts allegiance to international institutions ahead of the nation-state; seeks the unrestricted movement of goods, labor and people across borders; and rejects the principle that the citizens of a country are entitled to preference for jobs and other economic considerations as a virtue of their citizenship (Hicks cited in Stack 2016).

Rather than attribute growing interconnectedness and economic globalization to macro-level structures such as global trade and other systemic processes, the Right's interpretation individualizes these issues and has a conspiratorial dimension. In other words, by suggesting

that globalism is about organized political and economic elites conspiring against the interests of nation-states, Hicks' definition centers on ill-intentioned individual actors, rather than structural conditions. The Right labels those promoting this ideology as "globalists". For example, Lauren Southern, a Canadian media personality of the right-wing news site *The Rebel* describes "globalists" as wanting ". . .open borders, cheap labor and antinationalism to benefit their business and political visions, and [who willingly] shaft the little people to achieve it" (Stack 2016).

For my participants, globalism serves as a catchall term for (if not synonymous with) progressive political ideologies, such as communism, socialism, and liberalism (liberalism meaning for RWAs, any progressive politics or gestures). RWAs in my sample connected nearly all political grievances to globalism: globalists promote climate change policy because it is an international issue that can bestow more power to government and encourage more globalist politics; globalists encourage "mass immigration" to bring in cheap labour at the expense of Canadian workers; the silencing or "cancelling" of conservative viewpoints is an effort to quash legitimate critiques of globalism; homelessness is partially a symptom of globalists prioritizing the plight of refugees and immigrants over poor Canadians; globalists view homogenous culture and moral standards as solidarity and thus an obstacle to power and consequently encourage diversity and gender fluidity to weaken the collective spirit; and globalists use Islam as a political tool to weaken Westernized culture, liberal values, and national identity. Some organizers also used "globalist" or "globalist conservative" as a slur to discredit groups or activists whose politics were insufficiently nationalist, or those they perceived as "sellouts",

such as organizers that interacted with local conservative politicians or mainstream media outlets.

RWAs saw Trudeau's election as the catalyst for Canada's shift toward globalism and viewed his "post-national" statements as a declaration of the Liberal Party's commitment to the "globalist agenda"[58]. Many participants cited the election of Trudeau as their "political awakening" and their reason for mobilizing. While RWAs saw a redemptive quality in Canadian party politics, they nonetheless expressed disillusionment with mainstream conservative parties as not representative of "real" conservatism, typically citing an absence of moral, nationalist, and/or religious values. Almost all participants viewed conservative parties as compromised by globalist ideas and elites, and consequently expressed their support of such organizations as a form of "harm reduction", viewing electoral channels as of secondary importance to collective action. For RWAs, the priority is raising awareness of how globalism has compromised major Canadian institutions, including conservative party politics. Many participants, for instance, described how their activism was a "last resort". RWAs viewed their collective action as independent of outside interests and therefore one of the only ways to raise awareness of the globalist threat, asserting that society's dominant information outlets – such as the mainstream media, education system, academia, and increasingly regulated social media platforms – have knowingly or unknowingly been compromised by globalist ideas and actors. As one participant stated: "how can elections be fair when our children [and young people] are being indoctrinated into liberalism? [and thus globalism]".

[58] Some also described this idea as a "global/world agenda", "one-/world government", "global politics", "global village", "global/world community" or "new world order". Some used globalism synonymously with secular humanism. Globalism's adherents were sometimes called "global elites" or similar iterations.

RWAs sharpened their populist and civic rhetoric following increased media attention after adopting the yellow vests imagery. Phrases like “we the people” and “united we stand, divided we fall” became common yellow vests slogans – alluding to the idea that progressives and globalists are “dividing” Canadians. Yellow vests pages also began foregrounding liberal abstractions in their mission statements and objectives. A major yellow vests page cites their “key values” as “love over hate, truth over lies, freedom over enslavement, happiness over suffering, justice over injustice, peace over war”. At a yellow vests rally, activists handed out pamphlets listing their collective beliefs and demands, which reads:

> We are the everyday hard working canadians [sic]. We are your brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, neighbors, coworkers, employers, and everyone in-between. We are peacefully protesting for our sovereignty and to have our voices heard through citizen initiated referendums.
>
> Our purpose is to educate and bring awareness to every canadian about how our way of life and our country is being threatened. Our sovereignty is being stripped. Our Veterans and Seniors lives have deteriorated and their voice is ignored by our government. Our energy sector has been robbed and increasing taxes makes it difficult and dangerous for regular canadians. The national debt is unmanageable and future generations will be responsible for it for years to come. We are protesting to protect ourselves and future generations.
>
> We want to unite all canadians. We want to involve all canadians.

> We shall not be divided by political allegiances, race, religion, ethnicity, creed, generation or any other discriminatory division or lifestyle choices.
>
> [. . .]
>
> *We are a grassroots movement. We are peacefully protesting for our sovereignty and to have our voices heard through citizen initiated referendums. We are tired of corrupt governments and their repression. This movement is about freedom, inclusivity, unity and empowerment*. [emphasis in original].
>
> [. . .]
>
> We also seek to grow as a country with the implementation of referendums initiated by citizens. Until these policies have been fulfilled satisfactory to the People of Canada, we the people of Canada shall make our voice heard! United we stand!

As this pamphlet excerpt suggests, the movement's populism is defined through the language of "democracy", a term that RWAs often equated with "self-determination" and "sovereignty". In other words, globalist leaders, such as Trudeau, are "anti-democratic" because they do not represent the will of the people, but instead put foreign and monied interests ahead of Canada. Consequently, the "People of Canada" must "return" that power to Canadians through fighting for government accountability, decentralization, and "direct democracy". These narratives led to an increased focus on local issues by Alberta organizers. By the end of my fieldwork, much of the YVM in Alberta centered on more tangible local political issues, such as the 2019 Alberta general election and promoting the province's oil-focused resource economy.

