

**Populist Counterpublics: Exploring Populist Mobilization, Crises of Representation, and
Popular Subjectivities in Canadian Politics**

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs in partial fulfilment for
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

at

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

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Abstract

The concept of “populism” presents a unique conundrum in academia and popular discourse. Despite the universal acknowledgement that it has an increasing presence in global politics, there is little to no agreement on what populism is, how it should be defined, or what concepts should be used to make sense of how it works. In the face of this conundrum, theorizing of populism amongst sociologists and political scientists has become formulaic and repetitive. First, the most common approach is to formulate a conceptual map of what populism is. Second, that map is then applied to various jurisdictions with elected populist politicians. The result is that field of populism studies is loaded with essentialized, *context-independent* theories that impose on the unique features of each case and are not flexible enough to capture how populism may manifest as different “species” of a wider political “genus”.

This dissertation resolves these core issues by introducing the interpretive concept of “populist counterpublics,” which identifies populism as a fundamentally *context-dependent* phenomenon. Populist counterpublics capture how a specific kind of populism operates *in-situ*, from the perspective of social actors, by analyzing (1) the political logic identifying some representational crisis in a given democracy, and (2) the popular subject-position forged to create a shared, viscerally-felt lack among diverse individuals. Illustrating its utility through five empirical case studies, I argue that the concept of populist counterpublics is a way through the conceptual battle-zone currently plaguing the field. It does so by shifting focus to the *subjective* aspects of subordination that populists claim to fix, encouraging the suspension of moral judgement before analyzing cases, and attunes us to the unique features of diverse contexts in which populisms operate.

Acknowledgements

I learned how to ride a bike because my dad tricked me into thinking he was holding onto the back of the bicycle while I pedaled. He held on for the first couple of times, but then by the fourth or fifth time, I remember him waving his hands next to my head. I freaked out, fell off, and cut my knee. Before I had a chance to panic, he rushed to my side and exclaimed how cool my banged-up knee looked. I too, thought it looked cool. I didn't cry. Then I got back on, and kept pedalling.

This dissertation embodies such tiny, yet innumerable, lifelong lessons from my friends, family and colleagues. I can't say for sure what parts of it reflect which lessons. Many reflect the sagacity and expertise of my dissertation committee. Others were researched and written while my spouse helped me practice self-compassion during periods of torture by my own psychological demons. Still others are a product of the optimistic perseverance bequeathed by my parents that, I've learned, are crucial for both bike-riding *and* dissertation-writing.

In short, this dissertation is the reflection of what I consider to be a charmed life. I have many privileges—racial, gender, and otherwise—that culminate in this document. I also have the privileges of loving and being loved, of caring and being cared for, of teaching and learning. I can only hope that the following, brief acknowledgements do some justice to this life that I've been fortunate enough to live, and all the forces and people throughout who made this work possible.

My advisor, Dr. Xiaobei Chen, is a brilliant mentor and an enthusiastic champion of intellectual exploration. She has a remarkable gift to nurture students' curiosities, giving them the space to grow and grapple with new ideas while still providing them with the wisdom and guidance needed to make that growth productive. The fruits of this gift are visible throughout this project, and I am indebted to her unyielding support both in and of my work. To the extent that I want to convey that in this all-too-small paragraph, words fail me.

“Committee member” isn't enough to describe the role of Dr. Janet Siltanen in this project, and in my intellectual growth more broadly. She has, to an unknowable magnitude, influenced and guided my thinking on research methodology, how to think about the nature of social realities, and how to write compelling research questions, with both patience and wisdom. The quality of this project has improved exponentially because of her engagement with me not just as a *student*, but a *young scholar*. I thank her for her mentorship, her expertise, and her many lessons and dialogues throughout my studies.

Dr. William Walters, also of my dissertation committee, is responsible for my critical thinking about publics and how they operate. It was in one of William's seminars early in graduate school that I was exposed to critical theories on populism, the public, and the rational subject, after which I fell in love and never looked back. As a result, this dissertation inherits some of his radical curiosity about the socio-political world, and I can only hope that it does so with some of the quality as his prolific scholarship.

I further thank my external and internal examiners, Dr. Fuyuki Kurasawa and Dr. Hans-Martin Jaeger, for their very lively and passionate engagement with this project. The dissertation is much improved because of their efforts, and I thank them both for the significant time spent reading my work, reflecting on it, and taking it seriously.

Matthew Johnston, one of my best friends and frequent collaborator, can only be described as my intellectual soulmate. In the acknowledgements to his dissertation, he asks of our relationship, “where would we be without each other?” to which I can only reply, “much worse off.” He has been a bottomless well of support, one of my most enthusiastic champions, and a co-captain in the treacherous seas of graduate school. I know we will continue to help each other navigate whatever storms lie ahead. “Thank you” is woefully inadequate.

For my PhD peers—Rhys Steckle and Mark Ramsay—I am grateful for the many venting sessions, the many homemade nachos (that I still can’t recreate), and shared pints while venting about equally shared struggles. Having like-minded, empathic friends is crucial for the weary doctoral student. They are two of the very best folks this weary soul could ask for.

The Department’s administrative team, past and current—Kimberley, Paula, Darlene, Patricia, Kim, and Stephanie—do the critical yet invisible labour that lets the University tick. They advocated for and supported me during my time at Carleton, and, make no mistake, keep the entire Department afloat and functional. They have the utmost gratitude of myself and all of us graduate students that come under their care.

The entirety of this dissertation was written under the close, watchful supervision of a tuxedo cat named Wisp. Her affection and deep, endless purrs soothed the many anxiety-inducing parts of writing something this massive. I am thankful for her very calm nature and very kind soul.

I count myself as part of an incredibly lucky group whose parents have turned, over the years, into friends. We had little money when I was young, a dearth made irrelevant by so much love. It was on a blue plastic blackboard that my dad introduced me to the letters and words that would, much later, form the basis of my intellectual pursuits. My mom has always treated me like a star, even when I didn’t feel like one; in doing so, she gave me the confidence necessary to get through a PhD. Their lifelong support is the soul of this project. It is as much of a product of their efforts over my entire life as my efforts these past five years. In their parenting, and by setting an example in their own behaviours, they taught me how to keep pedalling.

To Laura, my soulmate, my very best friend, my partner in crime: it is difficult to explain the roles of your love and sacrifice during this project and in our lives. You not only moved to a new city and started over with me, you also guided me through unfathomable challenges I had during this degree. You played the roles of coach, guardian, sounding board, therapist, and many, many more, with both the wisdom and enthusiasm demanded by this journey. There are a lot of things I’m unsure about—both in life and in this dissertation—but marrying you has never been, nor will be, one of them. I can only hope that I do justice to what a marriage should look like in the ways you do. I’ll love you always.

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

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CHAPTER ONE: Why Populist Counterpublics?

“Like Nailing Jell-O to the Wall”

Populism has been at the centre of theoretical and political puzzles for over half a century. Ionescu and Gellner (1969, p. 1) once warned us that “[a] spectre is haunting the world—populism.” Fifty years later, this ghost seems to be even more ubiquitous. This is especially true in the elections of powerful countries worldwide. In the last four years, we have seen the increased popularity, and even election, of several figures described as “populist” by both academics and journalists. These include U.S. President Donald Trump, President of the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte, French politician Marine Le Pen, Italian comedian and politician Beppe Grillo, U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, and several others that use uninhibited, direct and “cruder” language and mannerisms that Ostiguy and Roberts (2016, p. 30) refer to as “a flaunting of the low.” Such world and national leaders are not afraid, say their supporters, to “tell it like it is,” “shoot from the hip,” or go “off the cuff.” While flaunting the low in and of itself is not troubling for liberal democracies who elect such leaders, these qualities often act as euphemistic proxies for xenophobic or regressive language used to stoke anti-immigrant, racist, or otherwise exclusionary sentiments among electorates (Ostiguy & Roberts, 2016; Skonieczny, 2018; Waisbord, 2018a/b). This is what journalists and laypersons usually mean when they say “populist.”

It is something of a different story for academics. For sociologists and political scientists looking to explain why this strategy is finding more success, there is something larger at play. Hitherto, it is unclear what exactly this is. Some scholars believe that populism is an external, pathological ideology brought on by the throes of rising inequality, neoliberal policy and/or social isolation in a postmodern society; others believe it is endemic and internal to democracy

itself, and that it cannot be fully eradicated, but merely controlled; others believe it is the result of particularly charismatic individuals who are able to re-draw political alliances in civil society (Aslandis, 2017). In any case, there is a complete and total lack of consistency or coherence when academics—within the same disciplines, and even within the same journals—write about populism (Bale, Van Kessel & Taggart, 2011). The result is that trying to define populism, as Silvio Waisbord (2018b, p. 22) describes, is “like nailing Jell-O to the wall.” In its current form, the literature forces us into fractured, competing camps. Making things even trickier, scholars often take advantage of this arrangement to try and sell their own version things, coming up with new criteria of what *really* makes something populist over and above previous work.

Why does this matter? What are the issues if we continue this trend? Academically, the lack of agreement has made it so that “populism” can mean anything and everything, *and* has turned the term into a moral (rather than analytical) signifier indicating distasteful or politically incorrect leaders and movements—familiar features that haunt other terms, such as “neoliberal” (Arditi, 2010; Gerim, 2018; Sanscartier, 2017b). While a lot has been said about populism and why it happens, most of these accounts are contradictory and incomplete, leading to a lack of collective recognition of what we, as a community of scholars, are trying to better understand. We are forced to work with the one small Jell-O segment we have left, rather than collectively piecing together the puzzle of how and why populist movements constitute significant political forces in our time. Pragmatically—and perhaps more importantly—populism has been identified as being at the root of several regressive and disruptive political movements in multiple countries.

In Canada, the geographical focus of this dissertation, populism has been said to appear in the forms of increased desire for Western separation (Anderson & Coletto, 2019; Laycock,

2005), authoritarian legislation in provinces like Ontario and Quebec (Blanchet & Medeiros, 2019; Gerson, 2019), and as we will see in chapter seven, alarming amounts of anti-elitist, anti-immigrant and xenophobic organizations like ID Canada, Immigration Watch Canada, and “Yellow Vesters,” among others. Canadians are more torn than ever on whether we let “too many immigrants” into the country, a trend that pollsters blame on “authoritarian populist movements” (EKOS, 2019). The questions raised by these movements are critical—what kind of impact can they have on our political landscape? How do the leaders of these movements craft discourses capable of linking diverse individuals together? How do we combat them? If we want to answer these questions among others, we first need to understand why and how they come about—something current literatures do not allow.

At the core of this dissertation is a dissatisfaction with the current state of populism studies, and a proposal for a way forward that draws on a key strength of sociology—what Max Weber called *verstehen*, or *understanding* a phenomenon from the perspective of those who are participating in or collectively building a social phenomenon. In this chapter, I explain in detail the sources of my dissatisfaction, chiefly the tendencies to constantly create new, predetermined accounts of populism that try to read frameworks into various contexts, and how this has so far precluded an interpretive approach to populism studies. I then move to a discussion of how I think we can overcome these flaws by focusing on how populist mobilization creates specific kinds of “popular subjectivities” (Roberts, 2015b) that link individuals together into what I call populist counterpublics. The value added by this concept to an already busy literature is guiding an interpretive, *in-situ* examination of different contexts of populism that allow us to identify multiple “species” of populism, how they mobilize members, and why they emerge from the perspectives of those that join these counterpublics.

Before advancing, it should be made clear that this dissertation concerns itself primarily with leftist political theories around populism, which, in North American and European circles, constitute the bulk of arguments around populism-as-concept. Specifically, this means work on the ontology of populism and how it operates in multiple contexts. There are other contemporary literatures, such as the American-ethnographic stream, which gleams populism as part of (sub)cultural contexts but are not dismissive of it (e.g. Goldstein, 2016; Hochschild, 2016; Metzl, 2019). There are other camps, too, that aligned closer with my goals of transferring “populism” from a polemical tool to an analytic one (e.g. Agnew & Shin, 2019; Urbinati, 2019). This latter, budding space of scholarship does not constitute the target of my critiques in this chapter, but what this study helps to grow. In sum, my intellectual argument is primarily concerned with the tendency often found in left political theory, which treats typically populism as undesirable, pathological, and/or regressive.

Current problems with populism

There are a few features of populism that all scholars agree on. For example, all accounts of populism argue that it “always appeals to a claimed people” who are spoken for by some political leader, and that “the people” is defined against political antagonists, usually either government or corporate elites (Morelock & Narita, 2018, p. 137). Aside from this, however, there is little consensus of how populism should be best conceptualized to maximize analytical purchase of how it appears in so many diverse contexts. Taking stock of the current literature, we might say there is a spectrum of approaches that offer contrasting accounts of what populism is, and why we see it appear in modern democracies that runs from “content-centred” approaches to “form-centred” approaches. The key to establishing an interpretive approach to populism lies

somewhere in the middle of this spectrum: therefore, it is important to outline what I mean by these terms and how they can help us find a way forward.

Content-centred accounts of populism

What I call “content-centred” approaches to populism identify some kind of “common ‘ontic’ nucleus that could be taken as a basis to define populism” (Kögl, 2010, p. 176). Conceptually, they try to strip populism down to some bare set of criteria that can be used to identify it across multiple contexts in various forms. This is exemplified by one particularly popular account of populism by Jan-Werner Müller (2016) as a “moralistic imagination of politics” and advancing seven core theses on populism, including that populism is not a legitimate form of participatory politics (p. 102) and a “real danger to democracy” (p. 103). Before even defining what populism is, Müller (2016, p. 6) decries populism as little more than a “degraded form of democracy” that threatens “real,” “enlightened” democracy. Such is the case with many content-centred approaches one finds in North American and European literatures.

The most popular approach in this camp is an ideological one, which argues that populism is a “thin-centred” ideology that attaches to multiple ideologies such as socialism (left-wing populism), conservatism (right-wing populism), or liberalism to produce a Manichean arrangement in which a pure and sovereign “people” are pitted against a corrupt “elite” (Brett, 2013; Kaltwasser & Taggart, 2016; Mudde, 2004, 2007; Oliver & Rahn, 2016; Pasquino, 2008). Populism is “thin-centred” because its only core features are to establish the people, the corrupt elite, and to pit them against each other; the specific ways and reasons it does this are offloaded onto the ideologies to which it attaches. It is an essential identification of populism, pinning it

down to two common elements: appeals to “the people” and a strong sense of anti-elitism, from which a summative typology can be (theoretically) developed (Canovan, 1981, 2004).

Content-centred accounts (i.e., populism as a thin-centred ideology) are the most popular approach to populism today, but they are problematic. First, most of their utility is about definition; what differentiates populist politics from non-populist politics. While this is clearly an important academic and practical exercise, I would suggest that this approach makes definition, rather than analysis, an overriding priority. When applied empirically, scholars usually begin by “refining” or listing even more criteria of what makes something populist, starting from these two elements.

For example, Tufts and Thomas (2014, p. 64), exploring how populism becomes embedded in Canadian labour union discourses, identify “seven fundamental aspects of populism” (producerism, scapegoating, conspiracism, apocalyptic narratives, a cult of leadership, authoritarianism and nativism), then proceed to spend all their analytical energies reading these criteria into their case studies. It is not explained *why* or *how* unions, for example, take on populist sentiments. For every new empirical context, we get a new set of static, essential criteria, and it is unclear what value this practice has in understanding populism *across* contexts and *why* it happens (Laclau, 2005). By boiling populism down to an “ontic nucleus”, there is a focus on trying to read those qualities of that nucleus into any given context to define it *as* populist, rather than appreciating how that context works to generate populist support. Second, it is not clear if populism can reasonably be called even a thin-centred ideology. The foremost scholar on political ideologies, Michael Freeden, has argued that populism, unlike other thin-centred ideologies (e.g. feminism, ecologism), is not the product of reflexive thought or

collective meditation; there are no self-identifying populists¹, for example, or populist theorists that try to advance some kind vision (Freeden, 2017; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). “Populist” is a label used by some actors/groups to describe *other* actors/groups, often in a derogatory or belittling way.

Form-centred accounts of populism

In contrast, what I call “form-centred” approaches to populism are more concerned with what populism *does* as opposed to what populism *is*. This set of approaches, which is growing in number and popularity, are made possible by the ideas of Ernesto Laclau, who argued that populism as an organizing/antagonistic dynamic should be separated from the specific modalities through which that dynamic expresses itself (2005, p. 87). In short, we should separate the *form*² of populism from the various *contents* we find across different populist movements. For Laclau, what underpins the specific antagonisms of a populist movement is less important than *how* that movement emerges from diverse political wants (or “lacks”, in Laclau’s terminology) that emerges via the process of discursively naming “the People”. In short, populist movements emerge from the aggregation of multiple types of problems into one “problematic situation”: that vacuums political actors into the diametrically opposed banners of “the People” and enemies of “the People” such as elites, immigrants, and other political outsiders (Aslandis, 2017, p. 309).

¹ There are a few notable exceptions here. First, the “Populist Party” in the 1890s that primarily represented farmers’ concerns in the United States; second, the CTF, the first case study addressed in this dissertation (chapter four), sometimes describes itself as a populist or grassroots organization. Maxime Bernier, leader of the People’s Party of Canada (PPC), has also claimed that his party adheres to a doctrine of “smart populism”, trying to remove the connotations that populism is a symptom of stupidity or a lack of education.

² I use the term “form” as Simmel used it to discuss his idea of sociation; here, it contrasts with “content” by separating out the “particular, time and place-bound” associations by the formal frameworks that lead to the particular concrete modalities of those forms (Lizardo, 2019, p. 94). Applying this to populism, the concrete ways in which populism express itself in diverse jurisdictions should be separated from the common formalized framework in which it operates from place to place, which forms much of the basis for Laclau’s work.

Several different kinds of problems are equated to one another through the polyvalent semiotic of *the people* and crystallized around a central leader (or leaders), who claim to be able to address the common lack of this group.

Moving towards a form-centred account of populism helps not only to render it as a more fluid kind of political strategy, movement, or logic—whichever we pluck from the available conceptual buffet—but also helps to de-stigmatize some of its features. More recently, Chantal Mouffe (2018), Laclau’s contemporary and partner, argued that a post-structural approach to populism shows us that while regressive movements can emerge from the current populist moment, so too can more progressive forms if we are not too quick to dismiss them from left perspective. By focusing on the *forms* in which populism operates within and across contexts instead of the specific content or demands advanced by specific movements, we can recognize it as a legitimate political strategy that is not a *degradation* of democracy, but a means of resisting institutions and structures perceived to be controlled by a small group of elites.

Much contemporary study of populism is, without question, indebted to Laclau’s insights (Panizza, 2005). The case studies in this dissertation all work by “vacuuming” people into a specific kind of political subject, translating individual problems into a common subjectivity (i.e. a current understanding of themselves as political actors). In chapter four, for example, we see how the Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF), translates multiple individual problems—the price of orange juice or gas being too high, paying too much income tax, tax being wasted by politicians—into a shared subject of the paranoid watchdog. In chapter five, low and moderate-income individuals have their personal troubles (e.g., being unable to afford rent) translated into a public, crusading subjectivity that identifies specific politicians as the responsible for these issues, and pressures them into making life more bearable.

While Laclau provided the basis for these varied insights by separating out the dynamics of populism from their specific contents, his framework has been critiqued as being unsuitable and too vague for empirical work. It is unclear, for example, if Laclau sees populism as separate from “politics as usual”, or whether or not the connection of individuals’ personal problems (what Laclau calls “equivalential links”) require a leader around which to crystallize and form a collective, problematic situation (Arditi, 2010 Marchart, 2005; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). Benjamin Arditi (2010, pp. 493-494) for example criticizes Laclau’s framework as effectively saying that *all* politics is populist, making the term less than useful in identifying and analyzing specific kinds of movements happening in democratic societies. Likewise, some movements identified as populist—such as the Occupy movements worldwide, or the Zapatistas in Mexico—refuse to articulate central demands through a leader, or even form demands at all, meaning that Laclau’s framework cannot help us make sense of the wide variations of what is often labelled “populist”.

Mixing content and form: stylistic/discursive approaches to populism

These critiques of Laclau imply that identifying *some* content of what separates populist from non-populist kinds of politics is helpful, so that calling something “populist” has distinct definitional or analytical purchase. So, if Laclau’s seminal (but vague) populism-as-political-logic is furthest down the “form” end of the theoretical spectrum, we can re-trace our steps back towards the middle, between content and form. What we find here is a set of so-called “stylistic” or “discursive” approaches, itself a fairly diverse camp of scholars looking to shore up Laclau’s form-centred account with some content to more clearly demarcate populist from non-populist kinds of leaders and movements. Here, the focus is on how political leaders mobilize a group of

individuals by using speech or discourse that is anti-elitist, nationalistic, xenophobic, authoritarian, or some other set of criteria that makes it distinctly populist. It retains some of Laclau's concern with what populism *does* (rather than what it *is*) by arguing that there is a leader, or some set of leaders capable of animating support by the aforementioned kinds of discourses. However, it re-introduces content to the concept of populism by arguing there are certain ways that politicians, leaders and movements *behave* that make them populist.

One group of scholars in this section of the spectrum tries to operationalize populism as a kind of rhetoric, capable of being quantified in campaign literature and political speeches (e.g. Bonikowski & Gidron, 2017; Bos et al., 2013; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Oliver & Rahn, 2016; White, 2016). The concern here rests with communication strategies that revolve around simplicity, clarity, straightforwardness, and simultaneously distance their users from “the institution” (politicians, elites, etc.) while claiming to “fix what’s wrong with” liberal democracy. While this framework has methodological benefits (e.g. large-scale quantitative studies, experimental manipulation) it reduces populism to a set of phrases and does not really address the deeper questions of *how* or *why* populist rhetoric is able to convince individuals that their problems are really part of a broader set of issues faced by *the people*, of which they are part. While it usefully tries to identify a specifically populist set of rhetoric, it does so rather superficially, without fully considering how discourse becomes translated into subjectivity, which is subsequently translated into action.

Another group of scholars, a bit further towards the *form* end of the spectrum than the previous camp, still thinks of populism as a set of mobilizing discourses, repertoires, or performances by a leader (or set of leaders), but argues that the populist *style* actively calls subjects into being. It is enacted to create political subjectivities that can subsequently be

activated, linked together, and mobilized towards political ends (Aslandis, 2017; Brubaker, 2017; Jansen, 2011, 2015; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). This account sticks a little closer to Laclau's original assertion that populism does not merely group already like-minded people together, but actively forges a common label under which people come to identify. Kurt Weyland (2017) identified this theoretical account as a political-strategic approach to populism that emphasizes the role of leaders in gaining direct, unmediated support from voters, activists, protestors, and other actors that can be organized and mobilized in some way. The features of the populist style vary somewhat by account, but there is significant convergence around a few core traits: "bad manners" when addressing the public (i.e., not politically correct, abrasive), majoritarianism, and the valorization of "ordinary people." While these are vague and imprecise qualities, which Laclau (2005, p. 17) notes are at the root of populism's moral devaluation by many scholars, he argues we should instead try to understand *how* these qualities work to animate political support.

The impetus for this dissertation's theoretical framework stems from this camp of scholars. There are a few elements of this camp that separate them out from other approaches, allowing us to identify a path forward to a more interpretive account of populism. First, the populist style is not a feature of a single, charismatic politician that appeals to the "sociocultural low" at the head of a movement, like Donald Trump, Rodrigo Duterte or Hugo Chávez (Ostiguy & Roberts, 2016). It can be enacted by multiple "backstage" leaders who spearhead a formal organization, for example. Jansen's (2011, p. 82) concept of populist mobilization is especially helpful here, reframing "populism" in a grounded and operationalized, yet flexible fashion as *populist mobilization*: "any sustained, large-scale political project that mobilizes ordinarily marginalized social sectors into publicly visible and contentious political action, while articulating an anti-elite, nationalist rhetoric that valorizes ordinary people." This broadens our

field of vision to not only include spectacular movements and events, like the Occupy Movement or Donald Trump, but organizations that may be functioning on smaller scales or local levels. Importantly, this also means that just because a populist figurehead is defeated—such as Maxime Bernier in the most recent Canadian federal election—it does not equate to the eradication of *populism* itself.

Consequently, and second in this list, this enables us to think of populism not only as extraordinary, rare events, but as a “thoroughly mundane, even conventional” politics capable of routinization, trying to continuously construct crisis and confrontation between ordinary, “common” people and elites (Knight, 1998, p. 229). The goal of such movements is to continuously use anti-elitist and nationalist discourses that not only aggregate, but *actively construct* individually felt “lacks” to perpetually forge a solidary people. Any political actor(s) can draw on anti-elitist, nationalist discourses to animate political support from diverse groups of people.

Third, and finally, the stylistic framework allows us to challenge dominant assumptions in the literature that populism is primarily a “top-down” movement (Aslandis, 2017; Roberts, 2015a/b). Populism also regularly occurs in “bottom-up” formations, not stemming from a singular, charismatic figurehead, but in ways that construct participatory linkages capable of linking individuals together into a shared, “popular subjectivity”; the construction of knowledge that allows someone to feel a sense of belonging to “the people”, and how to make sense of oneself in that context (Roberts, 2015a/b). The following chapters in this dissertation show a wide range of participatory linkages built by organizations: boycotts and petitions, simply consuming information, attending meetings, rallies, and protests, and contributing to certain kinds of discourses in the online space. Each of these, in unique ways, tries to bind individuals

into some anti-elitist and nationalist popular subjectivity that come to collectively identify themselves as “the people”.

Capitalizing on an interpretive approach

These three elements of the stylistic camp—conceptual freedom from a central figurehead, routinization, and participatory linkages—help form the basis of an interpretive account of populism. In this understanding, populism is a more permanent, enduring feature of the democratic political landscape than many mainstream accounts suggest. An interpretive account analyzes populist mobilization from the perspective of those “in” the mobilization. Capitalizing on an interpretive approach to populism, this dissertation utilizes a qualitative, multi-method and case-study approach to understand how organizations routinely operating in the Canadian political context draw on populist mobilization strategies to encourage Canadians to renegotiate their identities in collectively antagonistic and anti-elitist ways. As I illustrate in chapters two and three, critical theorizing about populism helps us to see the ways in which context matters, and how theoretical accounts need to be attuned to the experiences of those *within* diverse political contexts, rather than disciplining and shaping the unique features of each case into a pre-decided framework. This will not only involve better understanding of how Canadians are encouraged to actively reshape their political identities, but determining what kinds of political subjectivities—that is, new modalities of understanding one’s own place and role within Canadian politics—are circulated in Canadian and Ontarian politics.

Hence, the core contribution of this dissertation is a concept forged within a critical realist/interpretive tradition that will help theorists of populism understand the latter in this way. This concept, which I define and expand upon in the following chapter, is that of “populist

counterpublics.” At present, it is enough to understand these counterpublics as specific kinds of counterpublics that reframe for their members all political issues as Manichean in nature, pitting them as “the People” against a corrupt elite. They accomplish this by creating and advancing certain political logics, advanced as discourses of crises of democracy, encouraging Canadians to understand themselves as part of a group that is perpetually excluded and subordinated to a wider, dominant public. This wider public is antagonistic and phantasmal, continuously constructed by the members of populist counterpublics in ways that help them identify and understand the ways in which they are systematically oppressed by current liberal-democratic relations. This involves constructing and circulating “popular subjectivities” within the Canadian socio-political context; that is, subjectivities which divide politics into an “us” versus “them” that individually mirrors, and links into, the collective fight of the counterpublic against the wider public.

Research Questions

This dissertation builds the following key question (chapters two and three), addressing it via a wide variety of empirical case studies (chapters four through eight): *how do populist counterpublics attract and recruit diverse Canadians to their causes?* This can, in turn, be broken down into a series of sub-questions:

1. What kinds of popular subjectivities are offered by various agents of populist mobilization?
2. How do these popular subjectivities facilitate re-negotiation of Canadians’ political identities into anti-elitist and nationalist (i.e., populist) actors? This will involve examining how each subjectivity offers:
 - a. a crisis of democratic representation;
 - b. political knowledges of the self, and
 - c. the antagonistic construction of the “public” writ large

3. How are these discourses circulated and taken up within populist counterpublics?

I address these questions empirically through an examination of five case studies that vary widely on ideology and political goals, yet share the fundamental tactic of populist mobilization. While I examine the structure, history, and detail of each case study more in their respective chapters, I briefly introduce them here for the purposes of familiarity moving into the rest of this chapter, and chapter two, where I note some of their conceptual and theoretical features.

The first case study is the Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF), an organization that believes government plays too big of a role in managing the affairs of Canadians. This manifests primarily in the issue of taxes—which the CTF believes should be lowered and used more efficiently, such as by ridding of “corporate welfare”—and the inappropriate use of public funds by politicians. The “taxpayer” operates as an empty signifier (Laclau, 2005) to which any Canadian, experiencing financial difficulty or frustration with respect to paying tax, can attach themselves to publicly grieve the loss of their hard-earned income to government elites (bureaucrats, politicians, etc.) that ultimately end up wasting large sums of it.

The second case study, The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now Canada (ACORN Canada), advocates for the issues of low- and moderate-income Canadians. These are far-reaching, including topics ranging from rent controls/increase, to subsidized bus fares for low-income Canadians, to the affordability of internet. Like the CTF, ACORN understands government elites as the main obstacle or “target” for their members, but for very different reasons: they tend to be captured by corporations that use their financial might to influence them in ways that harm less well-off Canadians. Because members are low and moderate income, the focus here is on community organizing to instead build “people power” to offset this financial discrepancy between “the people” and corporate/government elites.

Third, the Council of Canadians (CoC, or “the Council”), is a farther-reaching organization that claims advocacy on behalf of “all Canadians”, not just “the taxpayer” or those of specific income brackets. The topics that form the core of the Council’s advocacy efforts involve improving Canadian democracy, Canadians’ access to water, corporate irresponsibility with respect to the environment and human rights, and keeping politicians accountable to *all* Canadians, not just private entities. While some of these overlap with ACORN’s goals, they tend to be much wider in scope, a sentiment reflected in the Council’s repeated claims of representing the needs of *all* Canadians, which I expand upon in chapter six. As far as political ideology is concerned, the Council could be described as much more “mainstream” than the CTF or ACORN; the topics on which they touch are relatively anodyne compared to the previous two cases. This is reflected in their forms of protest, which most often include consumer boycotts and petitions circulated to members at all levels of government.

Fourth, a pair of linked case studies, ID (Identitarians) Canada and Immigration Watch Canada (IWC), are both explicitly concerned with Canadian immigration policies. These groups believe that current levels of immigration are unsustainable, both in a cultural sense (in which “Canadian culture” becomes destroyed or eroded) and an economic/financial one (especially with respect to healthcare institutions). They advocate for the Federal government to significantly lower or altogether stop of the flow of immigrants into Canadian borders, whom they claim love Canadian “milk and honey” but fail to respect a distinctly Canadian way of life.

In what follows, I build my framework of “populist counterpublics” in significant detail, making frequent references to these case studies in ways that foreshadow their more specific discussions. I further explain how this framework allows us to approach the highly confusing and sensationalized topic of “populism” from an interpretive perspective, allowing us to practice

verstehen – understanding how it operates from the standpoint of those who participate in constructing, advancing and utilizing populist mobilization. The lack of available tools for an interpretive approach is, I claim, a surprising hindrance from the otherwise incredibly vast literatures of populism studies. This dissertation makes significant headway in addressing this hindrance.

CHAPTER TWO: Toward an interpretive framework of populism

Relativizing “marginalization”

In chapter one, I explained the benefits of merging form-based with content-based accounts of populism, exemplified by Jansen’s (2011) flexible concept of *popular mobilization* – it blends content and form in ways that attune us to social context, while still imposing some order on the concept. However, even these more sophisticated approaches have significant flaws: they do not sufficiently consider the perspective of those involved in populist mobilization. I have argued that the stylistic camp is the most theoretically and empirically useful account of populism to date, since it blends both elements of form-centred with content-centred theories of how populist discourses operate. While the stylistic camp provides a conceptual girder to a more interpretive framework, the bridge itself is absent. This is because there is still an assumption that populist movements must consist of some essential feature(s). Jansen’s notion of populist mobilization, which I understand as the most useful formulation of populism for the above reasons, assumes that those joined to a popular subjectivity must be “ordinarily marginalized.”

What exactly does this mean? Does it mean that those we study must meet some objective measure of oppression or marginalization? Can only certain people—the oppressed, the subaltern, and so on—participate in populist movements? If this is so—and there is no clarity provided by Jansen on this point—then a key element of Laclau’s gift to populism studies is neglected: what is defined as a “problematic situation” does not exist *a priori* to the mobilizing efforts of populist leaders.

So, a drawback from the content-centred approaches to populism remains here: it encourages us to predetermine the qualities of populist movements, and then tries to “read in” those qualities into various contexts. But following Laclau, we must recognize that it is in the act

of mobilizing *itself* that situations become collectively problematic (2005, p. 88). As sociologists, we should refrain from imposing the qualities of “ordinarily marginalized” on particular cases, thereby essentializing “marginalization.” If we are too concerned with moralistic gatekeeping of what “counts” (and does not) as marginalization then we are forced to rely on content, rather than form, and we miss important cases in which “marginalization” is not *objectively* verifiable but *subjectively* constructed. The CTF, for example, has a knack for making “taxpayers”—primarily white, middle/upper-class Canadians—feel like they lack a voice in parliament and pay too much in taxes to politicians who waste it. Meanwhile, from a social justice perspective, it would be a bit of a stretch to label this group “oppressed” or “marginalized.”

Elsewhere, ACORN Canada mobilizes the socio-economically disadvantaged, encouraging them to be fed up and reject a way of life where struggling to afford rent and dealing with problematic landlords is the norm. It is tempting to view the former as ultimately *unproblematic* when compared to the latter, because from a social justice point of view, it *is* *unproblematic*—historically underrepresented people, like people of colour and the working/underclass, should be given representative priority over those with racial and financial privilege. However, this does not mean that members of the CTF do not, or cannot, see their own situation as problematic—indeed, it is *how* they come to problematize taxes and public spending in which an interpretive approach is most interested.

So, if we are to develop a more interpretive approach to populism—one which seeks understanding from the perspective of those swept up in these movements—we should jettison frameworks (or parts thereof) that encourage us to weigh the gravity of populist *content* (i.e., specific political issues) in direct comparison to one another. It is unlikely that any reasonable sociologist would disagree with the fact that, on average, those mobilized under ACORN are

objectively more marginalized than those under the CTF, particularly along lines of race, ethnicity, and/or class. But this does not mean that CTF members cannot *feel* excluded from politics, or from democratic processes, just as much as the former. This *felt* exclusion provides an affective basis for forming “the people” in its various forms (Aslandis, 2017; Skonieczny, 2018). This is where Rogers Brubaker (2017, p. 364) very helpfully offers an interpretive component linking various populist styles together: that they “antagonistically re-politicize” certain issues, or re-assert democratic control of features of political life widely understood as “depoliticized or de-democratized.”

This is an important conceptual asset that serves to relativize specific, concrete issues. It would be easy to accuse the CTF, for example, of perpetuating individualistic or neoliberal ideology, condemning the kind of paranoid-inducing political work they do with the genuinely collective dynamics that ACORN uses to better the socio-economic conditions of their members. But this would assume that being upset about paying taxes is little more than a joke when compared to struggling to afford rent. The populist style, in which leaders of an organization can engage to antagonistically mobilize its members, serves to re-animate issues that those members formerly thought was out of their democratic control. In this dissertation, the issues range from how much tax we pay, to poor living conditions, to the impact of corporations on the environment, to how many immigrants arrive at our border annually.

Therefore, an critical-interpretive approach to populism must avoid predetermined moral and analytical judgements of this type: the matter of what is “worse” or “more worthy” of political attention is not of direct concern to us. Certainly, while we can assess a kind of politics or movement as repugnant or desirable in moralistic terms, the linkage to populism does not *ipso facto* make a specific movement or politics repugnant. While I wish to make it clear that I

denounce white nationalism in my fourth and fifth case studies, for example, the linkage to populism is not what drives my distaste of it; rather, it is the fact that it links populist mobilization *to* racist discourses. To date, the mainstream assumption of left-theorist scholars is that populism constitutes a social or institutional pathology based on the *content* of the specific movements they analyze, claiming they threaten to destabilize our institutions by encouraging alienated citizens to abandon “civility, diversity, tolerance, reason, and truth” (Waisbord, 2018b, p. 23; 2018a; also see Fenster, 1999; Moore, 2018; Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2016; Silva, Vegetti & Littvay, 2017; cf. Arditì, 2010; Canovan, 2004). In such accounts, “populism” constitutes little more than a pathological hypnosis based on economic anxieties, stoking “immediate reactions [that] obviate more measured responses” (Freeden, 2017, p. 6).

But, treating populism as a sickening or immoral miasma is a conceptual discredit. Contrary to this mainstream lamenting of the downfall of a truth-oriented, rational, enlightened and progressive society, I suggest that relativizing the content of specific movements in favour of analyzing their *forms*, and how they discursively incorporate members into their folds, helps transfer “populism” from a polemical tool to an analytical one. This will ultimately provide a better understanding not only of the movements themselves, but from a pragmatic point of view it could also help us strategize on how to combat those we understand are more problematic, (from a social justice perspective).

In sum, an interpretive framework for analyzing populist mobilization must understand the human beings *in* them “not as objects” that are passively hypnotized by the allure of populism, “but as agents...actively and collaboratively constructing (and deconstructing, meaning both critically assessing and changing) their polities, societies and cultures—along with the institutions, organizations, practices, physical artifacts, and language and concepts that

populate these” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 46). The rest of this chapter theoretically establishes the concept of *populist counterpublics* to do just this. I explain the conceptual anatomy of populist counterpublics in the following section, as a way of overcoming the limitations in contemporary theorizations of populism. It does so by focusing on how populist mobilizations advance a certain kind of political logic, which becomes translated into concrete political (popular) subjectivities through tangible mobilizing practices; these subjectivities become linked through a constructed “problematic situation” in ways that not only construct “the people”, but *the public* as a hostile and unwelcoming place. In doing this, it confronts the matter of how the actors in populist movements see themselves in relation to the wider public, seriously considers the motivations for their actions, and the logics which govern their understandings of politics writ large.

Populist counterpublics: A conceptual anatomy

Populist counterpublics consist of three core elements that encourage analyses of populism from the perspective of those engaged in populist mobilization. This section will culminate in a working, operational definition of populist counterpublics, and importantly, what separates them out from *non*-populist counterpublics. This will require an initial breakdown of their conceptual anatomy, which I explore here. All populist counterpublics, which engage in populist mobilization, consist of three elements. Each of these elements can take on a wide variety of ontic nuclei, meaning that they enable us to approach movements or organizations that are *prima facie* populist³ and allow us to appreciate their qualities without being distracted by definitional qualities. These qualities are political logics, popular subjectivities, and finally the actual

³ I explain what I mean by “prima facie populist” in more detail in the following chapter, when I discuss case selection.

counterpublic itself, which links together subjectivities in ways that simultaneously problematize the public sphere while presenting itself as the solution. This culminates in a specifically *populist* counterpublic.

Political logics: Creating crises of representation

First, there is some *political logic* in which movements are steeped, providing a basis for problematizing the wider public sphere by claiming there is some “crisis of representation” in which political representatives are detached from or unaccountable to citizens (Knight, 1998; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014; Thompson, 2017). Political logics (and the crises of representation they construct) are key to the process of “antagonistic re-politicization” precisely because it serves to problematize some previously unproblematic social arrangement, constructing a “lack” with which certain kinds of people (in this dissertation: those in higher tax brackets, low socio-economic status, environmentalists/social justice activists, white people) can identify, depending on the specific movement. As Kenneth Roberts (2015a, p. 141) argues, these are “logics of popular empowerment” because within their internal structures, they suggest a corrective to whatever deficiencies are responsible for that “lack”.

From a Foucauldian perspective, political logics are constructed by and manifest themselves in “reason-giving practices” that justify various forms of agency and resistance in the social plane. These are, in turn, built from “internal normative justifications” that define themselves in relation to wider, rational-institutional norms (Schaff, 2004, p. 52). In all the cases this dissertation presents, I examine these practices and justifications on an organizational level, showcasing how they exist primarily *in negation to* (i.e., try to counteract) wider, rational-institutional norms. My first case, the CTF, constructs government authorities as “radically alien

enemy powers” (Rosanvallon, 2008, p. 25) as a way to problematize current, usually taken-for-granted norms around taxation, or worse—those who argue that we should be paying *more* taxes. Politicians, who needlessly waste taxpayer money because of opulence (e.g. ambassadors purchasing crystal dinnerware) and injustice (e.g. corporate welfare), are constructed as too far detached from ordinary Canadians to govern reasonably and effectively. This comes through quite clearly in my interviews with CTF staff.

ACORN Canada, on the other hand, works against the perceived norms that money “talks” louder than people can, meaning those who have no money also have no voice. Politicians, as a part of this system, are influenced to the point of being detached from “the people.” As I illustrate in their chapter, they prefer to work outside mainstream political mechanisms (e.g. voting, petitions), because these norms prevent effective action *within* our political systems. The Council of Canadians, in contrast, has full faith in such mechanisms, but believe they have been co-opted by corporations looking to take advantage of the Canadian people, who must work hard to re-claim them in the name of real democracy and social justice. IWC and ID Canada believe that political representatives have planned nothing short of an immigrant invasion for personal gain, drowning out the *vox populi* of white, “Old Stock” Canadians who do not subscribe to a “progressive agenda.” In each case, some element of Canadian political or institutional norms is constructed as problematic and rejected in favour of direct action by “the people”, whoever they may be.

As some scholars have argued, the specific logics that drive populist movements are not external, deviant pathologies of democracy—a commonly held assumption among most scholars, especially those who use content-centred approaches. But in an interpretive approach, we should try to understand these logics as endemic to representative democracy itself precisely because, in

that system, *sovereignty* is conflated with *representation*—people are forced to participate only vicariously in politics through representatives, who may not necessarily reflect the beliefs of their constituents (Canovan, 1981, 1999, 2004; Caramani, 2017; Goodwyn, 1991; Gerim, 2018; Rosanvallon, 2008; Worseley, 1969).

This representational distance provides the constant structural potential for crises of representation to emerge, which populism then tries to address via unmediated interventions such as referendums, recall elections, protests, or the growth of institutional distrust more broadly; this is why populism is sometimes called the “shadow” of democracy (Arditi, 2010; Canovan, 2004; Thomsson, 2017). Democracy and populism are closer to “Siamese twins” than mortal enemies; if individuals who feel alienated from democracy become “allured” by populist mobilization, it is only because democratic structures provide the means through which that mobilization can breed resentment and crisis (Canovan, 2004; Pasquino, 2008). This is especially exemplified by ACORN Canada, who frame their actions as belonging to democracy’s “redemptive” face, which corrects democracy’s other, “pragmatic” face (Canovan, 1999). Because representatives must “get on with” the business of governing, they can “forget” who they represent; as such, ACORN believes political fights are *ipso facto* worthwhile, even if they do not lead to tangible change. This is explored more in chapter five.

Importantly—especially if we are to establish an interpretive approach to populist mobilization—we need to recognize that the political logics of populist counterpublics are not inherently immoral or undesirable. We should take great care not to assume that those in any given counterpublic are stupid or misguided. This conflation can easily tempt us into thinking that people of colour who participate in anti-immigrant campaigns, for example, are “race traitors” working against the “rational” interests of their demographic (Lukes, 2005; Preston &

Chadderton, 2012). This kind of moral judgement before we analyze a case bears little analytical fruit. In fact, if we are to fully understand populist counterpublics, we should forego the assumption of rational, publicly minded “Habermas-esque” subjects that become “corrupted” by populist mobilization. It is possible to approach populism through a non-polemical epistemology while still denouncing some forms of politics that threaten pluralistic justice.

