

Domicide in the Liveable City:
The Gentrification, Demoviction, and Redevelopment of
Heron Gate in Ottawa, Canada

by

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

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

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Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the social relations of rule and resistance surrounding gentrification, eviction, and the financialization of rental housing. Contributing to scholarship in critical urban sociology, this research troubles the notion of urban liveability by examining socio-spatial processes of home unmaking at a key site of revitalization and redevelopment in the City of Ottawa. Heron Gate is a large rental neighbourhood owned by one real estate investment firm. Around 800 people—predominantly lower-income, racialized households—have been evicted and displaced from the neighbourhood since 2016, leading to the emergence of the Herongate Tenant Coalition to fight the evictions and confront the landlord-developer.

Two theoretical threads guide this research project: settler colonial property relations and domicide, the deliberate destruction of home. Within the context of the City of Ottawa aspiration to be North America's most liveable mid-sized city, this research interrogates how discourses of improvement are mobilized alongside practices of home unmaking in the development of settler colonial cities, as well as how domicide is resisted. This project engages from the standpoint of political activist ethnography, a methodological approach that aims to produce knowledge from an activist perspective and that is useful for social movement struggles.

Through the Heron Gate case study and engagement with the Herongate Tenant Coalition, this research sheds light on the investment strategies of apartment investors—including demoviction and intensification—as well as tactics that they deploy to attempt to demobilize tenant opposition. The research further demonstrates the role of municipal governance actors in facilitating gentrification initiatives, and how gentrification is produced through discourses of improvement—such as liveability, revitalization, and community wellbeing—that work to unmake homes, communities, and homelands for some (marginalized, racialized, and Indigenous populations), and remake homes, communities, and homelands for others (affluent, white, settler populations), contributing to how we understand the evolution of racialized property relations in settler society. The significance of this research is that it informs a broader understanding of the financialization of rental housing, larger impacts on affordable housing, and the role that grassroots tenant movements can play in defending their buildings and neighbourhoods.

Acknowledgements

Completing this dissertation would not have been possible without the loving support of my family, friends, and colleagues. It would also not be possible without ongoing processes of settler colonization and Indigenous dispossession, to which my family has contributed through migration, settlement and unhindered movement through the Mi'kmaw homeland (Mi'kma'ki) and my personal migration to the Algonquin Anishinabe homeland, where I have been able to obtain an education and raise a family as an uninvited guest.

I entered and completed the degree program at two separately unusual times. A strike by support staff at Carleton during the 2017-2018 academic year led to decreased enrollment, and my cohort was about one-quarter of the usual size. I am very grateful to have been able to spend quality time with Jasmeet Bahia and River Rossi during the first nineteen months of the program. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that I spent more than the last half of my degree program at home, in the cozy yet cluttered corner of my kids' playroom.

Despite these unusual beginnings and endings to the PhD program, I have met and worked with some stellar people along the way. This endeavor would not have been possible without my two PhD supervisors, Aaron Doyle and Jeff Monaghan, as well as my committee members Jackie Kennelly and Jen Ridgley. This rockstar committee has made my PhD experience incredibly enjoyable as well as considerably strengthened my academic work. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my internal and external examiners David Hugill and Ted Rutland.

I am also extremely grateful for the guidance of department chairs, faculty, administrative staff, and coordinators in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, with special thanks to Blair Rutherford, Xiaobei Chen, Rania Tfaily, Stephanie Leblanc, Paula Whissell, Darlene Moss, Kimberley Seguin, and Patricia Lacroix. My pre-PhD and departmental pals Alexis Shotwell and Chris Dixon also deserve a special shout-out and warm thanks.

For most of my degree I have had the pleasure of working as a Research Assistant with Jackie Kennelly, which has resulted in me working with some really great people. Through the *People, Places, Prospects and Policies* project I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked closely with Catherine Leviten-Reid, Isobel Findlay, Sarah Buhler, Nazeem Muhajarine, Brenda Parker, and the larger team of scholars and researchers. I also appreciated working with and have deep respect for Cihan Erdal, Mathieu Samson-Savage, Genevieve Johnston, the late Alice Conroy, Leif Harris, Holly Peterson, Bella Desjarlais, Aijia Deng, William Roy, as well as many others that have come and went over the course of this research project.