RWAs' opposition to "globalism" – as the perceived systematic corruption of nearly all Canadian institutions – can reasonably be called "anti-establishment" or "anti-system"[59] within the context of (Canadian) right-wing politics. Moreover, my participants' individualist construction of "globalism" as a loose cabal of ill-intentioned or misinformed elites meets the basic criteria of the "thin ideology" of populist politics. In other words, RWAs see themselves as raising awareness of how powerful "elites" impose their interests that are fundamentally opposed the "the people" (Canadians). In short, a populist logic is foundational to the Canadian nationalist movement. In the following section, I explore how this "thin ideology" compliments the "thick ideology" of civic nationalism.

II. "Thick ideology": Canadian civic nationalism

> I don't like it. I don't like the yellow vest thing. That's what the French do! That's theirs! ... This is Canada. We should have our own thing … But it [wearing yellow vests] works, I guess (George, yellow vests activist).

Among my sample, ethnonationalism and white nationalism were a marginal force. Of my participants, 10 of 42 supported explicitly ethnonationalist groups, such as promoting a racialized vision of globalism as a Jewish conspiracy to destroy White Canada. I dub these

[59] My participants are not "anti-establishment" in the traditional sense of the word, as right-wing thinking (in Canada) fetishizes tradition and tends to view liberal democratic capitalism (that is, the establishment) as "natural" or "common sense". Consequently, RWAs struggle to imagine alternative or new ways of living and knowing – hence my hesitancy to dub these groups anti-establishment nor "radical". Nonetheless, the Canadian nationalist movement is as "anti-system" as right-wing ideology can be – outside of extreme racists demanding a white ethnostate.

participants “far-right activists” (FRAs). FRA groups in my sample were insular, intensely skeptical of other activists and groups, and much less visible or public than the dominant right-wing groups. While some FRAs attended “the odd [right-wing] rally” in Alberta, they constantly expressed their disappointment with the yellow vests movement and did not identify with any RWA group. All far-right participants expressed how Canadians are not receptive to white nationalism. Altogether, FRAs had little power in the broader movement, reflected in my interviews with RWAs.

A handful of RWA leaders I interviewed sympathized with ethnonationalist views but did not mobilize such ideas through their group. Dylan, for example, was involved in activism for two years upon me interviewing him and founded the anti-Muslim group, Rebel Infidel Federation[60] (RIF), which hosted yellow vests rallies in Western Canada and once sported over 13,000 Facebook members. Dylan was one of the only participants to (explicitly) identify as a white nationalist. Despite his beliefs, he expressed the futility of growing such a movement in Canada, telling me that “we need to deal with Islam before we start talking about that kind of stuff”. For Dylan, Islam was the most pressing issue afflicting Canada, and argued that ethnonationalism hindered the movement. These ideas are encapsulated best in the following passage:

> Justin: Yeah, so would you ever consider working with a more extreme group? … doesn’t have to be the [Ku Klux] Klan, but you know?

[60] Group and participant names are pseudonyms.

> Dylan: Well how awesome would it be if they would just focus on Islam, right? But, I would if I knew what their intentions were and what their … but the problem is, is that some of them won't work with somebody like [an ex-Muslim activist] or somebody else because they're not white. We can't afford to be that way right now. Because we need all these other people to stand with us. Some of these groups are just too extreme and that's why they never go anywhere. Nobody takes the KKK seriously anymore because they're not, you know. And there's not enough white people in the world to fight Islam alone, you know? That's the way I look at it.

Nearly all RWAs dismissed extreme-racist groups as "a joke", "useless", "completely out of touch", and/or "giving us a bad rep". While RWAs tended to allow white nationalists into their online pages (although this is sometimes beyond their control), most expressed how they rejected such ideas as "un-Canadian" and discouraged their members from voicing such opinions in public and online, as it repelled potential supporters such as moderate conservatives, LGBTQ* people, and people of colour.

Newer supporters also recognized ethnonationalism as a poor framing strategy in Canada. Grant was my youngest participant at 19 years old and a recent member of a men's-only conservative group, the New Nationalists (pseudonym). I asked him about white nationalism in Canada:

> Justin: [What do you think of the idea of a] white ethnostate?

> Grant: Yeah, stuff like that is ridiculous. I will say that, I've always said that if you want to take the white ethnostate somewhere, you need to take it to Europe, because that's the only place

> where it would make sense. And the only reason I say that is because America, Canada, and those kind of places, they were founded on ideas, they weren't founded on race. Whereas, generally speaking, Europe was a pretty mono-ethnic kinda society, right? So I don't – personally, I don't think a white ethnostate or anything like that should happen – but I'm saying, if you want to take that idea somewhere, you need to take it somewhere where it had already worked at one point.

Unlike organizers who were familiar with nearly all local groups, newer supporters tended to be less aware of white nationalists, some denying their existence in Canada altogether. For instance, when I asked Ellie about how her group managed far-right viewpoints online, she dismissed racist Facebook comments as "liberal trolls" trying to sabotage their group's image: "this is Canada [chuckles], those people [white nationalists] aren't here". While the Canadian nationalist movement contains a vocal segment of far-right actors (particularly online), right-wing groups increasingly view ethnonationalists as "un-Canadian" and a threat to the movement's legitimacy and goals. Some of my participants described the far-right as their opponents.

Despite their nationalist convictions, most RWAs – including prominent organizers – struggle to define Canadian identity and distinguish Canada's culture from other Westernized countries. Nonetheless, nearly all participants arrived at a highly conventional and civic interpretation of Canadian identity as a series of principles or values, such as freedom, security, and most of all, tolerance. Ideas related to tolerance and intolerance permeated nearly all interviews and is foundational to RWA's interpretation of Canadian nationhood and its perceived threats. Eryk became involved in the Christian right-wing movement since moving to

Canada from Turkey in the mid-1990s. Eryk emphasizes how tolerating differences is central to Canadian identity:

> We are all different. [We] agree to disagree [in other words, we *tolerate*], that's Canadian identity. I would argue. The freedoms, that Charter of Rights and Freedoms clearly states – the whole constitution – that you are free to be different. You are free to believe differently than your neighbour. You're free to have certain values that your neighbour may not understand. That's the identity of Canada.