Instead, we should primarily concern ourselves with how “techniques of power and procedures of discourse” that change how individuals understand themselves as political agents. In populist counterpublics, discursive constructs of “the People” polymorphically suture people “from below...[traversing] local oppositions and links them together to bring about redistributions, realignments, homogenizations...and convergences of force relations” (Foucault, 1990, pp. 94-98). The result is a *popular subjectivity* that both reshapes how individuals understand themselves, and simultaneously links them to others with the same felt “lack” brought about by a crisis of democratic representation.

Popular subjectivities: Creating and naming “the people”

Put simply, a popular subjectivity encompasses the techniques and knowledge that are used to redefine political agents (to themselves and others) as members of “the people” through the implantation of a felt lack. This lack is created through discursive cleavages that define “the people” in opposition to political foes (Roberts, 2015b, p. 683). In populist movements worldwide, we see two primary kinds of cleavages. First, these cleavages can be vertical, in which the people are defined in opposition to some sort of elite—this elite can be a political elite (e.g. progressive or corrupt politicians), a corporate/socio-economic elite (e.g. the wealthy, capitalists, etc.), or a cultural elite (typically politicians understood as “pushing” diversity,

multiculturalism, immigration). This elite is then positioned as threatening the sovereignty, purity, and/or valor of “the people”, from whom democratic control has been wrestled (Mudde, 2004). Cleavages can also be horizontal, in which some demographic or group in civil society is excluded from membership to people, usually on the basis of citizenship, race, or ethnicity (Barr, 2009; Bonikowski, 2017; De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; Kyle & Gultchin, 2018; Pollock, Brock & Ellison, 2015). The most common kind of horizontal cleavage in Western populism has to do with anti-immigration, in which white people fear losing a political majority (Clarke & Newman, 2017). We will explore this kind of cleavage in more detail in chapter six.

In talking about a “popular subjectivity”, I am drawing partially on Laclau’s original formulation of a “popular subject position” that is discursively constructed through the deployment of empty signifiers (Hutagalung & Lubis, 2018). This refers to a signifier with no semiotic reference, enabling it to take on polyvalent meanings depending on the contexts in which it is deployed. Therefore, as we will see in following chapters, “the taxpayer” is used by the CTF to discursively interpolate Canadians in a diverse, but particular way—as someone who is entitled to transparency of government actions. Likewise, in chapter five, I illustrate how the Council of Canadians uses purposeful vagueness in their discourse (standing up for “all Canadians”, moving democracy “forward”) to animate potential members. Importantly, a *popular* subject position is one in which a “position is constituted through dividing political space into two antagonistic camps” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 131). Hence, it is a subject position that deploys a flexible signifier to redefine the political self, and in a way that does so antagonistically.

In the context of populist counterpublics, popular subjectivities are the result of political logics that work to redefine the individual members of a populist movement to themselves and to

social relations which come to exist within a variety of these vertical and horizontal cleavages. The empirical analyses that follow in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation examine how prospective members become bound to a popular subjectivity via the discourses and practices of knowledge-claims, recruitment, fundraising, training, and participation in events like protests, meetings, and petitions/boycotts. It is through these processes that the people become named, diagnose a crisis of representation, and enact a vision for resolving that crisis.

In chapter four, we will see how the CTF promises to keep members informed about how national debt impacts them as individuals—framing them as holders of individual debt—and how they work on members’ behalf to alleviate this burden. Likewise, in chapter five, I discuss interviews with ACORN staff that illustrate how they consciously try to get people living in the community “fired up” about various issues that they take for granted, such as rent, bad landlords, threats of gentrification/eviction, inadequate social supports, and so on. Members are told that it is up to *them* to take direct action against politicians who will continue to ignore their concerns in favour of catering to the wealthy. The Council of Canadians and IWC/ID Canada also do this, but around different content (corporatocracy and immigration, respectively). The popular subjectivity for each case is labelled in ways that reflect the kind of knowledges these organizations advance towards members, redefining them to themselves and to the polity.

In short, popular subjectivities bind individuals together into delineated, antagonistic “imagined communities” that constitute subsets of the wider polity. As Benedict Anderson suggested, such communities are imagined because, like members of a nation-state, those who call themselves the people “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1983, p. 6). In the case of populism and populist counterpublics, the “communion” is being deprived of political

recognition and fairness—whether this is because of an elite, or some segment of society that is responsible—and seeks to regain control, “filling in” that lack. Laclau (2005, p. 81) referred to this as a *plebs*, which present themselves as a “partiality which wants to function as the totality of the community.” This forms the basis for what I call a populist counterpublic.

Populist counterpublics: Political logics + popular subjectivities

When members are bound together via a popular subjectivity and are mobilized in some form (via donating/subscribing, protests, boycotts, petitions, etc.), they form a populist counterpublic. The term *counterpublic* comes from studies critical of the rational-communicative model of the public, theorized chiefly by Habermas. For Habermas, the public sphere is a temporally and historically bound arena populated by governed by the regulatory ideal of rational-critical discussion. What separates it from prior social systems (e.g. nomadic peoples, feudalism, etc.) is the specific use of *reason* by citizens to engage in reflexive debate about “publicly relevant” issues such as the exchange the commodities (Habermas, 1991 [1962], p. 27). This model positions Habermas, and those drawing on his theories, to lament the erosion of “the public” by industries like mass media, leisure, and infotainment that transform it from “culture-debating” to “culture-consuming” (1991 [1962], p. 175). Today, we see the spectre of this Habermasian model and its associated anxieties manifest in discussions about living in a “post-truth era”, or the rise of “fake news”, and how we need, but cannot seem to restore the public to its former glory. This is an academically fashionable narrative that scholars often tie to the rise of populism in the West, especially its right-wing variants (see e.g. Engesser et al., 2017; Fenster, 1999; Lakoff, 2017; McKee & Stuckler, 2017; Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2016; Schulz, Wirth & Müller, 2018; Waisbord 2018a/b; Ylä-Anttila, 2018).

Critiquing Habermas, Nancy Fraser was among the first and perhaps most known to suggest that Habermas ignores those excluded from public life, but nevertheless created and participated in their own publics. Her historical examination of how women were excluded from public life (voting, discussions in salons, etc.) illustrates how Habermas implicitly romanticizes a public that was constituted by its exclusion of marginalized groups—namely anyone who was not a white, property-owning man (1990, pp. 60-62). She insists that we should examine what she terms “actually existing democracy”, which shows a colourful array of publics that existed outside of, and in opposition to, *the* bourgeois public that Habermas outlines in his work; women, for example, built moral reform societies, voluntary associations, and organized protests whose goals heavily contrasted with or contradicted the hegemony of the public sphere. Fraser (1990, p. 67) calls such publics *subaltern counterpublics*, which “signal...parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.”

These “oppositional interpretations” are at the heart of counterpublics, which have germinated myriad studies of how the latter come to be. Research has included arenas in which people contest racial profiling and discrimination (Jackson & Welles, 2015), heteronormativity (Renninger, 2015), and oppressive workplaces (Johnston, Sanscartier & Johnston, 2018, 2019), among others. The contestation of these oppressive/alienating social conditions—perpetuated by the hegemony of the public sphere—constitutes the *counter* part of counterpublics. Counterpublics seek to re-negotiate political “common sense”, change social customs, and transform identities in ways that articulate problematics about identity (Goodnight, 1997, p. 272). They do so by creating “poetic-expressive” discourses that can take the form of art, written word,

literature, language (e.g. reclamation of the word “queer”), and other forms of resistance that recursively generate audiences.

In my efforts toward an interpretive approach to populist mobilization, I slightly modify what scholars mean by *counterpublics*. For populist counterpublics, the re-negotiation of identities is sparked by a *felt* lack and a crisis of representation that brings together members *through* poetic-expressive friction. In the following chapters, I illustrate how various populist counterpublics engage in populist mobilization via discourses of paranoia and fear, pride, collectivity, stewardship, frustration, and other forms of affect that catalyze the adoption of popular subjectivities. This means that, once again, we must forego the parts of frameworks that implicitly encourage us to parse out who is “really” oppressed, and therefore worthy of scholarly attention. For literary critic and queer theorist Michael Warner, what makes a counterpublic properly “counter” is that it “maintains, at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself is not just a general or wider public, but a dominant one” (2002, p. 86). This means that the poetic-expressive mechanisms of a counterpublic generate “[f]riction against the dominant public” (ibid). In populist counterpublics, a key part of populist mobilizing discourses are working to actively construct the wider public as dominant and oppressive, even if by all sociological sense the “subordinated” hold privilege on several axes (sexuality, gender, race, class, and so on).

This is a difficult (and doubtless controversial) theoretical manoeuvre, because for all intents and purposes, we are forced to de-reify the oppression of counterpublics relative to the hegemonic public sphere. Certainly, dominant public discourses contain sexism, racism, heteronormativity, classism, and other oppressive features identified by the literature on various counterpublics that serve to exclude certain demographics. But if our goal is to identify how a

populist counterpublic wants to re-negotiate what they see as political “common sense” that excludes its own members, our main focus should be on how those members *feel* excluded, rather than whether or not they are actually (or “ordinarily”) or objectively excluded. This will involve understanding how populist counterpublics not only construct themselves as oppressed, but discursively construct a hegemonic public sphere in exclusionary ways.

I contend the best way to do this is by de-reifying *the public* writ large. The work of Jodi Dean (2001) is ideal for this, who does away with the rational, debating, enlightened “Habermasian” public subject altogether, and argues that what we understand as a progressive public is little more than a fantasy inscribed in our institutions. The public, as Habermas understands it, can be separated into three phantasmal publics whose interlocking produces the fantasy of the rational public sphere. These are publics “supposed to believe,” “supposed to know,” and “supposed to *not* know”, the first of which maintains faith in rational-critical debate and mechanisms of publicity to inform the public on what it needs to know to achieve “enlightenment” – a supposed state where the public knows *everything* and functions in an ideal state. Publics supposed to *not* know operates on the basis of guilt, rather than belief. This means that when someone flips from CBC News on politics to watching a reality show, they feel a negated sense of duty to the rational-communicative public by feeling guilty about indulging in “trash TV” (i.e., they *should* be informing themselves through news but are choosing not to). In short, contrary to Habermas’ assertion that the public operates on the basis of *knowledge*, it actually operates on the basis of desire, driven by a faith in publicity that is embedded into our structures in ways that believe *for* us (Steckle, Johnston & Sanscartier, 2019). Dean uses the example of talking heads that debate political issues *for* us—as individuals, we never have to lift a finger. Talking heads implicitly project the fantasy of a communicative and rational public.

There are two important theoretical corollaries here conducive of an interpretive approach to populist counterpublics. First, the character of the public—what constitutes as acting in the “public spirit”, for example—is flexible. As I have illustrated elsewhere (Sanscartier, 2017b), social actors can manipulate the ontological fabric of the public by engaging in discourses of publicity, and its counterpart of secrecy, to infuse publics with a kind of sensibility that re-calibrates what counts as “common sense” or “acting in the public interest.” Ontario’s welfare fraud hotline, for example, is a kind of public technology that tells citizens to be on the lookout for “secret fraudsters” who are leeching on public coffers. Dean effectively identifies the “secret” as the cathexis of the public supposed to believe—the public needs to uncover *every* secret to make itself omnipotent and make democracy work. Second, it follows that the Habermasian rational-communicative subject is nothing but fantasy, operating on faith and not knowledge. Key to our own purposes, Dean provides a relativized subject, one that is impervious to the constant moral upkeep of the public and its associated activities. In this framework, we are free from seeing members of the public and adjacent counterpublics as subjects that *should* be informed, or rational, or communicative.

In different ways, the following case studies try to establish popular subjectivities and populist counterpublics by revealing some kind of truth about individuals, ushering out a secret and publicizing what needs to be done to address the common lack faced by their members. Revealing personal debt, as the CTF does through the ever-increasing “debt clock” – symbolizes an effort to teach Canadian something about themselves. Obviously, this is a different trope than the kind of secrecy implanted by ID Canada or IWC – one in which there is a conspiratorial plot to erode white culture via the “ethnic vote”—but the conceptual flexibility of “the secret”, in both of these cases, allows us to suspend the judgements that come with the tacit endorsement of

the rational-critical ideal for the public sphere. These cases, in some way, are working “under the hood” of public discourse by tapping into the ontological configurations of desire and faith associated with the “advancement” and “progress” of the public described by Dean (2001).

Counterpublics are, however, more than just assemblages of various discourses about governments, “the” public sphere, and secrecy. The concept draws our attention to the ways in which publics are formed, how they change, and the strategies of mobilization and collectivization that are used to bring people together in efforts to change society in some ways. These efforts are couched in the various kinds of political logics and popular subjectivities which I have described above. I will now formally define the concept of populist counterpublics, which forms the basis of this dissertation.

Populist counterpublics are a specific kind of counterpublic that antagonistically re-politicizes some area of sociopolitical life by re-drawing allegiant boundaries into an “us” (“the people”) and “them” (vertical or horizontal enemies responsible for a subjectively felt “lack”). They do so by (1) circulating political logics constituting a crisis of democratic representation, in turn (2) fostering a popular subjectivity linking individuals together, working toward a solution to this crisis, and (3) perpetually construct their counterpublic as oppressed by, excluded from or otherwise subordinate to a corresponding (and also constructed) dominant public.

I conclude this introductory chapter by illustrating how this definition allows us to identify different *forms* of populism by taking a case-based, *in-situ* approach, in contrast to the current trend of trying to establish a content-driven definition and generalizing across all possible contexts. In this final section (and in the rest of the dissertation), I illustrate why and how populism is better thought of as a kind of political *genus* of which several species flourish, all of which share the above conceptual anatomy.

Populism-as-genus

I have maintained throughout this chapter that the value added of populist counterpublics is that it provides an interpretive approach, working to understand the dynamics of populist mobilization from the perspective of those inside those movements. To date, no approach to *populism* specifically adequately does this. Most approaches to populism-as-concept take what we might call a “positivist” slant—that is, they start from some working definition (some set of essential content) and try to illustrate how it applies to as many movements and leaders as possible. In stark contrast, by analyzing the political logics and popular subjectivities of a variety of populist movements and their leaders, and how these come together to form specific kinds of counterpublics, we are forced to meet these phenomena where they are rather than trying to formulate a de-contextualized, universally applicable definition that captures *all* populism across space and time. As I explain further in chapter three, analyzing populist counterpublics warrants what Joseph Maxwell (2004, p. 6) calls a process-oriented approach, which is fundamentally context-dependent and grounded in a constructivist epistemology. We can neatly sum up a process-oriented approach to social phenomena as “mechanism + context = outcome” (Pawson & Tilley, 1997, p. xv) in which our mechanism is some political logic leading to a popular subjectivity, the context is the political environment in which those logics and subjectivities disseminated and taken up, and the “outcome” is the building of a populist counterpublic as I define it above.

The core benefit of approaching populist counterpublics in this way is appreciating each case for the features it has, rather than a preoccupation with trying to see what cases “fit” an *a priori* definition of “populism”. Certainly, scholars framing populism-as-political-style got this ball rolling by prioritizing form over content. For example, Moffitt and Tormey’s (2014) criteria

of “bad manners” can manifest in a wide variety of ways—and although they talk specifically about individual *leaders*, we see these come through in each case study in this dissertation. The CTF uses crass and insulting language and imagery to expose what they see as politicians’ wrongdoings; ACORN Canada gathers outside the offices of social services and creates chants singling out politicians, deviating from “appropriate behaviour”; the Council, while much tamer, still engages in various tongue-in-cheek discourses and demonstrations, such as building a 30-foot snake to protest the building of pipelines; and IWC/ID Canada takes to social media to antagonize “progressives” via insults and what they see as “politically incorrect” discourse. By allowing the features of a context to “breathe”, rather than analytically constricting them by imposing some pre-built framework or definition, we can more fully appreciate the naturalistic features of each case. This of course raises the question of how we can select cases for analysis. In chapter three, I go into significantly more detail with respect to my case selection strategy.

In the analytical chapters of this dissertation (chapters four through seven), I build on these strengths by using a qualitative, empirical approach in each case to understand populism from the perspective of those in the movements. Across all cases, I illustrate how populist mobilization morphs and twists in different ways that vary with the social contexts in which it is employed. Each case represents a different “species” of populist mobilization, all of which may be fall under the political “genus” of populism. Each of these cases share the use of anti-elitist, nationalistic discourse that simultaneously constructs the wider public as exclusionary/oppressive and their organizations as *counterpublics* that struggle for more just, more inclusive representation within Canadian democracy in ways that address the supposed lack felt by its members. I re-visit this biological analogy more extensively in the conclusion, after examining four “species of populism”, all of which are identified in Table 1.

To be clear, according to this framework, there is no *singular* Canadian populist counterpublic. Counterpublics, by the nature of their varied “poetic-expressive” friction and their felt oppression by the overarching public, are unlikely to combine or fuse. While both the CoC and ACORN are on the left of the political spectrum, they take radically different discursive approaches to addressing the “lack” felt by their respective memberships. The nature of the problems are not only different themselves (“democracy”, “clean water” vs. “affordable housing”, “accessible internet”) but the *ways* in which they are addressed are incommensurable (faith in democratic mechanisms vs. radical distrust of political institutions). On the right, too, we should take great care not to conflate the CTF’s brand of populism with that of IWC/ID Canada. While I acknowledge how the CTF does (reluctantly) tap into the affect of anti-immigrant sentiments, this is a far cry from the politicization of whiteness by white nationalist groups. Indeed, these counterpublics are separate, multiple, and should be treated as such. The same is true for other populist counterpublics that form, although they may have some overlapping discourses (e.g. “Wexit’s” animosity towards central Canadian elites corresponding with the CTF’s).

Chapter summaries

Before the analyses (chapters four through seven), I first explain my methodology in more detail, along with the underpinning ontological and epistemological assumptions in approaching my cases (chapter three). I outline my fusion of a realist ontology with a constructivist epistemology to produce a critical realist account of populist counterpublics. I discuss how my multi-method qualitative approach to each case is the most appropriate for identifying the context and details of

each, by giving participants freedom to use their own language in constructing their accounts of the social contexts they inhabit and want to change.

Chapter four examines the CTF in detail, ultimately identifying it as perpetuating what I call “paranoid populism”. The term “paranoid” is chosen on the basis of how the CTF works to animate its members through what has been called the “paranoid style” of politics characterized by a “heated tenor” of policy reactions and renders all political actions as a threat (Parent, 2010). The basis for this mobilization is a logic of what Pierre Rosanvallon (2008) calls counter-democracy, or the tools inherently available to citizens of democratic countries to monitor and control representative government: surveillance, denunciation, and evaluation. I show how the leaders of the CTF hyperextend this logic to the point that government, and not merely its actions, is rejected altogether, resulting in the subjectivity of the “watchdog”. The watchdog is a largely passive subject that is sustained by subscribing to the information provided by the CTF, who claims to act on their behalf. Through the CTF, they primarily anxiously watch the government from afar; CTF staff work to correct the crisis of representation, in which “the taxpayers” have no voice in parliament.

Chapter five focuses on ACORN Canada, which operates under what I call pastoral populism. This term reflects Foucault’s 1978 lectures on pastoral power in *Security, Territory, Population* (2007). By drawing on several features of pastoralism—chiefly the balance of both individualizing *and* collectivizing dynamics that discipline individuals and link them together as a flock, the relationship of care, and the state of obedience—ACORN Canada builds individuals up as “leaders”, and links them to one another through the solidarity found in their shared troubles like bad landlords, lack of social safety nets, and subpar living conditions. These dynamics create the popular subjectivity of “the crusader”, which exists primarily *outside* formal

mechanisms of democracy. For ACORN, our formal political system and its various checks and regulations are inadequate in addressing a lack of substantive justice. They enter that “the public sphere” only to rally politicians to their cause and/or to interrupt business-as-usual, drawing attention to their key issues. Interestingly, the people themselves, working under the guidance of staff, are responsible for addressing the crisis of representation, which is that politicians do not care about groups or individuals unless they have money to lobby or influence them. This contrasts highly with the CTF, who claim to work on behalf of their members to ensure adequate representation.

Chapter six examines the Council of Canadians. The Council perpetuates “protective populism”, which is an admittedly vague term—however, this reflects the rather vague, highly inclusive species of populism found in this case. The Council claims to represent “all Canadians”, rather than simply one segment like all other cases, such as taxpayers or those with low/moderate-income. Also unlike all other cases, the Council is willing to share much more discursive space with the wider public they construct—the core mechanisms of democracy, including voting and representation, *do* work, but they are currently corrupted by wealthy corporations and elites who colonize political and natural resources that belong to *all* Canadians. Democracy cannot progress with these obstructions. Thus, it is up to all Canadians to protect democracy by engaging in actions—typically from a distance, in ways that appeal to middle-class, civically-minded participants—such as signing petitions and pledges, boycotting corporations, and other forms of activism that can be done from one’s home. The subjectivity fostered by the council has the *active* quality of ACORN’s, but the distant quality of the CTF, forming what I call “the steward.” Stewards are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of Canadian democracy, purifying it of corporations.

Chapter seven examines a pair of cases that claim that white Canadians are being left behind by the racial and ethnic “progress” of the wider public sphere. These are ID Canada and IWC, both of which engage in the shared mobilizing practices of trying to politicize “whiteness” and antagonizing “Old Stock Canadians” (i.e. white Canadians of European descent) against immigrants and elites that seek to disempower whites both culturally and demographically. For these groups, whiteness is an ethnicity just like any other—African-Canadian, Indigenous, various diasporas living in Canada, etc.—and should be politicized and celebrated just like those identities. Drawing on work concerning “white fragility” found in Critical Race Theory (CRT), I identify the resultant subjectivities as “revanchist”—hyperfragile white Canadians who not only go on the defensive when racial discourse is explicated, as Robin DiAngelo’s (2011) original formulation contends, but actively go on the offensive, claiming that initiatives around “diversity” are racist against whites. They seek to regain privileged status, as white Canadians of European descent, that they understand as lost to too much focus on multiculturalism and immigration. This chapter uses two cases instead of one because nobody from either case was willing or able to speak with me, necessitating the use of more data than only one case could provide.

The eighth and final chapter concludes the dissertation by tying these cases together, asking what they contribute to the questions identified in the beginning part of this chapter, and what this framework offers to contemporary scholars trying to make sense of populism. Part of the offering is pragmatic, such as understanding and countering the kind of discourse that leaders like Donald Trump use to animate support by calling into being certain kinds of popular subjectivities. Other contributions are more scholarly and conceptual in nature, transcending debates and moralistic labels such as “high” vs “low” (Ostiguy & Roberts, 2016), the pedantic

vocabularies of “top-down” and “bottom-up” populism (Roberts, 2015b), and how to best “boil down” populism to its essential features. Each chapter is summarized in Table 1.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodological Considerations

Building a process-oriented approach

To answer the core research question(s) introduced in chapter one, my goal is to produce a process-oriented account of how political identities are (re)shaped and aggregated into a populist counterpublic. This will involve careful identification of how the mechanism in which we are interested—the deployment of anti-elitist and nationalist discourses—interacts with various contexts to produce counterpublics that take on those qualities in varying ways.

Case/Counterpublic	Species of populist mobilization	Political Logic	Political Subjectivity
Canadian Taxpayers Federation (Chapter four)	Paranoid populism	Hyperextension of “counterdemocracy” (Rosanvallon, 2008); government is an alien, enemy power	“The watchdog”; a passive, distant consumer of information
ACORN Canada (Chapter five)	Pastoral populism	Formal democracy is unable to provide substantive justice for low-SES Canadians; impetus for action boils down to money or people	“The crusader”; an active, involved co-creator of political action and engagement
The Council of Canadians (Chapter six)	Protective populism	Corporations obstruct democratic progress/enlightenment, inherently harming all Canadians	“The steward”; a distant but active participant in caring for Canadian democratic mechanisms
Immigration Watch Canada & ID Canada (Chapter seven)	Purity populism	“Whiteness” is an ethnicity that should be celebrated and politicized like any other	“The revanchist”; those that have whiteness must learn to protect/defend it before it is “too late,” and dominance is lost

Table 1. A summary of the populist counterpublics found in this study.

As I have also outlined in the previous chapter, this mechanism consists of two components that I heuristically separate out in each chapter for analytical purposes. These are the political logics that create a crisis of democratic representation, and the popular subjectivities that result from those logics.

Methodologically, I am interested in the *process* of how logics are produced, disseminated, and taken up by those in populist counterpublics. Joseph Maxwell, responsible for translating the philosophical concepts of “variance” and “process” into the social sciences, argues that while the former is concerned with variables and their correlations (based on a difference in *variance* among concepts), the latter “deals with *events* and the processes that connect them; it is based on an analysis of the causal *processes* by which some events influence others” (2004, p. 5). Thinking back to the equation of “mechanism + context = outcome”, the first event that concerns us is the production of populist rhetoric, and, relatedly, how it is disseminated by its producers to the target audience. More specifically, it is the dissemination of “antagonistically re-politicizing” logics (Brubaker, 2017) that construct crises of representation and encourage individuals to understand themselves in new ways (as “excluded” or “lacking”). In sum, the context of each case study shapes and causes the internal mechanism—populist mobilization—to work by having individuals re-negotiate their political identities with “the public sphere.”

This first event inherently varies by context. The demographic of each case’s membership, for example, plays a unique part in shaping their style of discursive communication, and materially impacts how subjectivities are built. The CTF relies much more than other cases on physical media like magazines and flyers, likely in part because its demographic consists of older, relatively wealthier individuals with stable addresses—a fact

revealed to me by one of my participants (chapter four). ACORN, on the other hand, has members with more variable and precarious living conditions. They may not have stable mailing addresses, be in a shared living arrangement, or may otherwise ignore political campaigning they feel is ultimately pointless given their oppressed circumstances. ACORN therefore takes a relatively “earthy” and local approach to organizing, relying more on face-to-face campaigning, doorknocking, and calling to reach potential members and recruit them to the cause (chapter five). The Council and IWC/ID Canada rely much more heavily on social media and digital distribution to communicate with members, all of whom probably have busier middle-class schedules (in the case of the Council) or may be afraid to publicly and openly identify as white nationalists (in the case of IWC/ID Canada). Mechanisms like boycotts, for example, make it easier for Council members to feel as though they are making a difference by altering consumption habits, whereas the digital realm creates a place where “whiteness” can be discussed and talked about without fear of being called a racist (chapters six and seven, respectively). Digital means of communication would not work nearly as well for ACORN, however, because many of its members do not have access to the internet at home, given the nature of their demographic (low/moderate income Canadians). Thus, considering contextual factors is important for mapping out populist counterpublics.

The second “event”, broadly, is the taking up of these discourses and logics in ways that (re)produce a popular subjectivity. Each analytical chapter further focuses on how political logics circulate within the counterpublic, linking individual problems and concerns to some wider, shared political subjectivity that is fundamentally context-dependent. In chapter two, we will see that the CTF starts from seemingly insignificant individual issues—like noticing the cost of orange juice at the grocery store—and tries to use these to wrap individuals up in a watchdog

subjectivity in which the state becomes an “alien power” that unfairly taxes citizens. For ACORN Canada, a key part of organizing support is “meeting people where they’re at”, a phrase that multiple staff members used when describing their door-to-door recruitment strategies. Like the CTF, they start from individual, everyday issues to try and show individuals why they should be “fed up” with current affairs. Unlike the CTF, they let prospective members take the lead on what those issues are—cockroaches, bedbugs, rent, unlit and unsafe walks home from work, minimum wage, and so on. The Council of Canadians concerns itself with comparatively abstract issues, such as the environment, voting rights, and democracy, and uses these across broad recruitment campaigns to try and concern Canadians about the health of our democratic systems. Last, the IWC and ID Canada panic about how the power and privilege of whiteness is dwindling, yet nobody seems to notice. Those captured by this kind of narrative begin to feel personally attacked by initiatives touting “diversity” or “multiculturalism”.

Linked together, these events can tell us about each populist counterpublic and how its leaders work to maintain and grow its membership and influence. When constructing the specific methods used in this study, I took into account how to heuristically capture these events as a process, going from the first event to the second, and reflecting on how logics and subjectivities interact and congeal to create a collective counterpublic. I now turn to a description of these methods, why they were chosen, and their epistemological and ontological underpinnings allow me to triangulate these processes.

Populist counterpublics and critical realism

In this dissertation, I take a critical realist approach to studying these counterpublics. When thinking about the process through which someone becomes “vacuumed” (Aslandis, 2017) into a

popular subjectivity via political logics, reality is necessarily complex and multiple. Certainly, this process affects many people at once, uniting them into a counterpublic that is larger than themselves and consists of some intersubjectively constructed reality, shared by all members (the watchdog, the crusader, the steward, or the revanchist). Simultaneously, the same subjectivities are adopted by different individuals for different reasons, meaning that the lived experience attached to a subjectivity for one individual will vary from the next (i.e. *why* we join a movement, *how* it speaks to us, and so on). Importantly, these realities are not mutually exclusive. As scholars of mixed methods have shown time and again, there can be a structural or processual reality consisting of some “real” mechanism outside the lived experience/realities of those in its workings, *and* reality can be radically different for people with varying standpoints in those mechanisms (Freshwater & Fisher, 2014; Harrits, 2011; Johnson, 2017; Maxwell, 2016; Sanscartier, 2020). The tricky part, of course, is building research designs capable of taking both senses of reality into account—both a broader structural reality, and the lived realities that affect and are affected by that broader reality.

An important, strategic distinction to make is that even though I believe the discursive processes are real—adopting a *realist* ontology that “accepts the reality of causation” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 657)—I also use a constructivist epistemology that understands the only way for us to ascertain reality is through inherently fragmented and multiple points of view. In each case study, there is something about the context that is real, and allows a certain species of populist mobilization to link individuals together into a counterpublic. In short, something about the contexts *causes* the mechanism (populism’s generic “form”) to work, and are “inextricably involved in the outcome” of a populist counterpublic (ibid). At the same time, we should take care to not assume that counterpublics impose a uniform reality or sense of political self on each

staff, member, supporter, and so on. In adopting a realist ontology and a constructivist epistemology, scholars using multi-method research designs have considered how it becomes possible to triangulate multiple points of view to better understand the real, yet polyvalent mechanisms underlying multiple and different lived realities (Flick, 2018; Maxwell, 2012). Qualitative researchers using a critical realist approach eschew “the counterfactual approach to causation that underlies the logic of experimentation”—the social world is too complex and consists of too many possible paths/outcomes of causality to identify universal patterns of cause and effect (Schwandt & Gates, 2017, p. 345). In short, we should avoid seeing “event generation” as being couched within universally valid laws, but rather as fundamentally bound to social context (Modell, 2009, p. 212).

Triangulation is helpful for making sense of such complex, interlocking realities. For many constructivist scholars, the term “triangulation” has poor connotations—certainly, the distrust of this term is not unjustified. Triangulation has often been used by scholars to bastardize qualitative methods from a constructivist ontology or epistemology, using it to support quantitative methods seen as generalizable, nomothetic, and altogether more insightful (Given, 2017; Sanscartier, 2017a, 2020). However, qualitative scholars have explored how triangulation can be used in post-positivist and interpretive research designs. Although “triangulation” is most often associated with *mixed* methods, in which quantitative and qualitative methods are combined, Uwe Flick (2018, pp. 26-27) has argued for the recognition of “within-method triangulation” where multiple qualitative methods are used to develop context-dependent and “narrative-episodic” knowledge, which is “oriented to situations [and] their context and progress.” To borrow a well-known phrase from *Capital*: if a context-dependent mechanism we want to better understand is a “social process that goes on behind the backs of [actors]” (Marx

1978 [1867], p. 311), we want to map the perspectives of variously placed actors participating in those contexts and mechanisms to better understand how it functions. In sum, each populist counterpublic represents a real mechanism that is recursively and interpretively built, operates in context-dependent ways, and impacted by the various actors who try to create and re-negotiate meaning in their contexts. It is with this understanding that I started building my research design and selecting my cases.

Before I continue, an important note on philosophical and methodological disposition. “Critical realism” and/or “constructivist epistemology” should not be conflated with “grounded theory.” In conflating these separate concepts, one may erroneously perceive my analysis as “reading into” cases populist criteria that are, in “reality,” not there from the perspective of those *in* the organizations. We should keep in mind that according to critical realism, “empirical data are only meaningful to researchers in relation to some theoretical perspective” (Modell, 2009, p. 211). I am not claiming, nor is it the intent of this study, to enter the cases as *tabula rasa*; my research questions concern populist mobilization, which, according to the “actual” or “real mechanisms” set out by my explicitly *realist* ontology, *do* exist in each of these cases in some form beyond the awareness of the actors themselves. In fact, to many critical realists, pure “grounded theory” is little more than fantasy, since no researcher enters the field without having some familiarity with core theories in their discipline. So, once again, I am interested in how these *real* processes impact the *perceived* social worlds of those inside (Maxwell, 2012).

A note on politics and “stenography”

In the chapters that follow (mainly chapter seven), I cite and report on some unsavory political discourse in Canada. Some sociologists, like myself, may disagree with political stances like

lowering taxes. This is within the realm of reasonable debate, however, and those at the CTF acknowledge that debate and disagreement are good things. In chapter seven, however, these claims transcend the realm of what any sociologist or readers of this dissertation would call reasonable debate. Later on, we will see some rather repugnant and brash claims around who does and does not belong in Canada, namely around race and nationality.

It is an unfortunate but immutable reality that reproducing some text and images of these websites is a requirement of an interpretive design, the goals of which are to understand the ways in which these relations produce new political modalities. However, this requirement does not equate to my personal endorsement of these politics, and my goal is not to give these groups *more* political space to voice their claims, but to adopt a non-polemical approach to analysis. As such, I caution the reader, like myself, to treat these quotes as sociological artifacts from which we can glean a better understanding of populist mobilization.

Methods and research design

Given this discussion so far, we can identify the methodological cathexis of this study as the identification of meanings ascribed by social actors to these various objects—the public, democracy, themselves as political agents, the organization of which they are a part, and the outsiders against which they rally—and how these vary according to “their specific contexts of time and place” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 46). To do this, we need to give participants the room to make sense of their own situation in the context of the study, for which qualitative methods are the most appropriate (Pearce, 2015). Relatedly, qualitative methods are also appropriate for making sense of phenomena from a process-oriented approach, which “extends causal efficacy to beliefs, values, intention and meanings,” key to a critical realist approach to

understanding the multi-sided nature of reality (Maxwell, 2012, p. 657). To capture the multiple viewpoints of actors in each counterpublic, I decided upon on the following methods: interviews, document analysis, participant observation (primarily in the case of ACORN), and social media analysis. I will briefly expand upon each of these.

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with paid staff of three of the five organizations—the CTF (two interviews), ACORN Canada (three interviews, one of which consisted of a volunteer), and the Council of Canadians (two interviews; one in person and one via e-mail). Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, and each participant read and completed a consent form at the time of the interview. These interviews were treated as what Sarah Tracy (2013, p. 140) calls informant interviews, where participants are “experienced and savvy in the scene, can articulate stories and explanations that others would not, and are...open to providing information.” Each interview was recorded⁴ and transcribed within the following week and imported into NVivo 12 for coding and analysis. Here, I was able to make annotations based on how what participants said aligned with the organizational literature I had read up to that point and link the codes across methods using the software through what NVivo calls “nodes.” Immediately after each interview, I took some time to physically write down my own thoughts about how the conversation went, the demeanor of the participants, and how/why some parts of the interview were more difficult to get through than others.

Because I wanted to provide a basis for participants to elaborate on their work more broadly, my questions took an “inverse funnel” approach starting by asking specific, more comfortable questions about their situation (their role, position, history with the organization)

⁴ In chapter five, I never did get the chance to ask “John” permission to be recorded due to the fast-paced nature of the ACORN office and its many tasks. His quotes in that chapter are constructed from hurried note-taking, but do not affect the quality of the quotes (in large part due to John’s patience with me asking him to repeat himself).

and broadening to the ways it advocates for Canadians, how it keeps members active, and how they (would) spread their message nationwide. This structure helped participants “warm up” by thinking about their roles/organizations in ways they may normally not before getting to the core generative questions in the script. The end of the script asked broader, hypothetical questions such as: if you had sixty seconds of free nationwide advertising, what messages would be the most critical for recruiting Canadians? What kind of society would we need to see before the organization’s work is “done”?

The number of interviews per organization is relatively low because of how much of an imposition they were on the resources of each organization. However, this is somewhat offset by the fact that in each case, those included are very close to the helm of each organization with significant influence in how discourse is generated. While I cannot reveal specific positions out of confidentiality, together the respondents represent an amalgamation of board members, federal representatives, research coordinators, head organizers, and media officers, among others, from these organizations. Discourses from these informants are key for answering research sub-question 1 and providing a jumping-off point for answering subquestions 2 and 3 identified in chapter one. Attempts at contacting IWC and ID Canada went unreturned, and so I rely on secondary methods for those cases in chapter seven.

Who was interviewed from each organization was primarily matter of their convenience; respondents were whoever was available to meet. The obstacles I faced in approaching respondents were surprising. For example, the CTF—from which I expected distrust of an academic—was likely the most welcoming and accommodating group I spoke with. ACORN Canada presented more of a challenge, simply because of how busy the schedules are for staff in that organization. After an initial interview, I was told that nobody else had time to meet with

me. I took a more strategic approach here, offering to volunteer for the organization in exchange for some time with staff, which helped to return their time. For the much more bureaucratic and highly staffed CoC, getting an appointment with even one person was, ironically, incredibly difficult and required multiple attempts at contacting gatekeepers. Further attempts at communication after my single interview went unreturned by multiple people, and I was forced to move on in the interest of timely completion of the research. In each case, I interviewed as many staff as I could before I felt I was imposing too much on the organization's time and resources. While my original design had a distribution of questionnaires to the members of organizations, simply securing interviews was already quite challenging due to resource constraints, and I decided not to pursue this method out of respect to the organizations. While I secured formal ethics clearance for this component, my sense of "ethics of practice" (i.e. the smaller, everyday, pragmatic tensions in social research) was that it would be unethical to demand the kind of time it would take to do a large-scale survey (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

My approach to interviewing was that of a co-constructor of knowledge (Beuthin, 2014). As researchers, sometimes it is easy to think of ourselves as archaeologists or journalists trying to "uncover the big story"—but in an interpretive approach, interviewing is less of a matter of "uncovering" and helping participants account for their hermeneutic processes, in which I am not a passive interviewer but active participant (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, pp. 30-32). The themes I identified in these primary data are therefore impacted by my social position as a relatively affluent and privileged researcher—a white, straight male with a specific research agenda. Different life experiences, training, or social positioning would undoubtedly have unknowable impacts on my approach to the cases. Were I to come from a less privileged background, for example, my theoretical framework and consequent insights may be more

emancipatory or transformative in nature. It is important to recognise that my critical realist and relatively analytical approach are borne of these features as much as the literature that informs my analysis.

The purpose of including interviews is to obtain a better grasp on *how* antagonistic discourses are produced in these organizations and *why* leaders settle on the rhetoric that they construct. After each interview, I took anywhere from 15-30 minutes to sit alone and debrief myself on how the interview went, taking notes about what parts I thought went well, and which were challenging. Where challenges happened—such as when a participant resisted giving an answer or hedged how they answered a question, I tried to identify which of my assumptions caused tensions in the interaction and interrupted the co-construction of knowledge. This is most visible in chapter five, during an interview with the Council of Canadians.

Document analysis. This method contrasts interviews by shifting the unit of observation from *individuals* to the *organization*, which this literature represents more broadly. In both methods, the unit of analysis remains the organization, but the vantage point is different for each method. For each case, I took stock of what documents were available to me, carefully considering how each represented the goals and spirit of the organization in question. For the purposes of limiting analysis due to time and resources, I decided to restrict selection to three years—from 2015 to 2018, going up to the most recent publication of 2018.

For most cases, which documents to analyze were obvious choices, as they were front and centre in how the organization presents itself to the public. The CTF, for example, has a quarterly magazine called *The Taxpayer* which is the primary method of communication to supporters. I thus acquired as many as I could in between the years of 2015 and 2018 and was offered a few issues by a study participant from prior to 2015. I scanned each issue, looking for

overarching and repetitive themes until I arrived at saturation—no new themes were being added. This was the strategy I used for all other cases, although selection was sometimes trickier. ACORN Canada, for example, does not have a regular publication, but a collection of fragmented newsletters, press releases and infosheets. While I found as many of these as I could off their official website, I relied primarily on the foundational text of ACORN: *The Nuts & Bolts of Organizing* by Wade Rathke, one of the founders of ACORN International (of which ACORN Canada is a part). One of the respondents from ACORN directed me towards this text as foundational to their organizing and mobilizing activities.

The Council of Canadians was somewhere in between the regularity of these two cases. They do have a semi-regular newsletter—*Canadian Perspectives*—that is freely available on their website, and which I read at length from 2015-2018. They also have multiple factsheets, petitions and other informational brochures that promote their various campaigns such as boycotting Nestle or circulating petitions to be sent to Members of Parliament. I found as many of these as I could off the Council's main website during the same time span, and added these to my collection. Overall, twenty pieces of literature were collected off their website.

For their part, IWC and ID Canada do not have formal publications, but fragmented writings across their websites. IWC for example has an enormous archive of original columns and reproductions (primarily from right-wing, ethnonationalist writers and venues). I read all available literature, keeping the timeframe the same as the other cases for the purposes of direct comparison. While each piece was relatively short—only a few paragraphs—there were hundreds of pieces decrying the negative environmental, economic and cultural effects of mass immigration into Canada (and columns are organized in these categories on the website). These culminated in a vast collection of extremely difficult material to read for the progressively

minded, including myself. ID Canada has short writings representing itself on their main webpages, but do not have an accessible archive of newsletters or other publications like other organizations. I simply captured all available webpages using NVivo and read these the same as other literature.

Document analysis allows me to more thoroughly address research subquestion 3 in chapter 1, and to a lesser extent, questions 1 and 2. These documents represent the ways and rhetoric that leaders of these organizations choose to communicate to existing and prospective members. They represent efforts by the organization to encourage Canadians to understand themselves and political outsiders in certain ways, complementing interviews and other methods by connecting the two aforementioned “events” together. Documents do this by crystallizing what leaders believe to be the most important/effective ways of mobilizing individuals.

Participant observation. Initially, I had intended to participate in events for all cases, but pragmatics restricted this to one case: ACORN Canada. This is because of all cases, ACORN was the only one had that consistent, local chapter meetings to which I was invited by a staff member. The CTF does not have local chapters organized by members in the same fashion as ACORN, and there were no ongoing events in the area to attend. Even nationally, I could not find any significant events that were open to the public—the “Teddy Awards”, which are an annual prize given to Canadian politicians who waste the most tax money, were streamed publicly in February of 2019, which I watched. While the Council of Canadians does have local chapters throughout the country, the Ottawa chapter no longer meets regularly. As far as I am aware, IWC does not have any chapters or major events, and while ID claims to have chapters, membership is protected and only available to individuals who pay a fee, undergoing a “background check” (requisite questions include “To your knowledge, is there any public

information available about you?” and, “Do you have a criminal record?”). For personal reasons, and because I would realistically need to deceive participants about the actual nature of this study, I was ethically unwilling to go through this process.

Participation in ACORN events happened three times. Once, I volunteered to call existing members to advertise a meeting about public expansion of the O-Train, and how the community needed to build a voice to impact how the billions of dollars on this project were spent. The second time I attended a local chapter meeting, the purpose of which was to strategize on how to get politicians’ attention on key issues like affordable housing. The third time was the meeting that I had called participants about earlier. In this second meeting, leaders (volunteer members in the process of learning how to conduct meetings and other affairs) were more experienced than in the second meeting, providing some variation in the leadership pedagogy of ACORN.

In each meeting, I introduced myself as a researcher who was there to learn from participants, and then mostly observed with limited participation in the discussions. This was for a couple of reasons. First, as a relatively inexperienced ethnographic researcher, I was overwhelmed with trying to remember key themes and discussions, taking minimal notes and concerned about appearing like a detached scientist imposing on an insider meeting (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Second, I was acutely aware of my privilege in an environment in which diversities of race, class and gender were both visible and openly discussed by members and was concerned I would overstep my role as “guest.” I was also acutely aware of “ruling the research agenda” through the process of “studying down” in these instances by sitting there with my notepad (Råheim et al., 2016). Immediately after each meeting, I sat in my car for approximately 15-20 minutes and wrote down everything I remembered that I thought was important for the analysis.