I am also deeply appreciative for opportunities to work with marvelous people at Carleton's Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice. At the ICCJ I have had the pleasure of working with Alex McClelland, Jeff Monaghan, Maddy Santos, Evelyn Maeder, Kanika Samuels-Wortley, and Lara Karaian, with special thanks and

appreciation to Robin Dunbar, Natasha Stirrett, and Nicolas Carrier. Through Alex's *Tracking (In)Justice* research project, I have worked alongside inspiring people at the CCLA (Abby Deshman), the Centre for Research & Innovation for Black Survivors of Homicide Victims (Tanya Sharpe), and Queen's University (Catherine Stinson). I have also worked with some stellar RAs on this project (Erica Chen, Rohan Khan, Zhongmin Lin, and Darby Mallory), along with some amazing community partners.

I have also enjoyed working and collaborating with the Urban Lab initiated by Jen Ridgley and David Hugill in the Department of Geography. This group was a ray of sunshine during pandemic isolation, and I benefited immensely from invigorating conversations with Sloane Mulligan, Josh Hawley, Teresa Van Den Boogaard, Monika Imeri, Cassie Smith, Sneha Sumanth, and David and Jen of course.

Outside of Carleton, Kevin Walby and Martine August have played instrumentally inspirational roles in my academic life. I also appreciate working with the Urban Sociology Research Cluster of the Canadian Sociological Association, specifically Dan Kudla and Zack Hyde.

I am forever appreciative of my broader networks of colleagues and friends, in particular within OPIRG-Carleton and The Leveller newspaper. There are many, many people in both groups that I have had the pleasure of collaborating with and learning from over many years.

Although my larger networks of friends have dwindled over the last decade as I have refocused my energies on my immediate family, I am deeply indebted to a large group of people that have contributed to my personal and intellectual growth over the past 20 years. This list is far too long to elaborate on, but if you are reading this, you know who you are. I could not have undertaken this journey without the comradery and support of Jen Duford, Guillaume Blais, Ajay Parasram, Fazeela Jiwa, Adam Gassner, Eddy Zvekic, Thomas White, Jason Birch, Steve Gallant, and Jeff Monaghan, as well as the entire farm crew. Finally, I am extremely grateful for the local punk community in Ottawa and the opportunity to participate in such a rad scene with great people and bands. There are too many people to name here but you know who you are—a source of unrelenting inspiration and fun.

I could not have undertaken nor completed this project without the Herongate Tenant Coalition and the great folks that I have met through these encounters. There are many to whom I owe a debt of gratitude, as this project would not have been possible without them, but in particular I would like to thank Josh, Nima, Tammy, Mumina, Ikram, Lily, Neal, Jocelyn, Nick, Daniel, and Yavar.

Thank you to my loving and supportive family, as well as my extended family and in-laws. In particular my Sister, Mother, and Father who are always available to offer support and guidance.

Last, but not least, and certainly the most, words cannot express my gratitude for my partner and children—Rachel, Évie, and Noélie—who offer me an endless source of inspiration, love, and joy, for which I am forever thankful.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the wonderful people that have been involved with the Herongate Tenant Coalition. The Coalition welcomed me into their struggle with open arms and I have learned so much from them all. Collaborating with the Coalition throughout my PhD program ensured that I never once got bored or discouraged. While I never expected to take on this work in an academic sense, I hope that the words in the following pages do justice to their work and can be useful for the ongoing struggle as well as future tenant movements. The Herongate Tenant Coalition's uncompromising determination, resolve, and commitment to tenant and housing justice is a source of infinite inspiration and hope.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The City of Ottawa revised its Official Plan in 2021 with the stated goal to transform Canada’s capital into North America’s most “liveable” mid-sized city (City of Ottawa 2021a). This announcement was made shortly after construction commenced on one of the largest urban redevelopment projects in Ottawa’s history: the redevelopment of Heron Gate Village (hereafter referred to as Heron Gate¹) involves the demolition-driven eviction and displacement of hundreds of lower-income, racialized tenants. Within this context of exclusion, eviction, and city marketing, my research troubles the notion of urban liveability by examining processes of dispossession and resistance surrounding housing development and neighbourhood revitalization. This work contributes to contemporary research in urban sociology by investigating private, high-end housing development as a form of domicide—the deliberate destruction of home (Porteous and Smith 2001)—and by examining resistance to domicide at this key site of urban revitalization in Ottawa.