For RWAs, being Canadian is intimately connected to ideas related to tolerance, such as politeness and civility, acceptance, and openness. Consequently, most RWAs accept the basic tenets of multicultural philosophy and tend to share the Conservative Party's interpretation of multiculturalism as "anyone can succeed" regardless of their cultural background or immutable characteristics. For RWAs, Canada should be racially colour-blind and tolerant of diversity and differences, but should not promote, uplift, or subsidize certain groups. For RWAs, progressive politics that acknowledge racialized groups, such as the motion-103 to protect Muslims, policies investing in Indigenous communities, or initiatives addressing anti-Black racism in Canada, are a kind of "ethnic favouritism" and are therefore "racist" (resembling Harrison's 1995 findings on the Reform Party: 176). Some participants referred to these policy efforts as "radical multiculturalism" or "liberal racism". RWAs also use this rationale when discussing gender and sexuality, asserting that the government and other institutions should not "elevate" certain "lifestyles". In short, RWAs view "equality" as achievable through "neutrality", in other words:

without acknowledging differences, history, nor structural inequality, especially not in a formal institutionalized way.

Perhaps ironically, tolerance discourse also informs how RWAs demonize certain groups. Participants tended to romanticize Canada as a nearly utopic society being disturbed by a rise of intolerant, divisive subcultures. In the following excerpt, Corey imagines Canada as a peaceful, apolitical, and tolerant society that corrupt (globalist) politicians are beginning to undermine:

> Yeah, Canadian values for me, are ones of acceptance, you know? I [. . .] don't feel that there's a whole [lot] of racism. I know there's pockets of racism [. . .] But I mean, people in [Canada] are very accepting, and people … I guess, they're very much concerned about their neighbour's welfare, and that's a big Canadian value [. . .] Honesty, integrity, I think is another sort of Canadian value or some of Canadian values. I think… patriotism is a Canadian value. People who love their country, people who love their countrymen [. . .] I think Canadians tend to be … a lot less politically minded than say, you know, in the United States, where people are a lot more politically minded.
>
> But I think that's, that's beginning to change now because people are, there's this awakening going on to, I guess, political corruption and what's happening since the Trudeau Liberals got into power [. . .] There's still the attitude of you know, "ahh, just let it go, it's not as bad as you think it might be". It's, you know, [Canadians] always hope for the best, you know? And that's a good Canadian value, don't get me wrong. But I think we need to have our eyes wide open now. And I think that we can't just sit on our laurels, so to speak, and just allow the politicians to just go about their business and trust that they're going to do the right thing for Canada, because, it's proving that they're willing to do the wrong thing for Canada.

Corey cites the "balkanization" of Canadian society as sparking his activism. Many participants echoed this sentiment, such as Ellie, who proclaims:

> We're the tolerant ones! The patriots! They're [progressives] the ones bringing up race, and race differences, and stuff like that, like that's the most important thing. [. . .] Canada's never been like this! This is all new! We never had to organize like this in the, before Trudeau! He's creating divisions and it's only going to get worse.

RWAs view their own (liberal-civic) values as inherently tolerant and non-ideological. As one RWA participant explained to me, "I wouldn't even say we're right-wing, we're simply patriots speaking truth to power". Similarly, Gary rejects the political spectrum altogether:

> I don't like the Left or Right. I shouldn't even say I like the Right. Because I'm very left on social issues, like health care, and, you know, socialized housing for the elderly. You know what I mean, right? It's not about left or right. You're either a nationalist or a globalist.

RWAs view "globalists", the Left, and the far-right as "ideologically driven", "politicizing" issues, and encouraging intolerance and division. At rallies and during interviews, RWAs explained how leftist groups, such as antifa and Black Lives Matter were the "real hate groups" or "real fascists", using "identity politics" to divide Canadians by stoking hate between different groups (such as between white and Indigenous Canadians, police and Black Canadians, and conflict between "the genders"). RWAs also viewed progressives as intolerant of conservativism, Jews,

police, and Christians, but *overly* tolerant of globalism, Islam, and criminals, among other groups. Some RWAs emphasized Trudeau's hatred of average Canadians, as Bernard outlines:

> You heard of Justin Trudeau's statement saying that evangelical Christians are the worst part of Canadian society. So you're talking about all the charity organizations, the hospital, orphanages, the founding fathers, all the people that built this great country. He says "you guys – all the volunteers in the churches, and Christian organizations, are the worst part of this nation – we hate you, we hate what you do, and what you stand for".

RWAs applied similar views to "globalists". When I asked Peter what motivates globalists, he responded: "Hatred of the West, hatred of Christianity, hatred of Jewish people".

Tolerance narratives also featured prominently in discussions about Islam: RWAs asserted that Muslims were inherently intolerant of Canadian culture, Christians, women, Jews, and or the LGBTQ* community, among other groups. Eryk outlines this perspective:

> Majority of the newcomers [Muslim immigrants], they *hate* Western standards, they *hate* our heritage, they *hate* what this nation stood for, and they do not want to integrate [. . .] You got newcomers from nations that *hate* what we stand for, and they will never integrate, they have no desire to integrate.
>
> [. . .]
>
> That's why multiculturalism, that way [through policy], is not working in the European countries. It will never work. It's impossible. Because you're mixing two totally, two different values together, commanding them [through law] to respect each other. While they hate each other.

> They cannot live in peace with each other. Islam says that there will never peace unless all the Jews will be destroyed, and all the Christians submitted. So how can those two values work together?