Chapter five best illustrates the fruits of this labour. The way that members discuss issues, and how leaders group their concerns into a pointed, antagonistic issue is intimately involved with how democracy is represented, how selves are re-worked and joined, and how *the public* is constructed through conversations about members' everyday lives. This method, as I show through vignettes, was crucial for understanding that ACORN engages in a kind of pastoral populism that is uniquely concrete and dynamic from the other cases in this dissertation.

Social media analysis. With the proliferation of the internet, qualitative researchers have become increasingly interested in how connected, digital environments—forums, chatrooms, comments, video games, and so on—allow for community building across virtual environments (Garde-Hansen & Gorton, 2013; Hine, 2008, 2015; Kozinets, 2015). What Sarah Pink *et al.* call (2016, p. 5) “virtual sociologists” have paid special attention to social media over the last decade and a half, including popular websites and apps such as MySpace, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and others to better understand how “inequality is complicated, extended, and reproduced by digital media technologies,” and how the circulation of discourses (and by extension, subjectivities) take shape in virtual spaces alongside physical ones. For example, my colleagues and I have shown elsewhere how employer rating websites work to build resistant discourses and subjectivities to oppressive workplace conditions (Johnston, Sanscartier & Johnston, 2018, 2019; Johnston, Johnston, Sanscartier & Ramsay, 2019)

Understanding social media in this way is especially important for this project, given my methodological restrictions. As I have noted above, for ethical reasons I felt uncomfortable and was unwilling asking for listservs or contact information for members of these organizations in my interviews. This literature has highlighted how sociologists should look at social media (comments, posts, etc.) not simply as strangers individually publicizing themselves, but as

networks of “memorial talismans that carry the weight of the past” contained within “digital archive[s]” of discourse (Cvetkovich, 2008, p. 120; Kuntsman, 2012, p. 6). In short, amalgamations of Facebook comments and Twitter posts create something more than the sum of their individual parts: they represent collective repositories of various discourses towards which members contribute and draw on to make sense of the world and themselves. This is what media scholar Adi Kuntsman (2012, p. 3) calls the *affective fabrics* of the online social world.

My approach to social media analysis is steeped in these understandings. How members post on the Facebook and Twitter pages of the case studies can tell us something about research subquestion 3. I use Facebook comments and Twitter posts more specifically to understand how populist discourses are circulated and taken up by those who subscribe or are targeted by the mobilizing efforts of organizational staff. For Twitter, I used NVivo’s social media capture function (NCapture) to take in all tweets from the organizations’ official pages over the prior three years. Because of the short nature of Tweets, I was able to read the entirety of them for the organizations that had a Twitter page. In the case of ACORN, there was both a local (Ottawa ACORN) and national (ACORN Canada) Twitter page; I analyzed both pages. Retweets were also included in this analysis (e.g. if the organization re-tweeted a member’s or other organization’s tweet).

For Facebook comments, I used an online application called Netvizz (Rieder, 2013) on each case’s official Facebook webpage, which collected and organized comments with various reactions (like, love, anger, sad, etc.). I then organized these comments by the greatest amount of “Likes” to target the text that had the most visibility and was the most approved of by members. The amount of “Likes” differed by organization since the size and reach of each page is considerably different. Logically, such comments represent sentiments commonly held by

members of the organizations, or those that at least subscribe to their social media pages. I stopped coding comments when no new themes were emerging, and when the number of Likes had dwindled appreciably, meaning that visibility was no longer a factor. The specific cut-offs for numbers of “Likes” and other documentation can be found in the Appendix.

There were a couple of errant cases. ID Canada had a Twitter page, but no Facebook page. IWC, for its part, had an official Facebook, but no Twitter page. Since these cases are in the same chapter, I considered these absences to offset each other. All other cases had both official Facebook and Twitter pages. In each case, I read through comments and Tweets, asking what those texts took for granted, the ideas they were trying to spread, and how they connected to the data I had collected from interviews, document analysis and (in ACORN’s case) participant observation. These comments were grouped into thematic strands, which I kept track of by colour-coding them in Excel spreadsheets (the default output of the Netvizz application). I continued to read comments and tweets until similar themes continued showing up.

In most of the chapters that follow, I rely more on Facebook comments than Tweets in my analyses because they better represent how members are reacting to and taking up the discourses offered by the organizations. Tweets, for their part, represent organizations trying to propagate discourses. Taken together, social media analysis allows me to address research subquestion 3 more thoroughly in chapter one and takes as its focus the second “event” of the wider, counterpublic-building process I identify earlier in this chapter. It represents an easily accessible interface at which members can freely interact with the discourses produced by the organization.

Identifying and approaching cases

When building case-based research design, two core questions must be addressed. The first is, why are we using cases? The second is, how are they being used? Together, these questions determine possible strategies for case selection. With respect to the first question, I decided that my use of cases was a primarily descriptive approach to populist counterpublics, being a novel approach within populism studies. Schwandt and Gates (2017, p. 346) argue that the most common use of cases is in fact descriptive, but that this has been variously called “interpretive,” “intrinsic,” or “holistic” by different qualitative researchers. Specific labels aside, the purpose of a descriptive case study design is “to develop a completed, detailed portrayal of some phenomenon...drawing on methods of document review, participant observation, and in-depth interviews to understand the experiences, perspectives, and worldviews of people in a particular set of circumstances” (ibid). So, if I am proposing to understand populism in new theoretical and empirical ways, and to do so interpretively, case studies allow me to do so by re-casting understandings of how populist counterpublics work by analytically breaking them down to constituent events. Other reasons for case studies—like hypothesis generation, theory testing, or emancipation/social justice—are equally valid, but are not the motivation for this study.

The second issue—*how* we are using case studies—is addressed by Bent Flyvbjerg’s (2006, pp. 229-230) well-known discussion of strategies for case selection. This account of populism (context-dependent populist counterpublics) and my relatively limited resources warrant what he calls an “information-oriented selection,” where researchers try to “maximize the utility of information” from a relatively small amount of cases. I have selected five cases, all of which I did using a “maximum variation” approach. A maximum variation approach considers “the significance of various circumstances for case process and outcome” (ibid) by selecting

similar cases that differ along a key dimension, such as size, budget, location, or organizational structure.

I chose a maximum variation strategy because one of the only agreed-upon features of populism, across all content *and* form-centred approaches, is that it has no home on the ideological spectrum; it manifests in left-wing, centrist, and right-wing forms (Brett, 2013; Kögl, 2010). To build a thorough and convincing empirical analysis of populist counterpublics, I decided that this axis—ideological leaning—was most relevant for a descriptive exploration using a case study approach. In this regard, I picked two case studies that we would consider on the left of the spectrum—ACORN Canada and the Council of Canadians, both of which brand themselves as progressive organizations—and three on the right, CTF, IWC, and ID Canada (the latter two being rolled into one analysis). Before entering the field, I hypothesized a relationship between ideological underpinnings and the specific (context-dependent) form that populist mobilization takes on based on existing literature. For example, while left-wing populism typically places more emphasis on building participatory linkages and getting citizens to actively participate in political action, right-wing populism is more likely to revolve around a figurehead who validates xenophobic, racist or otherwise exclusionary language (Roberts, 2015a, 2015b). As I show in the following chapters, this was partially validated by my findings.

Having decided on a broad ideological spread, I then considered how to approach populist organizations, especially when such organizations will not usually self-identify as “populist” because of the latter’s negative connotations. I turned to the literature to guide my selection. One immensely helpful feature of populism identified by Aslandis (2018) is that what scholars or journalists call “populist” usually translates to “grassroots” *in vivo* because of its more positive understandings. Grassroots and populism dovetail discursively, both perpetuating

an ethos of direct political participation, action, self-organization, and direct democracy. As such, the first feature of all cases is that they describe themselves as “grassroots”, which I looked for on their websites. I felt sure of this criterion when one of my respondents from the CTF went so far as to identify their organization as a “populist, grassroots organization,” actively linking those two words together despite the negative connotations of the former. This is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

The second feature shared by all cases is that, put simply, they must engage in populist mobilization as defined by Jansen (2011). There must be a readily identifiable “elite” that is framed as a scapegoat for the issues faced by the members of the organization in question. They must also engage in nationalist discourse. Usually, nationalism conjures images of *ethnonationalism*, which is certainly the style found in chapter seven. However, nationalism can also be more inclusive and progressive, as is the case with *civic* nationalism, which we find in chapters five and six. The Council of Canadians is quite clear that it claims to speak for *all* Canadians—seemingly the only criteria of membership to “the people” is to identify as Canadian. While other cases are a bit narrower in how they defined membership, they are in some way linked to the Canadian identity—whether it be the Canadian taxpayer (CTF), Canadians left behind by politicians and government (ACORN), or “Old Stock Canadians” (IWC/ID Canada). All of these groups perform nationalism to various extents, either by explicitly wanting to “protect” Canadian values from external threats (the Council, IWC/ID Canada) or by subtly infusing the *plebs* (the part wants to become the whole) with a sense of linking what is best for *them* with what is best for Canada writ large (the *populus*, or the whole; e.g. accessible internet for healthier democracies, fewer taxes and less national debt).

Thus, explicitly or implicitly, both anti-elitism and nationalism is found in each of these cases. To verify this, I used my least intrusive and time-consuming method—document analysis—and tried to identify at least two or three themes that included anti-elitism or nationalism. In all cases, both were identified almost immediately, and I settled on including that case in the study. Two other cases were approached, but ultimately not included in the study. These were the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, a progressive, evidence-based organization, and RISE Canada, an anti-Islam organization. In the first instance, the organization is simply too sprawling for a single researcher to fully understand, and it was impossible to figure out who to contact for a possible interview. When I tried contacting a media person, I was bounced around to different individuals, ignored for several months, and then told the person I was planning to speak with had left the organization with no recourse for further contact. RISE Canada, for its part, simply has no social media presence aside from a few grainy videos that were difficult to transcribe. In both cases, I decided to move on for logistical purposes.

In sum, cases were selected on the following criteria: (1) engaging in populist mobilization (explicit anti-elitism and explicit or implicit civic or ethno-nationalistic discourse); (2) a self-proclaimed sense of “grassroots” organizing, as a way of appropriating the benefits of “direct” democracy/activism without the negative connotations of “populism”, and (3) existing on various points of the left-right political spectrum in relation to one another.

One consequence of focusing on more discursive criteria is that I further allowed the organizational features and structure to vary. As a result, the cases range from a high to low degree of formal institutionalization. The Council of Canadians, for example, is the highest, with a larger bureaucratic force, well-defined positions, a key figurehead in the form of Maude Barlow, and positions itself as a protector of Canadian democracy by working *within* the system.

The CTF has a similar but smaller structure, having only a handful of actually defined “members” while the rest are “donors” (see chapter four for more details). Additionally, the CTF positions itself as more of a “think tank” by conducting research on government (such as access to information requests about government spending, evaluating government budgets, etc.) that criticizes politicians on spending habits.

ACORN Canada, on the other hand, has a more fluid structure that encourages members to lead meetings, develop materials, and collectively become the centre of the organization (in contrast to organizational leadership) to a greater extent than the CoC or CTF. Finally, IWC/ID Canada represents the least formal organization, existing primarily online with no real bureaucratic presence or designated physical offices. In each case study, I comment on how the degree of formal institutionalization affects the “organizational performance” of populism by each case—the extent to which they engage in populist mobilization to form a populist counterpublics—particularly in contrast to others. This will further help to establish how “populism” is not a set of static criteria, but a *graduated phenomenon* in which each case tends towards populist mobilization in certain ways.

My first point of contact with all organizations was made using information I found from a Google search. Some were more direct. The CTF, for example, had direct contact information for upper-level staff that I could use to solicit invitations to participate. ACORN Canada and the Council of Canadians both had gatekeepers with whom I negotiated before having access. In the first case, this was usually a coordinator or a trainer; in the second case, there were dedicated administrative assistants or receptionists, as the Council has a larger bureaucratic presence than any of the other cases.

In each of these cases, I was forwarded to, or give the contact information for, someone who might be willing to speak with me. An interview was then scheduled, and I asked those initial respondents if anyone else might be willing to speak with me. This was a successful strategy for both CTF and ACORN. The Council made it clear to me that interviews were difficult because staff were already strained for time and resources. After three unsuccessful follow-ups with reception staff and my initial respondent, I stopped reaching out. As previously mentioned, while e-mails or contact forms are present on both IWC and ID Canada websites, nobody responded to my efforts at contact. This was not unexpected, as I was fully transparent about who I was (a sociologist) and the goals of the research (how organizations impact perspectives of elites).

A note on data analysis

My approach to all the various data sources here was not an individual approach to *each* method. Because NVivo allows for the researcher to include so many different forms of qualitative data in a single case study pane, I approached all the types of data—interview transcriptions, organizational publications, field notes, and social media analysis—as holistic *blocs* of thematic strands. While coding, I explicitly and conscientiously looked for the ways in which datasets spoke to one another, whether they did this in conflicting, mixed or confirmatory ways (Fitzpatrick, 2016). Because of the small size of these organizations and the design of the study, datasets from all organizations spoke to one another in coherent ways. As such, in the chapters that follow, I am not discussing one strand from, for example, Facebook, and yet another strand from interviews; I draw on examples from multiple methods to illustrate the *same themes*. Again,

my goal is to triangulate the ways in which these supra-individual, discursive constructs operate in order to mobilize members and potential members.

Limitations

These matters aside, the methodology of the study is certainly imperfect. The biggest issue is lack of direct contact with members of the organization, from which I refrained for the above “micro-ethical” reasons (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). There would likely be a difference between those who simply contribute financially to an organization, and those who actively participate in meetings/affairs, for example. I cannot assess these various “sects of membership” because I was unable to reach members through the methods I employed. Another noticeable flaw is the small number of interviews. In the future, I would like to supplement current data with interviews with larger figureheads, such as Maude Barlow from the Council of Canadians, or political strategists from the CTF who have gone onto make the careers of politicians like Stephen Harper or Jason Kenney (who was once management for the CTF). However, my lack of resources prevents me from meeting with such individuals in ways that would produce rich data that complement existing texts.

Finally, because my methods across all cases are not uniform, making direct comparisons between cases limited. It is unfortunate (but not unexpected), for example, that IWC or ID Canada did not return my requests for interviews. My ability to answer research sub-question 1 for these cases is stunted in contrast to other cases, since I did not have the opportunity to directly co-construct discourse with organizational leadership. Likewise, that ACORN is the only organization with regular, local events means I have different insight into how that organization works (by using participant observation) in contrast with other cases. As such, I have vignettes

from participating in local chapter meetings from ACORN that are absent from other analytical chapters. It is important to keep in mind, however, that some of these differences are not simply methodological flaws but features of the contexts themselves. The CTF, for example, does not have constant local events like ACORN because they employ a radically different style of populist mobilization—one that is distant and passive, rather than present and active. I could not observe anything in the CTF analogous to ACORN's chapter meetings, simply because there was nothing to observe. I discuss these differences in further detail in chapter four and the conclusion of the dissertation, keeping these factors in mind. I now turn to an analysis of my first case, the CTF and paranoid populism.

CHAPTER FOUR: Paranoid Populism and Waking the Watchdogs

Introduction

Walking into the Ottawa office of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation for my first interview, there is little to suggest that I am at the right place. I rely on the small plaque on the front door and my very friendly and engaging participant, suit-clad, to tell me I have the correct office. Despite having dressed nicely in anticipation for this interview, I can't help but feel underdressed. I also can't help but notice how *bare* everything is—the walls, the desks, the furniture, the floors—and how *empty* the office feels. When neither one of us is speaking in the interview, I can hear a pin drop. In fact, during all my three visits to the CTF's offices, the only other living soul I see is my research participant. In each case I feel very alone with them, which, in some ways, is good for interviewing purposes. But in other ways, the interspersed silence tells me how very different this office is from the others I have visited during my research.

Everything is clean, square, monochromatic, and professional—none of the grit, clutter, denim, or colour of the other offices I will visit in the future. Members, volunteers and staff are not coming to-and-fro. My participants speak with a confident and friendly authority on topics that are normally boring, such as taxes, government spending, and public debt—but they do so in a way that keeps me engaged during my hour-long conversations with them. The office is mostly empty, but the people who are present are very clearly busy. As a non-libertarian typically in favour of higher taxes and more spending, I find myself personally learning a lot (not just as a sociologist, but as a citizen), and asking questions about why politicians do what they do. Not just for my research, but because my curiosity is genuinely more piqued with each answer.

In my interviews, I allowed myself to become allured by the scent of what I call *paranoid populism*, or one kind of “species” of populism we find amongst Canadian political groups. The

core elements of paranoid populism are metaphorically reflected in the above recount. Paranoid populism is a fundamentally passive species of populism in which the mobilized are encouraged to participate in ways that support those who *represent* them—donating money, writing letters denouncing politicians, and remaining informed about the ways in which the “little guy”—in this case study, the taxpayer—is being continuously steamrolled by an unethical and fiscally irresponsible government.

In these ways, CTF functions as a “counter-democratic” social organization, which Pierre Rosanvallon (2008, pp. 63-65) describes as “watchdog groups” that have a dual function as both think tanks and advocacy groups, seeing themselves as “questioning prevailing rationales” about some specific policy area. In this case, the CTF challenges rationales of government spending, public debt, and the ways in which citizens are taxed, the prevailing rationale of which they describe as “too much”. The organization is hence couched in a counter-democratic logic, which this chapter explores. Moreover, this logic extends to citizens in ways that they need not be *physically* present to make a political difference—only to support the CTF as a prism of expertise that unscrambles the unintelligible workings of government into understandable rays of information about the behaviours of politicians. Little wonder, then, why the national office of the CTF is, for the most part, bare.

In what follows, I first describe paranoid populism as it has been described so far in the literature, primarily by American political scientists. “The Paranoid Style” (Hofstadter, 1955; Shils, 1956; Parent, 2010) is a kind of political rhetoric and enactment sowing an unquenchable thirst for transparency that is sometimes grounded in conspiracy theory. I then outline the CTF’s structure in more detail and unpack some of these workings to better understand the “outcome” of these—a popular subjectivity of *the watchdog* that cultivates both an unquenchable thirst for

government transparency/accountability, and an impulse to denounce politicians. The upshot is that the CTF positions themselves as a watering hole of political knowledge at which paranoid, thirsty taxpayers can drink and be “in the know” about the fiscal affairs of the Canadian government.

Populism and the paranoid style

I arrived at the term *paranoid populism* as one species of the wider populist *genus* of politics based on U.S. literature. This style of politics, first described by Richard Hofstadter (1955, 1966) looks to render invisible unequal power relations between elites and non-elites visible, evoking “a uniform, overheated tenor of policy reactions” that amounts to “an especially intense form of threat perception, adopted to surmount inadequacies of capability” (Parent, 2010, p. 219). In short, this means mobilizing intense affect and blame towards a power centre perceived to be at the root of social and political problems that impact one’s personal life. American political culture, some commentators note, is infused with paranoia furnishing several examples, ranging from communists infiltrating government and raising taxes to secular “socialists” forcing the adoption of “Happy Holidays” over “Merry Christmas” (Appelrouth, 2017; Oliver & Wood, 2014). Importantly, as Hofstadter notes, a paranoid style of politics need not be pathological. There is a difference between mobilizing individuals against “conspiracies *in* history and saying that history *is*, in effect, a conspiracy” (Hofstadter, 1955, pp. 71-72; 1966, pp. 4-7). For Hofstadter, there is an implicit line between engaging in reasonable theorizing over *who* is responsible for personal-political issues in political systems, and the baseless reading of agency into wider social structures.

A paranoid style of politics, by locating the causation for problematized issues as specific political actors, prefigures all audience members it reaches into a schism of those either “in the know” or those *not* “in the know” (Dean, 2000; Marasco, 2016). The job of those helming the charge is to convince those *not* in the know to flip sides by subscribing to a certain kind of logic that demands continuous revelations, transparency, and omnipotence; this ensures that *no* secrecy remains, behind which powerful actors hide from public scrutiny (Fenster, 1999; Shils, 1956; Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2016). Far-reaching conspiracy theories can act as part of this, presenting alternative kinds of logics linking together disparate actors (e.g. global networks of bankers ruling the world) and reading coordinated agency into their actions where there may be none (Grewal, 2016). However, as with the CTF, conspiracy theories are not a necessary component of a paranoid political style. It is possible to read into powerful actors (in this case study, government officials) the intent to purposefully act in their own self-interest, thereby shorting or “ripping off” those in positions of less power (in this case, the “taxpayers”) without weaving narratives of total national or global domination (Boltanski, 2014).

A continuous, unquenchable, and paranoid demand for transparency may, as I illustrate below, also be an inflammatory extension of what Rosanvallon (2008) calls *counter-democracy*, or innate features of citizenship that accompany the democratic promise of self-governance and sovereignty. These include vigilant oversight of elected representative, denouncing state actions as a form of checking (i.e. negative sovereignty), and the evaluation of government. A paranoid style of politics enters the equation when these features are intensified, and the state (rather than specific agents) is understood as an enemy. Paranoid styles and democracy, as Luc Boltanski (2014, p. 191) notes, are intimately linked: paranoid styles “[set] up a rampart against extremists” and governments that look to disrupt proper democratic functions of representations.

I argue in this chapter that the paranoid populism we see in a Canadian context—embodied in the research and advocacy activities of the CTF—is less concerned with identifying *conspiracies*, but creating a popular subjectivity that, once *in the know*, cannot help but continue consuming information supplied by the organization that promises it. The denunciatory styles of the CTF, I illustrate in this chapter, taps into the paranoid style of politics by “[dissolving] the distinction between the cognitive and the affective, the rational and the passionate, knowledge and belief” and creates a recursive *satisfaction* in keeping “in the know” (see Marasco, 2016, p. 237).

In short, this subjectivity (and the counterpublic which these subjects constitute) is obsessed with *knowing*—knowing the exact ways in which state systems and officials continuously bulldoze the interests and rights of the taxpayers, who, for too long (in the CTF’s view), have not had a voice in how governments conduct their affairs. The first step in understanding this dynamic is the structure of the CTF, which creates the potential for breeding watchdogs.

Canadian Taxpayers Federation: A structural overview

The CTF was founded in 1990 through a merging of two prior organizations, the Association of Saskatchewan Taxpayers and the Resolution One Association of Alberta, both of which held similar principles as the present-day national association (“Who We Are”, 2010). Today, the CTF has a Federal office in Ottawa, along with regional offices in BC, Alberta, the Prairies (Saskatchewan and Manitoba), Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada, with directors helming each. According to one participant, these directors work mostly from home, while the main offices in Regina are dedicated to primarily processing donations. While the CTF does not have

self-governing local chapters⁵ (unlike other organizations in this study), it claims over 145,000 “supporters” across the nation; and, while it costs nothing to “join” the CTF, donations will net individuals a subscription to the *Taxpayer* magazine, which is published four times a year (Terrazzano, 2019).

It should be noted that being of Western Canadian origin, the CTF has inherited an ethos of Western alienation from its organizational ancestors—that the Federal government is unable or unwilling to properly address the economic and cultural concerns of BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba (Wesley, 2011). Historical policies such as the protectionist forcing of farming provinces to buy Canadian equipment, and the creation of the National Energy Program to redistribute oil-based wealth to Central Canada, fostered the perception that the Federal government favoured Ontario and Quebec over Western provinces (Sanscartier, 2014). As a result, many Western Canadians felt (and continue to feel) Ottawa cannot properly represent them, which David Laycock (2005) describes as a key factor behind the rise of Reform and Canadian Alliance Parties. These are populist political parties that villainize Central Canadian elites. Being headquartered in Regina, it would not be inappropriate to think that the CTF, to some extent, channels this sense of alienation—my suspicions were confirmed by one staffer, Jason, who told me that the CTF’s “base is pretty conservative from Western Canada.”

The CTF appears semi-regularly in mainstream Canadian media—their reports and staff have been featured in news stories on CBC, CTV, and other nationally recognizable outlets. For example, the Alberta director of the CTF was invited on CBC Radio Canada to discuss his reaction to the budget released by Jason Kenney’s provincial parliament in Fall 2019. My respondents indicated to me that one of the CTF’s core goals is to establish itself as the “go to”

⁵ The student group associated with the CTF, “Generation Screwed”, does have chapters at universities across Canada, the goals of which are tightly linked to the national arm.

organization for matters of taxation, public spending/debt, and corporate welfare, all of which they work to link the fates of all individual taxpayers. Importantly, the CTF has also produced recognizable Canadian political figures. Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper was at one time the federal director of the CTF, while current Alberta Premier Jason Kenney was formerly president and CEO of the CTF in the 1990s. So, while the CTF positions themselves as being external to the government and taking on watchdog role, there do exist historical “insider” connections that link the organization to government more intimately.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the CTF’s organizational structure is that, technically, the organization has seven members which comprise the board of directors. The CTF operates according to a donor model, rather than a membership one, meaning that donors do not get a direct say in how the organization is run, or what kinds of activities it pursues. This is true for the approximately 145,000 donors the CTF claims to have. This model sets the stage for the development and circulation of paranoid populism, since it structures the flow of information primarily as one-way; *from* the think tank/advocacy group *to* the watchdog citizens—and does not really allow for an informational counter-flow. Certainly, there exist some avenues of participation. The *Taxpayer* magazine, for example, regularly publishes letters to the editor denouncing politicians, but this kind of “denunciatory technology” (Sanscartier, 2017b) that contours this counter-public (which I explore below) is pruned/selected by staff—there is a distinct lack of authentic “participatory linkages” (Roberts, 2015a/b) shaping the quality of anti-elitist discourse circulated in their literature.

This lack of democratic structure has drawn criticism from observers (e.g. Lamont, 2016), who argue that CTF’s branding as “populist ‘citizens advocacy group’” is misleading, because members do not actually get a voice in how the organization is run. In response to this

some of this criticism, one participant, Kevin, argued that the CTF operates according to the free market principles of supply and demand:

So we have a supporter model. What that means is, if you come to our website, you click, you wanna be a supporter...you can actually subscribe to just some things and not others. I mean, a lot of our supporters—I don't know if many of them are aware of everything we do—some of them are keen on the spending stuff, some are keen about budget, it depends. So our model is very much a market-based model. Walmart stays in business by keeping their customers happy. If we don't keep our donors happy—and I would say about a third of our supports are donors—if we don't keep them happy, we're out of business...at the end of the day, I think, whether or not we end up retaining donors is the tell on whether or not we got it right.

A staff member of Generation Screwed, Dave, told me about his obligation to financial backers by providing members with

...good products from research. We produce quarterly magazines each year, with a lot of great research...[t]he CTF is a non-profit, but the donors, they don't get tax receipts. So they're willing to give their money with no questions asked, nothing really other than the great services we provided. They don't have any financial incentive in terms of tax credit. So they really believe in our organization, and that really fosters an environment of wanting to keep fighting for the taxpayer.

In a nutshell, the staff of the CTF frame their relationship to their donors in ways that render the latter as passive consumers of political information. Donors effectively pay for an informational service, which allows them to vicariously watch the government's actions through the CTF's research and publicity. If an individual donor does not like what the CTF is doing, they are of course free to *stop* donating—and if enough donors do this, only then is the feedback is loud and clear. As political agents, donors act *through* the CTF primarily in terms of financial contribution, and because the CTF acts as a vicarious guardian on their behalf, donors are effectively reduced to “voting with their dollars”. In this sense, the interpellated political subject (i.e., one that wants to know about Canadian politics) and the consumer are effectively dovetailed into “citizen-consumers” under the CTF supporter model (Clarke, 2004; McKee,

2009; Turner, 2016). While the idea of a “citizen-consumer” is bound up in the literature with analyses of neoliberalism”, I illustrate below why this it would be analytically imprudent to refer to the CTF’s constructed subjectivity as neoliberal.

In addition to political information, the CTF also understands donors as purchasing anonymity and protection of privacy when they sign up to support the research and advocacy activities of the organization. When discussing why the CTF does not reveal who donates to them, Kevin had the following to say:

We have donors who are members of unions. We have donors who are members of First Nations communities. I don’t think it would be reasonable for us to out them, frankly, if they want to out themselves they can. But we’re not gonna do that to them. And also, frankly, you know, there are a lot of people who don’t like us. Like, like they don’t like me. I’ve got threats, I’ve had terrible things said about me to my family, all my colleagues have—I signed up for this, so I’m prepared to take it. But I view myself as...I will take the arrows, if you support our cause, you don’t have to take the arrows. I *will* take the arrows, because I’m prepared to do that as part of what I signed up for, right.

Taken together, this trio of quotes illustrates how the CTF’s staff position themselves as political sentinels willing and able to do the dirty work of advocating for an unpopular perspective amidst a wider public arena, dominated by organizations and voices calling for *more* spending in various areas. The CTF sentinels for “the taxpayer”, that is, anyone that pays taxes—by the staff’s collective definition, individuals who have a financial, contributory stake in how government spends its revenues, and wants the government to tax/spend less. “The taxpayer” is one who is *owed* political transparency and accountability by virtue of having paid taxes to the government through the form of sales tax, income tax, corporate tax, and so on. While the taxpayer deserves a political voice, they need not speak up themselves; the CTF will provide a voice, demanding the owed transparency and accountability, at donors’ financial behest. This structural distance between the staff and donors of the CTF, in turn, provides a fertile discursive

space for the growth of counter-democratic logical assumptions of how democracy is supposed to function.

In sum, through their self-described non-partisanship and efforts to produce widely distributed research, the CTF resembles both a formally organized activist organization as well as a think-tank that rests on the efforts of various organizational directors. They have a dedicated board of directors, regional directors, and other dedicated roles that allow for the fluid and continuous production of key materials like *The Taxpayer*, the key channel through which they communicate to members. These “leaders” or directors are the ones responsible for the routinization of highly populist mobilization (blatantly anti-elitist while negotiating discourses of nationalism, as illustrated below) as described by Jansen (2015). This is a highly formalized organization that performs populist mobilization to an equally high degree, according to its following logic and popular subjectivity.

Watchdog logic: The CTF and counter-democracy

I have been hitherto saying that the CTF operates according to a *counter-democratic* logic of democratic relations. I will unpack the elements of counter-democracy here before linking them to the CTF’s brand of populist mobilization. According to Rosanvallon (2008), counter-democracy—contrary to its name—is a set of citizen practices inherent to all democratic societies, which together form a compensatory mechanism for the primary architectural flaw of representative democracy: citizens can only indirectly govern themselves. The three practices, vigilance, denunciation, and evaluation, all act as a set of checks and balances that maintain a negative relationship to self-governance through representation: citizens are “watchful, alert, and on guard”, monitoring the government closely to make up for the “arrythmia of the ballot box”

(2008, p. 33). This compromises vigilance, which Rosanvallon calls “essential attributes of citizenship” (ibid). Because citizens cannot consistently *positively* govern themselves logistically (i.e., through direct and immediate participation) except for voting for their representatives, they monitor the government and take *negative* action when needed—opposing government action when actions clash with the *volonté générale*. While Rosanvallon locates ancient republics and the French Revolution (under the Girondins) as vigilance *par excellence*, he explains that in modern democracies, vigilance is taken up in both *civic* forms (the actions of citizens and citizen-groups, where we can locate the CTF) and *regulatory* forms (government bodies or external agencies that monitor government actions).

Where action is required, it primarily takes the form of denunciation, which draws on the functions of publicity to render transparent, and draw attention to, government actions. For Rosanvallon (2008, pp. 41-45), denunciation serves two key functions. The first is that it serves as a “direct corrective” to government action, the means of which are available to citizens indirectly governing themselves. The act of denouncing has an “institutional effect” that “reaffirm[s] and deepen[s] collective norms and values” by framing the opposition to those norms and values as threats to the public sphere (ibid, p. 45). The second function is that the act of denouncing itself “reaffirm[s] one’s faith in the possibility of using publicity to administer a direct corrective” (Rosanvallon, 2008, p. 43). Hence, it dovetails faith in publicity (and by extension, faith in the public sphere itself; see Dean, 2001) to the values upheld by the content of denunciations, or what actions are collectively understood as unacceptable. Finally, vigilance and denunciation are joined by evaluation, which specifically refers to a form of judgement regarding “the *competence* of government officials” in the forms of benchmarking, efficiencies,

meeting budgets, and other developments reflecting the rationalization of the state (ibid, pp. 53-55).

That the CTF is a counter-democratic organization is a relatively straightforward claim. Donors and supporters are relegated mostly to watching the activity of the CTF, in much the same way that the CTF watches activity of the government. First, there is seemingly no end to the vigilance with which they monitor government action, extending far beyond the other cases in this study. Every issue of the *Taxpayer*, for example, has a large collection of snippets called “Wastewatch,” which describes incidences of government waste in excruciating detail. For example, in 2017, Global Affairs Canada spent \$10,000 on Toronto Blue Jays tickets for government officials and private sector employees (Taxpayer, 2018b, p 6). Three years prior, an Ontario MPP received a \$58,000 severance payment for five months of work and then voluntarily retiring (Taxpayer, 2015b, p. 6). Elsewhere, a (since-dismissed) McGill professor spent \$19,500 from his tax-financed grant money to purchase a special bed for his ailing mother (Taxpayer, 2013, p. 6). In total, there are hundreds of these accounts across all issues of the magazine, all of which focus on either *individual corruption* (i.e. politicians or workers misappropriating public funds) or *system inefficiencies* (i.e. governments or agencies spending money imprudently, albeit legally).

Secondly, these actions are denounced via highly visible means, most notably through the CTF’s “Teddy Awards,” in which politicians and/or agencies at all levels of government are “awarded” pig-shaped trophies for profoundly wasting taxpayer dollars. The event is also quasi-famous for its pig mascot that perennially help CTF staff “award” the trophies. Dave of “Generation Screwed” discussed the core function of the awards in our interview:

Oh yeah, they [politicians] *love* hearing about it [sarcasm]. I remember one time we gave it to Mike Duffy, and I don't think Mike Duffy was overly pleased about it, but at the end of the day, it was something that he did, and that's the reality of it. It really kind of draws a spotlight. Like, a lot of stuff people just kind of skip over. ...[The ceremony] will be streamed on our Facebook page, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. Our Youth wings will be sharing it, of course. And we give it to—we have Federal, Provincial, Municipal ones, honestly, it's just really funny. That's more the point of it.

The spectacle is primarily designed to publicize the corruption and inefficiencies in government, and, in doing so, promote an understanding of government that is fundamentally libertarian, reflected in the CTF's motto "lower taxes, less waste, and accountable government". As Dave points out, the event is designed mainly to use humour to attract people and/or students without much knowledge of formal politics, who are the CTF's main clientele. Facebook comments on the CTF's most recent Teddy Awards post indicate that supporters/donors also denounce politicians, often reflecting the crassness embodied by the event itself. Perceived mistakes by made by politicians are assumed to reflect the latter's inherent corruption or stupidity. For example,

Associating incompetent, wasteful politicians with pigs is insult to the pigs.
(Comment 48386)⁶

Hate this government if Turdeau was on fire I wouldn't piss on that goof to save him. (Comment 48407)

Is that Trudeau on the left of screen. :) [Referring to the pig mascot] (Comment 48427)

Congratulations to Calgary for winning with the most awful and wasteful art I have ever seen. The government and municipalities have lost sight of what is important. This is simply theft and hiding taxpayers hard earned money for themselves.
(Comment 48436)

⁶ Comment numbers do not refer to their raw sequential order among all comments, but the unique identifier given to comments after they are imported from the Netvizz application in Microsoft Excel. I have placed them in sequential numerical order in all examples throughout chapters four through seven. A lower ID indicates a greater amount of "Likes" relative to others.

Seems all level of governments are a bunch of wasteful assheads..tired of paying taxes so these pricks can just throw it around like a drunken sailor.. (Comment 48470)

The CTF also *evaluates* governments in the form of “report cards” and scathing commentary, usually revolving around a “balanced budget”. Importantly, all staff I interviewed were very clear that they evaluate this criterion for all political parties, a key discursive manoeuvre in positioning themselves as *external* evaluators of government performance. In our conversation, Kevin tried to make clear to me, in no uncertain terms, that the CTF was in fact a neutral (libertarian) evaluator of the *state*, not any specific government.

It’s the fact that we...it’s interesting, cause ironically, this speaks to one of the only criticisms that annoys the crap out of me, which is that we’re partisan---which is that we will not hold a [Conservative] government to account. We hold a Conservative government to account as well. So, you know, I think that the confusion from a lot of people who calls us partisan—they conflate political with partisan. We’re very political. We’re not partisan. We will applaud a government for cutting taxes, if they’re a Conservative government, or dem---we don’t care. And we will attack government that raises them, again—we do not care if they are conservative government. And our supports recognize this...And interestingly too, people don’t know this—when we first, when we were first founded, we were founded in an era when there were Conservative governments in Saskatchewan and Alberta...and we were so aggressive, going after those governments at the time, that they accused us of being a...a...front for the provincial New Democrats. That was our original...[Laughs]...we’ve come a long ways since, since then...but that’s um, that was our...initial, uh, allegation of partisanship.

MS: Yeah. You can’t win, huh?

Kevin: No. [Laughs]. Hey, well, if both sides are saying that, then I’m doing something right.

By separating out *political* from *partisan*, Kevin ensures that the “attacks” and “applauses” are legitimately counter-democratic—they engage in a form of civic vigilance that represents “the People” (i.e., the taxpayers), completely detached from political elites. Hence, by formally positioning the CTF as wholly independent, he is discursively protecting the legitimacy of their denunciations and knowledge-production functions as uncorrupted “watchdogs”. As Rosanvallon

(2008, p. 63) explains, this kind of self-positioning is crucial to preserve the perceived integrity of the “whistle-blowing” function of counter-democratic organizations. As we will see in subsequent chapters, this discursive manoeuvring contrasts with the other organizations I observed, who explicitly seek allies in formal politics and opportunities to work *with* the state, however transiently. The CTF, in no uncertain terms, discursively positions itself as external to this realm, and as we will see, to the “wider” public it constructs as fiscally imprudent.

Counter-democratic extremes: Self-identified populism

While the CTF is very obviously a counter-democratic “watchdog” organization, what makes the CTF an interesting case is that it takes counter-democratic principles to extreme ends. This is what makes them *populist* in their own right; Rosanvallon (2008, p. 268) describes populism as a “pathology of vigilance and oversight” to the point where state authorities become “radically alien enemy powers.” For him, it is a shift from vigilantly watching, denouncing, and evaluating *actions* of government to obsessively denouncing and a will to destroy the *government* itself. Citizens come to feel alienated from the functions of government and infused with inherent mistrust of the state. Rosanvallon refers to this as “negative politics”, since it creates a profound sense of disconnect between the government and the citizens it governs. He also sees it as a pathology of democracy—not because of external ideologies or the charisma of morally deficient politicians, but socio-economic alienation taking a natural disposition of democratic citizens (to monitor, watch, and correct government) to destructive extremes.

Indeed, the populist mobilization of the CTF is grounded in the hyperextension of counter-democratic principles. When I asked Jason what kind of world is needed for the CTF’s work to be unnecessary, he replied that there would need to be an unrealistic, radical

transformation of the state that we are unlikely to see.

I mean, once there's like a, if the govern...if the size of the government was cut, like, I'd say, substantially-ish. And like, there is, radical transparency in ways that are not likely at all. Just kind of...publishing almost everything. Immediately. Without delay. Cutting spending. Low enough taxes that people don't care that much...Yeah. I'd be satisfied [with] pretty radical transparency. But also, like a...a significantly less government so that it doesn't matter...they don't do all the things that they don't need to do, so, there's kind of no need for transparency in those areas because you're just not doing them. Yeah. Like I would love to not care about what the government is doing. The government would have to be so substantially smaller, like that's not going to happen here.

I posit that these sentiments—that inherent distrust of the state is a necessary and desirable trait in our democracy—explains the most interesting feature of the CTF. I am referring here to the fact that the CTF is the only organization in this study to refer to *itself* as populist. This is because, for the CTF, populism is not an indication of moral deficiency or pathology. Near the end of my conversation with Kevin, he referred to the CTF as a “grassroots, populist movement”. When I asked him why he chose those words, he explained that

I think there are some people who look down on populism because they see it as...you know, society is composed of a small group of people who understand stuff, and a big bunch of people that don't. And if populism is the “dumb” people sort of banding together, that's gonna be bad because they don't understand things. And I think that, that runs the risk of really undermining...I mean, these are the same people...these elites are the same people who are usually, call themselves “democrats.” Well, that's the reality in democracy—yes, we have, there are limits on majoritarianism, but you win elections by getting the most votes. And if you're gonna start castigating large segments of the population as not being “fit”, basically to make decisions, I mean, why do we have elections, right? You're basically saying the stupid people...if you're saying the stupid people are wrong to have that opinion, why are they then qualified to elect the people who are making choices, right? And I think, I understand the frustration because, as someone with a background, I mean I got degrees in economics and law, I like to think I understand those subjects better than the average person. But, I never, ever will sort of, be like “well you shouldn't talk about this because you're an idiot”. Because the minute you do that, you sort of undermine the whole system.

When asked if there will ever be a “finish line” for the CTF's work, he further explained:

I don't think it will ever be done for the same reason that, you know, the Auditor-General's work will never be done. There may not be something burning at the moment, but government requires mechanisms for oversight. We are obviously a...a third party watchdog. Just in the same way that we need the Auditor-General, we need ombudsmen, etc., I think in that sense we'll always have that function, regardless of whether...if we win on the fiscal stuff, I imagine we would shift our focus to things like, increasingly spending time on transparency and accountability instead.

Here we see that Kevin is appropriating, *in vivo*, Rosanvallon's logic that counter-democracy is necessary for democratic relations to function. However, he does so under the caveat that taking it to extremes is *not* a bad thing, precisely because the average person does not understand the machinery of government. If we contrast Kevin's perspective to scholars who denounce populism as a pathology of democracy by interrupting a rational democracy, we might characterize his comments as majoritarian apologist, rooting the legitimacy of populism as the direct expression of the political majority's voice. In other words, populist demands are inherently valid *because* they come from the majority (or "silent majority"). Some scholars of populism have also observed this discursive tactic in other populist movements and leaders (Brubaker, 2017; Caramani, 2017; Tufts & Thomas, 2014).

So, taking a more interpretive approach to these comments, we understand populism—in the form of extreme vigilance, denunciation, and evaluation—are necessary correctives to a system in which a small group of knowledgeable and political people govern, and a large group of *unknowledgeable* and apolitical people are governed, with a gap providing fertile ground for corruption and waste. At this point, we also see threads of a paranoid style of politics weaving into the discourse. A clear goal of the CTF is to act as a bridge between powerful, "educated" officials capable of acting in self-interest over the interests of the governed, and the governed themselves with markedly less power.

Yet—and this is key—it is the latter that hold the legitimacy of the sovereign. The CTF positions itself as a bridge, expressing the taxpayers’ *vox populi*, and to ensure that the views and policies of representatives do not stray from the desires of Canadian taxpayers. This sentiment is reflected by supporters in a few scattered Facebook comments—for example, regarding the Teddy Awards, one user said that “This might be the best awards show ever. Very eye opening. [S]uper entertaining, and ensures the idea that ‘*politicians are not necessarily smarter than you and I*’” (Comment 48446, emphasis added). All of this, of course, is a little ironic considering the CTF has produced politicians—they are not entirely free of the “insider” connections that show themselves when those like Jason Kenney or Stephen Harper move from the CTF to popular political careers. In this way, they play an effective insider/outsider game.