This project is driven by two primary research questions: 1) How are discourses of improvement mobilized alongside practices of domicide in the development of affluent settler colonial cities? 2) How are social relations of rule and resistance produced and

¹ Heron Gate Village refers to the 21-hectare residential (predominantly rental) area between Heron Road and Walkley Road before they converge. Heron Gate Village is part of the broader neighbourhood identity known as Herongate which is exemplified by shared demographics as well as social and commercial entities, including local schools, shops, and community services (Masuda and Bookman 2018). Throughout this dissertation I use Heron Gate to refer to the specific rental neighbourhood under corporate ownership and Herongate to refer to the broader neighbourhood and tenant organizing undertaken by the Herongate Tenant Coalition, which includes tenants from Heron Gate Village as well as in surrounding neighbourhoods, such as Heatherington.

challenged through struggles over the financialization of rental housing and urban revitalization and redevelopment efforts? The first question informs the development of a theoretical approach to understanding urban liveability and domicide in affluent settler colonial cities such as Ottawa. The second question denotes how the project is driven empirically, to understand how social relations of rule and resistance are enacted, materialize, and altered in relation to the practitioners of domicide and those resisting domicidal practices.

This project engages with both of these questions from the standpoint of political activist ethnography, a methodological approach that aims to produce knowledge from an activist perspective and that is useful for social movement struggles. Political activist ethnography is a form of qualitative inquiry that focuses on work with and for social movements. This approach emphasizes that activists hold particular social and political insights into the institutions and social forces they struggle against, ultimately seeking to change social relations by investigating and disrupting the organizing logics of ruling relations. Engaging qualitatively with social movement struggles around urban development in Ottawa—and supplementing participant observation with interviews and textual/archival research—my research project interrogates ruling relations by examining discourses of urban governance (liveability) and practices of domicide enacted by ruling actors and institutions (such as city officials/planners, developers, and financialized landlords) while simultaneously participating in the struggles against these processes and actors.

The objectives that stem from this engagement and that have informed this project are: 1) To develop and ground an analytical framework that centers contemporary urban

development and revitalization efforts from the standpoint of settler colonial city-making and the socio-spatial reproduction of property relations; 2) To develop and contribute to theoretical understandings of urban liveability and domicile through a sociological lens; 3) To immerse myself in activist struggles against gentrification and eviction, and to produce knowledge about the intricacies, successes, and shortcomings of these struggles; 4) To understand how ruling actors interpret, respond to, and sometimes attempt to repress urban/tenant social movement mobilizations; 5) To produce accessible knowledge that is useful for tenant, housing, and decolonial struggles.

The contributions of this project are: 1) To investigate the racialized and spatial logics of settler colonial urbanism by examining how liveability is discursively mobilized alongside processes of domicile through regimes and relations of property; 2) To infuse a sociological understanding of domicile as both repressive and productive; 3) To understand how discourses of improvement are mobilized as mechanisms of urban governance and to contribute critical scholarly insight on urban liveability; 4) To develop conceptual tools around the ideas of demoviction and financialized gentrification; 5) To contribute to emerging scholarship on the financialization of rental housing and landlord-tenant relations; 6) To communicate enhanced understanding of landlord tactics and techniques of transforming the built environment and responding to tenant resistance; 7) To contribute a radical perspective in response to liberal and neoliberal prescriptions to the affordable housing crisis and gentrification-induced displacement.