Here, tolerance discourse is intertwined with another core liberal value: security (see chapter 4). RWAs rationalized their own intolerance of Islam as "common sense" if we want to "protect" women, Jews, LGBTQ* people, and Canadians generally. Shawn led at least two different nationalist groups throughout my fieldwork, and as he put it: "I'd be tolerant of Islam but Canadians are dying [being killed by Muslims]".

Participants also used in/tolerance narratives for political boundary work, using concepts like "hate group" to distance their views from the perceived "real" (hateful) racists. For nearly all my participants, "hate", racism, misogyny, and anti-Muslim and anti-gay prejudices could only manifest in explicitly hateful statements and interpersonal violence. Eryk, for instance, regularly collaborated with right-wing nationalist groups while running an anti-gay church. He thought of his organization as outside of the "hate group" label. When asked about working with other right-wing activist groups, Eryk explained that he would not collaborate with "hate groups":

> Well always, I'm a Christian [. . .] I disagree with every group that entices hate. And I don't care which group. It can be hate against Muslims or hate against homosexuals, transgender. Any hate – you see, hate, will never bring love. If you put hate to hate, it will create a bigger hate. [. . .] No, I believe that only love, and the freedom to express that love can change human beings. Hate will never achieve that. So I disagree with any form of hate. *I will speak, I will disagree with*

> *your lifestyle, I will say I disagree with Islam, because it's based on hate. I will disagree with your ideology, but I do not hate the Muslims.* [emphasis added]

Despite their commitment to the liberal principles of "free speech", many RWAs support Canada's hate speech laws. Participants shared Grant's view that Canada's hate speech laws should be applied to both sides of the political spectrum: "Far-left and far-right both hate Jews, that's the basic idea". Corey provides a longer explanation:

> You know, I can cite some cases for you, where our hate speech laws have worked! You know, people that have denied the Holocaust for example, I can't remember the guy's name. The Keegstra case, in Alberta, I don't know if you know about that. But that's where the hate speech was applied under the Human Rights Act, and it worked! And it did its job. It did what it was supposed to do. And so, to add another layer of sort of, anti-Islamophobic law, makes no sense whatsoever. Because you've already got, in my opinion, some of the strictess hate laws in the world. And you know, when you look at what's happened in Europe okay? And I'm going to point this out. People in Europe now, are so fearful to speak about Islam. This form of Islam that we're discussing, that they won't talk about it at all.

While some RWAs support hate speech laws when used against "real racists" such as neo-Nazis, they also express concern about how anti-Muslim sentiment and "political incorrectness" could potentially fall under the hate speech umbrella. As Peter put it: "'hate' is [increasingly] being defined as anything that's conservative in nature. So any conservative ideology is now classified as hate speech".

My findings suggest that traditional ethno/white nationalism – while present and visible – does not play an important role in the current yellow vests movement because it offends mainstream conservative sensibilities, contributes to the culture of "divisiveness", and thus hinders movement growth. Instead, Canadian nationalist groups foreground civic or liberal principles when framing issues, which is viewed as "common sense" or non-ideological, such as "securing the border", "keeping streets safe", or "protecting Canadian sovereignty" or "the rights of Canadians". RWAs view their activism as a "natural" response to attacks from what they view as intolerant, "agenda-driven" groups and elites.

SECTION III: discussion and conclusion

Discussion: civic pride in scholarship/civic pride on the Right

The yellow vests aesthetic arguably well-encapsulated the Canadian nationalist movement's civic and populist image, the florescent vest itself representing "hard-working" and "average" or "forgotten" Canadians fighting against "the powerful", with no explicit reference to ethnic heritage nor race. While the yellow vests shift can be called a successful framing realignment or "rebranding" strategy, the YVM's politics and proposals differ little from those espoused by the movement's ethnonationalists. Put another way, racially colour-blind politics and civic ideas – such as those concerning "security", "rights", "tolerance", and "hard work" – can be just as effective (if not more effective) at advancing policies that disproportionately affect people of colour and other marginalized groups. My findings highlight: 1) the Eurocentrism of dominant

conceptualizations of right-wing populism; and 2) liberal biases in scholarly analyses of right-wing populism and the "far-right".

While dominant conceptualizations of right-wing populism might appear generic, they privilege Western European contexts by characterizing RWP as a top-down phenomenon involving political parties mobilizing so-called illiberal ideals, such as authoritarianism, anti-pluralism, and anti-immigration. These kinds of grand binary political concepts (such as democratic vs. un-/anti-democratic, multiculturalism vs. nationalism, and liberal vs. illiberal) may be better suited for analyzing the European party structure, in which this style of top-down populism perhaps more clearly manifests in established "far-right" parties' official discourse. Moreover, popular analyses of RWP are often intertwined with discussions of white nationalism and euro-nativism, ideas which have more power in countries with stronger ethnic nationalism (that is, much of Western Europe). When generalized to non-European contexts, writers sometimes conflate right-wing populism with white power ideology or anti-immigrant politics. For example, while Perry, Mirrlees, and Scrivens (2019) acknowledge how Canada's mainstream conservative parties sometimes use populist techniques, they later equate right-wing populism with racist extremism, arguing that "large numbers of people are drawn to right-wing populists and thus also drawn to taking up 'race war' ideology" (69). As I have shown here (and discussed in chapter 4), extreme racist discourse (to which the idea of a "race war" arises) has negligible power in Canadian conservatism and right-wing activism. This intellectual habit may also explain the popular reduction of the Canadian yellow vests movement to white nationalist terrorism.