Jason’s and Kevin’s sentiments on the complexity of state structure and the necessity of populism (rooted in a counter-democratic logic) are not lost on the consumers/donors of the organization, according to Facebook comments on the CTF’s national page. A small cross-section of these include:

I think we need a law that requires all parties to have a plebiscite if they go into deficit. Get the public to vote on if they agree or not (Comment 24627)

We had the Liberals crooks now we have the NDP without clue what to do and how! Politicians should be judged by a civilian committee, because no trust on justice system either, and be jailed for corruption! [Prince Edward] Island is the best example in our modern days and now their growth is amazing! (Comment 37921)

the more expansive the government, the bigger incentives for corruption. (Comment 48648)

Supply and demand. The government is vigilant when it comes to milking more taxes out of the already over taxed population. We are sooo screwed! Think about that next time you vote....or don't vote. I'm a no vote....no way am I supporting the party system or the corrupt politicians who feed off it!!! (Comment 54253)

You cannot control government debt, if you cannot control the guy at the top. There really is only one way to control the guy at the top. DO NOT PAY ANY TAX. Governments

operate on tax revenue. If that revenue is no longer there, then it cannot be spent...So, here's the deal, I'm cutting you off right now, and putting you on probation for the next 6 months. (Comment 102141)

We are not a free society, we've stayed [sic] so far from a free market economy. The path we are on is unsustainable no matter who we elect, we will either walk or run off the cliff. It's time for a revolution, our countries future is at stake (Comment 103821)

These comments indicate a view that sees the problems faced by the taxpayer being beyond the agency of any one politician or party. As such, the problems woven into our collective political fabric can only be solved by *structural* changes, either through intense citizen oversight or rejecting the system altogether. Only then may the state seem less “alien,” precisely because it ceases to exist in certain respects; indeed, the very existence of the state is problematic for CTF staff and supporters. Rather than seeing these viewpoints as pathological or unrealistic—as mainstream theorists of populism would have us do—we should see them as triangulating a position of unapologetic and fundamentally *paranoid* watchdogs, who simply cannot trust politicians nor the systems they run.

In conclusion, what largely sets the CTF apart from other cases is that it understands *itself* as a populist counterbalance to the inherent flaws of the democratic system. The only way to deal with the gap between representatives and those they govern is to sow a constant anxious/angry watchfulness among the governed but avoiding racist and xenophobic sentiments while doing so. In this sense, it has a responsibility to fight a battle that positions it against the constructed, “prevailing rationale” of poor fiscal management. Its primary weapons in doing so are largely shared with the stylistic tools of populist politicians found in the literature: “bad manners” to disrupt a “proper” or “civil” public sphere that obscures the latter’s corruption (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014); a “language of crisis” to generate a sense of urgency among

individuals perceived to not care about the public sphere (Knight, 1998; Brubaker, 2017); and a radical division between “the corrupt elite” and “the pure people” (Aslandis, 2017).

I myself could not help but feel the state is a “radical alien” after reading countless, cherry-picked tales of corruption and waste in the *Taxpayer* magazine and on the CTF’s Twitter feed. Going on the CTF’s national Facebook page, it is also clear there are like-minded users who find politicians inherently stupid and inane. In sum, the CTF works to—in their view—foster profound skepticism (or alienation, using Rosanvallon’s vocabulary) of the political system by Canadians capable of. Having mapped out these logics, we can examine how they translate into a specific kind of subjectivity by convincing Canadians to be *watchdogs* via the knowledge claims of the CTF.

Navigating xenophobia and racism in paranoid populism

One caveat worth mentioning is that, in the CTF’s brand of majoritarianism, there is the purposeful (attempted) avoidance of possible accusations of xenophobia and racism. In my conversations with CTF staff, they discussed their careful attempts at avoiding typical populist associations with anti-immigration and/or white nationalism seen in populist movements in other parts of Canada, the U.S., the U.K, or Australia.

Unfortunately, this exclusion often clashes with some of the bigotry that the CTF attracts through its style of populist mobilization. In speaking to staff, I received contrasting approaches to this issue. Kevin, who described himself as pro-immigration, articulated his frustrations about speaking with individuals who are anti-immigration either because they are racist, or because they are “fair-minded individuals” who believe that Canadians should “take care of their own” before helping others. To Kevin, this was an exception to their duty of tapping into taxpayers’

pre-existing frustrations with the government. Because immigrants help grow the economy (i.e. are entrepreneurial, more likely to start businesses, consume, and so on), the issue should be framed as an *economic* one that advantages taxpayers. For the most part, however, Kevin refuses to talk about issues around race and immigration, saying that “[he] shouldn’t have to, because [he’s] here to talk about, you know, debt, taxes, and spending.”

Jason moves a little further into acceptance than Kevin regarding this part of their supporter base. Jason did express similar sentiments, but admitted he was more willing to tap into xenophobic sentiments to generate outrage about economic issues. However, bigotry “for bigotry’s sake” is off limits.

So what I’d say is...if, like, if China is involved in a story, I’ll go there, but I’m not gonna kind of do it in a way that I think is racist, or bigoted. But, are our people more interested because they’re maybe a little bigoted? Yeah. But, like, we did like, I did like a, a little meme thing on Facebook about foreign aid to China, and like, we’re still giving China some foreign aid, and, it’s not a lot of money. But like I know, well that’s gonna bother people. And like, is it gonna bother people for not particularly good reasons, but there is a good reason to be outraged. Our money’s doing nothing there. So like, why bother? But, you know. So I’ll kind of go there-ish, but, not...[Laughs].

MS: Right. There’s a line you’re not gonna cross.

Jason: Yeah. If it’s only about being bigoted, I’m not going anywhere near it.

For Jason, the ends of “antagonistic re-politicization” (Brubaker, 2017) justify the means. By presenting an “enemy” (in this case, China), he tries to dovetail economic frustration and anxiety with concerns fuelled more by racist or xenophobic sentiments. In doing so, he understands himself as harvesting useful affect insofar as it alerts individuals to the economic consequences of sending foreign aid. While some sociologists have discussed the translation of economic anxieties into xenophobic ones via populist strategies (see e.g. Bonilla-Silva, 2018), Jason seems to be trying to translate affect in the opposite direction. However, this creates

something of a moral issue by relegating “actual” or “real” bigotry past a certain “line”, discursively purifying attempts at drawing attention to strictly economic issues. This is an effective strategy seen in many forms of right-wing populism (Taggart, 2002; Rovira Kaltwasser & Taggart, 2016) and is discussed in more detail in chapter seven.

From a social justice perspective, this is not unproblematic. Although there may be no explicit racism or xenophobia in the CTF’s social media or published works, by tacitly allowing nativism and whiteness to become part of the chain of “equivalential links” that crystallize into a popular subjectivity (Laclau, 2005), “the taxpayer” can take on these qualities, as well. In some Facebook comments on the CTF’s page, we can see individuals discussing the “invasion” of non-white groups, or explicitly positioning “the taxpayer” against immigrants/Indigenous people. What links the following diverse comments together is the ways in which “the taxpayer” as a popular subject is expected to relinquish economic resources in antagonistic ways, such as for taking care of refugees, terrorist groups, and honoring Indigenous treaty rights.

[About Trudeau] Funding Hamas linked terror groups with Canadian taxes through UNRWA...Stays silent when his refugees rape and murder Canadians...Multiple million dollar payouts to convicted Islamic terrorists...Tweeted to the world that our borders were open to everyone, creating an unprecedented level of illegal immigration to Canada. (Comment 10004)

Why are refugees more important then us Canadians if we were at war would they take us in give us free homes money health care. GOD DAM DONT THINK SO why in hell should we CANADIANS put up with Trudeau and rest of these stupid liberals.We are sick of giving away our money (Comment 30191)

Also consider the gross overrepresentation in our courts and legal system with these never-ending race-blaming court cases using our Supreme Court to override our DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED GOVERNMENT to create new laws and new meanings that were never there before in Treaties; to tell exaggerated stories too many of which amount to LIES...That sounds more like racketeering than democracy. You need to start answering to us Canadian Taxpayers and proud citizens and to stop dictating to our elected officials for whom we vote. (Comment 118049)

If popular subjectivities (i.e. the specific and contextual modality of “the People”) act as discursive “vacuums” by linking several disparate claims and concerns (Aslandis, 2017; Roberts, 2015a/b), it seems that, in this context, these claims and concerns are allowed to have xenophobic and racist undertones. Although these claims are not explicitly nurtured by CTF staff, who keep their distance from overtly racist discussions, their online space allows these concerns to co-exist with the others found on the Facebook page. Here, we see the problematization of Islam, refugees and Indigenous rights shot through the lens of the taxpayer having to *lose* something in order for these groups to *gain* recognition. It is, implicitly, a zero-sum game played between white taxpayers and racialized minorities, with elites like Justin Trudeau tipping the “battlefield” in favour of the latter.

From taxpayer to watchdog

The CTF creates space for their popular subjectivity by reproducing their counter-democratic functions among their supporter/donor base. In the same way that the CTF monitors the state from afar, supporters are encouraged to watch the CTF from afar without much by way of direct participation. This passive dynamic is a product of both logistics—most supporters are Western Canadian, and the majority of the CTF’s publicity mechanisms are directed towards the Federal government in Ottawa— and the counter-democratic logic that governs the CTF’s operations. The corollary is that one does not need to actually *do* anything (beyond subscribing) to be a watchdog. The only preconditions are to support (and, ideally, donate) to the CTF’s ongoing efforts at research and advocacy for the taxpayer, and, of course, pay taxes.

The fundamental passivity of the watchdog means that CTF staff has a monopoly on creating knowledge about the government, which is distributed to members and supporters. This

monopoly, in turn, stems from the fact that the CTF frames its supporters as initially *unknowledgeable*. Importantly, as Kevin said, “unknowledgeable” in the CTF’s context does not mean “stupid.” It means, rather, that they require an interpreter publicizing government actions, telling them exactly what to monitor and why, and to help them understand the significance of certain actions (and why those actions are good or bad). Therefore, as Kevin told me in our discussion, the CTF “picks on the little things”. Speaking on how he decides what “makes the cut” in his research on overspending, Jason said that:

I mean like, \$16 orange juice is one of the biggest things ever. And like, ehh, it doesn’t seem that crazy to me, but like, it bothers people a lot, so it’s kind of, kind of find that little thing...I mean, it kind of gets back to the \$16 orange juice thing. I mean, it’s like, it’s great to do things about billion dollar waste. But like, no one knows what a billion dollars is. They have no clue. People will be much more outraged by like, a \$16 orange juice...But, it is kind of, these everyday things. Cause it’s also why like, expense issues with MPs are such like a, a big thing, ‘cause like, people understand double dipping on a meal expense. It’s easy for people to grasp, and it really pisses them off. They can’t expense their meals *one* time. So, somebody doing it twice gets them. [Laughs].

Here, one may be reminded of how publics are materialized not only by actors and discourses, but by physical objects themselves; here, orange juice is being touted as a particularly effective physical symbol to enrage individuals, bringing them together around a tangible and concrete issue as one method of “sparking” public action in the form of “chequebook activism” (Marres, 2005; Putnam, 2000). Kevin described a very similar sentiment when talking about connecting to their supporters and donors:

Uh...people are sort of , wow, I can’t...you know, it cost me 90 bucks to fill up my car. These are things that people will see everyday, whereas something a little more esoteric, that’s like, a very niche thing—it’s really hard to get people excited about it because even—frankly, even if the dollar figure is bigger, you know, an example that I’m starting to wade into this a little bit now—is military procurement. I mean, it’s so massive, and the figures are so big, and frankly, and there’s so much money sloshing around there, but it’s *so* big, the average person knows—they know that oranges shouldn’t be sixteen dollars. But they couldn’t tell you how much a

Destroyer is supposed to cost. So if it's 4 billion or 6—they don't know. They do know that orange juice [shouldn't be] 16 dollars, right.

Here, both Jason and Kevin elucidate two important ways in which the CTF packages their knowledge about state behaviours. The first is that the knowledge they distribute—in the form of denouncing “little things,” like the cost of orange juice—is designed to travel to supporters in ways that traverse discretions in institutional knowledge. CTF supporters do not require an understanding of how government works, nor do they need to physically attend any kind of event, seminar, or meeting to digest the information presented to them in the pages of the *Taxpayer*. The CTF distributes materials that are pertinent to *individuals*, like the cost of filling up one's car with gas or buying orange juice at the store. These are far-reaching, private, everyday activities. And, interestingly, this is largely the extent of the mobilization. This is quite different from the subjectivities fostered by the other cases in subsequent chapters. While all forms of populist mobilization documented here begin with personal problems, they typically use these as a starting point to bring members *out* of their homes and *into* the office or wider community. With the CTF, members are mobilized, but apparently not in ways that encourage them to learn about government or acquire new skills.

The second way pertains to the infusion of affect into those claims, in ways that generate, to use Jason's phrasing, “outrage.” By engaging in typical populist rhetoric—bad manners, a language of crisis, and framing elites as alien enemies—the CTF denounces state activities in ways oriented towards a primarily *affective* reaction among supporters. Indeed, part of populism's poor moral reputation among scholars is because it is primarily understood as an affective, rather than rational, kind of politics that threatens democracy (e.g. Freeden, 2017; Gerim, 2018; Waisbord, 2018a/b). However, as I have shown above, the counter-democratic

logical grounding of the CTF's self-identified populism neutralizes, from the perspective of its leadership, the kind of moral issues presented by a rational/emotional dichotomy. "All the little things" are chosen specifically because they are likely to bother people as individuals and as consumers—when they engage in those behaviours, like going to the store or filling up a tank of gas, there is a visceral feeling of somehow being "ripped off." Therefore, outrage is not just an assumed consequence of the information. The CTF sees it as their job to generate anger. When I asked Jason about how the main way the CTF lobbies for taxpayers, he stated:

By generating kind of outrage news coverage, we get the government to change policy. And it's a lot...it's about these like, smaller things. And like, they're not that big of a deal in the end for like, in the finances of the government. But like, there have been real changes, and they may result in like, real cultural changes. And it is kind of like that, sparking outrage thing that I think is probably the most effective...people being upset about it, and us kind of driving that outrage gives space for, in some ways, an opportunity for politicians to take up the cause themselves and do some change.

Kevin also discussed this sentiment:

So if people are really angry and want to march on Parliament with pitchforks, our job is not to calm them down. Our job is to give voice to that sentiment, right? But the flip side is, as you say, and it's true, a lot of people don't understand how Ottawa works. And why would they? They don't live here. They don't have any contact within their everyday life...They don't want to be told, "calm down". They want to be told to speak out.

These interconnected mechanisms are at the heart of the CTF's kind of populist mobilization that generates the watchdog subjectivity. By mostly publicizing state actions in (1) ways that Canadians will already understand, and (2) generating outrage by framing those actions as breaking the implied covenant of paying taxes, the CTF is looking to amalgamate smaller, everyday problems into a larger, shared problem. Jason all but confirmed this idea when he told me about how the CTF "uses" outrage to try and drive the change they want to see in government:

Yeah, ideally use that...outrage, about a very narrow thing, to make a broader point. To solve this, we should...see especially with the expense stuff, it's like, okay, outrage about this specific incident, then push—our solution is, they should have to post receipts, publish receipts about everything. Just kind of automatically—if you expend something, photocopy the receipt, publicly post it. It's like, that's a bigger change than, kind of, this one thing. And like, I think that's kind of, that's the key to having some actual success with the policy wins. Find this narrow case, that really gets at people, and using that to make a bigger change.

To pin down these specific components of the discourses used in the CTF's kind of populist mobilization, it is instructive to map them by using Amy Skonieczny's (2018, pp. 3-4) "Lacanian-narrative framework," in which unsatisfied collective subjects, constantly yearning for a desire to be "made whole," are situated by populist leaders within (1) a re-characterization of their sociopolitical environment, (2) the promise of (imagined) wholeness, and (3) the fantasization of some past and some (usually unattainable) future. In the CTF's case, the "us"—the Canadian taxpayer—is positioned against government elites that create a shared lack of lost "hard-earned" money that is stolen and/or wasted by the state. Taxpayers' "imagined wholeness," advocated for on their behalf by CTF leadership, is the radical restructuring of the state itself to provide (admittedly) unrealistic levels of transparency to ensure proper appropriation and use of taxpayer money. The characterization of the wider socio-political environment, as I illustrate below, is one of pessimism, which is used to position the CTF as "David" against the "Goliath" of politicians and special interests (e.g. unions, advocacy organizations). As the president of the CTF recently wrote:

"[w]e are pretty much universally governed in Canada by people who believe more government regulation and more government spending makes us better off, especially those at the margin. Seldom are the unintended consequences of this grand experiment of big government ever considered." (Taxpayer, 2018b, p. 2)

This self-centred positioning also extends to the temporal repair of a "past nightmare" –

that before the CTF established the “voice” for taxpayers, politicians had *carte blanche* over how to tax and spend citizens. Under the watchful eye of the CTF, and by supporting their activities, taxpayers can expect a more hopeful future of transparency, accountability, and efficiency. This positioning helps the CTF to ensure that they will be needed for years to come.

The watchdog as popular subjectivity: Key attributes

There are three unique key attributes of the watchdog subjectivity we can infer from these analyses. First, the watchdog is a subject that is not understood as created but *awakened*. The CTF primarily understands themselves as activating dormant qualities that are already found in Canadian citizens by virtue of living in a democracy: the propensity to vigilantly monitor the government, denounce actions that they see as counteracting the *vox populi* (i.e. the assumed interests of taxpayers), and evaluating the government on the criteria of efficiency and transparency. This is quite different from other case studies, insofar as they understand themselves as engaged in a process of building new, active political subjectivities for members. These involves learning, to some extent, about how politics works. Hundreds of thousands of Facebook comments corroborate this viewpoint, denouncing the actions of various politicians on posts that publicize various inefficiencies or corruption. Often, these are linked to the desire for the rest of Canada to “wake up” to the disconnect between taxpayers and politicians. The Facebook page is reserved almost exclusively for these denunciations. In fact, finding comments that are *not* personally insulting politicians requires substantial hunting. The top-liked comments (in the top 1% of “Liked” comments) include:

My question is, when will the rest of Canada see these 2 pathetic self obsessed destroyers for what they really are. [Referring to Justin Trudeau and Sophie Grégoire Trudeau] (Comment 3)

More staff? Who the hell does she think she is? Get her ass off the red carpet & get her back to being a Mom. Obviously she needs more practice. Throw in a time management course too. Send her expense money to Alberta where moms have had little help. [Referring to Sophie Grégoire's public appearance at an awards show] (Comment 5)

Trudeau is medically (mentally) unfit to serve as prime minister and should be forced to step aside because of his condition and irrational behaviour which has affected his position to govern and speak on Canadians behalf. We can no longer afford his generosity with our tax dollars (Comment 19)

Justin Trudeau is a special kind of stupid and who knew so many Canadian's are that kind of stupid as well...wake up people none of these morons work for us. The sooner you realize this and demand change the better off I will be and so will you. (Comment 41)

Neo-liberal globalist socialist wasteful useless thugs will destroy Canada. Wake up Canadians learn from the Ontario McWynnety corrupt Liberal thugs of Ontario, if don't get rid of them next election, Canada hasn't got a hope in hell. (Comment 211)

Trudeau continues to live in his elitist bubble with reality being whatever he decides it is. Justin Trudeau was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and a millionaires allowance [and] has NEVER made a serious decision in his life...Trudeau is NOT FIT for office, yet the Liberals in Canada love him. Hopefully in the next election Canadians will wake up and smell the coffee and vote him out of office and return the business of Federal Politics to the Grown ups! (Comment 336)

Second, and related, the watchdog is a *distant* subject. This attribute is the result from the passive consumer model of the CTF. Because the source of discontent is primarily fuelled by Western alienation towards the Federal government, it is important that supporters can understand themselves as politically involved, but in ways that need not require their physical presence at chapter meetings, rallies, protests, or the like. As we will see in subsequent chapters, other cases foster subjectivities in the context of fellow involved individuals and tangible political actions taken by members to try and impact policy. Because the work of the CTF is logically couched in counter-democratic social relations, supporters already have all they need to understand themselves as watchdogs: they pay taxes and are governed by representatives in the context of a democracy. The only action that the “watchdog” should/can take is to financially

other representatives that provide a counterbalance on their behalf.

Third, and final, the watchdog is, of course, *paranoid* insofar as they subscribe to the obsessive publicity of government elites. This knowledge, as I have explained above, is fundamentally tied to an affect of outrage that the CTF circulates in their kind of populist mobilization. Because the CTF acts as the representative for taxpayers, the outrage generated by the kind of knowledge they distribute to supporters is used directly towards specific political ends—as they are in the other organizations I study—but is simply fed back into a loop of “needing to know”. The watchdog is perpetually sustained by the “*satisfactions* of the paranoid style” of politics (Marasco, 2016, p. 236), delivered by the denunciations of the CTF. The CTF constructs the problems of rampant, hidden corruption and government waste by denouncing all the “little things” and generating outrage, planting a drive to further learn about exactly *how* taxpayers are being slighted by the governments they elect.

Therefore, it stands to reason that “[dissolving] of the cognitive and the affective” political domains (ibid), the CTF’s brand of populist mobilization tries to cultivate a kind of “paranoid politics” with respect to the Canadian state. In short, the watchdog’s paranoid cathexis towards government—about what it *might* be doing, how it *could be* messing up, all the ways it makes “our” lives harder—is the inevitable result of being simultaneously awoken, yet passive. Unlike the cases in following chapters, the CTF offers no active means of participation other than offering payment in exchange for information that satisfies the need to know. Without a channel through which to actively pursue their “wakefulness” or political dissatisfactions (as ACORN, the Council of Canadians, and RISE all provide their members), they are recursively funnelled into the financial and moral support of the CTF’s research and advocacy.

A Watchdog's Counterpublic

We can broadly locate the workings of the CTF as advancing a form of neoliberal ideology. It would not be inaccurate to describe this as a neoliberal populist counterpublic. The individualistic, responsabilized, entrepreneurial and private subject encouraged to withdraw from public life (i.e. taxation, public programming, and other features of a Keynesian postwar welfare state) are at the heart of what Woolford and Nelund (2013) have called “neoliberal citizenship.” Scholars have discussed at length the shaping of passive citizens and citizen-consumers as a neoliberal project of states and elites more widely, divorced from the collective body politic (Brodie, 2002; Brown, 2006; Peck, 1998; Newman, 2013). In fact, we could likely frame the CTF’s populist mobilization as part of a wider “erosion of citizenship” that begets “thin, fragmented, and fragile social bonds to the public world” (Turner, 2016, abstract). Robert Putnam (2000), a well-known theorist of social capital, has illustrated how “chequebook activism” serves to thin social bonds and trust in the ways described by authors focusing on neoliberalism and public life. Certainly, by interpolating Canadians as passive consumers of information, advocating for a wider agenda of government austerity, and encouraging a self-understanding of Canadians as *individual* “contractors” who fund the state, the CTF could be described as a civic contributor towards the neoliberalization of the Canadian public sphere.

However, we should be careful to uncritically accept the unidimensional erosion of public life described by these literatures. While it remains incredibly popular and fashionable to describe such ideologies, discourses and movements as “neoliberal,” this term too readily blinds us to the *public* sensibilities that may be advanced, binding individuals together in new ways; not merely leaving them as floating atoms detached from social life. We should therefore think of the CTF as trying to infuse Canadians with *public* (watchdog) sensibilities which underpin a

paranoid populist counterpublic. Scholars relying on neoliberalism as an explanatory mechanism too often rely on the assumption of a stationary, pre-existing and progressive public sphere, against which they describe actions they find as morally distasteful as mere residuals of hegemonic projects that unyieldingly individualize, privatize and marketize.

In response, a literature has emerged rejecting neoliberalism as an analytical category because its primary common function is denunciation rather than analysis, morally lumping together diverse modalities of ideology, discourse and governance mapping out social contexts prior to fully understanding them (Barnett, 2005; Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009; Flew, 2014; Sanscartier, 2017b). This sentiment appears to be especially relevant regarding what Kyle Willmott (2017) calls “taxpayer governmentality”. He rejects placing it “under the auspices of what is called neoliberalism” because it “ignores the way in which this subject is taken up, responded to and reasoned with, and the sort of work that it can do to refigure social and political space in ways that appear contradictory” (p. 270).

In the context of paranoid populism, there is an apparent contradiction in the ways that taxpayers are heralded as passive, distant or private watchers of the state, but are recruited at the same time into a “public supposed to believe” (and, by proxy, a public-supposed-to-know) by offering taxpayers an escape from the guilt of *not* knowing (Dean, 2001, p. 645)—in this case, not knowing the corruption and waste in government. Tools like the “debt clock”, for example, visibly and quickly try to instil a sense of urgency to know—a rapidly upward ticking number and how that number translates into individual debt—and the sense that *not knowing*, continuing to let government mismanage funds, will lead to disaster. By simply being “awakened” to the problem of debt, and supporting the CTF’s research and advocacy functions, Canadians *are* largely considered active by the organization by virtue of knowing. To *not* know is constructed

as a problem. This strategic discourse is part of the in-person recruitment strategy used by the student arm of the CTF, “Generation Screwed”. Dave illustrates this through a discussion of recruitment practices.

[It’s about] [j]ust asking students, hey, are you aware of like what’s going on with government? Do you know how much we’re paying in debt? Do you know how much *you’re* in debt right now? And just kind—‘cause most people—no, I don’t care. I have student debt, does that count? And I’m like, well, on top of that, blah blah blah...So it’s just like, connecting the dots and bringing it back to financial stuff. Because at the end of the day, everything relates to money. Like, my shoes are related to money because I had money to buy the shoes. So it’s just finding a way to connect to them.

MS: Yeah, and it’s almost like you’re—getting them into a political frame of mind without them even knowing.

Dave: Yeah. Yeah. ‘Cause we say politics, people are like—nope, don’t want to talk about that, thank you, have a great day. But like, hey, nice socks. Where’d you get them from? Like, ok, we can talk about stuff like that. So it’s just like, making those small things, and kind of—just, making sure they are willing to engage with you.

In much the same way that reading about the *Kardashians* instead of reading the newspaper or watching the news invokes guilt about not participating in a rational-communicative public sphere, the CTF positions themselves as an alternative public which, from a distance, engage in counter-democratic practices to solve the inherent problem of *not* knowing. However, because individuals are perceived to be “asleep”—apolitical, jaded to the consequences of government waste and corruption—recruiters must find innovative ways to draw people into the fold, “awakening” them to the violations of their trust as taxpayers, and, hopefully, initiating a sense of guilt or urgency about *not* knowing. One anecdote, again from *Generation Screwed*’s recruitment practices, illustrates this dynamic in practice:

Armed with a camera...our McGill Coordinator, Paige Hunter, this Halloween asked a few students how they felt about the federal debt. We couldn’t have hoped for a better response: when told just how large Canada’s debt is—more than \$67 billion—students recoiled at the prospect of paying for it for decades to come. As the students said, it scares them. (Taxpayer, 2018b, pp. 24-25)

By using these strategies to convert individuals from a public-supposed-to-not-know to a public-supposed-to-believe (and, consequentially, know), the CTF simultaneously accomplishes two discursive tasks. The first is the characterization of the wider public sphere as unknowing, ignorant, and possibly uncaring about just how much “trouble” Canadians are in regarding public debt.

The second, combined with their self-positioning as *external* and *distant* from the diseased public sphere, is to establish themselves as a *knowing* counterpublic that seeks to bring prospective members into its fold. Its “poetic-expressive” character (Warner, 2002, p. 86) is one of paranoia, which infuses its watchdog members with a sense of *needing to know*—a public-supposed-to-know government corruption and waste. It may seem odd at first, from an outsider’s perspective, to consider the obsessive scrutinizing of government spending as either poetic *or* expressive, but it became clear to me in my conversations with CTF staff that there is, in fact, a certain poetry in the art of their recruitment. The individuals with which I spoke all very much believe in the message they spread to that inevitably “suffer”, in the form of indebtedment, from *not* knowing.

As we will see, the CTF’s distance between its counterpublic and the wider public, combined with the passive and distant nature of its subjectivity, is quite different than the other cases in this study. In what follows, we see quite a different form of populist mobilization and popular subjectivity: one that collectivizes members, encouraging their active and constant involvement in the activities of the organization.

CHAPTER FIVE: Pastoral Populism and Creating Crusaders

Introduction

On Halloween of 2018, I made the first of what would be several visits to the Ottawa chapter of ACORN. Having just completed two interviews at the CTF offices, I knew to expect a different vibe. I was not, however, quite prepared for what I found. A brief vignette from my notebook illustrates my initial impressions.

Although the office is much smaller than the CTF's, it's pretty clear that it's for everyone, not just staff. They cram a reception desk by the door even though there's barely room for one. I check in, and someone offers me a seat while I wait for the organizer, who I see speaking emotively on the phone through a boardroom window. Volunteers are constantly coming and going. The walls are jam packed with yellowing newspaper clippings of all things ACORN has done over the past years—the earliest I glimpse is something from 2004. A very subtle aroma of cigarettes hangs in the air. I sit, overwhelmed by the stimuli, trying to stay out of everyone's way. I am so not prepared for this. Two younger women, who clearly don't know each other, are seated in adjacent chairs sit across from me. "I like your shirt," one says to the other. "Oh, thanks!" the other replies cheerfully. This immediately turns into an intimate discussion about where they lived before, why they both moved to Ottawa, what they're in school for, and their love lives. I suddenly feel like I'm intruding, though I've been present for their entire relationship. They are here for ten minutes before a staff member summons them to another room. This is the kind of place, I think, where people have just enough time to become friends before being pulled into a bigger political machine. (Research Diary, Oct. 31st, 2018)

In stark contrast to the CTF, the ACORN Ottawa office feels lived in. It is colourful. The outfit of choice consists of jeans with collared shirts or sweaters. There are people of all ages making phone calls, in the kitchen brewing tea/coffee, and chatting about various topics. There are Halloween decorations in the windows. The above dynamic between the young women, I later learn from an ACORN organizer, is not unique. Friendships are made quickly in solidarity-building exercises of training, door-to-door knocking, and setting the stage for meetings. Clearly, this office offers a radically different kind of politics than the first case I investigated.

Much like the previous case, the “feel” of this office is directly linked to the kind of populist mobilization that ACORN uses, and the kind of popular subjectivity they produce in doing so. ACORN engages in what I call *pastoral populism*. Focused on the political organization of low- and moderate-income Canadians, ACORN constructs itself as a counterpublic to the wider machinations of capitalist democracy that fails its members. It constructs an entirely alternative counterpublic for members that does not rely on the wider public sphere, through either constant critique (like the CTF) or faith in its ability to correct itself (like the Council, in chapter six). It is a fully independent counterpublic capable of self-maintenance through a pastoral model, taking on specific features laid out by Foucault in his 1978 lectures on the Christian pastorate as a specific kind of individualizing and totalizing power. Like all cases in this book, ACORN produces and circulates anti-elitist discourses, positioning “the People”—low- and moderate-income Canadians—as sharing a lack that ACORN constantly fights to correct. And, as a populist counterpublic, it constructs its members as having a shared lack *because* of elite interests that are unwilling or unable to make them whole.

Unlike the CTF, however, ACORN does not govern itself according to counter-democratic logics. Indeed, ACORN does not fulfill a watchdog function, concerned instead about members’ immediate quality of lives. In this vein, ACORN does not simply watch or denounce politicians; it instead uses its resources to train and rally its members, producing a fundamentally *active* political subject that oscillates between their alternative counterpublic and the wider public, speaking, writing, and rallying to politicians and policy-makers perceived as gatekeeping the paths to improved quality of life. To some extent, this reflects a wider difference between left-wing and right-wing forms of populism in how they relate to “big business.” Left-

wing populisms are much more inclined to embrace logics that challenge capitalist modes of production and blame the corporate elite for corrupting “the people” (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Brett, 2013; Mudde, 2004; Pollock, Brock & Ellison, 2015). In both this chapter and the next—both of which discuss left-wing organizations—this is in fact the case. Right-wing forms of populism, for their part, focus more on political actors, and are more likely to embrace authoritarianism in ways that are compatible with corporate rule/governance of democratic relations (Freedon, 2017). The CTF, for example, places heavy faith in the ability of the free market to act in the best interests of all Canadians if the government does not interfere with its operations (e.g., through corporate welfare).

ACORN empowers their members to make a sustained, impassioned effort to bring political change in ways that will directly and immediately improve their lives, and are less concerned with wider, more abstract principles like government “transparency” or “water rights,” like the CTF and the Council of Canadians, respectively. This combative disposition is why, as I illustrate in this chapter, I have labelled this kind of populism as forging *crusaders*.⁷

While I compare ACORN analytically to the CTF insofar as they are both engaged in populist mobilization, I want to make it clear from the outset that we are dealing with two very different species of populism. In a report from the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, Kyle and Gultchin (2018) develop a crude but heuristically helpful typology of kinds of populist leaders—cultural populism, socio-economic populism, and anti-establishment populism. While the latter form of populism best describes the CTF—in which the people are “hard-working victims of a state run by special interests and outsiders”—ACORN is better described as advancing a specific kind of socio-economic populism, in which the people are “honest, hard-

⁷ This term is offered not as a reflection of historical/religious crusaders, but of the energy, confidence and power emanating from those who attend ACORN meetings, rallies, and other political activities.

working members of the working class” (pp. 3-4). This kind of populism is usually associated with Latin American political leaders like Hugo Chávez and is rarely discussed in the North American context, especially Canada (Brett, 2013; Rovira Kaltwasser & Taggart, 2016). This is likely because North American literature is overwhelmingly preoccupied with the study of *politicians*, and there is a noticeable absence of left-wing populist Canadian politicians. However, an *in-situ*, interpretive and “bottom-up” (Aslandis, 2017; Barnett, 2005) account of populist mobilization can attune us to how these discourses operate in this context. Left-wing populism is alive and well among the community organizing forces of ACORN.

Pastoral populism is named after Foucault’s (2007) identification of *pastoral* techniques and forms of power that are both individualizing and collectivizing. In his 1978 lectures, Foucault identified the ways in which Christianity—and later, modern forms of government—engage in techniques of discipline *and* subjectification to shape individuals whilst linking them to a “a common destiny” that “envelops the people and the person who is their chief or guide” (2007, p. 167). In this chapter, I illustrate how ACORN, by using mobilization techniques relying primarily on physical co-presence (i.e. attending meetings, bringing people *out* of the home), organizational leaders become “guides” that offer salvation to members via actions that build individual *leader while* linking them to a “crusading” *whole* that forms the basis of a populist counterpublic.

The layout of this chapter closely follows the previous one, briefly discussing the history and structure of ACORN Canada and Ottawa ACORN before moving to a wider discussion of the logic underpinning its mobilizing practices, the subjectivity produced via pastoralization by ACORN leaders, and how these subjects come together to form a specific kind of populist counterpublic. As ACORN holds regular membership meetings and other events—some of

which I was able to attend—I draw on vignettes from my research, alongside interviews with ACORN staff and a review of organizational documents.

ACORN: An Overview

ACORN is an international organization spanning Canada, Peru, Mexico, Argentina, India, Kenya, Italy, and other countries in both hemispheres. In its Canadian form, ACORN has offices at both the national level in Toronto, as well as local chapters in New Westminister (BC), Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, Montreal, Halifax, Oshawa, and Mississauga. Noticeably absent are the Prairie Provinces, which (perhaps uncoincidentally) is where the CTF draws most of its supporters. While most political actions (rallies, marches, protests, etc.) happen at the local level, the national arm does try to make policy changes in favour of its low- and moderate-income members. For example, shortly before my discussion with Mavis, chair of a local chapter and national board member, she had met with the Minister of Innovation and advocated for subsidized internet for all low-income families in Canada. While national and local chapters will band together for certain campaigns at the federal, provincial, municipal, and local levels, and congregate at certain venues—for example, the national ACORN conference—they are independently coordinated.

By now it likely seems that ACORN’s participatory structure is a near total inversion of the CTF, and this is true in many respects. In ACORN’s recruitment strategies, the primary goal is to get people *out* of their homes and *into* the office to help identify issues the chapter should pursue, strategize on how to pressure politicians, or to help with organizational work (data entry, writing short reports, and so on). The organization’s handbook, *Nuts & Bolts: The ACORN Fundamentals of Organizing*, serves as a guide for setting up local ACORN chapters. The key

principles, among others, are building power *with* others, sharing leadership, and that ACORN belongs to its members. The latter sentiment is especially important, constantly present both in the meetings I attended and the discussions I had with staff. It stresses the importance of bottom-up participation, an executive board fully accountable to its members, universal consensus decision-making, and sharing information with members. Wade Rathke, an original architect of ACORN and the author of *Nuts & Bolts*, repeatedly emphasizes the centrality of collective ownership, since the core purpose of ACORN is to restore power to low- and moderate-income individuals. As he puts it:

I have made my life and living organizing working families...not doctors, lawyers, or big whoops, but plain spoken and down to earth families. A lot of the best and worse results of public school education will assemble in these meetings, and it will be spiced heavily with the kind of life experience and shoulders to the wheel that took mothers out of school to have and raise children, and fathers out of school to make a living on the street...A community or workplace meeting is not a prototype of a seminar attended by PhDs, legal eagles, or a society book club. Therefore, for the process the work, the structure of the organization has to put everyone on hard, solid, and very even ground. (Rathke, 2018, p. 17).

In laying the foundation of ACORN's philosophy, Rathke does two things here. One, he explicitly places the epistemologies of life experience and formal education on equal footing, precisely because the constituents ACORN empowers typically have the former kind of knowledge. In all ACORN meetings I attended, this sentiment was established at the beginning of every discussion in the same organizational mantra stating that there are multiple truths, and while what is true for one member may not be true for another, all truths must be respected. This created a safe space for the co-existence of assertions made from experience, such as when participants with disabled children discussed how Doug Ford's policies made their lives harder, and more "educated" assertions like how (un)likely inclusionary zoning would fix issues around affordable housing. The second thing that Rathke does here is explicitly position the educated

“big whoops” against “down to earth” families. These are the “hard-working members of the working class” that are the stuff of “the People” under “socio-economic populism” (Kyle & Gultchin, 2018). It was clear to me that this populist sentiment germinated in the Ottawa ACORN chapter. Discussions in which everyone feels safe contributing are crucial, Mavis told me, because “that’s an important part of democracy. Because...it’s the people. The people have to be heard somewhere...That gives them a chance to express themselves.” This will be unpacked further in this chapter.

With respect to how the chapter itself is funded, roughly a quarter of funds comes from membership dues, which, as head organizer Jen told me, is the best source of funding because “how do you hold the government and corporations accountable, if they’re the ones paying your bills?” Another sustainable source of funding comes from donors solicited by door-to-door knockers that go into “middle-upper income neighbourhoods” for one-time, monthly or yearly contributions. A third source, about which Jen was ambivalent (at best), are annual fundraisers that take the form of craft beer tasting nights. While these are a good source of income, she told me, she resented the precious time they detracted from front-line organizing. Finally, ACORN does apply for government grants, a “necessary evil” to try and pay for office space and salary, which in turn, allows for more members, more dues, and more independence.

What all these fundraising strategies share is that they are fuelled by—as Jen put it—“people power.” Volunteers and staff are both heavily involved in organizing fundraisers, writing grants, and going soliciting donations and memberships from those in the community. While ACORN shares with the CTF a desire to be independent from government and the private sector—which they do not do as successfully, given their reliance on grants—they depart radically by doing so via *active* members and volunteers. Chapters can have several meetings in

a week, and any members that have yet to participate or lead a meeting are encouraged to take on supporting and leadership roles. The participatory-democratic structure of ACORN, which presents itself as an alternative to the wider, broken democracy that fails low and moderate-income Canadians, is fertile ground for the germination of their passionate crusaders. In what follows, I outline the political logic in which ACORN grounds its actions, before moving to a discussion of how members are encouraged to understand themselves as political leaders.

In sum, while ACORN is a formal organization, it is much less formalized than CTF; as a result, people in various roles do many diverse tasks that would normally be separated in a bureaucracy. Jen, for example, is responsible for writing grant applications, training members, organizing political actions, and coordinating volunteers. As such, we can locate it as a *less* formal organization than the CTF or Council, while still having more structure than IWC/ID Canada. This corresponds to a different, less “concentrated” and discursive form of populism seen in the intense anti-elitism of the CTF, and, as we see below, is more concerned with the efficient and immediate interpolation of new members who can contribute to organizing. Its organizational performance of populist mobilization is less therefore less intense but *broader* than that of the CTF.

Crusader logic: A constant battle

For ACORN Ottawa, the promised vision of democracy has failed in its promise to represent everyone, especially the most disadvantaged. So, the only solution is to build another democracy, one that is capable of functioning in the best interests of all its members. In speaking to ACORN staff about Canadian politics, I was reminded of Janine Brodie’s (2008) assertion that social citizenship in Canada has been restructured by the state, backed by powerful interests,

undercutting an ethos of socioeconomic inclusion via universal social policy. In effect, the terrain of citizenship has been skewed dramatically in favour of the wealthy. The outcome is that, if “the people have to be heard somewhere,” as Mavis told me, it won’t be in Canadian democracy or the offices of politicians—at least not without ACORN’s leadership-building and collectivizing functions. ACORN is responsible for leading the pack up the skewed terrain of social citizenship, advocating for mechanisms that redistribute wealth and help improve members’ quality of life. This, in turn, is framed within a wider zero-sum game between the wealthy and the disadvantaged, with the game board tilted heavily towards the wealthy. At ACORN’s meetings, there is a background of confident energy emitted by leaders and members, derived from the fact that to a large extent, they see their work as necessarily correcting these representational deficiencies in democracy. A few quotations from various ACORN staff members illustrates this.

...there’s really only two ways to make a difference in this world. You either have a ton of money, because that’s who decision-makers listen to. Or, you have a lot of people, right. And if you’re looking at the differences between, you know, between who has power in this world and who doesn’t, money is obvious. But even besides, like, the difference between, you know, one group has money and one group does not, but if you also look at the wealthy, they’re *extremely* well-organized. Extremely well-organized. Banking lobbies, landlord’s associations, payday lenders have an association for crying out loud. However, outside of ACORN, there is no other association for low-income people. So you either have organized money in this world, or you have organized people, right. So that’s kind of always the conversation we’re having with our members. (Jen, head organizer)

I learned what [participatory democracy] means. Because if you...if you’re involved, if you act, if you get their attention, but also, you have to be part of something big. Cause ACORN has...over 113,000 members across Canada. And uh, when you’re that big an organization, they will meet with you. And it’s sort of, on your own, you cannot accomplish anything. (Mavis, board member)

It’s building power, right. We’re talking to people who...you know, a lot of them, who think it’s kind of silly for even trying. You know, they’re dealing with the same stuff for however many years, and it just gets worse every year, so why bother, right? I hate to reduce it to that but...they do have power, they just don’t know it. There’s really not a lot they can do to stop us, right? Not like it’s easy, all coming

together...but, even if you get a few people together, we can actually get some stuff done. (John, staff)

In stark contrast to counter-democratic logic, in which the democratic system will theoretically function “properly” (i.e., according to the will of the people) as long the state has watchdogs, there is a markedly more pessimistic outlook here on democracy’s capability for inclusion. Part of this is due to the material circumstances of ACORN’s membership, which is a staple of how ACORN constructs an ongoing “crisis of representation” (Knight, 1998). Staff told me stories of individuals struggling to pay bills, living with cockroaches, and being evicted due to gentrification. As Pasquino (2008, p. 27) notes, abject or relative poverty constitute the requisite “social conditions of anxiety and availability” in which left-wing populist leaders can insert themselves, blaming political and corporate elites for their circumstances. This was the case, for example, with Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. Whereas the CTF’s brand of populist mobilization operates in direct relation to the government and wider public by instilling a kind of paranoid politics about politicians, ACORN is more “inward,” focusing first on the plight of its members, and second, how various parts of government can work to relieve that plight. In short, CTF staff sees scrutiny of government as a desirable end in and of itself, while ACORN sees scrutinizing government a means to wider, more inclusive social ends. In each of these quotes from ACORN staff, we glimpse a sentiment held by political scientist Charles Lindblom:

In short, in any private enterprise system, a large category of major decisions is turned over to businessmen...they can also, over a broad range, insist that government meet their demands, even if these demands run counter to those of citizens expressed through [democratic] controls. The large private corporation fits oddly into democratic theory and vision. Indeed, it does not fit. (Lindblom, 1977, p. 356, cited in Knutilla & Kubik, 2000, p. 82).