Case Study

My dissertation documents the demolition and redevelopment of the Heron Gate neighbourhood in the City of Ottawa through my engagement with tenants and community activists, the landlord-developer, and municipal actors over a four-year period (2018-2022). The Heron Gate neighbourhood—a racialized, working class, and lower-income neighbourhood, home to many immigrants and refugees—consists of dozens of acres of multi-family rental townhome units and a number of apartment towers. Heron Gate’s landlord—a financialized real estate investment firm that purchased the property in 2012 and 2013—is in the process of demolishing sections of the neighbourhood in order to build over 5,000 new units. Since 2016, over 800 people have been displaced from their homes in two separate mass evictions. The latest mass eviction, in 2018, has been the subject of intense struggle, with which I have been engaged since then, involving the Herongate Tenant Coalition and landlord Timbercreek Asset Management Inc. (recently rebranded as Hazelview Investments²). This struggle has played out on various terrains such as within the community, the media sphere, and the legal arena, including what promises to be a precedent-setting case at the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal brought by numerous displaced evictees seeking a right to return.

At the crux of the human rights case is the assertion that the mass displacement of a racialized, immigrant community and elimination of an ethnic enclave violates the right to housing in international law (Yussuf et al. v. Timbercreek 2019). Heron Gate is a

² Throughout this dissertation I refer to either Timbercreek or Hazelview largely depending on the time frame surrounding the name change. For example, prior to November 2020 I use Timbercreek and from November 2020 onward I use Hazelview. Sometimes I use Timbercreek/Hazelview where I think appropriate.

majority racialized community home to many immigrants and refugees, including significant numbers of Somalian, Arab, and Nepalese families. Diasporic communities in Heron Gate have ready access to existing cultural networks, social supports, and amenities. People who have written about the Heron Gate neighbourhood have used different terms to describe its demographic composition. Xia (2020) opts to refer to Heron Gate as a “diverse immigrant neighbourhood”, while Mensah and Tucker-Simmons (2021) use the designation of “ethno-racial enclave.” During my interviews with people that live in the community, I have heard Heron Gate described as a cultural enclave, an ethnic enclave, and an ethnic neighbourhood. Following Mensah and Tucker-Simmons (2021), the term that I have adopted for this dissertation is “ethno-racial enclave.” Mensah and Tucker-Simmons have worked on the human rights case brought forward by numerous evictees from the 2018 demoviction, the majority of whom are of Somali descent. In the application to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, the neighbourhood is referred to as an “ethnic enclave”, and Mensah and Tucker-Simmons (2021) have updated the term to “ethno-racial enclave” in a more recent academic publication examining the Heron Gate mass evictions.

The first phase of redevelopment involved the demolition of 80 townhomes and construction of a new apartment complex. Completed in 2020, “Vista Local” offers “liveable homes”, and “safe and healthy communities”, within a “resort-style living” setting (City of Ottawa 2018; Shaw 2017). This highly contentious development is designed to align Heron Gate with the demographics of the Alta Vista neighbourhood to the north, a largely white, affluent neighbourhood. The second phase of redevelopment involved the demolition of 150 more townhomes in 2018 and the eviction of some 600

people, 93 percent of whom were racialized, and half of whom were of Somali descent, according to a survey conducted by the Herongate Tenant Coalition. The Heron Gate case is a large-scale development that carries with it dramatic implications for gentrification, displacement, and affordable housing, where hundreds of lower-income, racialized tenants are being evicted from their affordable dwellings, displaced from an ethnic neighbourhood, and replaced by tenants with greater purchasing power in the attempted remaking of an entire community. The redevelopment is facilitated, in part, through discourses of improvement surrounding community wellbeing and liveability.

The redevelopment of Heron Gate cannot be disassociated from mechanisms of municipal governance that enable and facilitate gentrification and domicide.