Additionally, scholars sometimes present the ideas characterizing civic nationalism as an inherent good or "common sense". For instance, Beiner (2019) observes how scholars of nationalism continue to view civic nationhood as aspirational for governments and typically associate civic nationalism with progressive causes and liberal government practices, such as state multiculturalism. Like "right-wing populism", "civic nationalism" (also called liberal nationalism) is a highly contested scholarly concept implicated in Eurocentrism and normative liberal biases among some researchers (Trautsch 2019: 6). Some scholarship on nationalism challenges the civic-ethnic dichotomy, showing how most nationalisms are marked by both ethnic and civic criteria (Trautsch 2019: 7). For instance, scholars widely cite the United States as founded on civic nationhood, despite the country's stark history of laws privileging white Americans. Scholars have critiqued civic nationalism philosophically and politically. Many question the premise of nationhood based exclusively on political principles and its ability to accommodate social differences. As Roshwald (2006) puts it, nationhood is necessarily exclusionary, and governments promoting universal membership would "cease to be a nation-state" (257). The hypocrisies of civic nationalism are reflected in political reality, as nations founded on civic principles can be just as exclusionary and authoritarian as so-called "ethnic nations". For example, Trautsch (2017) explains how civic nations harbour aggression toward political deviance and competing forms of government, epitomized by the "War on Terror" (16). Social science research shows that liberal democracy's state violence and material inequality is often intensely racialized, revealing how civic principles can still privilege dominant ethnic groups and cultures despite the seemingly neutral language of "rights" or "equality" governing citizenship.

Some scholars continue to reproduce the ethno-civic dichotomy. While the ethno-civic nationalist distinction is a useful starting point for analysis (as certain figures, groups, or institutions may foreground certain aspects over others in their politics – such as privileging ethnicity over political values when describing national identity (or vice versa)), many writers and researchers rely on ethnonationalism and civic principles to Other right-wing movements as "illiberal" or non-representative of the liberal status quo. Indeed, Mudde (2019) opens his book *The Far Right Today* by stating that: "This book is not concerned with the so-called 'mainstream right,' such as conservatives and liberals/libertarians, but only with those on the right who are 'anti-system,' defined here as hostile to liberal democracy" (15). This is a curious statement, as Mudde (2019) implies that far-right politics (that is, "right-wing populism" and "extreme racism", as per his definition) are separate from mainstream politics and liberalism and that those relationships are not worth interrogating.

Mainstream discourse and scholarship consistently suggests that civic nationalism is unimportant for right-wing politics and populism and many writers dismiss the Right's commitment to liberal principles as illegitimate, insincere, non-representative, or as a perversion of the philosophy. For instance, some scholars assert that right-wing groups mobilize civic principles as a moderate veneer masking their "true" ethnic or white nationalism – as though liberal or civic ideals are inherently non-racist (see Fleck & Müller 1998). In these cases, writers act as gatekeepers for liberalism by overlooking, rejecting, or downplaying how civic pride – and liberalism more generally – manifests in right-wing or far-right groups. This is most often done by pointing to the right-wing's intolerance, prejudice, or hatred toward marginalized groups (often articulated as ethno- or white nationalism). As Berntzen (2020) observes, popular

and scholarly understanding of right-wing groups characterize them as "movements of exclusion", defined by their intolerance rather than what they support – epitomized by labels such as anti-immigration, anti-gay, anti-communist, etcetera (29, see also Rydgren 2005, Blee 2017b). Despite Western liberalism's *extensive* history of racist, sexist, ableist, anti-gay, classist, ageist, and anti-immigrant policies, many writing on right-wing groups conflate intolerance with illiberalism and tend to characterize intolerance as the foundation of right-wing politics. I have called this practice "hate stereotyping" where writers and researchers foreground negative emotions and intolerance as central to right-wing movements (see Tetrault 2019, chapter 3). I am not suggesting that emotions and prejudice or exclusionary politics are *unimportant* for right-wing politics. Instead, I am asking scholars to be more critical and reflexive when using political concepts and interrogate the more mundane and liberal aspects of these movements.

Conclusion: the messiness of right-wing populism

How can we understand the growth of right-wing populism without a sophisticated analysis of how such movements mobilize mainstream liberalism and civic pride? My participants' foregrounding of liberal principles is not illegitimate or insincere, but rather, reflects liberalism's malleability for advancing right-wing causes and resisting social change. The Canadian yellow vests represent a long history of right-wing and fascistic movements capitalizing on liberalism's vague principles to present the ills of society (such as political corruption and economic struggle) as an individualized problem of ill-intentioned persons and groups – in this case, "globalists". This kind of thinking is consistent with basic conservative ideology that takes the

status quo as natural and good, is unable (or unwilling) to criticize the status quo, and (consequently) individualizes social problems. Nonetheless, the Canadian nationalists' civic framing differs little from ethnonationalists in other parts of the world where activists use civic principles – such as tolerance and security – to advance racist policies that disproportionately impact people of colour, Muslims, and other marginalized groups. Moreover, right-wing grievances concerning "globalists" can arguably be viewed as a liberal-secular version of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. Consequently, instead of Othering right-wing groups through liberal gatekeeping, researchers should interrogate the *similarities* between liberalism and more "exclusionary" right-wing ideologies.

Affinity for liberalism sometimes diminishes critical engagement with how civic nationalism manifests in right-wing populist movements, encouraging some writers to fixate on the "illiberal" prejudices of extreme racist groups and discouraging them from connecting exclusionary, bigoted, and even extreme ideas to liberal values. This can be partially attributed to the overreliance on rigid political dichotomies, such as liberal versus illiberal, democratic versus anti-democratic, and civic versus ethnic nationalist, among other oppositional framings. It also speaks to the discipline's overreliance on grand narratives and global theorizing of right-wing populism. While there is a debate between "global" and "local" explanations for the causes of right-wing populism (Mudde 2019: 102), the dominant conceptual framework inherently privileges globalized or macro-level analysis, evidenced in its Eurocentric design centered on the top-down ethnonationalism of populist political parties. The discipline's reliance on grand explanations and conceptual dichotomies can discourage nuances and spur logical fallacies such as "begging the question". In other words, dominant claims that RWP is

“inherently ethnonationalist” or “illiberal” can encourage researchers to affirm established narratives and trends in the literature, rather than complicate these trends by interrogating how unexpected ideas and processes manifest among nationalist groups. While macro-level theories are important for understanding right-wing populism (such as considering the influences of globalized media and international politics,) more attention is needed to how these ideas manifest locally, considering the significant role of local-minded politics and national identity in RWP movements.