Because pluralist representational democracy is effectively a myth under capitalism,

ACORN—like the CTF—operates at a distance from the state. Unlike CTF, ACORN centres its members in discourse around “getting stuff done.” It does not claim or seek to represent them but organizes their voices into a coherent shout that tries to get attention of politicians. As Rathke (2018, p. 1) states at the very beginning of *Nuts & Bolts*, if organizers want to speak *for* or *to* people, “there are groups that certainly do that”—ACORN is not one of them. As staff make clear in the above quotes, ACORN’s socio-economic crisis of representation is one in which individuals do not stand a chance of building a better life for themselves unless can access “participatory linkages” that displace formal institutions, wielded directly by citizens that empower them “from below”. Participatory linkages, he states, can either take the form of institutionalist mechanisms under populist leadership, like referendums, or constructed by anti-establishment (but stable) civil society groups looking to empower the marginalized (ibid, p. 146). ACORN understands itself as providing these key linkages—these are what allow people to channel the “power” they do not know they have, as John says. As I explain below, this must be done through active participation, rather than a passive “awakening”, as in the previous case.

Ideationally, ACORN largely reproduces Szymanski’s (1978) sentiments on how the capitalist state comes under various “modes of control” by powerful, wealthy actors and corporations. More specifically, dominance through lobbying and public policy—both of which serve to disadvantage the working and underclasses—heavily impacts the social environment in which democracy can operate. Dominant classes finance major political parties and mass media, inherently (but *indirectly*) tilting capitalist and democratic ground in favour of higher strata. As such, the only thing that can counter such agency is *more* agency—a philosophy rolled into the consistent phrasing by members about “power” or the necessity of “people power” to counteract corporate power. In Marxist theories of the 1970s, Szymanski represents a shift away from the

notion of “relative autonomy” but does not approach hard instrumentalist stances, in which the state is under complete control of the capitalist class. In short, capitalists do in fact rule, but the state is not merely their puppet—there are indirect, structural features that keep them at arms length from direct governance.

In my discussions with ACORN staff, they me about how these structural flaws not only advantage wealthy Canadians, but negatively impact low-SES Canadians. For these reasons, ACORN distances itself from the state in a different way than the CTF, forming the roots of a fundamentally different counterpublic. Whereas the CTF positions themselves as external evaluators of the state, ACORN is not interested in evaluation. Their mistrust of politicians leads them to structure their relation to the state in a much more instrumental way, not out of an ideological drive (e.g. libertarianism) but a material and socio-economic one (e.g. hard-working Canadians cannot work their way out of poverty). Consider the following discussion I had with Mavis about the terms “transparency” and “accountability.”

To me, that is more politician’s terms. Where they would apply it to...then when you establish a program, you want transparency and you want accountability. You want to see how it’s...if it’s successful, and uh, providing what you were looking for. We’re not...so much not that part of stuff.

MS: Are those empty words?

Mavis: Well, those are politician’s words. I even heard it many times last night when we were at debate. Yeah. They complained there was no transparency and accountability. Yeah. Because it’s true. They have all these things, they have by-laws, ‘kay, property standard by-laws, they have uh...and, they have all these officers, by-law officers, and nothing happens. Okay? Accountability? Nobody seems to be accountable, because nothing’s happening. Um...that’s why, we say, that’s not working. That’s why we want landlord licensing. We want mandatory inspections. Not...uh, somebody calls, makes a complaint, then you go see what it is, but then first of all they’re gonna say “have you talked to the owner?” Some people are afraid of talking to the owner, ‘kay? Or, somebody’s put a complaint, and so, okay, they take, they...notice of violation to the owner, the owner has 30 days to appeal that. The tenant doesn’t know that.

Here, Mavis gives some insight into ACORN's instrumental relationship with politicians. By framing transparency and accountability as "politician's words", and noting how they fail to solve the real problems faced by ACORN's membership, Mavis is invoking the failure of legal and regulatory mechanisms to provide *substantive* equality for low- and moderate-income Canadians, which requires active correction of a social issue at hand (Barnard & Hepple, 2000). Formal equality, on which these agencies operate, treat each citizen as the same. This generates a problem because without corrective action, capitalism creates a shared socio-economic disadvantage, and because of this, members are fundamentally exploited and oppressed by capitalist social relations. In this example, there is a problematic gap between the two forms of equality when a renter is told to speak to their landlord or property owner as a first step in resolving a dispute, but the power relations between them make them fearful or hesitant to do so because they cannot afford to move or to find another apartment. Additionally, the disadvantaged may lack procedural knowledge that later puts them in a difficult position. The democratic/capitalist structure of the system is therefore inherently flawed, and unable to fully recognize the needs of those in the lower strata of Canadian society. Collective action external to this structure is the only real corrective that can work to restore the will of these "pure" people (Mudde, 2004).

That ACORN members are "left behind" or ignored in a money-centric society is reflected in Facebook comments left on the pages of both ACORN Canada and ACORN Ottawa. Usually, these comments, itemizing the various ways in which low- and moderate-income folks are excluded from larger politics, are paired with praise for how ACORN is restoring voice for the marginalized.

THANK YOU for standing up for those who are kicked down by the government and anyone else who finds out they are taking "benefits". (Comment 13)

[Regarding cuts to Ontario Disability Support Program] How is \$11 going to help anyone? With the prices of rent that keep raising to be absolutely ridiculous! No one can live off \$700 a month when rent for a one bedroom apartment is \$900-\$1200... (Comment 19)

This is what "conservatism" is all about. Screw the little guy and cater to the rich guy. And use racism and lies to divide and control the majority. (Comment 60)

Therefore, the instrumental and distant relationship between ACORN and government is a function of ACORN's corrective efforts towards substantive equality. This is seen most clearly in how ACORN strategizes to get government attention, by establishing what they call "targets". Jen provided some critical context for me when I asked them what a "target" was.

So for us, like a target is... anyone, or institution, whatever you want to call it, who is either responsible for the problem that the person is facing, or the person who... or institution... who has the ability to make the change that the people want to see, but clearly isn't doing it. So kind of what we're building, like, a vision of social change, with new people or leaders or whoever... we very much ask people, you know, how do we put pressure on this decision-maker to make the change that you actually want to see?

The CTF, which understands themselves as confronting the state as more of a monolithic entity, never identified to me a single, key target in this way. This is possibly because it sees the state as negative; it cannot do anything productive for citizens. The best we can do is constantly monitor its actions and beat it back when it oversteps its bounds. Politicians are the problem, and thus cannot be part of the solution. In contrast, ACORN sees themselves as confronting the formal political realm in bursts, oriented towards a specific issue or problem. In contrast to the paranoid style of politics of the previous case, we see that ACORN's approach is much more pragmatic, corresponding to efforts at addressing their crisis of representation. If abject or relative poverty is creating difficult conditions for members, to address that crisis is to make incremental, tangible changes in their lives. And, as I explain in the final section of this chapter,

the extent to which they are able to do this (and consequently, advertise themselves as a catalyst for change) plays a key role in the maintenance of the “politics of faith” imbuing their populist mobilization (Canovan, 2004; Brubaker, 2017).

If counter-democratic logic gives rise to the “watchdog,” this much more pragmatic, instrumental, and justice-oriented logic finds a corresponding popular subjectivity in the “crusader.” I now turn to the recruitment and mobilization strategies used by ACORN that converts this underlying logic into a popular subjectivity for ACORN members.

ACORN’s popular subjectivity: Creating Crusaders

ACORN’s instrumental and justice-oriented logic distills into its members by having them understand themselves in politically active ways, as agents for change. Unlike the CTF, in which members vicariously participate in politics through representatives, ACORN understands themselves as building up members by instilling them with new skills, information, and the cultural and social capital needed to make change. If ACORN’s goal is to act as a corrective to the inherent flaws in democracy by including low- and middle-income Canadians via supplementary and participatory linkages, members must be crafted into political agents that addresses these economic issues. They are transitioned *from* the passive *to* the active. This is the basis of the crusader.

Foucault (1983, p. 213) argued and illustrated how state power is both individualizing *and* totalizing. Individual citizens are constructed and hailed as thinking about themselves in certain kind of ways, but also arranged such that the whole is more than the sum of those individual parts, paired with a collectivizing rationality and morality. Brodie (2002, p. 378) for example discusses how Canadian social policy, prior to its severe retrenchment in the 1970s,

individualized Canadians as entitled to socio-economic security but always within the context of a wider, socio-economic solidarity part and parcel of “being Canadian.” If the fading of Canadian redistributive policies in have led to a growing gap in the rich and the poor and corresponding chasm in identity between fellow citizens—and indeed, empirical research points to this (Andersen & Curtis, 2013; Olsen, 2011; Myles, 1996; Sanscartier, 2015), ACORN understands itself as an external, corrective mechanism to this wider trend. However, its political practices simultaneously render it part of the wider “problematics of government” (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 194) in that it exists within a “complex body of knowledges and ‘know-how’ about government.”

So, by connecting citizens to formal politics and politicians via participatory linkages (however antagonistically), ACORN brings out and collectivizes “power” that members “don’t know” they have. In short, if low socio-economic status Canadians are being left behind in a largely uncaring public, they must be mobilized—individually, and as a collective people—by dovetailing their voices to a louder cause. The basis of the crusader subjectivity is therefore a specific kind of pastoralization that builds up individual crusaders via an “economy of souls” on the path to salvation (Foucault, 2007, pp. 166-167) and dovetails these to wider problems through discursive groupings, thereby mobilizing them collectively. Pastoral power combines disciplinary and subjectifying forms of power subjecting “the flock”—in this case, ACORN membership—to surveillance and discipline, but simultaneously promoting “self-reflexive, self-governing subjects” (Martin & Waring, 2018, p. 1298).

Pastoral power further emphasizes a *caring* relationship between the pastor and everyone in their flock. This involves not a necessarily disciplinary (i.e. corrective) style of governance, but an injecting an ethos and discourse of *care* into subjects across various social contexts.

Scholars have recently analyzed this “caring governance” in policies regulating urban space (Schuilienberg & Peeters, 2018), participants of sadomasochistic lifestyles (Parchev, 2019), and welfare accounting and the poor (Nikidehaghani, Cortese & Hui-Truscott, 2019). For ACORN, the end point of this process is the *crusader*. Here, I illustrate this individualizing and collectivizing process in more detail.

From passive to active: Coaxing agents out of their shells

In its specific brand of populist mobilization, ACORN tries to coax individual members along a political journey, at the end of which lies the potential and promise of a better life. In fact, what makes ACORN unique among the cases in this study is the goal of bringing members to a completely different discursive space altogether. This happens gradually, starting in the living room of the potential member, and “ending” when the recruit is in the office, participating in meetings, and identifying the “targets” responsible for the issues they face in everyday life. Key to this style of mobilization is door-to-door solicitation in low- and moderate-income neighbourhoods, where ACORN staff try to get their “foot in the door” to try and generate a conversation. Jen and John both explained to me how this happens.

[You start by saying,] I’m working with a group of neighbours who want to see some positive changes around here. People are really concerned about X, Y, Z. And then you ask people, you know, what’s something you want to see changed? And then people tell you about their issue, and then you actually ask to go inside and like, sit down for 20 to 30 minutes. Um. No, you do some small talk, you build trust, you get to know the person. But then...your job is to be like, listener. So you’re just asking them like a bunch of questions about the issues that, you know, they care about, that are affecting them. (Jen)

Like working in a call centre right, you’re just gonna sit back, and take it, and take it, and take it, right. ‘Cause there’s nothing else they can do about it. You know, to take someone from that position, to...doing something about it. Even before anything changes. Before they get the cockroaches out of the buildings. Before the crack dealer moves out. Even if none of that changes, they’re still *doing* something. And that’s pretty cool. Then we talk about targets...whose job is not being done? Let’s

figure out who that person is, they start asking about, *how* do we get them to do their job? (John)

These quotes illustrate the dual process that is, in the same stroke, pastoralizing and re-politicizing. On the one hand, Jen and John are discussing bringing individuals “into the fold”—they “embed and reproduce the new values and behaviours vaunted in governmental discourse” (Martin & Waring, 2018, p. 1298) within potential members by injecting them with doubt about the necessity and permanence of their socio-economic conditions. Jen, by drawing on the member’s “group of neighbours,” is discursively, morally, and physically enveloping the member in a “common destiny” by acting as “the person who is their chief or guide” (Foucault, 2007, p. 167).

This also illustrates Brubaker’s (2017, p. 364) notion of antagonistic re-politicization, which he identifies as reclaiming control over “domains of life that are seen, plausibly enough, as having been depoliticized and de-democratized.” Jen emphasizes the necessity of meeting members “where they’re at.” This is an especially important strategy when there are many potential issues one may be facing as the result of having low or moderate income. At ACORN meetings, these issues included job dissatisfaction, unsatisfactory living conditions, crime in the area, streetlights being out, Ontario Works not being nearly enough to live on (especially living with a disability), inadequate access to English language classes, barriers to transportation in the city, and so on. If the groundwork for populist mobilization’s success in this context is laid in the material conditions of ACORN’s members, door-to-door recruitment is the corresponding method to tap into those conditions. John illustrates a birds-eye view of what happens next—getting someone frustrated about their job or living conditions, using that affect to exit complacency, getting them into ACORN’s offices, and most importantly, fighting for the sake of

fighting, even if “none of that changes.” In other words, John’s words illustrate *putting the antagonism* into “antagonistic re-politicization”, simultaneously getting individuals fired up, and pitting that affect against a specific politician that can improve the situation.

The journey continues in ACORN offices, where members are then turned into “leaders” who effectively helm ACORN’s advocacy activities, with auxiliary support from staff.

Leadership for ACORN is grounded, unlike the CTF and the Council of Canadians, in the expertise of lived experience. Saurette and Gunster (2011, p. 196) identify this as *epistemological populism*, or a framework of knowledge in which opinions and claims based on first-hand experience are prioritized over theoretical or academic kinds of experience.

Epistemological populism is a crucial component of this kind of populist mobilization, since members are re-politicized based on everyday, personal dissatisfactions. As many members do not have post-secondary education, it also acts as a universally accessible foothold to the co-creation of knowledge. The knowledge that grounds valid claims in ACORN meetings, then, mirrors the issues they face: close-up, present, and immediate, as opposed to distant and looming, as is the case with public debt (chapter four) or water conservation (chapter six).

Members are then encouraged to participate in knowledge-building by voicing claims grounded in experience, and to begin eliciting those claims from others. In doing so, they “lead”. Jen elucidated some of this process for me:

And you have some people who joined, like Maya, who is just like, she’s just like a dreamboat member. She’s very confident. She’s very like, engaging. Like, she’s a natural, right. So, with Maya⁸, less training is needed. And so you’re just like, building her confidence. Building her commitment. And then giving her some new skills and tools to be able to like, form that. But then you also have people like Virnette who like, she’s more like, naturally soft-spoken. More reserved, right. She’s kind of shy. She’s not like, a huge talker. Which is like, also the other kind of member that we have. However she’s like, wicked smart. So smart. ...Like, seeing someone like her, again...who’s not kind of like, this natural, you know. I’m-gonna

⁸ The names of members, like study participants, are pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

grab-the-megaphone and go-get-her. But being able to work more one-on-one with her to build those skills. Like she led three marches of ours in Herongate. And now seeing her, she's just like way more confident. Like in meetings. And is kind of...way more comfortable, being more assertive, right.

A critical feature of ACORN's individualizing power is the cultivation of various leadership qualities. Importantly, the figure of "leader" is purposefully kept discursively polyvalent, meaning that leading takes on multiple forms—it is not reduced to, for example, leading individuals at a pep rally with a megaphone. Wade Rathke (2018, p. 224) makes this explicit when he states that "[f]inding a perfect leader of the pure balance of all skills and requirements in one person is the unobtainable holy grail of the work." Thus, ACORN staff are trained to curate various qualities they see in different kinds of people to make them into different *kinds* of leaders. In this kind of flexible discourse around leadership (it is multiple, it is unobtainable, etc.), pastors like Jen are able to care for members individually, coaxing out qualities that she understands as being helpful to the goals of the organization as a whole. So, we see how the polyvalence of "leader" here is purposeful: it allows for multiple valid paths to becoming a crusader under the care of ACORN leadership.

However, we should take care not to assume that "leader" here means an independent figurehead or pastor. Indeed, it would be a bit paradoxical to suggest that a pastoral model would have multiple pastors or leaders. It became quite evident to me, over the course of my talks and observation in ACORN practices, that the "leaders" emerging from ACORN training and meetings are leaders insofar as they remain circumscribed within ACORN's organizational relations. As such, "leaders" take on what participants consider a leadership role as long as they remain under the care and guidance of those like Jen, continuing to participate in the "economy of souls" (Foucault, 2007, p. 166) as part of the larger flock. For example, one of the more

experienced leaders that Jen discussed, Maya, still relied extensively on staff for cues when to begin meetings, how to conduct business, and to correct those who were speaking out of turn. When it came time to schedule an action—in this case, a meeting with a politician, and if that failed, a rally—Jen once again assumed control of the meeting to frame things in a vertically antagonistic way (“who’s the target?”) and to plan out logistics.

Elsewhere, Virnette, who Jen also described as a more soft-spoken and less experienced leader, required assistance on bringing the room to attention, when to speak, and so on. In both cases, there was a continued “state of obedience” characteristic of followers in a pastoral model (Foucault, 2007, p. 177)—the wills of leaders continue to be subsumed under the direction of staff. As such, leaders are leaders insofar as they continue to remain as part of the flock—they do not emerge in ways that challenge the pastor role of organizational staff. In sum, although ACORN staff work hard to build individuals up as leaders, there are still “backstage” staff manoeuvres to ensure that meetings run smoothly. Participation in these meetings—where the economy of souls operates—is still required to be a leader, even for more experienced members.

Importantly, “pastors” like Jen become traders in the “subtle economy of merit and fault” (Foucault, 2007, p. 173), figuring out how to elicit certain personality traits in members that allow them to motivate or inspire others in taking political action. The state of obedience taken on by members enables the continued regulation of the economy of souls (ibid, p. 192), even when leaders become more experienced and confident. The polyvalence of “leadership” is quite visible in Jen’s story about Ryan, another ACORN member with a speech impediment that made him difficult to understand when speaking in meetings. While this effectively barred him from traditional forms of leadership, he surprised everyone by bringing in staggering amounts for a holiday fundraiser.

[H]e killed it. Like he did such a good job. So it's like, even though he might not be able to run a meeting, right, but he sure as hell...he can teach members how to fundraise. He can go out and do businesses. So it's just trying to find out, what do members actually want to do within the organization? How do they envision themselves being involved? And then giving them the opportunity, and a bit of training to actually do those things. (Jen)

While individuals have different skills, the collectivizing function of ACORN's populist mobilization welds these to a larger cause. As Baker (1994, pp. 190-191) points out in his Foucauldian account of the French Revolution, technologies and policies of the state serve to establish a "circuitry" between the individual subject of *citizens* (i.e. how citizens are expected to behave, what constitutes a "good "citizen) and the collectivizing dynamics of the wider *citizenry* (i.e. what it means to act in the public interest or to perform a social good). ACORN manages its members to foster the right kind of discourse, linking all individuals to a wider collective circuitry, as well as arranging individual skills in productive, complementary, and functional ways. Rooted in the diametric logic of "money vs. people", ACORN does what it understands as building the necessary political and social capital to take on the wealth of external interests.

From active to collective: Forging a common destiny

The dual function of pastoral technologies of governance—discipline and subjectification—was most visible during ACORN meetings. Although I was very clearly an outsider (and I had introduced myself as a researcher, and there to learn), before long I was (somewhat uncomfortably) thrust as a participant in the wider dynamics of meetings. A brief recounting will illustrate some of this work in more detail.

In the middle of the meeting, members break into two groups and brainstorm about problems they have in their neighbourhood. I join the group where Jen, marker in hand and ponytail flying, is taking notes on a piece of chart paper on the wall. One boisterous man has a lot to say. Others nod their heads in agreement—he is making

some compelling points. However, someone else hasn't talked in a while, and Jen puts a gentle hand on his shoulder, whispering something in his ear—he apologizes and quiets down. After a bit more discussion, Jen unexpectedly tosses me the marker. "Can you note-take, Matt? I'll be right back." I did not sign up for this. (Research Diary, November 29th, 2018)

At times, Jen feels like the conductor of an orchestra. She has mastered the art of respectfully asking others to quiet down when they dominate collective discussion and asking others to participate when they are especially quiet or not participating (of which I was guilty as an observer-as-participant). I witnessed this kind of dynamic countless times in my observation of ACORN meetings. In Waring and Martin's (2016) operational model of pastoral power, we can identify Jen as engaging in "inspection practices" in which "pastors adopt a more disciplinary approach to advancing the adoption of appropriate subjectivities in communities and themselves" (Martin & Waring, 2018, p. 1298). By asking one member to quiet down, and throwing me into a more central role, she is adjusting us as individuals to fit within ACORN's wider, desired ethos of inclusion and democratic participation (Rathke, 2018, p. 235).

This work is necessary as under a pastoral model, "no individual sheep is a matter of indifference" (Foucault, 2007, p. 168). Jen and other ACORN staff ensured that *all* members, in all meetings I attended, had the opportunity (and were encouraged) to speak from a place of their own truth. This sets the stage for when she returns and continues to "herd" members towards a purpose for the mobilization of members. Pastoral power is visible in this vignette, which continues directly from the previous one.

Five minutes seems like fifty. I manage to elicit and write down a few issues—people can't afford rent. They must walk to the bus and home in the dark. Newcomers do not have access to enough support to ensure reasonable living conditions while they try to find work. Many low-income individuals, especially in Herongate, have been or will be evicted to re-make buildings for wealthier people. The city is building more commercial property, driving up the cost of land in surrounding areas. Issues are coming quickly, and my chicken scratch can barely keep up. Jen is finally back. I

thank her—and God, though I’m not religious—, gratefully handing the marker back to her.

She asks the group how we can take these problems to their city councillor in a clear, effective way. There are some suggestions, like calling the councillor directly, and Jen says these are possible courses of action, but she wonders if they would be effective at getting politicians to respond. Instead, she writes AFFORDABLE HOUSING on the paper and circles it—this, she explains, is the underlying connection between all these issues, and how we’re going to frame it to governments who have shown they don’t care about this issue. I failed to make that connection myself, but when she explains it to us, it’s the most obvious thing in the world. (Research Diary, November 29th, 2018)

Quite visible here two more elements of pastoral power. These are what Waring and Martin (2016) call *constructive practice*, in which pastors translate wider governmental practices and texts to their own communities, and *inscription practices*, which captures how pastors dialogue with their community to normalize some collective truth of their flock. In this case, Jen groups multiple, disparate lived experiences as a *lack of affordable housing*, a semantic umbrella that effectively translates multiple, private experiences into a collective problematic governable by the cogs of government. The group rallied behind this, and the question became: how do we get government to care about affordable housing? Who is our target? Not only is Jen demonstrating exercise of pastoral power, but she does so in way fundamentally oriented towards a populist dynamic that “vacuums” multiple experiences into a wider shared problem, pitting it against explicitly against an elite understood as responsible for the issue (Aslandis, 2017; Jansen, 2015; Roberts, 2015).

Here, we see the interplay of epistemological populism’s equalizing functions, which opens the way for pastoral power in both individualizing and collectivizing members towards the path of salvation. Everyone comes from an explicitly validated and different truth, grounded in lived experience situated in a wider socio-economic context (that of living with low or moderate income). This is, through pastoral techniques of the ACORN staff, translated into a collective

political problem for which a specific politician is targeted. If the politician in question refuses to meet with membership or fails to make meaningful change that impacts members' lives, ACORN initiates an "action" such as a rally, march, or another public display that attempts to pressure the "target" into acting. This journey, beginning with apolitical individuals in their homes and ending as a collective effort to temporarily invade politics, is the basis of the *crusader*. Crusaders bring their counterpublic inside the wider, unjust public to try and effect change, then withdraw back to their alternative and participatory forms of democracy.

For the reasons above, most centrally Martin and Waring's (2018) more granular components of pastoralism, we see how pastoralism and populist mobilization combine to produce new subjects. Jen actively forges a chain of equivalential links that, while respecting the multiple truths of individuals at the meeting, superimposes onto them a new way of understanding the issue as one part of a larger, *shared* problem that can be used to mobilize against a political "target". Additionally, even though members do learn organizational and leadership skills, in order for ACORN to create these horizontally shared and vertically antagonist discursive markers, they must continue to participate within the structure of dependency and hierarchy between staff and members. This is simply how the organization itself functions to mobilize members in populist ways, and I am not suggesting, importantly, that it contradicts ACORN's goal of teaching leadership and activist skills.

A crusading counterpublic

In the previous chapter, we saw that the CTF carves out their counterpublic primarily through discourses of the public-supposed-not-to-know, which operates chiefly as guilt, and other times as fear. Continuing the theme of ACORN's mirrored juxtaposition to CTF, their counterpublic is

forged in the discursive fires of a public-supposed-to-believe (Dean, 2001). What they believe in specifically is ACORN's ability to make positive changes in the lives of their members. If the CTF's membership is grounded in constant skepticism of government and denunciation under a counter-democratic logic, ACORN's membership is, in keeping with its pastoralizing theme, converted into a "community of the faithful" under its leadership (Foucault, 2007, p. 166).

While the work of staff might be best understood as "missionary", travelling to houses to proselytize about the nature and solutions to politics, I would suggest that the work of members themselves (in keeping with the analyses in other chapters) is that of the *crusader*. I use this term because of its links to what Thompson (2007) calls spirited martial power, a kind of power linked to "struggles formed in the context of 'blood, toil, and soil,' heroic virtue and legendary combat" (p. 488). It is fundamentally linked to territorially-derived authority and manifests in several geographic and historical modalities. In this case, crusaders represent a form of "populist" leakage of this spirited power, a failed containment of territorial governance operating in the Canadian context. In Laclauian terms, this means that governments have been unable to create discursive formations counteracting ACORN's issues (e.g. affordable housing) that co-exist with the jurisdiction of the territory-as-community (Laclau, 2005, p. 81). This means that a new *plebs* emerges from this lack, and, in rejecting the institution as unable to meet their needs, create another form of disaffected expression. In this context, this takes the form of meetings, described in detail above, that channel this spirited martial power in ways that draw members external to institutionalist politics, then back in via antagonistic ways before retreating again in cyclical fashion; hence, a *crusader*.

As Brubaker (2017, p. 380) suggests, the ability for populist leaders to continue marshaling support from followers hinges on a "kind of enchantment: on 'faith' in the possibility

of representing and speaking for ‘the people’” in a world where they otherwise have no representation. To sustain faith, ACORN continuously circulates discourses *of* faith, primarily through social media, of its tangible impacts on policy for members. In other words, it must “assure the salvation of everyone” to sustain the cycle of recruitment, training, and action—ACORN’s equivalent of what Foucault (2007, p. 177) calls “Christian obedience”, which is not a finite goal but a state to be continuously maintained.

When we examine ACORN’s various social media pages, what emerges is a public supposed to believe. A public supposed to believe, Dean (2001) notes, believes that rational enlightenment and the actualization of democracy—what democracy is supposed to look like under Habermasian ideals of communication—is always just around the corner. Unlike the public supposed to not know, it is connected to the wider, phantasmal public not through guilt but by belief and *faith* in the public itself, and in the function of publicity to make the public whole. By ensuring all information is available to the public, publicity papers over the gap between where the public *is* and where it *should be* by supplying the ideological treadmill on which publics supposed to believe chase the final, unattainable state of enlightenment. Most importantly, belief is not isolated to individual psychologies, but is embodied and crystallized in “procedures of democracy” that reproduce faith in democratic systems on our behalf (Steckle et al., 2019).

At first, this framework appears questionably applicable to ACORN. This is because ACORN is not a public supposed to believe, but a *counter*public supposed to believe. In my conversations with ACORN staff, there were no illusions that they are going to reshape capitalism to achieve “enlightenment”, which in their context would mean “eliminating power,” as Jen put it—something we both agreed was impossible. If this final, utopian state is

unattainable, then what is the libidinal basis of their populist mobilization and counterpublic? What drives their belief, if not the promise of a final, enlightened state?

Margaret Canovan's (1999) discussion of democracy's "two faces" is of some help here, allowing a translation of Dean's wider framework into to help explain ACORN's specific activities. Populist mobilization, Canovan (1999) argues, fills the perennial gap that emerges between democracy's "pragmatic" and "redemptive" faces. The pragmatic face of democracy is a kind of politics that confronts, and accepts, the realities and flaws of democratic systems—institutions, periodic voting, lobbying, and imbalances of power. However, power is held relatively accountable, and democratic systems are, after all, better than the alternatives of civil war or totalitarianism. Democracy's redemptive face, in contrast, is "faith in secular redemption: the promise of a better world through action by the sovereign people" (1999, p. 11). This element of democracy, she notes, is always present alongside its pragmatic twin and is strengthened when politicians and institutions veer *too* far from democratic idealism.

In this pragmatic-redemptive gap, she further illustrates how populist movements emerge and promise to lead the people to "salvation" under the banner of democracy's redemptive face. ACORN, for its part, does not simply fill this gap—which Canovan characterizes more or less as appearing in waves—but actively *carves out* this gap by espousing a political logic inherently rejecting the pragmatics of democracy (i.e., money makes politics fundamentally unjust, powerful interests monopolize government actions, etc.), and engaging in its own brand of faithful politics to sustain a virtuous counterpublic. Recall from chapter two that all populist counterpublics construct *the* public as exclusionary and antagonistic at the fault of elites and others, against which their own counterpublics fight for members' inclusion. For ACORN, the core drive is the tension between an inherently unjust public, characterized by the

domination of corporate interests and co-opted politicians, and the organization's ability to incrementally correct this, fighting for a better life. The salvation, then, lies not in achieving some static or fixed utopia, but *in the fight itself*, by virtue of invoking democracy's redemptive side. We can re-invoke a sentiment by John that illustrates this dynamic: "Even if none of that changes, they're still *doing* something."

An important corollary from Dean's framework is that belief and faith in the public supposed to believe is not simply a matter of converting individuals but establishing wider practices that engage in belief *on behalf* of its members, like political talking heads. In ACORN, social media plays this key role, circulating discourses of faith in the organization to make positive change in the face of unjust power structures. Certainly, this is not limited to social media. At the beginning of all meetings I attended, for example, the chairs (who are members) started with a pep talk that included statements like "we don't just fight, we win" and itemizing recent victories, such as getting a meeting with a politician or discussing a recent policy change as a function of ACORN's efforts. And, certainly, staff genuinely believe in the organization's abilities to create positive change by constructing crusading subjects. Jen shared the following with me in our discussion.

I guess one of the reasons that I found ACORN so attractive is because I felt like I was pretty disenchanted with some other organizing...I thought there was a lot of...ego. And it felt like a lot of performance...But like, with ACORN... I never felt like I should be the person in the spotlight. I've never felt like that. But I was always kind of thinking, but how can I contribute to the movement, then? Without being on the super front lines? So...for me, and I, I said this when it was very new to me, ACORN is one of the only organizations that took the word "grassroots" seriously... And then, like, being able to see, kind of, uh, like the growth of somebody who I've met, and engaged, like, in their home, to then being able to work with them, to see them running their own meeting, to seeing them talking to the media, to seeing them running rallies...to me that's just the most worthwhile part of the job.

Jen's passion for her position and its duties was contagious during our talk. She discusses herself as someone with an obligation to give back to the community, to take "grassroots" seriously, and to building up members as "the people [who] are the only source of legitimate authority, and salvation is promised as and when they take charge of their own lives" (Canovan, 1999, p. 10). Her sentiments of reciprocity further echo Foucault's (2007, p. 179) discussion of the pastor-flock relationship, in which he notes that while the sheep are servants of the pastor, "the pastor must experience his [*sic*] responsibility as a service, and one that makes him the servant of the sheep." Jen articulates a certain kind of faith, an "enchantment", in ACORN that allows her to assume a pastoralizing role. As staff are responsible for maintaining ACORN's social media accounts, it is not unreasonable to assume that discourses of faith flow firstly *from* them and into the texts that are digitally circulated throughout the public.

A few examples will illustrate how this translates into the online setting. Posts on the ACORN Twitter account, in stark contrast to the CTF's *modus operandi* of *outward* focus on denouncing specific politicians, focuses *inwardly* on the actions of members themselves. It is a parade of images and words about members rallying, meeting, and discussing to publicize the work they do. Framing theory can help us understand how ACORN develops a "collective action frame" through social media (Benford, 1997; Snow, Benford, McCammon, Hewitt & Fitzgerald, 2014; Williams & Benford, 2000). Originally discussed by Goffman, "frames" refer to psychological schema that act as a kind of filter, helping us to classify new information (see Pennington & Birthsiel, 2016).

Frame theorists argue that these frames are mobilized by organizations and movements, rendering them as "signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers" (Benford and Snow, 2000, p.

613). This means that a picture, for example, is never simply presented as it is—they are always presented within a linguistic or narrative context that “[punctuates and specifies] what is in our sensual field as relevant” (Snow, 2004, p. 384). These contexts are *ipso facto* transformative in that they *tell* us how to interpret the object in question, eliciting certain kinds of affect that are crucial to mobilizing individuals. This analytic orients us to how ACORN uses antagonistic and empowering frames to bring relatively mundane pictures to life. With respect to creating a populist counterpublic, we might say that ACORN draws on a narrative frame that (1) emphasizes their ability to create positive change and (2) explicitly challenges dovetailed with publicity’s function of reproducing faith in the public supposed to believe. Figure 1 illustrates one example of this.

On its own, the picture is anodyne and mundane. It shows a group of people sitting around a table, with the only identifier being the ACORN banner hung on the wall behind them. However, the accompanying text frames the photo as indicative of a functioning and antagonistic counterpublic: “Watch out Ottawa! ACORN leaders just planned a citywide drive on landlord licensing and a citywide tour of payday lenders! More details in the months to come.” This kind of tweet is particularly common on the feed, especially when there is a lack of more visible political activity. Here, the choice of “Watch Out!” could be understood trying to animate and antagonize what is, outside of context, a simple picture of people sitting around a table. This theme also extends to other social media outlets. Wherever possible, pictures of large groups or parades are posted, framing the organization as a fundamentally *active* one that aligns with the *crusading* subject borne of leaders’ pastoralizing techniques.



Figure 1. A photo from Ottawa ACORN's Twitter feed (January 23, 2019).

This is also partly because of necessity. Because ACORN only exists externally to formal democratic structures, their alternative public imagination must be continuously sustained and nourished by images and text that showcase ongoing, collective effort oriented towards tangible change. This is part of the discursive procedures of faith that justify the organization's ongoing efforts, confronting democracy as ultimately unable to address the issues that plague members' lives without active intervention. Other tweets include:

Organizing gets results! @OttawaACORN members & allies welcome what Mayor Watson calls "the biggest capital investment in housing in the city's history".

AMAZING turnout at today's odsp/ow rally!! Currently in the car with ACORN leaders living on social assistance to deliver a letter to the Minister!!
#DisabilityRights #odsp #ow #StopTheCuts

Organizing works! yesterday ACORN and allies won new powers for the cities to create affordable housing units in new developments! #inclusionaryzoning

RT @ACORNCANADA: VICTORY: Ottawa Members Move Council in the Right Direction Against Payday Loans [With link to press release]

Crucial to this politics of faith, then, is demonstrating the tangible changes that this counterpublic claims will improve the lives of its members.

Moreover, because the politics of faith is also connected to the notion that the process of

“fighting” is valuable in its own right—and not simply because it may lead to policy outcomes—ACORN’s politics of faith extends to collective call-to-arms that, more often than not, include words like “join”, “rally”, and “fight”. Some examples include:

Overbrook ACORN members are getting organized to make sure low-income families get a piece of the \$5-billion LRT pie. Join us Nov 13, at 6:30pm at our office to fight for #affordablehousing #childcare & other #communitybenefits

Happy to stand in solidarity today with our labour allies over at @J4JL2 fighting anti-union corporations in our city #supportcleaners #workersrights #solidarity #directaction #peoplepower #labour #community

Join our members in Herongate at an emergency rally to demand more time for tenants before evictions, rental replacements and #inclusionaryzoning to ensure more affordable housing is created NOT lost! Tomorrow @ 11:30am at the corner of Heron rd/Sandalwood dr

While these tweets serve a logistic function of letting people where and when to show up if they want to participate in rallies and meetings, ACORN’s Twitter feed simultaneously spotlights and frames these activities as constant, ongoing, and confronting the wider public. This is crucial, because the organization relies so much on direct, physical member participation to legitimize the organization’s actions—in sharp contrast to the cases preceding and following this one. This is partially explicated in *Nuts & Bolts* when Rathke (2018, p. 339) discusses building momentum, in which “[t]he key is keeping the target on the defensive”—constantly publicizing and showing the actions the organization is doing on the way to building change. By framing their actions as confrontational and constant, “targets” (and by extension, the wider, “mainstream” public) are kept “on the defensive.”

This is the necessary consequence of building a counterpublic on the principle of faith, rather than guilt or fear, as we saw in the previous chapter. It does not really serve ACORN well to focus on the actions of elites or politicians, because to do so would undermine the faith staff

and members work hard to collectively reproduce in the above ways. The injustice that ACORN discusses serves more as a backdrop for its own justice-oriented activities, rather than something to denounce. The publicity of these actions draw on publicity's function of generating faith in the counterpublic's ability to create change, and hopefully encourage members to "come out" and "fight with" the wider organization. As I have shown above, this is critical because crusaders are constructed in a processual way, starting from the apolitical and turned into a politically active subject that rallies against the wider public. The basis of that construction, in turn, is faith in the ability of ACORN to make real change.

Finally, we can see how this dynamic is reflected in several Facebook comments left on ACORN Ottawa's page. Many members use this as a forum to express faith in the organization itself to create tangible change, even if they themselves do not directly participate in them.

Grate [sic] campaign guys we will not be silent our voice will be heard. (Comment 18)

Thanks for all of the important work that you are doing and the difference you are making. (Comment 29)

Great action yesterday. Took over BMO Montreal headquarters. 200 + ACORN members from across the country occupied BMO HQ Demanding BMO divest their investments in predatory lenders! great work everyone!!! (Comment 33)

Always hit the poor and downtrodden because they don't have voice until NOW! ACORN is on the scene. (Comment 56)

ACORN a leader in fighting bad landlords. (Comment 97)

Who are we? Mighty Mighty ACORN xoxo (Comment 127)

Members use the online forum to reflect a politics of faith back at ACORN staff and leaders, reproducing and circulating the notion that ACORN is an organization that, indeed, "wins." ACORN members operate here as a "community of the faithful" (Foucault, 2007, p. 166),

believing in ACORN's ability in progressing them down a path to salvation; in this context, making continuous improvements to their immediate, material environments. Unlike in the previous case, where members followed leaders in insulting politicians on social media, members express faith in ACORN's ability to channel the voice of "the people", bringing them some kind of redemption in the face of a democracy that has effectively left behind low and moderate income Canadians.

In what follows, I contrast these collectivizing and faith-based dynamics with the more bureaucratic nature and broader nature of another case, the Council of Canadians. While the two share some progressive tenets, they go entirely separate ways with respect to the political logics and mobilizing practices that underpin their organizing activities. While both constitute populist counterpublics, the contrast between the two well illustrates just how flexible the concept is with respect to *how* and *why* they attract and organize members in ways that are antagonistic to the wider public, and the elites that govern it.

CHAPTER SIX: Protective Populism and Stimulating Stewardship

Introduction

In my discussion with staff at the Council of Canadians (CoC, or “the Council”), and as I pored through their organizational documents, one word kept going through my mind: *vanilla*. Vanilla, being slang for plain or conventional, is a good description for much of the Council’s activities, especially in contrast to the CTF or ACORN. The selection of the Council as the third populist counterpublic to analyze was a strategic one. As I illustrate below, the political logic and praxis in which the Council grounds itself is somewhere between the other two cases. Like ACORN, the Council presents an ethos of injustice in rising economic inequality and barriers to democratic participation, but places that blame on corporate elite directly, rather than targeting specific politicians. More like the CTF, however, the Council is more comfortable with fostering activism at a distance. While the Council does organize marches, rallies, and town halls in which anti-elitist discourse is engaged, I make the argument that its reliance on petitions, boycotts and pledges places it squarely in the middle of ACORN’s active subjectification and CTF’s more passive brand of populist mobilization. The result is a political subjectivity that is neither fully active, nor fully passive—the *steward*.

Stewards, as this chapter’s title suggests, are hailed to protect democracy for *all* Canadians. Stewards are different from crusaders in that they are not quite “herded” in the same way as ACORN members, but encouraged to take on individual actions that work *within* the wider public (consumption, petitioning) rather than *against* it (protests, blockades, etc.). Foremost, this means that unlike the cases we have analyzed so far, the Council shares more discursive space with *the* wider public and formal democratic mechanisms. They still position themselves as a *counterpublic* insofar as they call on Canadians to take care of formal

democratic structures—voting, stymying the influence of large corporations, and so on. Unlike the previous cases, however, there is no explicit definition of a specific *kind* of Canadian—the taxpaying Canadian, low-income Canadian, or Canadians who are “from here”, for example. At first blush, this raises the important question—is the Council really a *populist* counterpublic? As I show below, they do circulate anti-elitist memes and discourse via their social media and organizational documents, poking fun at politicians (including Prime Minister Justin Trudeau) and arguing that elites are out of touch with the needs of “the People”. However, it could be reasonably argued by some that, because the Council is not explicitly anti-institutionalist like the previous two cases, and because they are comfortable sharing discursive space with the wider public, they do not really qualify as a *populist* counterpublic. Part of this tension comes from the total lack of agreement in the literature on what, exactly, “counts” as populism. In my analysis of the Council’s political logic, I discuss how it qualifies for the label of populist mobilization and the corresponding crisis of representation that it constructs and advances.

Like prior chapters, I begin by outlining the structure and operations of the Council of Canadians while drawing on literature on populism to argue that the Council should be understood as a populist counterpublic, even though much of what they do overlaps with mainstream social movements. I then move to the logic and subjectifying process within the Council, much of which overlaps with other cases, but is unique insofar as it orients Canadians towards their formal democratic structures and fosters an ethos of their defense and protection.

The Council of Canadians: An Overview

Claiming the title of “Canada’s leading social action organization,” the Council has a federal arm as well as sixty local chapters spanning all Canadian regions. Chapters organize their own events

and campaigns, and as I learned in my conversation with Scott, an officer in the Council's head office, these are usually in support of national campaigns. These chapters engage local politicians in the way that ACORN does, but shares issues with the national arm. Further, the Council has a leadership figure in the form of honorary chairperson Maude Barlow, who has received several honorary doctorates and awards for organizing activists and worked with the United Nations on several initiatives, including clean water, water as a right, climate change, reliance on fossil fuels, and environmentalism. When I asked a member of Ottawa's chapter (via e-mail) how the Council attracts Canadians, they replied, "It is word of mouth and the Council's reputation, especially its well-known spokesperson and honorary chair, Maude Barlow. She is terrific!" Likewise, a letter from a member in a 2018 newsletter cited "feeling really impressed" with Barlow's inspiring story, prompting her to join the Council. We can infer from these kinds of comments, and the ever-present column in the Council's biannual newsletter—*On the Road with Maude Barlow*—Barlow largely acts as the face of the organization. This is a feature unique to the Council—no other organization I examine in this study has such a central, public figurehead.

Barlow's priorities reflect the Council's substantive political priorities. In contrast to the personal and lived nature of issues addressed by the CTF (taxes) and ACORN (living conditions, poverty), the Council engages in relatively "high-minded" issues for most of the membership. Most members of the Council, for example, have reliable access to clean drinking water; yet, many pages of *Canadian Perspectives*, the Council's newsletter, vilify Nestle's attempts at extracting Canadian water. This is not to say that the issue is not urgent for some—the Council points out, for example, how the town of Elora, Ontario may be left without drinking water because of Nestle's extractive practices (Canadian Perspectives, 2019, p. 2). In any case, the

Council largely understands itself as speaking *on behalf* of those without a voice or with a yet-to-be-realized stake in our environmental conditions. Part of this involves keeping their audience as broad as possible—speaking to “Canadians”, as their name suggests, rather than “taxpayers” or income-restricted groups—which allows them to engage more abstract and far-reaching issues. This pattern of broad inclusivity also extends to their political strategies, the bulk of which includes pledges, petitions, lists, letter-writing, and so on.