Around the time that I started my doctoral program at Carleton University, in September 2018, the City of Ottawa embarked on a process to update its Official Plan. The New Official Plan was formally approved in October 2021, one month after Ottawa City Council approved a proposal—the Heron Gate Official Plan Amendment—to demolish 559 more homes in the neighbourhood and intensify the property with dozens of new apartment towers. The New Official Plan is described as a strategic document determining how the city will grow and which policies will be used to support economic growth and community development (City of Ottawa 2021b). The 2021 New Official Plan is the latest in a series of urban plans dating back to 1903. City officials refer to this newest iteration as a “milestone plan” as it advances city planning in a significant direction aimed to increase the sophistication and maturation of the capital as it evolves into a “world city” (City of Ottawa 2021a, 10).

From the beginning, City of Ottawa promotional materials surrounding the New Official Plan marketed the project as embarking on a process that would transform Ottawa into “the most liveable mid-sized city in North America” (see figure 1). The

concept of the liveable city is the cornerstone of the New Official Plan.

Simultaneously in Heron



Figure 1. Screenshot taken from City of Ottawa website (May 25, 2019).

Gate, the eviction date loomed for the families that remained. This convergence of events—the quest for the liveable city and the domicidal destruction of Heron Gate—prompted what would eventually become one of the defining research questions of this dissertation project: How can a city simultaneously declare itself liveable while large-scale domicile was being executed in one of its most racialized neighbourhoods? How can municipal civil servants plan a liveable city while being both complicit in and facilitating mass eviction, gentrification-driven displacement, and domicile? These questions drove my PhD research to try and understand how ruling relations governed by private property work to produce both liveable and disposable subjects in the affluent settler colonial city. During the course of my doctoral program I closely followed the City of Ottawa’s New Official Plan process (see figure 2). I have participated in numerous community engagement-style events, have collected and analyzed dozens of documents associated with each stage in the project’s chronology, and have interviewed a number of elected officials and City of Ottawa employees in various units.

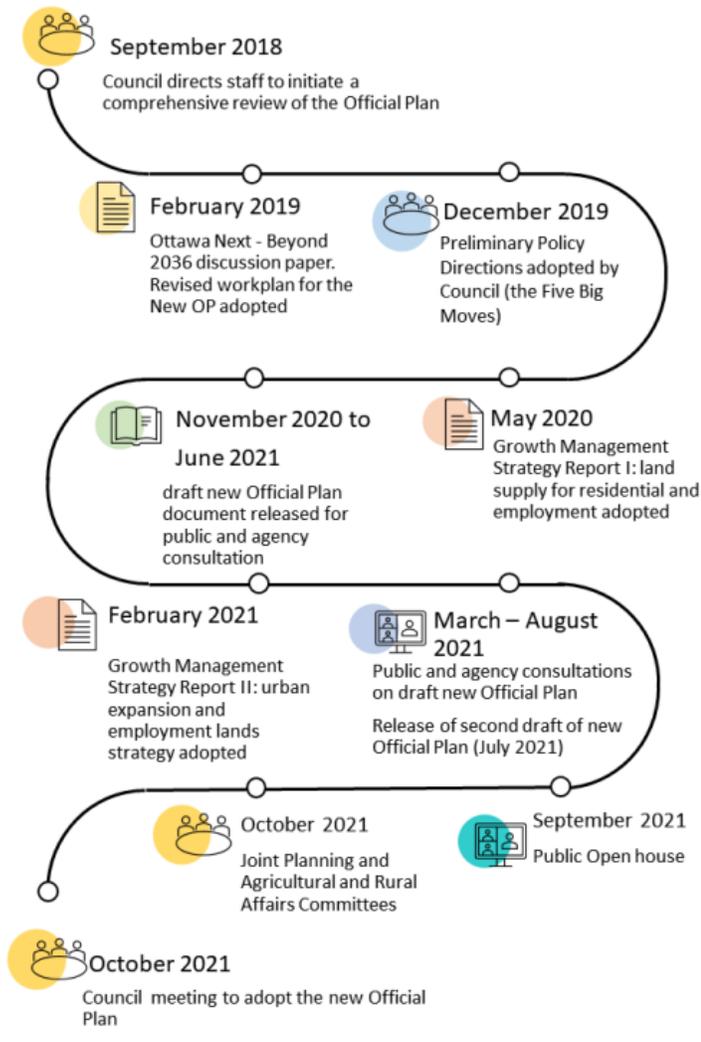


Figure 2. Chronology of the New Official Plan project (City of Ottawa 2021a, 10).