While this essay has tried to make sense of the Canadian yellow vests, it remains a messy and often incoherent political movement constantly undergoing changes. This essay demonstrates a need for conceptual fluidity and increased contextual analysis in the study of right-wing populism in Canada and abroad.

Chapter Six
Conclusion

This chapter provides an opportunity to reflect on my project's contributions to knowledge about right-wing nationalism and nationalist movements, and the tensions, challenges, and complexities I have identified studying this topic.

This project has been motivated by two interrelated goals. First, my intent has been to understand the dominant ideas and internal dynamics of Canada's right-wing nationalist movement in Alberta. However, in the early stages of this project, I realized I could not rely on recent scholarly trends and dominant theories to conceptualize my sample population nor address my research questions. To undertake my fieldwork, I had to identify and clearly articulate the problems I faced: Why were scholarly trends in Canada not appropriate for addressing my research interests? Why were dominant theories and concepts not mapping onto to my findings? Pursuing these questions transformed my project into a methodological critique of two major (and sometimes overlapping) trends that I identified: 1) the trend toward operationalized conceptions of right-wing politics and tactics for the purposes of policing prejudice and violence (such as "hate speech", "right-wing extremism", "alt-right gangs", or "hate group"); and 2) the trend toward transnational explanations of right-wing mobilization. My fieldwork revealed security approaches and transnational theory as not just "non-applicable" to my research site, but sometimes obscuring our understanding of right-wing nationalist movements.

Fleshing out these methodological problems led me to my second goal: developing a more precise language for discussing right-wing nationalist organizing. In this chapter, I review

the preceding methodological issues, how to speak more clearly about right-wing organizing, and some steps researchers can take moving forward.

Bad habits: conceptual carelessness and the illusion of precision

A core issue I have identified in this study is the uncritical use of political concepts when researching right-wing nationalist movements, such as the terms "hate", "far-right", "extremism", "in/tolerance", "multiculturalism", "il/liberal", and "un/democratic", among others. Conceptual issues tend to manifest in two "bad habits" in research, which can spur logical fallacies and dubious generalizations. These bad habits are ideal types which sometimes overlap:

> First, ***researchers use overly vague and/or fixed concepts***. When not explained thoroughly, vague political terms appeal to the reader's "common sense". In chapter 3, I showed how scholars take "hate" as a self-evident explanation for right-wing mobilization and use the concept to ease generalizations across right-wing groups that can differ significantly in ideology, structure, and social influence.
>
> Researchers also make this mistake when they use further vague political terminology when defining their political terms. For instance, in chapter 4, many researchers define "far-right" using further vague and contestable political ideas such as "nationalism", "extremism", and "exclusion", among others. Without explaining these secondary concepts, definitions such as "far-right" lose their precision and coherence.

What, for instance, separates the extremism or political violence of the far-right from state violence? Or far-right nationalism from conservative or right-wing nationalism? What distinguishes the far-right's exclusionary politics from how the status quo excludes certain groups?

Researchers rely on common sense when they do not acknowledge dichotomous concepts or ignore the contextuality of some political terms. As I demonstrated in chapter 5, this can happen when scholars neglect national and/or political context when using concepts. For instance, a researcher might outline how the far-right is "illiberal" or "anti-democratic" without explaining what is meant by liberalism nor democracy, or they might discuss the "radical right" without discussing the mainstream Right – suggesting these distinctions are obvious or not bound by history or national context. These instances force readers to fill in the gaps where the authors should be providing data and analysis to support their conceptual choices.

Overly fixed concepts and typologies can also pose issues. Whether or not this is a "bad habit", however, depends on the type of research one is conducting. If a researcher's goal, for instance, is to better police right-wing prejudices online, then fixed definitions, such as the legal concept "hate speech" or Facebook's definition of "hate group" can be appropriate. However, if the goal is to gain a more robust understanding of right-wing groups as a social movement, then fixed concepts have limits as they often resist differences, surprises, and/or nuances**.** An example is Davey, Hart, and Guerin's (2020) characterization of right-wing militia groups as inherently "anti-state" or "anti-government" (11). While this might be true of some militia groups, others, such as right-

wing border patrol groups or the anti-Muslim Three Percenters (III%), are highly statist and typically populated by current and ex-police officers, military, and prison guards. Many militia groups are arguably better understood as an informal extension of the state, rather than opposed to it (as the word "anti-" suggests). Fixed concepts tend to rely on intellectual or institutional traditions that resist – or are simply not interested in – new trends and nuances.

Pursuing a research project that starts with and reproduces fixed definitions can also encourage cherry-picking or begging the question, such as researchers choosing to foreground data that fits intuitional categories or narratives, rather than considering aspects that might challenge or complicate such ideas. As I demonstrated in chapter 4, fixed definitions of "right-wing extremism" center on criminal risks, encouraging researchers to foreground right-wing groups' hate speech and vigilantism, while ignoring or downplaying the movement's banal and more liberal elements.

These two conceptual "bad habits" can also overlap, as popular concepts such as "hate group", "illiberal", "anti-democratic", and "exclusionary" are vague yet also suggest a sort of "fixedness". In other words, these concepts imply that the groups in question are always, inherently, and/or foremost hateful, exclusionary, and illiberal, etcetera. Such conceptualizations seem to inherently resist questions such as, "how are right-wing groups welcoming or tolerant?", "how are right-wing groups inclusionary or pluralist?", "how are right-wing groups liberal or democratic?". While such questions might be uncomfortable to ask, they are essential to understanding the Right's political successes.