To some extent, the Council shares a similar idealist context with ACORN. As I illustrate in this chapter, the Council believes that corporations constitute a roadblock to a vision of society inclusive of all. However, as I also show, the Council places much more emphasis on targeting corporate actors over government actors, likely because they are more willing to buy into formal democratic mechanisms (voting, petitions) than ACORN, which distrusts the system entirely. The ideologies circulating within the Council and motivating their work seemingly share some of their DNA with the new left movements that got their start in the 1970s—indeed, the Council was founded in 1985 primarily to protest NAFTA. To some extent, the Council understands itself as confronting the “corporate offensive” (Brownlee, 2005) that began in the 1980s and continues to this day, enabling corporations like Nestle to appropriate public goods and sell them back to the public. Unlike ACORN, the Council has more resources coupled with a broader vision—it is not about improving the life of its members, specifically, but about restoring democracy for *all* Canadians. This involves “taking back” democracy and resources from those who colonize them on behalf of every Canadian.

The Council shares with ACORN the pluralist tenet that “[a]ny class ,group or association wishing to have an impact on the political process in a democracy must be organized” (Knutilla & Kubik, 2000, p. 59), but is much more willing than its leftist counterpart

to engage with the wider public on a full-time basis. In chapter five, we saw how ACORN's distrust of democratic systems, stemming from a slightly more instrumentalist notion of the Canadian state, forms its logic and mobilizing activities in ways external to formal mechanisms of democracy. Direct organizing and protests take priority over complaining to regulatory mechanisms, petitions, or voting campaigns, for example. With its larger pool of resources and influence, the Council seems to see itself not as merely an agential corrective but a *structural* one, too, in ways that ACORN does not (because of a preference to focus on its members' quality of life) or cannot (because of its relative lack of resources and influence). The Council therefore has more organizational will and self-efficacy to tackle not just individual agents, but the "regime of growth" that governs the logic employed by politicians and capitalists alike, forcibly separating them from democratic idealism (Jessop, 2013).

While local chapters of the Council exist, the extent of their activities varies. Because the Council spans across the country (unlike CTF and considerably more than ACORN), it is difficult to ascertain how active the organization is, holistically. When I tried to get in touch with the Ottawa chapter, for example, I learned that meetings were suspended indefinitely. Other chapters across the country, which typically have their own blogs, report recent activities including mobilization meetings for a Canadian Green New Deal (Halton, Ontario), speaker series with political activists (Toronto, Ontario) book launches by climate activists (Kamloops, BC), or trying to act as intervenors in energy projects (Winnipeg, Manitoba). Other chapters have not updated their activities in over a year or more. With few exceptions, the blogs and websites of the various chapters are quite sparse, with most activities being educational in nature (guest lectures, speakers, and so on). This does not mean that chapters lack political activity, but clearly social media—outside of the Council's national branch—is not a priority. Unfortunately,

I was unable to get in touch with these chapters, meaning my ability to speak to local campaigns is limited. As populist mobilization is spatially and temporally bounded (Aslandis, 2017; Jansen, 2015), it is best that case analysis remains within the Ontarian context. However, my inability to get in touch or spend time with chapter members means that my analysis will be skewed towards the activities of the national arm. While I do try to include actions taken at the chapter level, we should proceed with this imbalance in mind.

The Council of Canadians is, by far, the most formalized organization in this study. They have a more extensive bureaucracy and more clearly defined roles than all other organizations. This of course corresponds to a much gentler (or what some, like myself, might colloquially call “vanilla”) organizational performance of populist mobilization. In keeping with other cases, this high degree of formalization reflects its willingness to engage with mainstream political discourses, but still maintains an element of anti-elitism (against corporate elites) as well as inclusive *civic* nationalism. As we see below, discourses advanced by the CoC are predicated on several existing identities compatible with capitalist democracies: consumers, the “active” citizen, and the restoration of formal political mechanisms like voting.

Counselling Canadians: An inclusive and progressive logic

At first blush, an elite figurehead like Barlow, associating with the United Nations, the seemingly limitless inclusivity of “Canadians”, and higher-minded concerns like climate change or drinking water do not lend themselves well to populism. If we rely on stereotypes and operationalization of populism advanced by journalistic and academic literature, it would be difficult to make a case that the Council should be understood as populist—it is not nativist (Taggart, 2002; Tufts & Thomas, 2014), authoritarian or xenophobic (Pasquino, 2008; Pollock,

Brock & Ellison, 2015) and not, by any measure, anti-institutionalist (Freedon, 2017; Molyneux & Osborne, 2017; Rosanvallon, 2008).

Can we, then, realistically call the Council a populist counterpublic? As I discussed in chapter two, the benefit of relying on a form-centred account of populism is the ability to identify and understand populist *mobilization* even when it lacks the obvious ideational features often circulated in academic literature. Populist counterpublics centre on the simultaneous constructions of a *felt exclusion*, shared by a group of people with a *shared lack*, and the *wider public* which they want to correct in some way, according to the political logic on which they ground themselves. For the Council, these dynamics are primarily discursively articulated in relation to the colonization of corporations (e.g. Nestle, fossil fuel companies) of Canadian government; they also antagonize politicians that tolerate socially harmful business practices to the detriment of the country and its citizens. These are interpreted as a threat to Canada, writ large, and Canadian sovereignty. When asked why she continues to support the Council, one member wrote:

Canada is very precious to me and I see the huge influence that the U.S. can have on Canada. It's very important to me for Canada to remain independent of outside influences. I think that's a role that the Council of Canadians plays trying to face some of these issues head on – and helps us to keep our values and our country. It's easy to lose them. (Canadian Perspectives, 2018, p. 4).

Consider this in conjunction with quotes from Fred, a local chapter member, and Scott, a Council officer:

I would say that the Council advocates for all Canadians and for Canadian sovereignty. (Fred)

Well, our view is really centred around people power. Get enough people to speak up, things can change politically. That's where the Council comes in as the political home for a lot of people—tens of thousands of people across the country. And supporters have a voice through the Council to change things, and to shift the politics of the day... You know, there's a power in facilitating people, communicating

themselves, and providing the tools so they can do that. (Scott)

In one sense, Scott is producing a similar kind of discourse to what we saw in ACORN's pastoral populism—giving people the tools and a collective “voice” so they can change the way government works in ways that defend their interests. Unlike ACORN, these interests are much wider and further reaching, far beyond their immediate socio-economic contexts. To once again borrow from Kyle and Gultchin's (2018) crude typology of international populisms, we might say that the Council blends cultural and socio-economic populism. While “the true people” are Canadians who need to “keep our values and our country,” and organizing to “protect” Canada—a key element of cultural populism—the “outsiders” in this particular equation are corporations, capitalists, and “actors perceived as propping up an international capitalist system” (p. 4).

At the basis of the fusion is the claim to speak on behalf of *all* Canadians, rather than just a specific, defined subset. By identifying corporations and capitalists as the external threat to “the people”, who share “Canadian values” of progress and democracy, the Council advances a sense of *civic* nationalism, which differs from ethnonationalism by combining pride for one's country with inclusivity and diversity (Ipperciel, 2007). So, whereas the CTF narrows their scope to the taxpayer based on a reciprocal financial relationship, and ACORN exclusively advocates for low- and moderate-income Canadians, the Council is not discriminatory with respect to *who* they protect as an organization. In the following passage from my conversation with Scott, who works in a media role, note how he deliberately preserves the vagueness of the term “Canadian.”

MS: What sorts of Canadians does the council advocate for, or...act on behalf of? Is there a certain branch of Canadians that you work with?

Scott: No. In general, the Council advocates for social justice. That includes a whole bunch of people...[we're] pretty far-reaching.

MS: Do you find that you tend to attract a certain kind of “Canadian”?

Scott: It varies. It really depends on the issue a lot of the time, and timing, that sort of

thing. But we work with a broad range of folks.

This issue came up again later in the interview, in our conversation about democracy.

Scott: ...there's a certain vision that people want to see on a variety of issues, and often, the government is not listening to that, or not following the lead of what people want to see. You know. Pick your issue, that's often the case. So we often engage in that to highlight the need for actually following the lead of what people want to see. Yeah.

MS: I know we touched on this before—when you say “the people”, that refers to all Canadians?

Scott: Mmhmm.

MS: So just your average, everyday Canadian.

Scott: Anyone who is interested can get involved.

Visible in these quotes is what Beuthin (2014) calls a performative tension in interviewing: my role as a narrative “follower” is tempered by my desire to “get the story.” In this case, what I thought was “the story” was the making the ambiguous “people” more specific or concrete, which Scott refused to do. Compared to the other groups I spoke with, Scott’s comfort with ambiguity regarding who “the people” are was simultaneously surprising and frustrating. It was surprising, first, because I had expected an interview more along the lines of the CTF and ACORN—who spoke passionately and openly about the nature of the people they represent. These were specific segments of the Canadian population based on social position (ACORN, low/moderate income) or social contract (CTF, the taxpayer). Second, it was frustrating because my expectations as a researcher was to have the story of this case mirror the others in how “the people” are outlined. Reflecting on my fieldwork and the transcripts post-interview, my critical realism became a little *too* real; it seems like I was trying to “pull out” a definition of “the people” from Scott, who was gently refusing to co-construct one with me.

In re-reading my transcript with Scott, and in conjunction with organizational literature from the Council and social media, his passive insistence on a broad construction of “Canadian” was a result of his embrace of organizational ambiguity in order to remain attractive to diverse members. As Jacqueline Best (2012, p. 92) has argued, although we typically understand bureaucratic organizations as reducing or eliminating ambiguity, organizations may embrace ambiguity because of “their recognition of the challenges posed by uncertainty, diversity, and complexity.” I would argue that Scott’s reluctance to identify a specific segment of Canadians like CTF or ACORN staff is a result of such “residual ambiguity” – leaving their target demographic open to interpretation (“all Canadians”, “everyday Canadian”) so that there is flexibility built directly into their mobilizing discourses. Best (2012, p. 93) further argues that such ambiguity is not merely accidental, but reflexively recognized and controlled/encouraged by organizational actors. In this case, we have a performance by an actor that is purposefully ambiguous, resulting in a bit of disconnect between interviewer and participant.

This performance, I suggest, is a specific manifestation of the Council’s discursive strategies that places their members, as Laclau (2005, p. 81) suggests, “the only legitimate *populus*—that is, a partiality which wants to function as the totality of the community.” Laclau further states that one important differentiation between the discursive forms of populist and institutionalist claim-making is that the former co-exists with the jurisdiction of the community; political claims are about the *totality* rather than merely one *part* of the wider polity, which is the language states use in attempts to quarantine political lacks and problems to specific groups who can be dealt with on an individual basis (e.g. “special interest groups”). At the root of this strategy are the kinds of political issues the Council engages—ones that they understand as

affecting “all Canadians”. When I asked Scott what a 30-second spot for the Council would look like if guaranteed a national audience, he said the following:

Scott: Mmm. That’s a good question. Well, I think, a lot of it comes down to the core elements of our campaign, supporting democratic rights for everyone, water is a right for everyone, and uh, climate justice is central to the kind of future that we need to have. Pharmacare is something that should be accessible and affordable for everyone.

MS: Touching on these specific issues that are going to affect everyone’s lives.

Scott: Yeah. And it really centrally comes down to social justice and equity.

Contrast this answer with those given by staff from CTF and ACORN in prior chapters. In the first case, staff explicitly contrasted “the taxpayer” with “particular segments” of Canadian society and framed this as a zero-sum, financial game. Kevin of the CTF, for example, told me that “taxpayer” was a reasonably wide term that accepted the necessary evil of being unable to label the entire political community: “I mean you speak for some Canadians, not all. That’s just...there’s no really way to get around that.” In my discussion with Jen from ACORN, I was told it would not be staff but members doing an advertisement, and it would be framed around “fighting back” for better living conditions—discourse that reflects the pastoral techniques used to politicize members in that organization.

In the Council’s case, however, Scott sticks to “core elements” that are wide-sweeping, inclusionary, and fit into a metanarrative of social progress. Democratic rights, for example, should be improved for *everyone*. *Everyone* has (whether they know it or not) an objective stake in climate justice and water rights—in other words, to a “secure future”. Pharmacare, too, has a universal quality insofar as everyone potentially requires access to medication and drugs. In short, the Council tries to be as far-reaching as possible by focusing on seemingly universally applicable issues and policies, buttressed by discourses of civic nationalism and clearing the way for social progress. While some (or even many) Canadians may not identify these as political

priorities or may even see them as a waste of time, the stewards of the Council still take up these issues on their behalf.

This is clear in the Council's organizational literature, the pages of which are filled with collective improvement in the metanarrative form of progress, under which the above issues fit neatly. As political scientist Jared Wesley (2011) notes, Canadian political leaders often rely on discourse around "moving forward" or "making progress" when engaging in brokerage politics that speaks to wider swaths of the political spectrum than groups or parties with narrower interests or ideologies. We might say the Council does something similar on a smaller, organizational level. Although the Council is explicitly oriented towards social justice, it veers away from the more antagonistic, battle-oriented discourse of ACORN and opts for a less volatile narrative of moving "forward" or making progress.

Predictably, the negotiation prioritized the profits of multinational firms, not the well-being of working families who face increasing climate hazards. As a result, NAFTA includes an array of little-known rules that bind North America to fossil fuel dependency rather than supporting a just transition to a clean energy economy. NAFTA is an obstacle to climate progress. (Canadian Perspectives, 2018, p. 5)

[Regarding "Big Oil"] The reasons driving the Council of Canadians' opposition to these projects, the actions we take to resist them, and our vision of a better path forward, unite these campaigns on both sides of the country (ibid, p. 6).

The Council of Canadians' strength comes from the ground up. Ordinary people like you in communities across Canada coming together with courage and conviction in pursuit of the better Canada and fairer world we know are possible. (ibid, p. 9)

I hope this report finds you well. It's packed with inspiring stories and timely analysis on the real and substantive progress you are driving in communities across Canada and beyond. [Maude Barlow's introduction to the issue] (Canadian Perspectives, 2017, p. 1)

The Council of Canadians has worked with and supported groups opposing the pipeline...Council chapters and supporters are also taking action by sending letters and emails to put political pressure on elected officials. While we have made clear progress, there are still significant challenges to overcome before we can stop this project. (Canadian Perspectives, 2016, p. 23)

This brief cross section of the Council's publications illustrates the Council's crisis of representation (Knight, 1998; Tufts & Thomas, 2014) as powerful actors (capitalists, pressured politicians) *blocking* progress in a number of these issues, namely democracy, access to water, trade agreements, and climate change. Members of the Council, in turn, are called upon to tend to these obstacles, ushering them out so Canadians can continue down the path of a better future collectively. While the CTF and ACORN must both continuously and *actively* intervene to create change, the Council focuses its energy and resources on *clearing* the path, allowing progress to continue. This path, for the most part, is blocked by self-interested elites whose interests are diametrically opposed to "the people". Comments left on the national arm's Facebook page illustrate this dynamic.

Any of the corporations, such as lumbering, mining, Fracking, etc, that use processes that pollute our lakes and rivers don't want this Bill repealed! If the Liberals intend to ratify the TPP they probably won't repeal the Bill after all! Say NO to the TPP!
(Comment 57)

There is no free lunch. Free trade means labour and citizens get screwed. ISDS means multinational corps are doing the screwing. We need fair trade. The fact the Justin Trudeau represents corporate interests over labour and our citizens is typical of him. (Comment 85)

enough 'free trade' already- its not free trade- its restructuring responsibility and removing laws that protect our environment , labor laws and health standards so corporations can sell us poison food etc...go to hell- recinde them all [Trade agreements] !!! (Comment 177)

Silly wabbits, ALL TRADE DEALS 100%.. Are for the benefit of the filthy rich multinationals.....so they can rape and pillage our country and remain filthy rich.....real,people get NOTHING.....even our WATER is not designated as a RESOURCE.....and ISDS means we are sued by a tribunal totally separate and ABOVE our judicial system....TRADE DEALS SUCK (Comment 350)

Telling Nestle means nothing to them. The people to take action are the 3 levels of government municipal, provincial and federal who must write strong laws/regulations to control and stop large corporations from raping the water supply of all the people. Boycott all Nestle products as they are a large corrupt corporation.
(Comment 6008)

[Regarding the Trans-Pacific Partnership] It is a Conspiracy of corporations to control everything, including You (Comment 9343).

In this case, the antagonists of “the People” are corporations and corporate elites, who pressure governments to create policies and laws that go against the interests of those they govern. In most cases, comments are referring to *removing* something (primarily trade agreements, a pattern throughout the data) that will allow the people to thrive in a more socially just world. These comments are a small cross-section of thousands of comments with this very sentiment: corporate interests, and politicians that bow to them, stand between the people and progress. The people must take action to remove these obstacles, allowing Canadians to move forward together into lives and economic conditions free of manipulation from powerful interests. As Scott told me, “governments are under intense corporate pressure to go a certain way. And so there needs to be a counterbalancing pressure, and that’s where groups like ours come in.”

These comments illustrate another important feature of how this crisis can be addressed. “The People,” unlike in the previous two cases, can remove these obstacles to progress by using available institutional tools—oversight committees, electing progressive leaders, repealing trade agreements, and laws that can restrain corporate behaviour (e.g. fair trade). One Facebook user, for example, noted that “[t]here is an election next year. Let’s see how many Canadians this time bend over and vote for the Cons or Libs. Both exchange holding power and both do the same thing. We’ll need to be more courageous than that if we really want change” (Comment 28). “Courage,” in this context, refers to actions taken at the polling booth rather than on the streets.

This theme is also visible in stories the Council uses to mobilize or inspire members. In previous cases, the external positioning of the counterpublic elicited stories that (1) insulted

politicians, in the case of the CTF, and (2) valorized the protest/disruptive activities of members to sustain faith in changing the system from the “outside”, in ACORN’s case. For the Council, these stories are largely “inside”, inscribed within Canadian political institutions. Take the following narrative from the Council’s newsletter. It valorizes a group of Canadians who, in 2013, legally challenged the “Robocall scandal” after the Harper government failed to take meaningful action in response to accusations of voter suppression.

With nothing to gain, and driven by their belief in civic duty, these eight ordinary Canadians stepped forward to defend our democracy as no one else has. They’ve taken onto their shoulders not only the restoration of voters’ rights in their ridings, but a nation’s confidence in the very integrity of our electoral process. From the outset, the eight applicants expected an uphill battle. These are uncharted legal waters. However, the greatest challenge they would face – one they didn’t expect – would come from their own government. Over the last year, the applicants’ cases have been met by relentless and costly legal hurdles at the hands of the Conservative Party MPs in those ridings and their high-powered legal team. These hurdles aimed to discredit the applicants and stop the cases at every turn. Thanks to remarkable support from Council of Canadians members like you...the applicants successfully overcame every one of those obstacles...regardless of how the court rules, these eight brave individuals – and your support of them – have already achieved significant victories. (Canadian Perspectives, 2013, p. 8)

Though it takes various forms, this narrative structure is not uncommon in the pages of the Council’s newsletter. It simultaneously consists of rhetoric typical of populist mobilization—valorizing “ordinary Canadians” in opposition to a corrupt elite—and has an institutionalist slant, because it takes for granted that legal challenges and using institution is the best way to “defend our democracy”, rather than external, disruptive action.

These two discursive features, which are often depicted as mutually exclusive in literature that describes populism as an ideology (Mudde, 2007; Rovira Kaltwasser & Taggart, 2016; Taggart, 2002), dovetail in this kind of narrative. Taking a more form-centred and interpretive view, we can understand that this maneuver does is identify Council members and supporters as

protecting *all* Canadians by maintaining the fundamental pillars of our democracy (combating voter suppression), equating the valor of their own action with that of the *entire* political community (plebs = populous). Further, it dovetails this with utilizing existing institutions to challenge elites, and, importantly, it implicates the reader (“members like you”, “your support of them”), in these leaders’ victories. In the remainder of this chapter, I link this kind of logic to the “steward” subjectivity advanced by the Council. While the logic and practice of this popular subjectivity is antagonistically build like the previous two cases, as we will see, it is a relatively anodyne subject in contrast to those cases.

Collective defense: Mobilizing stewards

I use the term “steward”, in its broadest sense, to describe the Council’s kind of popular subjectivity. Put simply, a steward is someone who has a responsibility to look after or over something. In the Council’s case, this primarily refers to our democratic structures, climate, and natural resources like water. In a certain sense, it is linked to the concept of *the commons*, in the sense that individuals are called on to act in the collective interest to preserve the resources belonging to all. The commons, an ancient concept going back to medieval England, entered the collective imagination when private entities emerged and began controlling land for more efficient production during the rise of capitalism (Bluehorn & Waller, 2002).

In Hardin’s (1968) famous account of the commons, tragedy strikes when individuals pursue their immediate individual interests, netting them significant personal gain at a small cost to the land for everyone else. When a farmer adds one extra cattle to their herd, that cattle uses slightly more resources (to other farmers’ detriment) but generates greater sales on items like milk and meat. As more and more cattle are added, however, tragedy occurs when the pasture

eventually becomes unusable due to crowding. In the same way, the Council is asking individual Canadians to look beyond their immediate interests—the convenience and low cost of bottled water, for example—and act in the collective interest through *careful* and *responsible* consumption; in other words, being a steward (Bluehorn & Waller, 2002, p. 365). Similarly, voting in elections and letter-writing to politicians, though it nets no immediate personal gain, is participating in a “democratic commons” to the benefit of all. As such, members are encouraged to take ownership and care over both democratic and natural resources on which all Canadians rely.

Stewards share a few features with other popular subjectivities described thus far. Like watchdogs, stewards can operate from a distance, but like crusaders, are called on to *actively* protect and defend Canada’s progressive politics and environment. The steward’s political libido, therefore, is suspended somewhere halfway between the prior popular subjectivities. On the one hand, there are serious obstacles threatening Canada’s path to an enlightened future that demand action; on the other hand, the Council makes sure to diversify legitimate avenues of political activity to ensure a more far-reaching base. People should be able to participate not only by “pounding the pavement”—ACORN’s preferred methods of action—but also from the comfort of their own home, which aligns more closely with the CTF. When I asked Scott about the primary ways they try to mobilize Canadians, he replied that it

...depends on the political moment, what’s gonna be most effective can change. Sometimes it’s a press conference. Sometimes it’s a public forum. Sometimes it’s...you know, directing engagement with politicians. Sometimes it’s, uh...protests, sometimes it’s uh...you know, just having an organizing meeting. To talk things out with folks in the community, to plan next steps...it really varies... We have a lot of petitions, but also increasingly, uh, actions where people can click on a link to phone their member of parliament, or their councillor to send a strong message about the issue of the day.

Mirroring his hesitation to define “Canadian”, and unlike the other organizations I studied, Scott was hesitant to identify a specific practice or practices he thought were most effective, saying instead that it will vary by the topic and the issue at hand. I contend that this more pragmatic approach to mobilization—reflected in the pages of *Canadian Perspectives*—highlights that stewards do not act as a coherent collective (as we saw in the collectivizing practices of ACORN’s pastoral dynamics). Rather, the Council behaves as a political-democratic mediating structure, binding members together through “moral resources [that] transcend time and space”, expanding and adapting to the political imaginations of their members (Couto & Guthrie, 1999, pp. 113-114). This means that individuals are encouraged to “take action,” but to do so in ways that do not require the kind of commitment we see from ACORN’s members (although some local chapter members, certainly, may *choose* to commit more time and energy).

In practice, this means that insofar as stewards act as a meaningful political force, this happens primarily through *individual* actions believed to make a *direct* difference. The Council, as a mediating structure, coordinates these individual actions even though individual members are not collectivized as under ACORN’s pastoral model. The most visible way this happens in the Council are *boycotts* and *petitions*. Above, we saw how members are implicated more broadly in the activities of the Council—even if this means merely donating money—by praising members as “supporters” and linking them to publicized means of resistance. The Council also takes this a step further by encouraging members and Canadians to “take action” on several issues. The most common one in recent organizational literature—protecting water—relies heavily on boycotts to do so. Take for example a recent factsheet published by the Council on practices around bottled water:

Nestlé profits from water all over the world. Communities are saying “no” to Nestlé’s water grabs. It’s time to stop the corporate takeover and protect water for people by boycotting Nestlé and bottled water...Wasting our limited water on frivolous and consumptive uses such as bottled water is a recipe for disaster. We must safeguard water for communities and future generations. Until bottled water takings are banned, we need to send the message to Nestlé that corporate profits should never come ahead of communities’ needs. Join the tens of thousands of people that are taking a stand against Nestlé and bottled water by boycotting it. (“Protect Water: Boycott Nestle”, 2019).

First, this is an example of the tight link between the Council’s political logic and the construction of the steward. By individually refusing to purchase Nestle products, members are told that they can contribute to the removal of an obstacle to ensuring the future well-being of Canadian society. Boycotts are a form of historical “consumer activism” in which citizens are encouraged to “vote with their dollars”, blurring the line between passive and active political protest (Friedman, 1999). Because there has been no real evaluation of how effective boycotts are, we are forced to take on faith that they are an effective way to take compromise or impact corporate profits to try and change private organizations’ behaviours.

Second, because it blurs the active and the passive, the boycott is an important political technology in the Council’s toolkit. Because citizens are *already* consumers, not very much time or energy is needed to “send a message” to companies like Nestle. This allows for the Council’s kind of populist mobilization to travel over further distances, reminiscent of the CTF’s paranoid brand of populism. Simultaneously, members can have the means to act as stewards by simply exercising a different consumer choice. In this way, the Council uses a specific Nestle product—bottled water—as calling into being a certain kind of moral public “to capture consumers in networks of obligation to a wider good” and blurring the line between publics and markets (Hawkins, 2011, p. 540).

To drive this final point further, consider the fact that the Council has a “Boycott Nestle Pledge”, the point of which is simply to sign and publicise one’s commitment to the organization. One important function of this pledge is to bind the individual member into what Benedict Anderson originally called an “imagined community”, an idea which has since been applied considerably to social media and the creation of digital publics more broadly (Gruzd, Tiryakian, Wellman & Takhtyev, 2011; Lovari & Parisi, 2015; Johnston, Sanscartier & Johnston, 2019; Johnston, Johnston, Sanscartier & Ramsay, 2019). Whereas the CTF communicates the fruits of their counterpublic to fully passive members, and ACORN relies on the physical co-presence of staff/members to bind individuals to a shared popular subjectivity, the Council distributes “moral resources” primarily through digital mechanisms like the pledge, which allows members to act alone in concert with others.

Online mechanisms like the pledge allow members to be co-present in ways that defy the physical barriers of space and time, critical to functioning as a mediating structure. Mark Deuze (2012, p. 174) encourages us to think of online spaces more broadly as “silent discos,” where people listen to music individually while simultaneously “living through an involvement with distinct others.” The fact that the Council’s “moral music” is heard and taken up is reflected in several comments left on their Facebook page, all demonstrating the upstanding conduct of individual members in helping to “take down” corporations through consumer activism. To that end, members are often eager to demonstrate their efforts at advancing progress, particularly on posts about corporate exploitation. These are usually paired with anti-corporate elitist sentiments.

[Pledge] Signed and shared. I’ve been boycotting Nestle products for years!
(Comment 1036)

I boycott all bottled water! Really not a big deal, just a little bit of planning.
(Comment 1695)

Ive been boycotting nestle for years ever since I learned how they get their cocoa by essentially holding freshwater ransom for manual labour in Africa. Evil company. I don't like the environmental cost of bottled water. (Comment 2447)

Living in Guelph, one of many towns affected negatively by their unmitigated greed and short-sighted practices. Been boycotting these vultures for years now. (Comment 3679)

Boycott them forever. My Boycott has been going on since 1977. (Comment 7081)

I am Boycotting. Let [Tim Horton's] go back to their offices with closed down franchises. We prefer Canadian content for Canadians. Anything that promotes poverty here in Canada better stand up and fight or get out! (Comment 11021)

This effort at showcasing one's personal efforts circulates concomitantly with pleas to the wider (counter)public to also join in boycotts. These are often paired with scorn for ineffective or "bought" politicians, implying that boycotts are the way to circumnavigate ineffective politics.

Boycott, Nestle! Help to end plastic bottles polluting...and let Doug Ford understand, that, we the people will vote him out! (Comment 1426)

Boycott this company people!!!!!! Anything Nestle !!!!!!! This company isn't even Canadian! !!!!! But that's what the F.....ING Government does they give our natural resources away and we have to pay exorbitant amount of money for it!!!!so sick of the handling of our natural resources! !!!!!

Boycott Nestle' --ALL brands. There is NO excuse for our "POLITICIANS" to allow this UGLY EXPLOITATION of Ontario's water! (Comment 13363)

Of course, there are also those who are convinced that boycotts and petitions are not going to truly effect change. For these commenters, the Council's actions are a little *too* "vanilla".

I'm 100% in favour of nestle getting what's coming to it... but a petition and a boycott? Is that really the most effective protest? (Comment 7281)

Boycotting won't work. We should lobby the government to end this insanity. And why did the government not recognize the insanity in the first place before allowing this. (Comment 7984)

In any case, it is clear that the *boycott* is a central political practice of the Council, and it is a public technology well-placed to ensure that stewards can be active in defending Canadian values and resources, but also assures members that not *too* much time and/or effort needs to be invested to make (perceived) meaningful change. The above two comments perhaps reflect a frustration with this dynamic.

For this reason, boycotts, online petitions and “sharing/liking” on social media (among other practices) have been called *slacktivism* by some communications scholars, which allow for online impression management enabling “individuals to feel good about themselves, but does not lead to tangible impact” (Minocher, 2019, p. 623; Glenn, 2015; Lane & Dal Cin, 2018; Smith, Krishna, & Al-Sinan, 2019). While there is mixed evidence that slacktivism co-opts effort from more meaningful or impactful practices (cf. Kristofferson, White & Pelozo, 2014; Kwak et al., 2018), what concerns us is not the ability of boycotts to effect tangible change, but their ability to morally unite individuals across space and time to form a kind of digital (counter)public, with its own anti-corporate, civic nationalist (i.e. *populist*) norms outlined by the kinds of praxis and denunciation seen above. They suspend stewards between passivity and activity by both direct (consumer-based) and discursive participation in this digital public.

Online and physical petitions, for their part, share a slacktivist slant with boycotts by way of political participation. However, they also “presuppose a public competence not simply to understand but also to make normatively binding judgments on rival political claims” (Zaret, 1996, p. 1541). As Zaret (1996) argues, the petition is fundamentally bound up with the development of liberal-democratic norms in part because petitions inherently separate out the

vox populi from “supreme law” by recognizing petitioned authority (p. 1513), making it an effective earlier tool of resistance within monarchies. Printed petitions further “imposed dialogic order on conflict” via presentation to government and acting as a representation of public opinion, even though there might be multiple competing petitions (p. 1531). In sum, petitions allow for the expression of a transient public circumscribed within the usual norms of liberal democracy—norms it helped to establish by tactically employing the representation and invoking the “authority of public opinion in politics” (p. 1538).

Therefore, if the petition as a political mechanism respects and is ingrained in the fabric of *the public* against which Dean (2001) imagines her phantasmal publics, we can infer that the Council’s frequent reliance on them illustrates (1) the desire to elicit the *vox populi* in anti-elitist and civic nationalist ways that do not seek to topple or dismantle institutions (unlike counter-democratic, paranoid populism), and (2) the simultaneous and partial collapse of their counterpublic into *the public* to which it maintains a connection. By signing a petition, the steward cares for all Canadians by way of representation and a “binding judgment” that, like the boycott, serves to also bind the member in question through a sense of morality; in this case, morality for the defense and protection of Canadian democracy and resources writ large.

The boycott and the petition are two political tools that are fundamentally compatible with a kind of populist mobilization that understands institutional tools (e.g. courts, laws, regulations) as the means to achieve “progress”, as I have outlined earlier in this chapter. They also function as tools that temporarily bind individuals to a certain cause, perhaps just long enough to remove the perceived “obstacles” to progress. At the same time, the petition as political praxis further welds it as a “counterpublic-supposed-to-believe” to *the wider public-supposed-to-know*. I explain this dynamic in more detail in the following, final section of this chapter.

Sharing public space: Collectivizing faithful stewards

The public-building work of the Council is more straightforward than the prior two cases. This is because the Council shares with the wider public a fundamental faith in achieving progress. For the wider, mainstream public-supposed-to-believe, this is the continual uncovering of secrets to the point where the public *knows* everything through the virtues of publicity and transparency (Dean, 2001). For the Council, as a *counterpublic*-supposed-to-believe, it is the discovery and publicity of the ways in which external, capitalist antagonists disadvantage ordinary Canadians.

This counterpublic mirrors the faith and logic of these wider publics because the main political mechanisms the Council relies on—boycotts and petitions—accomplishes two simultaneous tasks, both of which I have touched upon earlier. I will briefly re-summarize them here. First, they orient members, however temporarily, to a cause—in the Council’s case, an obstacle to socially just progress—across time and space by not requiring a physical presence and allowing individuals to feel as though they are making a meaningful difference through relatively simple actions. Second, they circumscribe the Council’s brand of activism largely within existing institutions and mainstream discourses of the public. Consumer activism (in the form of boycotts) and political articulations that deferentially prefigure the state’s authority (petitions) are not looking to disrupt politics-as-usual, but rather work *within* existing institutional norms and practices to make change. As I have also already stated, when relying on mainstream literature, it is unusual to think about populist mobilization as working within the borders of institutional norms and discourses. However, anti-institutionalism as a specific kind of *ontic content* (Kögl, 2010; Laclau, 2005) need not be present in populism’s *ontological* form. This allows the Council to act as a *counterpublic* but remain attached to the institutions and discourses that make up *the* wider, overarching, mainstream public.

We saw earlier how the CTF constructs their counterpublic by prefiguring a public supposed to *not* know, tapping into the “big Other” by planting seeds of guilt and fear in members on the other side of “knowing”. This forms the basis of a paranoid way of knowing. In contrast, we have seen that the Council collectively believes in the power of institutions and liberal-democratic norms for making meaningful change—in this case, use of the big Other is not necessary. Guilt and fear, which Scott understands as nourishment for right-wing, ethnonationalist movements, can be displaced by a belief in institutions and liberal-democratic norms. Scott explained how the Council offers themselves as an alternative for these kinds of movements.

...I think there is disillusionment with politics, when politicians promise things and don't deliver. Their economic challenges. People want to be able to feed their families, and that's totally legitimate, and far-right politicians exploit that. And uh...try and place the blame on racialized communities and immigrants and refugees, when it's really corporations that are getting away with all the money...On the far right, they're putting forward a vision of exclusion, and racism, and you know. As the solution to people's economic problems. We're putting forward a vision of a just transition where workers aren't left behind, and there's a need for economic transformation, especially given the climate crisis. But it can look different and much more inclusive.

There is a slight economic reductionist tint to this narrative insofar as racism, xenophobia, exclusion, and so on are the function of misplaced concerns and anxieties about economic relations (i.e. corporate exploitation). This kind of narrative is not uncommon in academic commentary on the xenophobia and racism associated with right-wing variants of populism (see e.g. Fenster, 1999; Freeden, 2017; Wacquant, 2009). I argue that it serves two key functions in the Council's public-building context. First, it negates the antagonism potentially borne of discriminatory practices. Racists, xenophobes, and so on are simply individuals who need to be convinced of and shown their actual social position, presently “deflected from the perception and

pursuit of their own class interests by hegemonic forms of thought” (Lukes, 2005, p. 144). By orienting them towards who is “really to blame”—corporations—the Council keeps the singular enemy as *the* corporation against which it unites *all* Canadians, even those who are temporarily misguided. In a way, the Council gets to have its cake (it represents *all* Canadians) and eat it, too (even those who may disagree with the Council, or not understand their political goals).

Second, the Council can put into practice this political “benevolence” by spreading belief and faith as an alternative to guilt and fear. It is a *counterpublic* insofar as it (1) constructs Canadians as excluded from benefitting from corporatist relations and (2) identifies a *shared lack* as deprivation of progress due to the former. However, it overlaps with the wider public by (3) assuming the latter possesses tools capable of making meaningful change, something noticeably absent from both CTF and ACORN. Events like speaker series, town halls, and so on contribute to the construction of an “informed” kind of public capable of *knowing* its own interests and acting to achieve progress. Recognizing and acting on the basis of these interests—challenging corporate interests—is the basis of the Council as a kind of “public tribunal that unites ‘all the wisdom and justice of the nation’ and ‘decides on the destiny of public men [*sic*]’” (Dean, 2001, p. 629)—in other words, as a particular kind of public supposed to know. Herein lies the basis, then, for the Council claiming to represent *all* Canadians, and to synonymize their goals with the goals of the country. This third element of the Council’s counterpublic, together with its more formalized organization, is what makes it so much more conventional than the other cases in this study.

In these ways, the Council moves beyond a mere public supposed to believe, which is “easily seduced and unable to judge its true interests” because they stem from belief, rather than knowledge (Dean, 2001, p. 629). We saw this dynamic with CTF (belief in leadership to reveal)

and ACORN (belief in the organization to effect change). By merging itself more closely with mainstream democratic structures and institutions, the Council can tap into their legitimacy and dovetail their progressive agenda to “the destiny of public men” (ibid). Mirroring the knowledge-building practices within these structures—inviting experts to speak at events, organizing town halls and panels, and “public forums”—the Council internalizes the pursuit of the “public supposed to know”, reflecting and reproducing the wider faith of that public within their counterpublic. In short, the Council relies on these kinds of events to *advance* and *progress* Canadians, reflecting the political logic and kind of moral stewardship on which they operate.

In conclusion, the Council is interestingly placed within the wider discursive arena of the public. They explicitly overlap with mainstream discourses that propel the public supposed to believe into one that knows. Not only is there an explicitly buying into the ability of democratic institutions to fix crises of representation perpetuated by the corporate elite, there is a tacit faith in knowledge to get *all* Canadians to recognize that their interests lie in the far-reaching, inclusive issues on which the Council campaigns. However, they remain a markedly *populist* counterpublic in that they engage in anti-elitist and nationalist rhetoric, the hallmarks of Jansen’s (2011) populist mobilization. They engage in these discourses in ways that promote an agenda of anti-corporate sentiment, civic inclusivity, and social progress. The CTF and ACORN, we have seen, rely much less on “town halls” and “forums” that construct an *agora* married to more traditional forms of expertise. In the next chapter, we see a radical departure from these more mainstream practices in a kind of populist counterpublic that relies much more on horizontal *and* vertical antagonisms.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Purity Populism and Inciting Revanchists

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored how populist mobilization can be taken up under progressive banners in a more inclusive way, positioning “the people” against an economic elite. Civic nationalism, the kind of nationalism that tends to be attached to populist discourse circulated by organizations like ACORN and the Council of Canadians, has a right-wing equivalent in *ethnic* nationalism, which—in stark contrast to the two prior cases—“is said to be exclusive and to focus much more strongly on cultural matters” (Bonikowski et al., 2019, p. 72). Recall that the Council of Canadians—very much like the cases I examine in this chapter—wants to defend “Canadian values.” However, these ethnic nationalist cases do much more work to overlap “Canadian values” with the collective ethnic and cultural identity of “old stock Canadians”; in other words, white Canadian citizens.

The key difference between the “cultural populism” of this case and the prior case is that the Council prioritizes values attached to political inclusivity such as multiculturalism, diversity, and anti-corporatism. In other words, it is *vertically* exclusive, positioning the Canadian “people” against the economic and corporate elite, but *horizontally* inclusive by refusing to define themselves as targeting a particular branch of Canadians, as seen in my methodological frustrations around Scott’s comments. Whatever frustrations I had while engaging with the online communities of Immigration Watch Canada (IWC) and ID Canada was not due to blurry boundaries about who does and does not “belong.” The discourses of these populist publics are organized around exclusivity, both vertical *and* horizontal (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017). Not only do they scathingly advocate against the “cultural elite”—usually the historical and modern Liberal Party of Canada and its leaders—they are also staunchly anti-immigrant, claiming to

defend the ethnic interests of white Canadians. Fearful of becoming an ethnic minority, these groups try to instil a sense of fear and alarmism amongst white Canadians of European descent that the balance of power is tilting in favour of racialized Canadians and immigrants, who will unapologetically and unquestionably change the policy landscape to disadvantage whites while privileging themselves—much like white Canadians have done for hundreds of years.

It would be easy to hand-wave this logic as racist and relegate it to the fringes of Canadian politics. After all, Maxime Bernier’s People’s Party of Canada (PPC)—the only party that explicitly advocated for restricted immigration—received less than 2% of the popular vote in the 2019 Canadian Federal Election. As I show in this chapter, however, it is analytically and practically worthwhile to engage with some of the discursive moves by these organizations that position themselves as unapologetic, self-righteous subjects capable of deflecting claims of racism and their advancing of a “politics of hate”. These subjects, by drawing on a political logic positioning “whiteness” as just another self-interested ethnic group, can construct themselves as *revanchist* subjects. Alarmed by the cracks in institutional and demographic armour of white settler Canadians, these publics engage in populist mobilization that seeks to “antagonistically re-politicize” whiteness (Brubaker, 2017). In doing so, they seek radical reform to the status quo of immigration into Canada, and importantly, how Canadians understand ethnic and racial divides.

For these reasons, I refer to this species of populism as *purity populism*—it has very little tolerance for calls to “increase diversity,” to “pander to” Indigenous peoples through reconciliatory mechanisms, and considers policies like affirmative action and state-provided refugee healthcare as “racist” against white Canadians of European descent (euphemistically called “Old Stock Canadians” in these groups). These discursive levees are carefully constructed

around “whiteness” to prevent a flood of racialized dilution that threaten the demographic and sociological privilege bestowed upon white Canadians derived from their European ancestry. These groups understand their campaigns as an urgent, much-needed and significantly delayed effort to buttress the stability of white dominance, which has been compromised by the gradual rise of immigration into Canada. Purity populist mobilization thus constructs revanchist subjects: those who feel they need to recover lost territory and status to the “virtue signalling” of cultural elites touting the benefits of diversity and multiculturalism for self-benefit. The political logic and popular subjectivity fostered by this group (revanchists) ensure that members need not be apologetic about their desire to defend whiteness, at least in the online space.

Like other chapters, I retain the same basic structure in my analysis of IWC and ID Canada. I begin with a brief overview of the organizations and an initial discussion untangling and linking populism and nationalism—about which there is considerable discussion in the literature. I then examine the underlying logic that constructs a certain kind of anti-elitist and nationalist subjectivity, before moving to a discussion of how these groups want (white) Canadians to re-cast themselves as revanchist subjects.

A note before proceeding: methodological restrictions require a slightly different setup than previous chapters. As expected, I was unable to find anyone at either organization willing to speak to a sociologist. As such, I rely entirely on online methods to construct the analyses in these chapters—texts from the main websites, as well as Facebook and Twitter posts and comments. Unable to find interviewees, I am forced to “zoom out” by using two organizations to generate enough data to conduct meaningful analyses. All data collected in this chapter is publicly available. Themes resulting from my online analysis are presented in a more piecemeal way, sometimes zooming in on one organization and sometimes discussing discourse common to

both organizations. However, what follows is an analysis of both organizations as a political “bloc” of cultural populist mobilization looking to place preserving whiteness at the centre of politics and political subjectivities.

IWC and ID Canada: Building Canadian Nationalism

Both IWC and ID Canada are built around inciting fear and outrage around, according to them, unreasonable amounts of immigration in Canada. However, the ways they do this are slightly different. The exact discursive contrasts are unpacked later in this chapter.