The path toward the City of Ottawa’s transformation into North America’s most liveable mid-sized city is directed by what are referred to as the “five big moves” (see figure 3). The five big moves serve as “essential touch points for land use decisions and policy directions” over the 25-year life cycle of the New Official Plan (City of Ottawa 2021a). The five big moves include growth, mobility, urban design, resiliency, and economy. It is the five big moves that “collectively represent the guiding vision en route

to Ottawa becoming the most liveable mid-sized city in North America” (City of Ottawa 2021a, 34). The five big moves comprise the “milestone foundations” of the New Official Plan while the cross-cutting issues—intensification, economic development, energy and climate change, healthy and inclusive communities, gender equity, and culture—are described as “milestone new directions” (City of Ottawa 2021a, 34).

Ottawa

5 BIG MOVES

OVERVIEW

Ottawa is a beautiful city, with its unique heritage, stately architecture and abundance of parks and greenspace. We are a prosperous city with a stable economy, world-class universities and a well-educated workforce. We are also a diverse city where a quarter of Ottawa residents were born outside of Canada.

Home first to the people of the Algonquin Anishinabe Nation and a gathering place from time immemorial, Ottawa has been shaped by the history of Canada. Situated at the intersection of three rivers, two cities and two official languages, we bring together the past and the future, city and nature, First nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and waves of new immigrants.

This year, Ottawa’s population surpassed a million people. We have a solid foundation on which to build the future, but as we grow we will need to be able to adapt to an increasing pace of change whether in the context of the climate crisis, economic disruptions, emerging technologies, or changing demographics.

- **Growth:** Achieve, by the end of the Plan’s planning period, more growth by intensification than by greenfield development. This growth will provide for complete communities and a variety of affordable housing options.
- **Mobility:** By 2046, the majority of trips in the City of Ottawa will be made by sustainable transportation (walking, cycling and public transportation).
- **Urban Design:** Improve our sophistication in urban and community design, and put this knowledge to the service of good urbanism at all scales, from the largest to the very small.
- **Resiliency:** Embed public health, environmental, climate and energy resiliency into the framework of our planning policies.
- **Economy:** Embed economic development into the framework of our planning policies.

Figure 3. Overview and description of the Five Big Moves (City of Ottawa 2021b).

The overview presented in a document unveiling the five big moves acknowledges the city as prosperous and diverse, with a rich history. The overview

further acknowledges that the city was “first” home to the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation, yet simultaneously erases Algonquin sovereignty and jurisdiction over the land. Instead, “Ottawa has been shaped by the history of Canada.” While the Algonquins have never ceded or surrendered territory in their homeland, and lay claim to portions of the city of Ottawa—including areas around the Ottawa River that include Parliament Hill and the Zibi development on sacred Akikodjiwan lands—the city, having been shaped by Canadian history and settler colonialism, is now a space driven by the quest for perpetual growth, the ongoing expropriation of Algonquin land for urban development, and the reconfiguration and improvement of property for settler prosperity and enjoyment.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is structured through ten chapters in all. The second (and following) chapter lays the theoretical groundwork for this project, which is comprised of two dominant threads: settler colonial property relations and domicide. I begin by examining the origins and historical evolution of property relations in Canada’s national capital region, and outlining some of the colonial tools deployed both to attempt to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land and to produce urban settler formations. The role of racialized property relations is then explored in relation to settler colonial urbanism and the socio-spatial reproduction of space, as well as how diasporic space is produced in settler societies through the coloniality of migration. Having established the first theoretical thread of settler colonial property relations, the chapter then moves to explore the literature around urban liveability and domicide, identifying liveability as an ideological discourse of urban improvement that is mobilized alongside efforts to gentrify