Second, ***researchers overstate the generalizability of labels, findings, and/or theories.*** With attention to context, general theories concerning right-wing movements can serve as a helpful starting point for research design. For instance, someone studying American neo-Nazis might borrow from general theories about hegemonic masculinity or online recruitment within the far-right, or theories about economic downturn increasing right-wing mobilization. The problem, however, is that researchers sometimes accept or present dominant ideas or labels as "common sense" and thus generalizable, despite the oftentimes highly contextual nature of contemporary right-wing politics and the extremely limited primary data on right-wing organizations. As I illustrated in chapter 5, dominant labels of "right-wing populism" are predominantly developed in Western-European contexts, yet some scholars' present their Eurocentric framework as the "default" to which other contexts are to be measured. Standardized or sweeping proclamations, such as "the far-right is opposed to liberal democracy", or "right-wing populism is ethnonationalist" also create the illusion of simplicity and consistency for severely understudied and often erratic and idiosyncratic social movements.

Generalizing tendencies are closely connected to the first "bad habit": poorly defined (vague) concepts. Scholarship on right-wing movements is bursting with generalist language, such as using the universal "right-wing extremists" instead of the more precise "Canadian nationalist groups", or using "illiberal" as shorthand for those opposed to federal multiculturalism. Language matters for research design. A study on "right-wing extremism" in Canada will likely produce, for example, very different results than a study on the "Canadian nationalist movement". The former is more likely to

reproduce dominant patterns in the literature on "extremism", the latter is more likely to challenge dominant patterns by focusing on national or local context.

Altogether, the preceding bad habits are representative of a discipline overconfident in its development and application of theory. As I have tried to show through my ethnographic case study of Canadian nationalist groups, dominant theories of right-wing organizing rarely capture the messy on-the-ground reality of how and why groups mobilize, how activists practice nationalism and understand issues, and how and why groups present their ideas a certain way. The discipline's heavy reliance on neat (yet often vague) labels and classifications suggests that right-wing movements are consistent and coherent in their beliefs, organizing, and/or practice, while more fine-grained analyses of specific groups and contexts constantly challenge such clean distinctions.

The growing penchant for transnational explanations and neat categories has created an illusion of precise and robust analysis in the study of right-wing nationalist groups. Scholarly concepts such as "far-right" or "right-wing extremist" can appear precise and authoritative not because they are supported by primary data on activist groups, but because researchers connect such terms to scholarly trends and traditions (and other studies' data). Analyses such as the "far-right is anti-liberal" appear robust because researchers appeal to common sense about right-wing politics and liberalism. The reality is that we know remarkably little about right-wing nationalist groups generally and their broader social consequences.

Why is this happening?

Why do these "bad habits" persist in the discipline? These issues are connected to growing social anxieties about right-wing groups manifesting in two often overlapping public demands: 1) the growing demand for protection against right-wing prejudices and political violence, such as hate speech, white terrorism, and hate crime; and 2) the growing demand for immediate general explanations of right-wing mobilization. The surge of right-wing populism and far-right movements and violence across Westernized countries since c2015, has understandably led to a growing popular and scholarly urge to both manage and understand right-wing politics and violence.

As I outlined in chapter 4, security-centric approaches are growing in popularity and influence in scholarship on right-wing movements. While this style of research has made significant contributions to addressing the real threat of right-wing terrorism, it tends to use operationalized concepts oriented around criminal risks. Expanding such an approach beyond the study of violent extremism often leads to the "bad habits" I identified, as security-centric methods typically begin from fixed conceptualizations of right-wing groups based on criminal risk assessment, and are inherently interested in standardizing (that is, generalizing) theories of right-wing organizing for the purposes of policing. Put another way, the goal of security approaches (as an ideal type) is not to better understand group X, but to better identify, sort, and ultimately police the risky behaviours demonstrated by group X.

The encroachment of security approaches into social movement studies is symptomatic of the broader demand for knowledge about right-wing mobilizing. From Perry and Scrivens'

(2018) universal "climate of hate" thesis, to Cas Mudde's (2019) discussion of a global "fourth wave" of far-right politics, and Bertzen's analysis of a "transnational" anti-Islamic movement, many scholars have heeded the call to provide grand theories explaining the recent rise and successes of right-wing political movements across westernized countries. Like security approaches, grand theories are not problematic in and of themselves. Bertzen (2020), for instance, provides robust definitions of his concepts and conceptual debates in the literature, acknowledges the contextual limits of his study, and *empirically demonstrates* the transnational character of the anti-Islamic movement (as opposed to implying transnationalism is self-evident). Without close attention to concepts and context, general theories can reproduce "bad habits". As I demonstrated in chapter 5, various scholars have developed grand theories of right-wing populism using decontextualized and imprecise language – such as the claim that right-wing populism is ethnonationalist and thus illiberal. My chapter 5 case study of Canada's yellow vests movement reveals how such claims are Eurocentric and appeal to a liberal common sense. In other words, scholars take liberal principles as inherently "good" and engage in conceptual exercises (such as asserting the ethno- versus civic nationalist dichotomy) to dismiss right-wing populists' liberal claims as illegitimate or insincere. Put another way, some scholars neglect the (sometimes major) liberal components of right-wing mobilization based on what they think liberalism *ought* to be.

The study of right-wing movements is, perhaps ironically (or appropriately?), a conservative discipline, defined heavily by conceptual and theoretical traditions, appeals to pathology (i.e., hate), methodological sameness, operationalized typologies, and minimal interaction with the people being studied and spoken for. It is also increasingly dominated by

scholarship defending the liberal status quo through literally policing right-wing groups and Othering right-wing ideology as unrepresentative of liberal society. Few scholars have drawn attention to these issues, for reasons one can only speculate about. First, it may be the case that scholars tend to be liberally-minded and thus slower to question and critique things they agree with politically, such as claims that right-wing movements are illiberal or "driven by hate". Research on the political opinions of American and Canadian academics, for instance, demonstrates they are overwhelmingly progressive or centrist, especially in education, the humanities, and social sciences (Nakhaie & Brym 2011, Jaschik 2017). According to Abrams (2016), the ratio of liberal to conservative professors at the US national level has tripled from two to one in 1989 to six to one in 2014. Scholars of far-right movements such as Blee (2007) argue that – in addition to right-wing groups being difficult to access to begin with – progressive affinities likely prevent researchers from conducting ethnographic work with right-wing activists: "Few scholars want to [. . .] establish the rapport necessary for close-up studies of those they regard as inexplicable and repugnant" (121). This may partially explain why "at a distance" studies and stereotypical representations of right-wing groups as "frightening and irrational" (ie: hateful) are common in the discipline (Wintrobe 2002, Blee 2007).