Broadly speaking, IWC—whose website has aesthetics reminiscent of the 1990s—attempts to legitimize itself by including many links, spanning several topics, about why immigration is harmful. Economic, environmental, and cultural repercussions are discussed, alongside links to various columns by former government employees and books by academics. One such academic is Ricardo Duschesne, a historical sociologist and former professor at the University of New Brunswick condemned by peers for “academically” advancing white nationalism. Columns about “Cultural Marxism” are also posted and framed as having “stole our culture”—framing the surge in anti-European/anti-white hostility as orchestrated by “progressive elites” in search of political support from outsiders (Lind, 2013). Such primers set the stage for the fragile whiteness constructed by groups like IWC. Originally founded by a Vancouver teacher in 2010, the IWC advocates for restricting immigration to 25,000 individuals annually (Hampshire, 2013).

Elsewhere, while the group is responsible for a few isolated incidents around British Columbia, including posting anti-immigration flyers and protests blaming immigrants for issues like traffic and housing increases (Raphael, 2014), its presence is almost exclusively online.

Taking a page out of the Council of Canadians' strategy book, it also hosts links to petitions online and helps visitors find their local representatives to whom they may write letters expressing concern over immigration levels. Additionally, there is a page dedicated to "Reporting Fraud", specifically towards temporary foreign worker fraud, immigrations evading taxes, refugee fraud, and marriage fraud. I re-visit this later in the chapter as one form of "denunciatory technology" (Sanscartier, 2017b), trying to foster a fundamentally anti-immigrant public.

ID Canada, for its part, is a self-described "Identitarian" movement, an increasingly popular kind of movement seen worldwide in which members "emphasize[s] the importance of cultural nationalism to their identity" (Elsenhans, 2012, p. 650). Formerly called "Generation Identity Canada," an offshoot of the UK-based white nationalist movement Generation Identity, ID Canada claims that it was allegedly created

as a response to Canada's decaying identity, increased third-world immigration and the prevalence of anti-European sentiments in this country...Canada is a country of explorers, settlers, and nation builders. We refuse to disrespect our ancestors and those who sacrificed everything to build this beautiful country only to protect the decaying ideals of political correctness and "diversity". Canada is a nation of European values, traditions, customs and culture. Canada was never meant to be a melting pot of third-world migration. Diversity is in fact, our greatest weakness. (ID Canada, 2019)

This up-front, unapologetic, and purposefully brash tone is what primarily contrasts ID Canada against IWC. ID Canada does not attempt to legitimize its position through pseudo-scientific work and testimony, but believes that the demographic and ethnic erosion of White/European identity is an *ipso facto* valid cause for concern. At its core, ID Canada, like all identitarian movements, believes foremostly that "identifying with the past as one's core sense of being provides a deep and profound meaning to one's existence...in effect, offering a context for

one's life" (ibid). Put simply, because those of other cultures and races are "allowed" to be take explicit and open pride in their ethnic-cultural roots and origins, the ancestors of white, European settlers should be granted the same clemency, but are robbed of it through the guise of "political correctness" attached to multiculturalism, diversity, and other initiatives/policies dedicated to "eroding" European identity. This is key to the political logic in which both cases are steeped: underpinning their subjects as *racially self-interested*, but *not racist*.

ID Canada and IWC are, in stark contrast to the prior case, the *least* formalized of any case and offer the *brash*est, most incendiary, and exclusionary forms of populist mobilization in this study. They exist predominantly in the digital sphere but may occasionally meet or have members put up posters (anonymously), "clean" statues and other monuments to Colonialism, and engage in other *ad hoc* activities without formal elements of organization. The complete and total lack of formalization in these cases reflects what is by far the most intense form of populist mobilization I encountered, surpassing that of the CTF; it is *less* broad and *more* narrow (i.e. targeting a very specific group of individuals) than that organization, and their collective performances of populist mobilization are much more potent than either ACORN or the Council.

Because there is some debate over the extent of the linkages between populism and nationalism—whether they should be considered separate entities or inextricably linked—it is worth briefly reviewing the related literature to map out some conceptual context for the subsequent analysis. In line with chapters one and two and the rest of this dissertation, I take the position that, echoing Bonikowski and colleagues (2019), while populism and nationalism certainly have an "elective affinity" in the Weberian sense, they should be treated as analytically separate and combined in context-dependent ways.

The links between populism and ethno-nationalism

The resurgence of scholarly interest in populism is mainly focused on its right-wing variants (Brubaker, 2019; Freedman, 2017; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014; Thompson, 2017). This disproportionate focus reflects current global political circumstances. The popularity of and support for right-wing leaders like Donald Trump, Marine Le Pen, Beppe Grillo, Boris Johnson, Rodrigo Duterte, and Recep Erdogan in North America, Europe and Asia have raised questions about how and why the kinds of exclusionary and xenophobic discourse they use resonates with their electorates. For some, this takes the form of discussing misplaced anxiety about one's economic circumstances/positioning. Leaders like Donald Trump can transform visceral isolation from one's socio-political structures like the economy and government into blame on immigrants and racialized communities (Fenster, 1999; Oliver & Rahn, 2016).

For others, such figureheads tap into pre-existing discourses and structures of racism that have transformed but endured since the civil rights movement (Pérez, 2017). More commonly, these explanations are combined to some extent. In the face of changing demographics and globalizing policies in Western countries, some members of white, Anglo-Saxon settler populations feel threatened when they can no longer take their political dominance/majority for granted. This is especially true among working class white men, many of whom lack cultural and economic capital, and do not feel they meaningfully benefit from policies promoting cultural/racial diversity and economic globalization (Hughey, 2014; Mondon & Winter, 2019; Sioh, 2018).

These factors drive what Bonikowski and colleagues (2019, p. 74), using Weberian vocabulary, call the "elective affinity" between populism and nationalism that "[activates] strong feelings of ethno-national identification." When populist leaders split the entire polity into a pure

“people” and a corrupt elite, they typically try to do so in ways that position the fate of their “imagined community” as being in danger or at risk, necessary to complete the Lacanian narrative of a “lack” under which individuals can join a popular subjectivity (Anderson, 2006; Roberts, 2015a/b). For these reasons, Brubaker (2019, p. 2) argues that populism does not deserve to be fully purified of its nationalist tendencies; rather, they are best conceptualized as “intersecting and mutually implicated though not fully overlapping fields of phenomena.” Given that all the cases in this dissertation so far draw on *some* nationalist tendencies—whether subtly, as when the CTF tries to raise concerns over national debt, or explicitly, like when the Council of Canadians wants to reclaim “Canadian values” from corporations like Nestle—the understanding advanced by those like Bonikowski and Brubaker helps to make sense of populist publics. In these cases, we may say that populism and nationalism “resonate” a lot more clearly in the form of white fragility, as the following discussion of political logics and subjectivities illustrate.

A key question underpinning much of this chapter’s analysis, and one that is addressed *in vivo* by the texts and themes I present here, is whether the resonance between populism and nationalism (in its right-wing, ethnonationalist variant) is inherently racist. As I illustrate in my discussion of the political logics underpinning these cases, the members of these counterpublics would likely argue that wanting to maintain white political dominance is *not* racist because “self-preservation” does not automatically translate into thinking that one’s own race (in this case, being white) is *ipso facto* genetically or otherwise superior to other races. White people are, in this understanding, just like any other ethnic group wanting to advance and protect their own collective interests.

However, I should make clear at this point that this narrow definition of racism relegates problematic discourse to the actions of mere individuals, rendering wider racial power structures

invisible; as William Cornell (2018, p. 99) notes, “socially constructed definitions of normality...constitute the unacknowledged and unconscious ways in which racial (and/or gender) biases are built into what is normal, and, therefore, acceptable.” In what follows, it is clear that the members of ID Canada and IWC consider immigration, “political correctness”, and policies looking to strengthen cultural and racial diversity as “unacceptable” precisely because it interrupts what has so long been considered normal: that white settler Canadians are the default or “natural” beneficiaries of race relations (see Rabinowitz et al., 2009; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). Because I make sense of the texts on these websites and social media profiles of IWC and ID Canada using critical race theory alongside scholarship on populism, I do problematize their discourse as racist in parts of my analysis, though this is not my primary goal. Given the (epistemologically) interpretive nature of this study, what concerns me is not the philosophical or moral question of what “counts” as a racism. Rather, analytical concerns—informed by the theoretical framework of populist publics—are to understand the logics and subjectivities from the perspectives that these texts offer. It is from this position that I begin analyzing, comparing, and contrasting both cases in this chapter.

Populist-nationalist logic: Racial self-interest ≠ racism

The crux on which much of these cases’ discourse is produced is that racial self-interest does not constitute *racism*, a word reserved for those who believe their own race is biologically or culturally superior to other races. Political scientist Eric Kaufmann, who explores this issue at length in multiple publications (and has been accused of defending “white identity politics”; see Chotiner, 2019) argues that from the perspective of those that support Trump and Brexit, “[t]he racism/racial self-interest distinction matters” (2017, p. 2). Taking a slightly more defensive

stance in his recent book *Whiteshift*, he alleges that whiteness is “an ethnic identity like any other” (2018, p. 1) and that if Western societies are going to quell right-wing, ethnonationalist populism, politicians need to align immigration policies with what is in the “comfort zone” of white majorities, who are increasingly wary of becoming a minority. Accusations of racism, Kaufmann explains, are ultimately used to silence those with legitimate concerns about changing demography in countries like Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States. Kaufmann claims that these countries had public support for immigration in the 1960s and 1970s—when whites were in a comfortable majority—but that this consensus has largely eroded in recent decades (Kaufmann, 2017, p. 8). Importantly, he claims this discomfort with changing racial demographics should not be understood as racist, and warrants serious consideration from mainstream politicians and political discourse. Kaufmann frames this point as a question (and subsequent answer) about those opposing immigration:

Do restrictionists fear, hate or look down upon those of other ethnic backgrounds? If the answer is yes, they are racist by any definition of the term. Or is it the case that immigration skeptics are majority ethnic partisans who are acting in what Shadi Hamid terms their ‘racial self-interest’: seeking to maximize the demographic advantage of their group. ... [We] need to reserve [racism] for irrational feelings about other racial groups: fear, hatred, disgust, lazy stereotypes or a perception of the other as less intelligent...[b]eyond this, however, we must accept that groups will look out for their cultural, economic and demographic interests. (Kaufmann, 2017, p. 10).

This sentiment captures the essence of the legitimating logic underpinning the two overlapping publics in this chapter. While the “racist” label has indeed found discursive success in policing and quieting those perceived to be afraid or discriminatory against those of other races, this kind of logic works to discursively establish and uncouple a “non-racist cultural interest” and “actual” racism. This strategy has been quite successful not only among those who

belong to counterpublics such as ID Canada and IWC, but among academics as well, the use of which has caused considerable controversy in Canada.

A more famous example is former professor and University of New Brunswick sociologist Ricardo Duchesne, who has penned books such as *Canada in Decay: Mass Immigration, Diversity, and the Ethnocide of Euro-Canadians* and *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization*. Duchesne couches his work within this uncoupling logic, “legitimizing” his assertion that policies like multiculturalism are really “a cultural Marxist effort to undermine the historic rights of the majority population of Euro-Canadians” (Duchesne, 2018, p. 3). Lesser-known figures, like sociologist Kenneth Westhues at the University of Waterloo, have defended Duchesne from his colleagues’ allegations of racism by saying the latter are professionally envious of his CV and that accusations are morally charged instead of grounded in empiricism (Westhues, 2019). The logic claimed by those advancing this discourse is that being white is an ethnicity like any other, and therefore may be legitimately defended (as do those of other races and ethnicities)—even to sociologists.

In short, white nationalists are looking to claw their way back to the centre of the political realm by relegating *racism* to the fringes, separating the *irrational* bases of racism from the very *rational* thrust towards defending one’s own cultural values and demographic advantage: just like “any other ethnicity.” When individuals making or relying on such claims are accused of racism, this logic enables them to turn the accusations back on the accuser—that to deny white people the privileges of defending their own culture, values, and self-interest is what is *actually* racist, discriminating against whites.

Educational researcher David Gillborn (2019, pp. 99-100) refers to this as a novel form of “colour blindness” that redefines racism “in the narrowest way possible as ‘irrational hatred.’”

Empirically researched inequities between whites and racialized groups in institutions like the criminal justice system, in education, and across occupational sectors are relegated to invisibility and altogether ignored by this logic. When we consider *structural* racism—whose existence, for most social scientists, is analogous to the earth being round—this logic becomes a thinly veiled “attempt to safeguard an oppressive and racist status quo” via racist intellectualizing that has morphed to acceptably fit into a post-civil rights era (Gillborn, 2019, p. 99; Gillborn, 2018). Gone (or at least marginalized) are the days of scientific racism theorizing about the differences between the sizes of brains or racially caused IQ discrepancies between whites and other races championed by psychologists like J. Phillippe Rushton. In its wake, however, is another insidious logic that encourages white people to see their whiteness *as* a political target, and to advance it unapologetically.

Both ID Canada and IWC rest on this logic in both explicit and less obvious ways. More specifically, ID Canada takes on the task of discursive purification by advancing the logic that those of white European descent are entitled to defend their interests in much the same way as any other ethnicity, and that, supposedly, this does not amount to hatred or racism. Consider the following tweets (from July 2019) said in reply to those accusing ID Canada of being a white supremacist, racist or hate-mongering organization:

Maxime Bernier has made it very clear that ID Canada is not welcome in his party. The main reason is because of people such as yourself who improperly label us "white supremacists". Just like we're not white supremacists, neither is Max. You're a dog barking on command.

Keep stoking the flames of fear and division by pointing out fake White Supremacists at every turn for Twitter cred. It's great for building up a following, but anyone with a mind capable of independent thought can see you're just a grifter. Product endorsements coming soon.

I sincerely hope someday soon we figure out time travel so we can send you back to 1939 Germany to fully experience REAL hate and REAL Nazis as a gay, black,

disabled jew so that YOU can stop living in this fantasy land where everyone you don't like is a Nazi.

There's nothing divisive about defending Canada and standing against illegal immigration. It's a crime. Do you stand in support of illegal immigration, or do you believe they should follow due process like the thousands of others who have been waiting?

Your daily reminder that @ID__Canada is a white nationalist movement, wait sorry identitarian movement and should be rejected by the mainstream at all costs.

Our argument has nothing to do with immigrants as individuals. We all personally know immigrants who have done well here and are genuinely good people. ID Canada has taken an issue with our immigration system itself and not the individuals that come through it. Big difference.

Also no, we're not scared of foreign people. To imply that a love for our own is a hatred of others is absurd. Do you lock your door at night because you hate everyone outside? Doubtful. You lock it because you love everyone inside.

Replies to accusations of racism usually take this form on ID Canada's Twitter page. There is no one clearly dominant strategy to accomplish the discursive uncoupling of white self-interest from racism, since these are tailored to specific replies. In this mostly representative selection, we see conflation of legality and morality, as with standing against "illegal immigration"; insisting that the issue is not with *immigrants* but with *immigration*; that "Nazi" is a label farcically removed from its history, used to silence others with legitimate political opinions; and wanting to limit immigration is because of love for one's "own kind", not hatred of others. They are so reliant on decoupling their own activity from the discourse of Nazism and racism, that they also extend this courtesy to their virtual opponents, as well.

[On Antifa] They're not far left "fascists". They're simply communists and anarchists, acting like typical anarchists and communists. "Let's call everyone we don't like a fascist." is what got us in this mess where communism is somehow tolerated by society, and you're to blame for it.

Let's get one thing straight to all the neo-cons and other "right wing patriots". Antifa are not "Nazis". They're not the new "brown shirts". Antifa are and have always been anarchists and communists. They act in typical anarchist/communist fashion. Stating otherwise is false.

Emboldened by this logic, they tend to retweet memes, images, and other media advancing the idea that white, European descendants are entitled to defend their collective ethnic interests. Figures 2 and 3, below, are examples of images that are not only couched in a logic claiming “European” interests are just the same as any other ethnicity, but also utilizes this in an attempt to re-politicize whiteness in a way that antagonizes white people against those of other races wanting to come to Canada. Figure 2 rests on the alleged separation of racism from racist self-interest by calling the latter “common sense” for those of non-white ethnicities, while Figure 3 is explicitly used to generate concern over the fact that being White is not as politicized as being Black, being Hispanic, or being Asian. While they use different discursive means, their discursive ends dovetail in trying to generate concern over “unfair” social treatment of white people, and their seeming inability or unwillingness to address this disparity.

The crisis of representation at work in these texts and images is that “whiteness” is ultimately under threat. As Berry, Ebner and Cornelius (2019, p. 4) have argued, drawing on this kind of discourse attempts to invoke a “shared history and collective experience of socioeconomic privilege and dominance [that] have fostered a sense of linked fate among whites.” More specifically, by drawing attention to the fact that whites are not allowed to defend their collective interests—because of “political correctness” and other discursive barriers—a panic ensues over the erosion of whites’ social status (Pratto, Siadnus & Levin, 2006). In sum, these are attempts to establish that whites currently have something they should be afraid of losing. Research in the United States strongly supports the notion that Donald Trump’s campaigning invoked a felt loss of status among white people (particularly white working-class men) and was a key factor behind his eventual victory (Sides, Tesler & Vavreck, 2018).

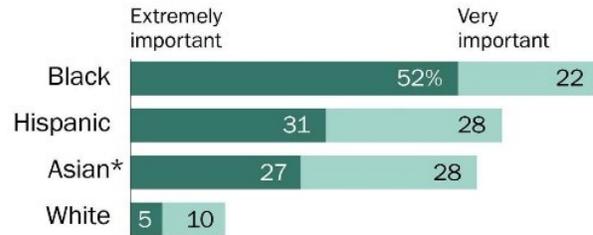


Apparently it's racist for whites to want to oppose the colonisation of their homelands, for everyone else, it's called common sense!

Figure 2. “Diversity is a codeword for #WhiteGenocide.” Originally posted by @TweetforBritain, August 1, 2019. Retweet has since been deleted or hidden.

Blacks are more likely than other groups to see their race or ethnicity as central to their identity

% of each group saying being ___ is extremely or very important to how they think about themselves



*Asians were interviewed in English only.
 Note: Whites, blacks and Asians include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 22-Feb. 5, 2019.

Pew Research Center 

Figure 3. “It’s hard for whites to understand just how central race is to other ethnicities.” Originally posted by @StefanMolyneux, July 26, 2019. Original post has since been deleted or hidden.

Importantly, this logic is not unique to the Canadian context. In Kaufmann’s study of racial self-interest in the United Kingdom and the United States. Some of his respondents, who participated in his study through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk, claim that racial self-interest is different than racism.

Racist would imply that they think that their racial group is somewhat superior. Racial self-interest implies the person simply wants more people of their own race.

Racism is a hatred towards a race in general, but in these examples [study vignettes] with wanting an advantage for their race is self-serving in a way but doesn’t depict hatred towards another group.

Racism is treating another person badly because of their race. Racial self-interest is wanting what is best for your group as long as it does not harm another group.

I don't believe there's anything wrong with supporting and loving your race and wanting there to be more people of your race in the country where you live. I think

racism only comes alive when you think your race is better than others and you begin to put down, judge and demean other races different from your own.

I don't think that wanting more of your own race to immigrate to this country is racist. People identify and relate to members of their race best. It is natural to want more members of your own race to be near you.
(Kauffman, 2017, pp. 56-57)

These kinds of quotes illustrate the ways in which that whiteness is discursively stripped of the institutional and largely invisible privileges it confers on its bearers, making it equivalent to any other kind of racialization. This allows it to become an object of antagonistic re-politicization (as we will see in the following section) while simultaneously letting its users deflect or avoid accusations of being racist. Once again, the discursive fulcrum enabling this is the meaning of racism being narrowed to an extremely specific, irrational form of overt hatred or discrimination towards others solely based on their race. To “act in the best interest” of white people is, to these publics, not racist because it is not overtly hateful towards other groups. For members of both IWC and ID Canada, it is about love for one’s own rather than hate for others.

By trying to divorce “whiteness” from discourses of hate, racism and irrationality, these publics establish an important springboard for all kinds of claims-making that takes place in the materials and online discourses of both organizations. Perhaps the most glaring is that by isolating whiteness in this way, members of both ID Canada and IWC grant themselves license to call policies around immigration, diversity, multiculturalism, and others (e.g. affirmative action) as “racist” against white people. Couched in this legitimizing logic, these claims become much more aggressive and defensive, politicizing whiteness in ways that create crises of representation of the white Canadian of European descent. Consider the following comments from IWC’s Facebook page.

Professor Duchesne is a realist, not a racist. The action that is most used by those who want to shut up your comments is to pull out the racist card. The reality is that the policy foisted upon all Western nations is allegedly the celebration of Diversity which means the celebration of differences. To achieve those "differences" race based immigration is utilized. Oh, it is not called that but the "choice" by the Federal Government of favouring non-European sources of immigrants just happens to work that way. Ergo, Diversity as a policy is racist. Racist against the white European ethnicity. (Comment 580)

Wanna see racism? Let's look at immigration statistics for the last two years and see what races are being favoured. (Comment 825)

The "racists" are in fact all those foreign peoples who barge into an already-occupied country and take over the government and institutions of the Founding Peoples of that country, which the Founders need to survive by preserving their OWN culture, their OWN legal and political heritage, thus pushing them aside, stealing their self-government, leaving them with nothing except RACIAL AND CULTURAL GENOCIDE. That's REAL "racism". (Comment 2517)

[Regarding a White South African family being denied refugee status] GEE WHAT A SURPRISE! ANTI WHITE RACISM BEING PRACTISED OPENLY IN CANADA AND BY OUR OWN GOVERNMENT!!! THE GREAT INCLUSIVE TRUDEAU. THIS IS HOW LIBERALS OPERATE. WE HAVE GOT TO THROW THESE SCUM SUCKING LIBERALS OUT OF OFFICE BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE. (Comment 2698)

Diversity is racism against white people (Comment 9431)

[On a racialized group not wanting to speak to a white reporter] Really? White people don't experience racism? Just as a white person cannot speak from a person of colour's perspective, neither can a person of colour speak from a Caucasian perspective... Stop the hypocritical double standard wherein anyone can discriminate and harass Caucasians but if the same treatment were shown to persons of immigrant background, the Caucasians would be up on criminal charges. If we were to demand safe spaces free from minorities, I am certain you would be one of those yelling discrimination the loudest. If an all white group had turned away an ethnic reporter, I think we are all familiar with the melee that would ensue. (Comment 11228)

In effect, these commenters are using discursively isolated whiteness to “flip the script” against those looking to enact policies promoting diversity or immigration. Those advocates, say these commenters, are the *real* racists, because they systematically impede and/or erode the

culture and heritage that white Canadians of European descent have already established within Canadian borders. For these commenters (particularly the last one, who is comparatively quite eloquent), it is not only possible to be racist against white people, but there is currently a crisis in place where whites—precisely because they are not seen as an ethnicity just like any other—are subject to discrimination and harassment that minorities are protected from by law.

In short, the uncoupling logic of “racial self-interest \neq racism” and its more defensive applications, as we see here, is the legitimatizing thrust behind the populist mobilization of these cases. Anti-elitist and nationalist claims around the protection of Canada are rooted in a crisis of representation surrounding *whiteness* that is being harmed, eroded and targeted by elites and racialized/ethnic minorities, but that white people are not allowed to defend or protect. By uncoupling racial self-interest from racism, the members of these publics see themselves as correcting this latter injustice, encouraging their fellow white Canadians to understand themselves as revanchist *subjects* alarmed at status lost due to policies encouraging “diversity.” The specific dynamics and discourses that construct the revanchist subject are mapped in the following section.

Fragility and Revanchism: Protecting Canadian whiteness

I claim that members of these groups don a revanchist subjectivity. At the heart of this quest to recover lost status is Robin DiAngelo’s oft-used concept of white fragility. White fragility, DiAngelo (2011, p. 54) claims, is “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive of moves [including the] the outward display of anger, fear, and guilt...to reinstate white racial equilibrium.” White fragility, DiAngelo states, is essentially grounded in the collective ignorance of white privilege as an

organizing force in social relations, and allows whites to “[disavow] race as an organizing factor, both of individual white consciousness and the institutions of society at large (ibid, p. 60). As I have shown above, the political logics found within these cases equate whiteness to other forms of racial self-interest through the taken-for-granted premise that to do so is *not* reproducing unequal power relations. Indeed, ignoring or denying the racial power dynamics between whites and racialized groups is necessary for one to feel justified in defending the collective white interest. For these groups, for whom whiteness is a race or ethnicity like any other, whites need to conserve their collective interests because they are the *only* race/ethnicity not to do so.

The revanchist subject is located at the intersection of intersecting horizontal and vertical antagonisms (Aslandis, 2017; Brubaker, 2017; Ostiguy & Roberts, 2016) that triangulate a hypersensitive, justified and self-assured white subject with very low “tolerances” of “racial stress.” Nationalism and populism resonate with each other because of what Brubaker (2019, p. 6) calls the “productive polysemy of ‘the people’—denoting at once plebs, demos and nation” capable of linking the shared fate of a specifically defined group (often done racially or ethnically) to the actions of a cultural elite. While nationalism defines who belongs to the nation (and why they belong), populism focuses on restoring the sovereignty of that nation by overthrowing rulers, elites or politicians perceived to threaten their status.

As one example of this, ID Canada states that mainstream Canadian politicians are “traitors” to the country, and that “[w]e [descendants of Europeans] are the rightful heirs to this nation, not those who come here to reap the benefits of our social assistance, healthcare, education and most importantly – the labours and sacrifices of our forefathers” (ID Canada, 2019). In saying this, they fuse horizontal with vertical antagonisms within their public by tapping into the polysemy of “the People” – the people are “real Canadians” whose ancestors

came to Canada. As such, they have the only legitimate claim to belonging to the nation, and that claim is under attack by leaders under the guise of “diversity.”

Additionally, populism and nationalism resonate because they are *restorative* rather than *transformative* frameworks of meaning (Brubaker, 2019, p. 6). We saw, for example, that even the Council of Canadians’ more inclusive brand of civic nationalism wants to *restore* “progress as usual” by removing corporate barriers to collective prosperity. Again, when ID Canada says that it wants to restore “Canada to its former glory” and that “diversity is our greatest weakness,” it is invoking antagonisms against both elites and immigrants while simultaneously fusing them to a felt loss, a lack, by which “we” (i.e., “Old Stock” Canadians) *had* something that is now being eroded. Such is the revanchist subject called upon to protect and defend the whiteness that has now come under attack by immigrants wanting to “reap the benefits” of Western society, and elites that are all too happy to orchestrate this arrangement.

Revanchist themes

To translate the above logic into a revanchist subject, ID Canada and IWC have slightly contrasting strategies, but both feed into a wider strategy of interlocking horizontal and vertical antagonisms by dovetailing discourses of populism and nationalism. I will first briefly outline how each case advances the revanchist subject independently, then move on to how these smaller publics dovetail into how cultural elites are responsible for “decaying whiteness” in the Canadian context, and how *purity populism* claims to reverse this decay by preserving the “culture” and “values” of the Canadian ethnic majority.

ID Canada

Like the populist mobilizations in other cases, these publics operate by using a language of catastrophe grounded in a certain crisis of representation. The latter, in this case, is that whiteness (and the benefits that it confers) is under threat, and whites are not “allowed” to do anything about it. The language of catastrophe here varies slightly across the two cases, but they share a common function in linking horizontal antagonisms—placing white “ethnic Canadians” against immigrants—to vertical antagonisms by framing immigration as an “invasion” of the nation carried out by self-interested cultural elites. For ID Canada, the most prevalent unique themes in the discourses they circulate are *disrespecting the past* and *hard to be white*. In the first theme, the past is consecrated as an example of what we should be trying to build in the future—a hallmark of populist mobilization (Jansen, 2015; Freedon, 2017). Usually, these references are conflated with war or conflict, and try to monopolize the interpretation of actions by Canadian soldiers that served in both World Wars. Consider the following tweets:

75 years ago today, the 3rd Canadian infantry division stormed the bloody sands of Juno beach in hopes of creating a better world. Today, we should all ask ourselves if they'd be proud of the Canada we've become? #DefendCanada #IDCanada #DDay

Back when we were part of a bigger family of nations, when we had Empire Day, Dominion Day, the old Red Ensign, the old anthem, when we still remembered who we were. These men could never dream of what we would become in a mere century.

Point is, the left will tell us those kids died for a "nation of immigrants". They'll chew us out for politicizing Vimy Ridge and in the same breath will do the exact same thing under the guise of "diversity" and "progress". Shameful.

Happy Dominion Day to all! Our nation is all but lost and no one seems to care. Slap on those red shorts and hit the town to rejoice in the destruction of our once great nation. Remember, diversity is our greatest strength!

Beautiful words by our PM @JustinTrudeau. Too bad by tomorrow morning he'll be back to selling out our nation, neglecting our vets and replacing old stock Euro-Canadians with his friends from around the world. Stand on those graves some more, Justin. Diversity is our weakness.

Some ungrateful individuals yet again vandalized this [Confederation] statue. This is the second time we've cleaned this very same statue after #antifa desecrated it. Alberta boys knew what they had to do.

These tweets exemplify the most common strategies used by the leadership of ID Canada to catastrophize the loss of whiteness in the Canadian context. Most critically, they dovetail the glorification of war with whiteness, such that honoring the memories of fallen soldiers is equated to having White/European pride. By establishing this link, the inverse is also true: disrespecting whiteness per the above political logic (i.e., racial self-interest is not racism) means disrespecting those who “defended” Canada. Of course, Canada in this sense is narrowly defined through a nationalist frame as a British colony belonging to European descendants. This is accomplished both by explicitly denying that soldiers fought on behalf of a diverse society, and claiming that elites like Justin Trudeau disrespect their memory through policies promoting immigration and diversity.

The intent here, by coupling images and discourses of war and soldiers with that of whiteness, is to infuse the latter with the consecration of war/military found in Canadian culture (Keelan, 2016). In doing so, they more readily cite the alleged “destruction of our once great nation” that, at the same time, is attached to both reverence for the past—a *white* past. The final tweet in this set reflects another, less used but parallel strategy that serves the same end: those who vandalize or disrespect statues representing confederation, or the military are “ungrateful” for the sacrifices of white/European colonists and soldiers. Of course, being ungrateful to Canadian history is to also be ungrateful towards all the “progress” that white people have accomplished. As geographers Sheehan and Speights-Binet (2019, p. 362) illustrate in the United States, such historical monuments are fundamentally linked to white fragility and revanchism through the use of deferential discourses. When there are calls to “respect” statues that are

vandalized or protested, the white fragility woven into the physical landscape is elicited and wielded by whites who feel threatened by resistance to symbols of racialized and/or colonial oppression. This allows members of counterpublics such as ID Canada to elicit outrage from members, used as a call-to-arms of sorts to regain Canada's lost (white) cultural dominance in a revanchist way.

ID Canada also regularly discusses how difficult life supposedly is for white people living in Canada. In accordance with the logic of racial self-interest \neq racism, policies that are perceived to work against the collective interests of white people are *actual* racism, since whiteness is an ethnicity like any other. The following tweets indicate how ID Canada feels whites are allegedly discriminated against in Canada.

Moreover, there are laws in Canada that are designed to make it more difficult for white people to find jobs. It's called employment equity, and it's a great example of racism against whites covered under the guise of "progress".

Due to affirmative action, white students require higher grades than minorities to get into university. #MyWhitePrivilege

#MyWhitePrivilege doesn't exist. #MinorityPrivilege on the hand, is very real. It's so real, that even the government has passed legislation to ensure both its existence and enforcement. Wake up.

[On an LGBT individual grandstanding at a pride parade] Any of the other days of the year that don't fall under pride month, this pervert would be arrested. Shameful that being part of a privileged class allows you to break the law due to fears of police being called homophobic.

[On a Facebook post of Antifa blocking Bernier supporters being removed] No surprise. This is typical anti-white, marxist propaganda aimed at dismantling non-existent "white privilege" from a decaying society. These people are on the wrong side of history. We know that much. (July / August, 2019)

This theme is a more straightforward corollary of the political logic I outlined in the previous section. When whiteness is understood as a form of racialization or ethnicity on equal

footing with other ethnicities, groups like ID Canada gain purchase to perceive policies promoting diversity/immigration as an *attack* on whiteness. There is an entitlement and comfort in calling such policies *racist* against whites. Though far less common, we also see an example of anti-LGBT sentiments that follow the same logic: belonging to a member of a sexual minority confers certain “privileges” lacked by the heterosexual majority. Alongside the theme of disrespecting the past, what we see here is the attempted communication that whiteness is something that both *deserves respect* or deference and is simultaneously *under attack*. This is the heart of ID Canada’s contribution towards building the revanchist subject; whites need to respect their existing whiteness, and to understand it as something that is in peril, at the hands of elites and government that continue to push diversity and “anti-white” policies. Only then can they truly understand the need, and urgency, to regain that lost ground.

IWC

Immigration Watch Canada has two themes closely related to those of ID Canada, once again, designed to establish whiteness as something to be jealously guarded and protected. By far the most common unique themes to the IWC include *theft by foreigners* and *media conspiracy*. In contrast to ID Canada’s Tweets (their Facebook page was banned or removed before I started the research for this project), these themes come from both the IWC website and Facebook comments.

Theft by foreigners is self-explanatory and a familiar xenophobic discourse. It seeks to antagonistically re-politicize immigration policies widely understood as compassionate or good (Brubaker, 2017; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). This theme claims that immigration to Canada drains resources with the most common being healthcare, an especially effective symbol as the

most symbolically cherished policy tied to Canadian identity (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2010). One especially striking narrative on the IWC website is written by a website subscriber on how his mother “lost her faith” in the public healthcare system; a system that is supposed to care and protect for its citizens. Interestingly, although race is never overtly mentioned in the article, the accompanying picture makes it quite clear who is included in the term “immigrant”.

The caption, “Hospital Immigrants start lining up to collect Socialized Medicine,” is intentionally linked to a waiting room full of people of colour. Consider this picture next to Figure 5, also included in the article discussing how our healthcare system is already stressed enough without the influx of immigrants “lining up” to encroach on healthcare.



Figure 4. “Hospital Immigrants start lining up to collect Socialized Medicine.” Retrieved from <https://immigrationwatchcanada.org/2018/09/21/the-night-my-mother-lost-her-faith-in-socialized-medicine-for-immigrants/>

In figure 5 (below), we have what seems to be whites suffering as the result of inadequate healthcare. Whether intentional or not, there is a clear juxtaposition between haves (in this case, immigrants of colour) and the have nots (white Canadians who “pay into the system”). Further, this is explicitly framed as a zero-sum arrangement; the author makes it clear that every dollar put into healthcare for immigrants is a dollar *taken away* from the white majority. Hence, I refer to this theme as theft by foreigners, rather than “strain” or “encroachment”. As the author states:

“[My parents] worked hard and paid their taxes, only to see people who had never put a nickel into the system bumped to the head of the queue...Milton Friedman once said that you can have mass immigration or you can have the welfare state. But you can't have both.”

This zero-sum antagonism between the white majority and immigrants also appears in areas other than healthcare. In each case, there is a loss suffered by whites at the hands of immigrants. One popular area of complaint is jobs—immigrants coming to Canada “steal jobs” from hardworking Canadian citizens. This is a rather tired but popular narrative used to rationalize keeping immigrants out of Canada to “protect” the white majority. IWC argues quite staunchly that current immigration levels are unsustainable in part because too many Canadians are losing their jobs to foreigners, and that refugee programs are little more than “social assistance/job finding programs for people from other countries” (IWC, “Intro”).

The IWC's use of stock stereotypes and tired narratives extends to other areas of social programming as well. Consider the following paragraph that claims there are serious flaws with how SINs are distributed in Canada.

Social Insurance Numbers and the possession of a SIN card conveyed the impression that the holder was legitimately in Canada, but SIN numbers were easy to obtain. Many illegals had more than one. One had 50. A Toronto lawyer tested the system by applying for a SIN number for his dog and got one. Widespread fraud was still occurring even after the supposed backlog had been cleaned up. Illegals were taking jobs from legals in times of high unemployment, and collecting welfare and UI. Tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of people continued to remain and work in Canada with small prospect of detection. (“For Remembrance Day, 2019”)

Validity of these “facts” aside (I was unable to find any proof, for example, that a dog was able to acquire a SIN, and we are expected to take the author's word for it), we see the continued theme of an inherently zero-sum arrangement between the Canadian (white) majority and

immigrants entering the Canadian system with the full intent to become little more than leeches on an already-strained system.



Figure 5. “Hallway medicine is a reality in many Canadian hospitals.” Retrieved from <https://immigrationwatchcanada.org/2018/09/21/the-night-my-mother-lost-her-faith-in-socialized-medicine-for-immigrants/>

There are several more examples throughout the website, but for reasons of space, I will refrain from quoting them here. They all have in common the allegation that foreigners are actively and intently *stealing* from white Canadians. Indeed, the members of IWC are eager to air related complaints on the Facebook page.

[On diverting money towards clearing asylum claims] YOU'RE ASKING FOR MORE THAN WE CAN GIVE. HONESTLY. REALLY. TRUTHFULLY. WE DO NOT HAVE IT. (Comment 16)

[On refugees entering the country and asking for aid] They are bankrupting us! How about money for our veterans, our homeless and our elderly???

 (Comment 93)

[On a Mahmoud Jaballah suing the Canadian government for wrongful imprisonment] Another welfare Migrant wanting a free ride. (Comment 8220); The lawyer doing this pro bono should be hung. (Comment 8221); Go the fuck back home than [*sic*] (Comment 8222).

Get thefuckout of our country and go back to ur sand traps were sick of paying for ur welfare already (Comment 8378)

[On temporary visas given to family of a refugee seeker with cancer]
Really.....sure come to Canada for free everything....he .will never get a job or pay taxes.....a welfarer for life (Comment 9890)

While not a particularly large theme on the IWC Facebook page, these comments (among others) do indicate that followers accept this sort of zero-sum equation between immigrants and refugees and white Canadians. These comments are much more likely to do away with the mere *suggestion* that the zero-sum game is played between whites and non-whites, as we saw in the above pictures on healthcare, and devolve into overt racism (e.g. “go back to your sand traps”).

Another fairly present theme is that of *media conspiracy* insofar as the media writ large—especially the CBC, as a publicly-funded corporation—are coordinating to advance an agenda of “political correctness” that privileges immigrants and refugees while white Canadians are not allowed to speak out or even feel upset over rapid demographic change. This theme connects to *theft by foreigners* insofar as that whites are expected to simply “sit back” and allow foreigners to continue siphoning resources that “we” support through taxation. Perhaps the most striking example of IWC’s conviction of media conspiracy is their discussion of housing unaffordability in Canada, which they claim is due to high immigration rates.

With ample justification, we would argue that the CBC’s betrayal of Canada’s majority population amounts to criminal behaviour. At the very least, CBC suppression of the truth has withheld information that could have substantially mitigated the injury done to Canada’s majority population. This sin of omission has severely damaged and even destroyed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in Canada’s majority population. (“CBC is a Quisling Organization”)

Another especially powerful example is one that is so urgent that it is written out entirely in capital letters, and calls for nothing less than the deaths of CBC employees and officials.

THE CBC HAS BECOME A MORAL CESSPOOL. IT COULD AND SHOULD BE WHAT OUR CBC FOUNDERS CREATED IT TO BE : A NOBLE PROTECTOR OF CANADA AND CANADIANS. INSTEAD, IT HAS BECOME

A TREACHEROUS HYPOCRITE. IT HAS PROMOTED THE IMMIGRATION INDUSTRY'S IDEOLOGY THAT CANADA AND CANADIANS SHOULD COMMIT CULTURAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUICIDE. BULLETS WOULD BE TOO QUICK AN END TO THE LIVES OF THOSE IN THE CBC MORAL CESSPOOL!! ("CBC = Canada's Broadcasting Cesspool")

These examples capture the essence of this theme, in which some media organization (usually the CBC, but CTV, the Globe & Mail, and Google are also occasional offenders) knowingly suppresses some "truth" that would be understood as politically incorrect and therefore unacceptable. These "truths" are always about what is *really* causing various social, economic and policy problems: immigrants and refugees. Emboldened by the notion that whites are an ethnicity like any other, it becomes unacceptable for IWC members that whites are expected to "commit economic suicide" at the hands of immigrants, and that corporations like the CBC are actively encouraging this. IWC members and subscribers also lend their online voices the notion that the CBC conspires to distribute leftist propaganda.

The 600 million for 5 years for news outlets is working. In any other country it would be called dictatorship with government run news media. (Comment 107)

[On Islamic terrorism] Canadian media have scrubbed this from our news. The Australian govt has made a major about-face in policies toward terrorists. (Comment 120)

[On French anti-globalist rallies] Canadian media continue to put a damper on these events. (Comment 153)

CBC Corrupt Broadcasting Corporation is leaching off the taxpayer...they will only spin the stories they want and will NOT report anything else (Comment 1401)

TIME TO DEFUND CBC - Trudeau's Muslim Propaganda Machine! (Comment 2200)

The CBC has always been the propaganda rag for the left. Why not they support each other. Just more of the same old same old. (Comment 4972)

Often, such comments are accompanied by others that talk about the “UN Globalist Agenda” being pushed by the likes of Justin Trudeau, and how the CBC is little more than his “puppet” used to filter anti-immigrant sentiments that are gaining traction around the world. Considering the IWC’s work next to that of ID Canada, it seems that ID Canada is more likely to unapologetically value cultural purity *in its own right* in line with being an *identarian* movement. While IWC does dabble with the cultural effects of immigration, more attention is afforded to policies and resources over which immigrants are trying desperately to wrestle from the hands of Canada’s ethnic majority and used for their own benefit. While ID Canada approaches the construction of the revanchist subject from cultural identity, we might say IWC helps to triangulate this by approaching it from a materialist angle, focusing on the distribution of wealth and policies “disadvantaging” the white majority at the hands of immigrants. Importantly, while the two organizations contrast slightly in these ways, they both contribute to the welding of populist vertical antagonisms to nationalist horizontal ones.

Horizontal + vertical: the planned ‘invasion’ of Canada

Where ID Canada and IWC connect is the discursive welding of antagonisms along both vertical and horizontal axes. In their proposed framework on understanding how populism and nationalism connects, De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017, p. 312) encourage scholars to examine four points of mutual discursive articulation: (1) the “nodal point of chain of equivalence”, (2) the offered subject-position, (3) the outside constitutive to this subject-position, and the (4) orientation of relation between the nodal point and antagonisms that constitute the subject.

Where populism and nationalism meet, they discuss “the people” as nation *and* underdog (the nodal points) citizens belong to both “the nation” *and* “the people” (subject position) and are

antagonized by immigrants/non-citizens *and* members of the elite (outside constitutive). Last, while populism creates vertical, down/up antagonisms concerning power struggles, nationalism creates horizontal membership conditions related to citizenship, identity, and shared territory. Here, I pay special attention to how these groups antagonize the self-constructed “people-nation” (white Canadians) against progressive elites looking to promote diversity and inclusivity.

Recall that the ability to fuse both horizontal and vertical antagonisms is foremost a function of the justification brought about by the political logic that racial *self-interest* is separate from racism. Within this logic, the populist mobilizers in both ID Canada and IWC are entitled to “call out” progressive politicians for planning the systematic invasion of Canada for personal gain. This takes the form of denouncing politicians who act as if white, “ethnic Canadians” lack a collective identity or culture in the ways that other ethnicities demonstrate the latter. ID Canada, for their part, often pins blame of the alleged loss of white identity on progressive/cultural elites, most commonly Justin Trudeau, but other political leaders as well. The following tweets are a cross-section of this sentiment.

But our prime minister says we have no identity and no culture. My family is full of identity and culture and we're proud of it #TrudeauMustGo

[To Andrew Scheer] Can you shut the hell up already? You conserve nothing. You're a globalist like any other. A traitor to Canada. At least Trudeau's slogan is four words - "Diversity is our strength". Your verbal diarrhea is a re-hashed version of the same crap, but much more tiresome to read.

[On Bernier's desire to reduce immigration by 50k per year] A slower replacement of ethnic Canadians - but a replacement nonetheless. Even Bernier's numbers simply aren't good enough.