What can be done?

Canada's mainstream Conservative Party recently elected a new leader, Erin O'Toole, brandishing the slogan "Take Back Canada". One might ask: take it back from whom? O'Toole's official statement and platform points to the current Liberal Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau,

who O'Toole presents as acting against the interests of Canadians and "cowering" to the "Communist Party of China". O'Toole suggests that the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) is also compromised, and pledges to "rebuild" the party and "win back the trust of Canadians" with "grassroots" policy and initiatives. In other words, "we" are not just taking Canada back from Trudeau, but from the global interests that have corrupted establishment parties and their politics. Altogether, O'Toole's statement complements the growing right-wing populist sentiment in the country – "taking back" power from "globalist" politicians and interests and returning it to "the people". While it remains to be seen if and how the CPC mobilizes populist sentiment any further, academics should be investigating the relationship between Canada's mainstream parties and right-wing nationalist groups. Addressing such questions requires an interdisciplinary approach, flexible language, and fine-grained analysis that transcends the fixation with "violent extremism" and generalist explanations for right-wing mobilization.

The goal of this project has been to develop a more precise, reflexive, and critical language for studying and discussing right-wing politics and organizing, particularly in Canada. While it would be hypocritical of me to assert a "one-size-fits-all" approach to studying this topic, I can nonetheless outline some general recommendations for future scholars engaging with this topic in Canada and abroad:

Tip 1: **Do interdisciplinary research**. Some of the problems that arise in research on right-wing movements can be connected to intellectual siloing. Sociologists writing about "hate groups" should consult psychological literature on hate and emotions studies. Counterterrorism scholars should consider incorporating social movement

studies. Research on white nationalist groups should include work on nationalism and race scholarship.

Interdisciplinary research can also draw attention to cultural context. For instance, this dissertation borrows from historical scholarship on Canadian culture and multiculturalism, as well as political science scholarship on Canadian conservatism and political culture.

Tip 2: **Maximize flexible language.** Develop analyses and concepts that leave room for nuances, differences, changes, and surprises. This can be done in several ways, such as by *drawing attention to debates on terminology*. This shows the reader that concepts are not perfect nor fixed. It can also highlight how the right-wing groups or actors in question are themselves inconsistent or contradictory in their ideas and/or actions. Researchers should also *avoid dichotomous terminology in their analysis*. While dichotomies are often inevitable when discussing politics (the term "right-wing" itself is arguably dichotomous), scholars can take steps to minimize this language to avoid generalizations and absolutist thinking. This includes omitting vague phrases such as anti-democratic, illiberal, anti-state, exclusionary, anti-authority, etcetera. Scholars can almost always substitute these phrases with more precise language. If you must use a dichotomy, such as "anti-immigrant" or "anti-democratic", be sure to spend time showing how absolute and widespread this thinking is. Researchers can also add more cautious language to dichotomous concepts: instead of saying "Canadian right-wing

nationalists are anti-Muslim", say "Canadian right-wing nationalists *foreground* anti-Muslim sentiment".

Tip 3: **Be as specific as possible**. Specificity requires constantly acknowledging the limits of your data and knowledge. This can be as simple as *contextualizing your concepts or analysis in the country or region you conducted the study*. For instance, "multiculturalism" means different things in different countries. Clearly defining and contextualizing your definition of multiculturalism to Canada, for instance, communicates the limits of your analysis. Another basic approach is to *minimize political concepts and include more adjectives and caveats in your language*. For instance, instead of saying "the right-wing opposes liberal democracy", say "German nationalist parties foremost oppose minority rights and the separation of powers". The second sentence discourages generalizations and does not appeal to common sense. The word "foremost" also communicates that these parties engage on other issues.

Tip 4: **Be skeptical of vague and absolutist language**. When reading or incorporating others' research on right-wing movements, ask yourself: what is the author's sample population? How often do they contextualize their discussion (such as by mentioning place)? Does their data speak to the claim(s) or generalizations they are making? Are the authors reproducing the attitudinal fallacy (Jerolmack & Khan 2014)? Do they rely on vague political concepts or the readers' common sense? What are they assuming about right-wing politics? Are they interested in policing the groups or ideas in question?

Scholars should also be asking themselves these questions as they design and conduct their own research.

Tip 5: **Consider using ethnographic and mixed methods**. As I detailed in chapter 4, research on right-wing nationalist groups – especially in Canada – tends to be limited to "externalist" accounts (Blee 2007). Few scholars interact directly with right-wing activists or groups. Ethnographic methods can reveal the internal dynamics of right-wing groups that are impossible to discern through other means. However, interacting with such groups may be impossible, deeply uncomfortable, and even dangerous for some researchers, especially Muslim and non-binary scholars, and scholars of colour. I suspect that most of my participants would not have spoken to me were I not a white-passing and cis-gendered man (see chapter 2). If scholars are able, ethnographic methods have the potential to generate much-needed, unique, and valid data on the internal workings of these groups.

My case study of Alberta's right-wing nationalist groups reveals how the discipline's neat concepts rarely equate to precision, and more often represent overconfident theorizing and oversimplification. A humbler and more robust methodological and analytical language is needed as right-wing movements grow across Westernized countries. Such an approach requires directly challenging dominant scholarly traditions while promoting interdisciplinarity, fluidity, specificity, and skepticism. Right-wing mobilization is an increasingly complex

phenomenon that must be met with an increasingly exploratory and interdisciplinary research design.

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