[In reply to nationalism's negative connotations] We love your implication that "nationalistic" is a bad thing. Imagine supporting a PM and government that doesn't support its own nation and constituents who elected them.

[On the 2018 attack of a Ceremonial Guard] Knife attack today on Parliament Hill. Two attacks on Canada in less than 24 hours. This is the future we should expect in @JustinTrudeau 's Canada. #DefendCanada

These tweets, first, directly link the fate of the people-nation to the leader, and second, try to mobilize support by implying that all major Canadian parties are “traitorous”, turning their backs on the whiteness that they are supposed to protect and support by acting as the voice of the people. While these tweets explicitly position the likes of Justin Trudeau, Andrew Scheer, and even Maxime Bernier against the collective interest of Old Stock Canadians (as “the people”), they implicitly position white Canadians against immigrants by concern over order *and* identity, as seen in the first and last tweets. Indeed, infusing a concern for both economic and social order with a sense of nativism is a common right-wing populist tactic seen in other countries like the UK and the US (Aslandis, 2017; Ostiguy & Roberts, 2016; Tufts & Thomas, 2014), and ID Canada is not unique in this respect. Elites like Trudeau are supposedly suppressing the explication and ownership over whiteness that is an ethnicity and culture, like any other, that they allege should be celebrated. It is especially telling that they accuse the Conservative Party of Canada of “conserving nothing”, allowing runaway diversification of Canada’s racial and ethnic demographic. Together, these tweets illustrate how ID Canada welds horizontal to vertical antagonisms, discursively triangulating the true, *pure* people that are victimized at the hands of a corrupted elite looking to undermine the demographic power of whites (Mudde, 2007).

Members of the IWC replicate these sentiments, but do so in ways that pin blame on Trudeau for orchestrating an “invasion” of Canada. Indeed, the most-liked comments on the IWC’s Facebook page lament Trudeau as a traitor, or an orchestrator of white Canadians’ ultimate demise.

Trudeaus mental illness and insane open border policies put all Canadians under life threatening conditions every day. As it has played out in Ottawa, Edmonton and Toronto. (Comment 14)

“Canada is a country where we encourage people to speak out and express their views and express their preoccupations,” he told reporters. What a laugh that is! He shows zero respect for anyone who disagrees with him. Name calling - "racist", "bigot" and the like. And now he's asking for respect? 100,000 is not a small number, and they reflect an even wider consensus against him - as he will find out next October. Respect, Justin? To get it, you have to give it - and you don't! (Comment 21)

It's NO LONGER immigration. Now it's INVASION !! (Comment 44)

2 world wars mean nothing????? my father and uncles fought for our freedom.....with borders!!!! (Comment 145)

Justin has facilitated Islamic power in Canada from day one in office--both internationally with billions in giveaways, and domestically with the placement of Islamic supremacists into govt. He is the ultimate internal enemy. Basically the Saudis stole the guy from under govt's nose and got away with it. Big Surprise there. (Comment 164)

[On Trudeau and Immigration Minister Ahmen Hussen] If people don't stand up to these two traitors we will loose not only our identity but our freedoms. Canada is on the way to becoming a communist Muslim state and people have to realize what is happening and do something to stop it or this country will never be the same again. (Comment 188)

Many more comments—too numerous to list here—continue to denounce Trudeau as a treasonous “internal enemy,” accusing him of placing the liberty and identity of white Canadians at risk. Like the previous tweets, these comments are a pretty clear form of discursive welding of “the people” against both cultural elites *and* racialized/immigrant communities. For IWC, there seems to be a streak of overt Islamophobia absent from ID Canada’s literature and social media discussions. What they share with ID Canada, however, is the construction of a “pure” people-nation that is at risk of dilution, erosion, and loss at the hands of elites that are trying to change Canadian demography for self-gain. This purity, conflated with whiteness in these tweets and

comments, and in the unique themes found in both cases, is at the root of what I have been calling *purity populism* – a distinctive kind of populist mobilization that welds vertical and horizontal antagonisms to create a deeply victimized and threatened group of whites who feel they have something worth protecting, and want others to understand this, too.

Further, we can clearly see how purity populism leads to a revanchist subject. The links between nationalism and populism found in these comments are designed to construct a fundamentally revanchist subject by identifying both horizontal and vertical attacks that conspire to attack, replace, and subordinate *whiteness* grounded within the justification that none of this, of course, is *racist*. The loss of both tangible (healthcare, social services) and intangible (culture, values, social order) benefits associated with whiteness justifies not only defensive discourse, but offensive and aggressive claims that “we” must protect whiteness. This kind of subject is revanchist at its core because any policies or discourse perceived to promote diversity or multiculturalism is understood as a direct attack, in this framework, on a whiteness *already* under attack. This is above and beyond what DiAngelo (2011) originally identified as white fragility, since whites are past the mere intolerance of racial salience and called upon to advance it in ways that privilege whiteness. An old military adage aptly summarizes the revanchist subject constructed by both publics: “the best defense is a good offense.” I now expand upon the construction of the revanchist subject by framing these discursive tactics as strategies for building counter-publics.

Creating a pure counter-public: Race-consciousness in digital space

Critical race theorists have discussed the construction of “race-conscious spaces” in universities (e.g. guest lectures, courses, clubs and groups) that place racialized othering and inequality at the

forefront of the public imagination, eliciting responses of white fragility such as defensiveness (“But I’m not racist”), mitigation (“We all have problems”), moderation (“Things are much better now than they used to be”), or simply leaving the area due to discomfort (Cabrera 2014, 2018; Liebow & Glazer, 2019; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). Race-conscious spaces are typically spaces in which racial inequality is discussed openly, and where white people are told—either subtly or explicitly—to try and be aware of their privileges when speaking and existing within these spaces. This is what is typically meant by race-consciousness. In the cases presented in this chapter, what we witness is the construction of a “race-conscious space”, but one that inverts the usual goal of the concept. It is a race-conscious “digital public” (Johnston, Johnston, Sanscartier & Ramsay, 2019), in which members are allowed, and indeed encouraged, to feel protective of their whiteness and collective dominance. Whites that exist within the space defend their whiteness and do so with the sense that what they have is eroding. They are, as I have explained above, hyperfragile. Further, those who do not defend their whiteness are antagonistically re-politicized into a revanchist subject. The race-conscious digital public is key to accomplishing this.

To construct this kind of race-conscious counter-public, social media is appropriated by these groups as a kind of denunciatory technology (Sanscartier, 2017b), which I have argued is a mechanism allowing actors to infuse *the* public with problematic qualities that demand action. As I have shown in the first part of this chapter, in this case it is unprecedented “racism” against whites. Rooted in the political logic of “racial self-interest ≠ racism”, denouncing politicians and progressives that promote diversity or inclusion constructs the broader public as a broadly *progressive* race-conscious space that is ultimately hostile and unwelcoming to whites, who are expected to constantly accommodate minorities (culturally and financially) without ever

receiving anything in return. For the members of these groups, to argue against or criticize this trend is seen as taboo or racism, and unrightfully so. By using denunciatory technology to criticize this state of the broader public, members of ID Canada and IWC sift out *white* counter-publics by dovetailing whiteness with antagonisms against an increasingly race-conscious, diverse, and inclusive public sphere. Even though these groups exist only online, they allow whiteness and white dominance to become a “talk-about-able objects that function as tokens in public conversations of broader issues within contemporary offline society” (Steinkuehler, 2006, p. 97).

According to Dean (2001, pp. 627-628), publicity and distrust are two side of one coin; publicity is required because of distrust in our social institutions and agents, and, reminiscent of Rosanvallon (2008), distrust is required as a counter-democratic guard against despotism and abuse of power. For ID Canada and IWC, their use of denunciatory technology does not only target those in power, which is a strategy we saw in chapter two’s analysis of paranoid populism. Rather, by denouncing both politicians *and* the immigrants that the former allow to “invade” Canada—and, therefore, welding horizontal to vertical antagonisms—they plant the seeds of distrust in non-white communities, which are framed as working together with politicians to become the ethnic majority. This is not a unique strategy to Canadian white nationalists. A similar tactic was used by Donald Trump during the 2016 Presidential campaigns, when he gave legitimacy to myths of terrorist training camps being established within U.S. territories, breeding white distrust of Muslims and other racialized minorities by saying “we’re going to be looking at that and plenty of other things” (Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2016, pp. 75-76).

The upshot of all this is that ID Canada and IWC are digital publics which allow members to *believe* in the Zizekian sense of the term—they “[exteriorize] belief in larger cultural

practices and technologies” (Dean, 2001, p. 628)—in this case, denunciatory technologies that constantly create enemies out of those *above* and *against* whiteness. While it is morally tempting to view members of these counter-publics as just individual racists posting on the internet, the act of denouncing online links these individuals to counterpublics that are firmed up by the institutional functions of denunciation as a social practice (Rosanvallon, 2008, p. 42). Indeed, in the very *act* of denouncing compelled by distrust, individuals are connected to wider discursive circulations by acting *as if* white dominance is under attack and *as if* white Canadians are discriminated against, irrespective of whether these things are empirically verifiable.

Denunciation in this context works to simultaneously frame and condemn the actions of elites and minorities as being *against whites*, and substitutes knowledge (the domain of social science, critical race pedagogy, and other epistemologies) with a collective, embodied fantasy shared via online denunciation. Therefore, it is irrelevant if a lawyer’s dog, for example, was able to acquire a SIN, or if the CBC really is pushing a conspiratorial, anti-white agenda. Most critically, it is *parables*, not *facts*, which matter to members of these digital publics. Members of populist counterpublics are animated by *faith* and *belief* rather than knowledge, parallel to how the wider public sphere maintains its permanence despite its phantasmal constitution (Dean, 2001). I discuss this at wider length in the final chapter.

This insight has serious implications for how sociologists approach populism, both conceptually and pragmatically. In both senses, it illustrates the need for sociology to adopt a more interpretive approach to populism by focusing on the meaning-making practices of individuals in the cases where populist mobilization occurs, something I have done both in this chapter as well the last three. While we may never actually achieve a unified approach to defining and analyzing populism, at the very least there needs to be a greater proportion of lenses

with *verstehen* as their main goal. I now turn to a more substantial discussion of how this manoeuvre would benefit the study of not only populist counterpublics as organizations, and social movements, but of the more mainstream types we see in countries like the United States and Western Europe. Additionally, I outline the three major strengths of the approach, and my hopes for how they could inform the study of populism in a broader way.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Whither Populism?

Populist counterpublics, recounted

In some ways, this dissertation is a plea to political sociologists to re-think the way they approach the study of populism, theoretically and empirically. I have presented the previous four chapters as examples of the analytic purchase gained when we avoid thinking of populism in the tired and routine ways the literature has produced over the last fifty years: as a set of essential/fundamental ideational features, a mobile/chameleonic set of core discourses, or a style emitted by a figurehead. We gain much more insight when we approach and respect the qualities already found in social contexts, rather than trying to extract from them, or read into them, specific features that scholars think of before reaching the field. In each of the cases in this dissertation, the importance of context is very clearly visible in the kind of political logics, popular subjectivities, and, ultimately, the quality of counterpublics that emerge from those two elements in tandem—what I understand as populist mobilization. Through a combination of anti-elitist and nationalist discourses, actors attempt to mobilize others using logics that instil crises of representation, and link individual problems to a collectively felt *lack* that motivates political actions, ranging from “chequebook activism” (CTF), rallies (ACORN), changing one’s consumption habits (the Council), and participating in online forums (IWC/ID Canada). In this final chapter, I discuss the ways in which a holistic, inductive and case-focused approach that leaves social contexts intact tells us some important things about “populism,” both conceptually and pragmatically.

Additionally, this approach has the benefit of respecting the work done by actors to make sense of their sociopolitical contexts, and their perspectives of how politics does or should work. In conjunction with a qualitative, case-focused approach, this interpretive take on what populist

mobilization is avoids characterizing it as a pathological force that “destroys” or “threatens” democracy. Nor does populism “hypnotize” uneducated or ignorant individuals via conspiracy and delusion. Rather, my approach starts from the understanding of populist mobilization as a fully legitimate kind of politics capable of re-politicizing a wide variety of issues, including those that would concern sociologists advocating for social justice. Populist mobilization, I have shown, is capable of animating action around inadequate social assistance as well as taxation. It can create support for movements that oppose corporations as well as spawn unsavory forms of politics that consecrate whiteness.

In short, the core thrust of this study is that we need to stop trying to pin down and neutralize populism as an entire political *genus* and begin thinking of it in terms of multiple *species*. The “species” of populism I have identified in these chapters—paranoid, pastoral, protective, and purity—received their names only because I have paid close attention to the contexts in which populist mobilization, as a genus of politics, manifests in radically different ways. We need a conceptual movement towards “form” while keeping *some* “content” to better understand how populist mobilization can be understood as a fluid organizational or collective performance. This will sensitize us, moving forward, to how the broader genus of populism changes in different sociopolitical environments, not unlike the biological adaptation of species in tune with their ecosystems. In what immediately follows, I identify three key properties of populist counterpublics in conjunction with a summary of the case material I presented over the previous four chapters. I then move on to a discussion of how these properties help open up new worlds of analysis and strategy for approaching populist movements that are seemingly ubiquitous in the modern political era.

Populist counterpublics: Key properties

Lateral analyses

The first property is that, by approaching “populism” as populist counterpublics, we can open up new angles of analysis by observing various case studies. I refer to these analytical angles as *lateral* because the conceptual anatomy of counterpublics accepts qualitative difference between different species of populism, unconcerned with trying to figure out *why* they fit (or do not fit) a pre-conceived holistic framework of what populism is. This latter approach, which I have argued characterizes most approaches to populism, is more *vertical* because of its logic of deduction and generalization: it starts by building a definition or a theory, then trying to apply it across cases. By holding just one feature of the cases constant—that they must engage in populist mobilization (see chapter two on case selection)—we gain considerable conceptual “breathing room” to explore the interesting features of each case.

Populism-as-genus, I have shown, contains multiple species that may appear, *prima facie*, unrelated. Paranoid and pastoral forms of populism, for example, have very little in common aside from the use of anti-elitist and nationalist rhetoric to animate support. The ideational, demographic and tangible bases of these organizations facilitate extremely different modalities of a common populist mobilization; Watchdogs, the subject of paranoid populism, are distant watchers interpolated via consumerist models of information. The CTF keeps donors and supporters on an “information drip” through quarterly magazines that show how their interests are being represented by this counter-democratic organization. ACORN, on the other hand, is interested in the “here and now”—trying to get into homes of potential members and firing them up about any number of problems they face in their own lives, guiding them into a “crusading” subjectivity.

This approach also alerts us to how the *forms* through which logics and subjectivities are circulated, and not just their contents, differ substantially. In his original formulation of populist mobilization, Jansen (2011, p. 80; 2015) notes that a key problem with much sociology on populism is that it assumes that ideas “translate unproblematically into political action.” By paying special attention to how logics and subjectivities are circulated within each case—both individually and in comparison—we can recover some of the complexity lost by the overly simplistic, nomothetic models that Jansen laments.

The logic and popular subjectivity underpinning the “watchdog” (the CTF), for example, is much more discursive in nature than other cases. A consumer-based model does not require supporters to do much else other than provide a periodic cheque or credit card information, and then to passively consume information to monitor government action. The IWC and ID Canada share this more discursive ontology of subjectivity, communicating to their followers from a distance. While members can participate in the digital publics these organizations provide online, there is little by way of tangible, physical activity. The mobilization tactics of the Council of Canadians, on the other hand, are also more discursive in nature but do require *some* (individual) action.

In chapter five, I discussed how the Council acts as more of a mediating mechanism for the multiplicity of *individual* acts carried out by members from the comfort of their homes—signing pledges, avoiding certain products, or writing letters to a representative. This form of mobilization dovetails with the content of the Council’s campaigns, which I explained reproduces a Habermasian faith in the public, and in democracy, to function “properly” once cleansed of corporate colonization. ACORN, in contrast, is a much more co-present and physical

form of mobilization that collectivizes and pastoralizes individuals, subsuming individuals into a “flock” with a more visceral, common destiny linked to social issues like affordable housing.

As the literature has already identified several times across several camps (Brett, 2013; Freedon, 2017; Laclau, 2005; Moffit & Tormey, 2014; Mudde, 2004; Pollock, Brock & Ellison, 2015; Wolseley, 1969), populism is orthogonal to the ideological axis: it crops up at the far left, centre-left, centre, centre-right, and far right of the political spectrum. The variety of forms I have identified here continue to acknowledge this “chameleonic nature” of populism that is fundamentally and “de facto constrained by [sociopolitical] context” (Taggart, 2002, p. 70). However, the cases in this dissertation extend this chameleonic quality to the *forms* of populist mobilization itself, not merely the content expressed in through those forms.

We should not, for example, assume that right-wing forms of populism will take on discursive, distant forms of mobilization while left-wing forms will tend to resemble the physical/pastoral form resembling ACORN. The Yellow Vest movement, primarily seen in Western Canada, relied on rhizomatic and informal mechanisms of communication/organization combining several grievances (anti-immigration, carbon tax, anti-globalism), all motivated by a feeling of being ignored by political elites (Hames, 2019). This right-wing form of populist mobilization, which crystallized around physical groupings of people, does not have a full analogy in any of the cases in this dissertation, but combines elements of both distant activism (people reading social media) and co-presence (physically attending rallies and protests). Therefore, I do not make any claim that certain forms and contents of populist mobilization have core, identifiable tendencies discernable across multiple contexts. Rather, we should treat the form and content of populist mobilizations as orthogonal, much like how the literature treats ideology and populism.

Analysis before judgement

The second key property of populist counterpublics is analysis before judgement. In this dissertation, I have been less concerned about what is “good” or “bad” by standards of social justice and the like, and more concerned about understanding political logics from the point of view of the actors in my case studies. By distancing ourselves from assumptions of the communicative and rational subject, we can approach various species of populism without the term’s “negative valence” that plagues other terminology such as “neoliberalism” (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009). The negative valence surrounding contemporary use of the term populism is that it disrupts rational communication (Waisbord, 2018a/b), belief in conspiracy theories (Fenster, 1999; Moore, 2016; Silva, Vegetti & Littvay, 2017) racism and xenophobia (Pollock, Brock & Ellison, 2015), or that it is caused by some kind of inherently regressive social development(s), including (but not limited to) the likes of neoliberalism, economic decline, the hyper-concentration of power, or the social isolation of individuals (Clarke & Newman, 2017; Pasquino, 2008; White, 2016). The result is that the presence of populism means we need to “worry about the current state of democracy in the West and beyond” (Kaltwasser & Taggart, 2016, p. 202).

But while some *species* of populist mobilization may be less desirable *morally* than others—I cannot fathom a mainstream (let alone critical) sociologist, for example, thinking white nationalist movements are a *good* thing—we should refrain from letting that judgement creep into our notions of populism-as-genus. Populism as a genus, or a family of political movements/groups that are anti-elitist and nationalist, is neither good nor bad. As I noted in chapter seven, it is tempting to take the discursive machinations of IWC/ID Canada as the conglomerated insanity of *individual racists*, when there is clearly something more collective

and interesting happening there. One is free to judge and dismiss politics as they wish—certainly, we should all work to suppress and defuse politics of racism and demographic exclusion—but to do so because of their associations with populism alone is unwise. Their morphological differences, and a moral impetus, may trick the scholar-activist into thinking one is “populist” while the other is not. In short, to extrapolate those judgements to populism as a *genus* of politics is to do it analytical discredit. ACORN and the Council of Canadians, I have shown, behave in “populist” ways, as do the CTF or IWC/ID Canada. These crystallize around different issues—anti-poverty, pro-democracy on the left, and anti-government, pro-whiteness on the right—but all have the ultimate goals of creating crises of representation and using that to link individuals to a popular subjectivity. Of course, these likely exist (and should exist) on different *moral* planes for the average sociologist.

For its part, white nationalism should be judged negatively as a threat to tolerance and politics writ large, but we should take great care not to let that judgement lead us to framing the movement as mere residuals of wider, more “important” structural shifts as so often happens under the moral analytics of “neoliberalism” (Flew, 2014; Sanscartier, 2017b). In short, suspending our own moral judgement of a populist context until *after* we have analyzed its relational qualities (beyond an overly simplistic, unidimensional axis of oppression-resistance) will help form more robust theorizing of these phenomena, and how to better address them in the future (see Steckle et al., 2019).

Of course, this is easier said than done. While reading through the pages upon pages of literature that subtly implied white people needed to “take back” Canada, I found it incredibly difficult to stymie the resentment towards this one group upwards, to the populist style of politics more broadly. This was made more difficult by far-reaching labels such as “the sociocultural

low” (Ostiguy & Roberts, 2016) that encourages us to think of species of populism as one big homogenous political strategy, imbuing it with essential features contrasted with high-minded, “reasonable” forms of politics. What chance, then, does the sociologist or layperson *without* extensive knowledge of populism have in seeing such a “negative” movement in those activities and movements they hold in high moral regard? Why is “populism” most often reserved for the Trumps, the Johnsons, the Dutertes, and other figureheads that agitate progressives? I challenge this assumption below, in my discussion of conceptual and pragmatic contributions to the field.

Empirical *and* case-focused

The final property is methodological, as opposed to the more conceptual nature of the prior two. Importantly, the concept of populist counterpublics forces the social scientist to take both an empirical and case-based approach to populist mobilization, rather than trying to write grand unifying theories of what populism is (or is not) that try to explain as much of they can as possible. Whatever *a priori* features of populist counterpublics there are, these exist insofar to help guide case selection. In chapter three, I identified my strategy of choosing self-identified “grassroots” organizations that engaged in both anti-elitist and nationalist discourse, the two components of what Jansen (2011) identifies as “populist rhetoric.” Beyond this, however, to learn anything about populist mobilization is to do so in fundamentally emergent and context-dependent way, giving priority to the narratives and perspectives of the actors in the cases themselves.

This approach—being *both* empirical *and* case-focused—contrasts significantly with current trends in literature on populism. It combines two features that hitherto exist in separate strands on populism. Broadly speaking, these strands are *theory/case-focused* and

empirical/nomothetic. In the first case, some unifying, self-proclaimed superior theory of populism is advanced, coupled with a critique of current literature and how this new theory corrects it by being able to subsume more cases/observations in new, cohesive ways. Two authors I draw on extensively in this study, Jansen (2011) and Moffitt and Tormey (2014), are examples that fall under this camp. In both examples, some supposedly superior account of populism is given. Then, it is put to work by discussing how it does a better job at identifying cases that *are* populist as opposed to those that are *not* populist (also see e.g. Curato, 2016; Kaltwasser & Taggart, 2016; Molyneux & Osborne, 2017; Ostiguy & Roberts, 2016; Roberts, 2015b; Singh, 2017). In other words, the goal is to impose a new definition on the term that alerts us to new features of some case, or how multiple cases (usually country-based, like Latin America or the United States, or cases that might be re-organized/joined in ways that produce novel insights). While this is certainly useful work, it relies entirely on secondary data and sources to make sense of what populism is, and further reproduces the problems I noted in chapter one about so much scholarly energy being devoted to *defining* populism, without equal concern of analyzing what happens after we identify a case as “populist”.

The second, empirical/nomothetic strand refers primarily to quantitative or experimental, large-scale projects that usually think of populism as communication style adopted by a politician (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016; Bos, van der Brug & de Vreese, 2012; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Oliver & Rahn, 2016; Pollock, Brock & Ellison, 2015). The sophisticated methodologies found here produce important insights about how populism works. For example, Oliver and Rahn (2016, p. 199) argue that populist politicians like Donald Trump resolve a contradiction in which national affiliation and anti-elitism co-exist in the political imagination—people *want* to be patriotic or nationalistic, but also want to “drain the swamp” of elites that

govern the country. Elsewhere, Bos and colleagues (2012, p. 202) conducted experimental surveys that show how populist modes of communication tends to increase the perceived legitimacy of political parties among Dutch voters, interacting with variables like education and political cynicism. These insights are significant, but the issue with this strand is that by using far-reaching, quantitative methods, some of the attention to micro-level detail is lost because it tries to understand large populations from a “birds-eye” and nomothetic perspective.

Moreover, some theoretical sophistication, which is abundant in the other strand, is lost here. Focusing on politicians, for example, fails to consider that populism is not merely about “big P politics” but also drives grassroots, “small-p” forms of organizing illustrated in prior chapters (Aslandis, 2017). Oliver and Rahn, for their part, sum up the complex machinations of populism as “the right rhetoric spoken by the right person to the right audience at the right time” (2016, p. 192). This is too serendipitous of an account to really quench the scholarly thirst for an explanation about what drives for these moments. It also problematically assumes that data gained from one case or country (what I have been calling a “species” of populism) can tell us something about populism writ large (what I have been calling “populism-as-genus”).

In the analytic chapters of this dissertation, I have joined the strengths from these two dominant patterns of studying populism. The notion of populist counterpublics marries a sophisticated conceptual anatomy to an empirical approach dedicated to *understanding* the mechanisms that re-politicize the world from the perspective of staff and members in an *in-situ* way. Analyses drawing on populist counterpublics do not assume that the form of one populist modality will resemble the form of another, because of how central sociopolitical context is to the genesis of political logics and subjectivities. Likewise, it balances this recognition of context with the need to approach those contexts empirically and interpretively, drawing on a variety of

methods to triangulate and understand the mechanisms that work to link individuals into a shared fate and common subjectivity.

Thus far, I have discussed the properties of populist counterpublics that make it a novel and sophisticated concept in and of itself. What, then, might it offer to the study of populism writ large? I turn to this broader question here, organizing the discussion into two themes. The first is what this dissertation offers to the field *conceptually*, to scholars trying to make sense of populism and how it works. The second is how the concept helps us to understand populism in a more pragmatic sense, addressing the questions of how we might neutralize less savory “species” of populism and how we need to re-think the relationships between populism and democracy.

Conceptual contributions

The properties of lateral analysis, analysis before judgement and case-focused make the concept of populist counterpublics especially relevant for thinking about the problems identified early in chapter one. The first key contribution is that it can give us fresh insights on politicians, movements or other cases that we readily define as “populist” in popular discourse, such as Donald Trump or Bernie Sanders, the Canadian “Yellow Vest” movement, or the “Wexit” movement currently popular in Alberta. By treating each of these cases as separate *species* of populism, we can give up the ghost of trying to invent schematics that identify what such movements have in common. Instead, we can identify populist counterpublics by paying attention to the particulars of each specific case, understanding how populist mobilization manifests in specific sociocultural contexts in ways that flexibly animate political support. The second key conceptual contribution is sensitizing us to political action that may not, at first blush, appear to be “populist” in lay understandings of the term, typically rude or crass

politicians that “flaunt the sociocultural low” (Ostiguy & Roberts, 2016). Indeed, there may be “politer” versions of populism, such as the Council of Canadians in this dissertation, that still engage in populist mobilization, but in higher-minded ways.

In the first case, we can examine a politician like Donald Trump from the mainstream perspective of democratic scholarship to better identify how the concepts in this dissertation encourage a different angle of analysis. Russell Muirhead and Nancy Rosenblum (2016) provide a particularly apt example of how scholars are wont to approach the political style and victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 elections. For them, the distrust of elites and political institutions associated with populism is “fatal to democracy” by creating social conditions prime for political leaders to stoke conspiratorial fears that are harmful in three ways. First, distrust can be channeled into theories that support hatred of other groups; second, the claim that other elites are guilty of treason, not simply against the interests of the public; third, a pathological distrust of every authority, not dissimilar to how Rosanvallon (2008) describes a flare-up of counter-democratic powers. Their example of Trump’s wanton destruction of the public sphere is when, at a rally, Trump was asked about U.S. training camps where Muslims were being trained as terrorists on American soil, to which he replied, “a lot of people are saying that... We’re going to be looking at that and plenty of other things (Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2016, p. 75). By promoting hatred and distrust in this way, they refer to Trump as a coward unwilling to act in the public good.

While I do not disagree with their moral assessment of Trump’s actions, they fail to move beyond such moralizing to the matter of what, and why, politicians might say something like this. We might instead think of this kind of quote not in reference to a rational-communicative subject of the Habermasian public sphere—in which, yes, it is a highly corrosive tactic—but in

the context of the kind of populist counterpublic being forged. The goal, as with cases in this dissertation, is to divorce members of the counterpublic from *the* wider public sphere to a subset of that sphere maintaining an antagonistic relationship with the former. While a thorough assessment of how Trump taps into Islamophobia is beyond the scope of this brief analysis, based on the prior analyses of logics and subjectivities in this study, we might say that this incident provides some insight into the quality of the kind of counterpublic that Trump has built in the U.S. context.

Crudely applying the populist species found through this study, these politics appear to be a sort of “cross” between paranoid (chapter three) and purity populism (chapter six), constructing a “secret power” of a minority group in ways that render the dominant group paranoid in a more horizontal way (ibid, p. 75). This is reinforced by other actions that Trump took before his presidency, such as accusing Barack Obama of being foreign and possibly Muslim (Moody & Holmes, 2015), as well as during presidency, like planning to publish a list of immigrants that committed crimes (Sanscartier, 2017b). Facts aside, one form of mobilization fostered by these actions are plebiscitary links that weld vertical and horizontal antagonisms, infusing the thirst for transparency and publicity with a nativist ethos.

To be clear, I am not implying that Trump is some master political strategist. Methodologically, one would need to closely examine the features of that case rather than rely on the species I identified in this dissertation to understand other contexts. Rather, these kinds of actions circulate certain logics and subjectivities that I am only briefly hinting at here. What is important is that, if we are to fully understand the dynamics of how and why people are mobilized by Trump as a leader, we need to approach it as a unique manifestation of populist mobilization that evolves *in-situ*.

This raises another important question of whether populism can refer to both “bottom-up” and “top-down” developments, a matter of some debate in the literature. Kenneth Roberts (2015b, p. 682) for example, argues that *populism* should be reserved for top-down phenomena in which individuals are mobilized by a leader in “big P politics”, while “popular subjectivity” should be reserved for “small p politics” organizing. To blur conceptual borders between the two, he argues, is to make the idea of populism too mobile.

However, as Paris Aslandis (2017, p. 310) argues, understanding “populism” is really about studying collective action frames that “interpret people’s life situations, including such emotions as the anger and fear they may feel, by articulating them as grievances against an unjust system or enemy.” Populist counterpublics can be manufactured by pre-existing organizations creating collective action frames—as I have shown in this dissertation—but they can also be constructed by a figurehead looking to animate electoral support in the formal political sphere. There is no license on *who* can create popular subjectivities capable of amalgamating personal problems into a shared “lack.” As such, the scholarly community needs to seriously consider dropping finer pedantic points and re-route that energy into understanding the ways in which logics and subjectivities circulate amongst supporters of a figurehead or members of an organization, group or movement, and how the latter *perform* populist mobilization on a collective level. The conceptual anatomy I have laid out in this dissertation provides the solid basis for doing just this.

Additionally, the key properties of populist counterpublics are also a form of advisory against sweeping generalizations of *all* populist movements or leaders. One that I have identified repeatedly both in this chapter and in chapter one, Ostiguy and Roberts’ (2016, p. 26) notion that populism is “always on ‘the low’” and constitutes a “flaunting of the low,” is one example of

this. In their hurry to illustrate how populism spans the entire ideological spectrum, they argue that what separates populism proper from other kinds of politics is the repeated use of “slang or folksy expressions,” appeal to the “culturally popular and cruder tastes,” and the presence of nativism as opposed to cosmopolitanism (ibid, p. 30).

Aside from the issue of trying to tie populism to fundamental content, this kind of analysis ignores the fact that there may in fact be forms of populism that exist in more “polite” forms, which I have illustrated in chapter five through the Council of Canadians. While the Council does engage in some tongue-in-cheek activity—such as one chapter building a giant snake in protests of pipelines—it is a far cry from the “cruder” discourses of, say, the CTF with an “award ceremony” consisting of a porcine mascot. The issues of the Council are in fact much “higher-minded” compared to other cases (clean water, the health of Canadian democracy), and members are encouraged to mobilize in relatively “vanilla” ways when compared with the likes of ACORN. They do not, by Ostiguy and Roberts’ definition, “flaunt the sociocultural low”, yet as I argued in chapter five, they are just as much of a populist counterpublic as any of the other cases in this dissertation. While some *species* of populism (i.e. specific modalities of populist mobilization) certainly flaunt the low, we should take care, as I have argued elsewhere, to avoid infusing populism-as-genus with this assumption. Otherwise, we lose analytic sensitivity and purchase on cases that are just as anti-elitist and nationalist.

Pragmatic contributions

What can the analyses in this dissertation tell us about the pragmatics of populist counterpublics? While I have argued that populist mobilization should be conceptually protected from moral judgement that blurs analytics, there are certainly less desirable manifestations of this

mobilization. Chapter seven especially identifies some trends that are troubling from a social justice and equity perspective. Encouraging white people to feel threatened that their whiteness is undergoing a loss of status flies in the face of basic sociological principles and research illustrating that racialized communities continue to face cultural and economic disadvantages, even in a “multicultural” society like Canada. Sociologists would also likely agree that the xenophobic element of some species of populism, like what is currently happening in the United States, undesirably lead to resentment and policies against minorities that contradict liberal-democratic values of plurality, diversity and tolerance. How, then, can we address these forms of populist mobilization, and hopefully work towards neutralizing them?

While this dissertation is far from being a Rosetta Stone for quelling undesirable populist energies, it does attune us to an important fact missed by those who assume that “populists” are temporarily hypnotized rational subjects. Because subjects within populist counterpublics are constructed via antagonistic discourses that are “supposed to believe” things about various issues (Dean, 2001, p. 640), it means that as popular subjects, they are “cathected by belief, rather than knowledge” (Steckle et al., 2019, p. 7). In other words, members are politically animated based on a converted *faith* articulated by Jodi Dean in her discussion on phantasmal publics (see chapter one), not the *knowledge* that Habermas claims forms the basis of the rational-communicative public sphere. This is what makes populist mobilization such a powerful strategy.

This seemingly abstract, academic point has major practical implications. It means that, regretfully, Michelle Obama’s mantra of “when they go low, we go high” is rooted in misguided faith that anti-populists can re-interpolate members of populist counterpublics back into the fantasy of *the* public sphere. One cannot combat faith with knowledge—this would be akin to

trying to convince a God-fearing Evangelical that God does not exist because we cannot see or hear Him. What makes populist counterpublics so powerful, and so potentially corrosive, is that they are able to translate the belief in the public sphere into antagonistic faith on the premise that this wider public sphere has gone astray, is being destroyed, and is facing a *crisis* that exists viscerally for members. The watchdogs of the CTF, the crusaders of ACORN, the Council stewards, and the revanchists of IWC/ID Canada mobilize on the basis of *belief* that their members are somehow being wronged. Whether or not one agrees with the basis of that belief is irrelevant (e.g. the government has a role to play in the economy, white people are not oppressed by society).

As such, “going high” is ill-advised, because it merely serves to reproduce a faith in the rational-communicative sphere from which members of populist movements feel excluded. Instead, we should begin thinking about fighting *belief* with *belief*, rather than knowledge. “Being reasonable” or “civil” is going to gain social justice advocates, for instance, little leverage over those who believe that whites are oppressed in a contemporary society focused on diversity. Neutralizing undesirable species of populism must be done in a language of belief by creating *other* species of populism with the ability to compete in the realm of political faith. Hence, some commentators have argued that Bernie Sanders was specially placed to defeat Donald Trump in an election because he engages in equivalent, if ideologically opposed, “fiery rhetoric” capable of animating progressive support in ways like Trump (Cassidy, 2016). Similarly, we are unlikely to alleviate what we would perceive as racism in chapter seven through “education” or “enlightenment” of members, precisely because members do not see themselves as offenders or racists, but as the *plebs*.

In contrasting the different populisms found in Latin America and Europe. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012) make the case that populism can be universally inclusionary among a *populus* as well as exclusionary; a similar contrast between chapters six and seven in this dissertation. Leftist leaders like Evo Morales and Hugo Chávez engaged in what they call a “Schmittian friend/foe distinction” by targeting the concentration of oil and gas wealth facilitated by government and private corporations (2012, p. 165). In campaigning for the material redistribution of these finances, they attempted to discursively unite “the people” under a shared socio-economic lack at the fault of corporate elite and corrupt government officials.

While we should take care not to assume that these tactics are readily transferrable to the Canadian context, they do illustrate that populism on the left can be just as inflammatory, antagonistic, and compelling as those on the right. This is an oft-forgotten fact in the North American context, a symptom caused by the negative moral valence attached to the term. Trying to unite “all Canadians” under a socio-economic banner, effectively linking the Council’s tactics to those described by Mudde and Kaltwasser, may be a strategy considered by Canadian politicians trying to draw on leftist populist rhetoric. We did see a version of this marriage in the highly visible, but short-lived Occupy Wall Street movement that tried to unite individuals on a socio-economic basis (“We are the 99%”). However, it ultimately failed because of its reluctance towards organization or a leader capable of linking the movement however antagonistically to territorial governance, and hence remained detached from the *populous* (Calhoun, 2013; Ehrenberg, 2017). As such, another lesson learned is the necessity of translating a moment into a more stable, continuous counterpublic by ensuring that there exist some leader(s)—whether a figurehead like Trump or Chávez, or less public staff like those in this study—that are dedicated to circulating crisis-inducing, political logics in routine ways.

Conclusion: A compass for populism studies

The goal of this dissertation is to introduce to the field an interpretive and empirically sophisticated approach to populism in the form of populist counterpublics. In addition to telling us something about how populist mobilization works in the Canadian context—a sorely neglected topic, with few exceptions (e.g. Laycock, 2005a/b)—it encourages us to think of populism in terms of a diverse *species* belonging to an overarching political *genus* that itself is qualitatively separate from politics-as-usual, engaging in concentrated anti-elitism alongside nationalism as its hallmarks. I conclude these analyses with a simple plea to researchers of populism, and to political sociology writ large, to draw on the interpretive strengths of the discipline, even when the phenomena we study are morally unsavory.

In many ways, the surge of global populism noted by scholars may be the result of several institutional changes noted in chapter five. Retrenching welfare states, rising income inequality, and the proliferation of stigmatized, demeaning work are all detrimental factors in societies that, culturally speaking, place so much self-worth on commodification and the ability to purchase goods (Clarke & Newman, 2017; Johnston, Sanscartier & Johnston, 2018; Pasquino, 2008; Sanscartier, 2015). To the extent that we can place the blame on this sort of strain—the gap between the cultural promises of independence and success, but the lack of institutions to buttress them—populism is not just a superficial or temporary phase. Indeed, it is more likely that these movements will continue to be far-reaching, significant, and fundamentally change the way many citizens understand themselves, their governments, and the public sphere(s) in which they operate. The case studies I explore in this dissertation allow us to better understand the minute processes through which this happens, but we require more honest, morally neutral, and

serious engagements with populism to fully understand why and how many countries continue on these trajectories.

At the base of these efforts, we will need to find ourselves critically examining the assumption of the ideal, rational-communicative subject in the theories we create. This remnant from Habermasian-style theorizing needs to be disposed of if we want to truly grapple with the issues outlined in previous chapters. If we are to truly understand why and how various species of populisms attract their members across the ideological and moral spectrum—from white nationalist to anti-corporate forms—it is important to divorce analysis from denunciation, however briefly, and to attempt to exercise *verstehen*, one of sociology's greatest strengths. By judging logics and subjectivities in a relativistic way when we analyze them, we can draw on this strength to tell us more about why we continue to see the success of discourses that are xenophobic and potentially racist, on the one hand, yet in the pursuit of social justice, on the other. This, I contend, will be a significant challenge to the social sciences moving forward, and while this dissertation is short of a complete map tracing the path from here to there, I sincerely hope it serves a compass and a map for scholars in that direction.

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APPENDIX: Case Materials

1. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation

Interviews conducted: 3

Organizational Literature: *The Taxpayer Magazine* - Spring 2013, Winter 2014, Spring 2015, Summer 2015, Winter 2016, Spring 2017, Spring 2018, Summer 2018.

Tweets: 6,440

Facebook Comments: 600 (most liked comment: 892 likes; threshold for analysis: 80)

Populist mobilization codes

Crisis of Representation: “Politics as usual” = catastrophic national/individual debt

Us vs. Them: “The taxpayer” (the individual funding government) vs. government officials (politicians, bureaucrats)

Addressing the lack: Radical transparency; reduction of spending

Case-specific codes

Vilification of politicians (idiots; criminals; schemers); corrupted political *structure* (not simply politicians); hypnotization of the public by politicians; the smaller (government), the better.

2. ACORN Canada

Interviews conducted: 3

Organizational Literature: *Nuts and Bolts*, Wade Rathke

“High Interest Lenders” – National Background.

“Ontario ACORN members are demanding an increase to allowable employment income before deductions.” – Provincial Background.

“Written Submission to the 2018 Federal Budget Consultation.”

“Written Submission for the 2019 Pre-Budget Consultation.”

Tweets: 6,440

Facebook Comments: 155 (Local Chapter) + 435 (National) = 590 comments (most liked comment: 9 likes; all comments examined).

Populist mobilization codes

Crisis of Representation: No money = no political participation

Us vs. Them: Low/moderate-income vs. “targets” (officials “bought” by other interests)

Addressing the lack: Policies of accessibility and affordability; redistribution of wealth

Case-specific codes

Multi-method codes: Organizational faith (showcasing effort); collective call-to-arms; contouring “the people” via government neglect; self-identification of *plebs* (no part of the political).

3. The Council of Canadians

Interviews conducted: 2 (one in-person, one brief via e-mail).

Organizational Literature: *Canadian Perspectives*⁹ – Spring 2013, Spring 2014, Autumn 2014, Spring 2015, Spring 2016, Autumn 2016, Summer 2017, Autumn 2017, Summer 2018, Winter 2019

“Protect Water: Boycott Nestle.”

“New Water Legislation Fails to Protect Every Lake, Every River”

“Getting it Right: A people’s guide to renegotiating NAFTA.”

Tweets: 3,220

Facebook Comments: 509 (most liked comment: 229 likes; threshold for analysis: 10)

Populist mobilization codes

Crisis of Representation: Corporations = blockades to progress

Us vs. Them: “All” Canadians vs. corporations, corporate elite

Addressing the lack: Use democracy to remove blockades to progress

Case-specific codes

Multi-method codes: Making “real change”; government as capitalist instrument; politicians as “out of touch”; reclaiming connection between citizens and state; showcasing personal effort at change; pleading for habit changes; representing “all” Canadians.

⁹ *Canadian Perspectives* is irregularly published, and all sources available on the CoC website at the time of analysis were included.

4. ID Canada & Immigration Watch Canada

Interviews: none

Organizational Literature (IWC)¹⁰: “Basics 1”, “Basics 2”, “Basics 3” (introductory pages)

“Canadians Are Tired of Footing the Bill for Racist Anti-White Propaganda”

“CBC = Canada’s Broadcasting Cesspool”

“CBC is a Quisling Organization”

“Diversity – Enough is Enough. This far but no further”

“The Night my Mother Lost Her Faith”

“Hallway Medicine is a Reality for Many Canadians”

“What the “Territorial Declaration” About Reconciliation Really Means”

Tweets (ID Canada): 593

Facebook Comments (IWC): 901 (most liked comment: 70; threshold for analysis: 10 likes)

Populist mobilization codes

Crisis of Representation: “Racist” label prevents reclaiming/celebrating “whiteness”

Us vs. Them: “Old Stock Canadians” (white Canadians of European descent) vs. immigrants

(horizontal) **and** government officials (vertical)

Addressing the lack: Radical/complete reduction of immigration and “diversity” initiatives

¹⁰ For the sake of brevity, I list the sources that contributed *most* to analysis here. I looked at many others that echoed mentioned themes in Chapter 7. These can be found under the “Bulletins” tab at the Immigration Watch Canada website (Date→2018 – Present, 2011 → 2017, starting from 2015).

Case-specific codes

Trudeau's "Invasion of Canada"; Whiteness is threatened; Media conspiracy; It's hard to be white; racial self-interest is *not* racism; racial double standards (diversity); elites "selling out"; disrespecting the (white) past