urban spaces and to unmake the homes of already marginalized populations. Discourses of liveability, in this regard, work to produce domicide, which I reconceptualize to account for the productive, as well as repressive, elements of home unmaking. I argue that domicide is structured in part through discourses of improvement (i.e., liveability and revitalization), in the reproduction of space and subjectivities. Alongside discourses of improvement, a framework of domicide is useful to understand how applications of liveability hierarchically and racially order life and the value of life.

Chapter Three lays out the methodological foundations of this research project. As mentioned above, my methodological approach embraces political activist ethnography, which has its roots in institutional ethnography. Within, I discuss the role and relevance of movement-relevant theory as well as my approach to and experience with directly engaging with the Heron Gate struggle. Chapter Three offers a blueprint of my research design, which, following the informal conventions of political activist ethnography, begins with activist experiences (through participant observation and interviews), analyzes data (such as interviews and field notes) to discover references to institutions and relations of rule, and then traces these relations of rule to uncover their textual mediation.

Chapter Four offers a segue into the series of empirical chapters that follow. Chapter Four is a personal vignette into my family's experience with rental housing and settler colonial property relations. Chapter Four provides a window into the world of financialized real estate through personal experience, which sets the stage for Chapter Five, which is an investigation into the financialization of rental housing through profiling Timbercreek Asset Management, the owner and landlord of the Heron Gate

neighbourhood. Within it, I move to conceptualize financialized gentrification in conversation with the various investment strategies and tactics that financialized real estate unleashes in the built environment, including a new trend around intensification. Finally, I explore literature and offer thoughts surrounding linkages between gentrification, racialized property relations, and settler colonialism.

Chapter Six offers a profile of the Heron Gate community and its trajectory into an ethno-racial enclave. I position Heron Gate as an already liveable community that offers strong social supports and cultural networks for its majority racialized, migrant residents, but has been subjected to racial stigma and strategic neglect. I provide a remarkable example of how Heron Gate's landlord manoeuvred municipal legal mechanisms to renege on maintenance obligations for the purposes of hastening demolition.

Chapter Seven examines the first phase of mass eviction and demolition in Heron Gate in 2016. Within, I examine some of the discourses surrounding demoviction, such as revitalization, relocation, and intensification. This discussion sets the stage for a deeper examination of the Vista Local redevelopment replacing those demolished townhomes. I unpack the redevelopment's racist underpinnings and overarching goals to harmonize Heron Gate with Alta Vista.

Chapter Eight documents the second phase of demoviction in 2018; moreover, it details the emergence and actions of the Herongate Tenant Coalition to try and stop the evictions and confront the landlord. I explore a number of Coalition tactics and Timbercreek's responses in return. In doing so I contribute to scholarship on social

movement mobilization and legal repression, by extensively documenting the legal threats and battles that have ensued.

Chapter Nine is the final empirical chapter that continues a chronological trajectory documenting the wider struggle and events unfolding around the redevelopment proposal for the neighbourhood. I first provide a window into the consultation efforts and community meetings surrounding the “master plan” for redevelopment, which is based on the Conference Board of Canada’s Community Wellbeing Framework. I explore the framework and the emphasis on investment returns and shaping desirable conduct, before moving into a deeper investigation of the proposal itself. The Heron Gate Official Plan Amendment was approved by the City of Ottawa in September 2021, greenlighting the demolition of 559 more homes. An MOU accompanying the approval establishes terms around future displacement and affordability, which the Herongate Tenant Coalition deems as a framework for social destruction. The chapter further examines the role of municipal actors and their ties to the real estate development industry, and how considerations of affordable housing for Heron Gate residents are eliminated through the agreement.

The concluding chapter revisits the major dissertation themes of liveability and domicide to offer some final analytical points. These points are accompanied with a discussion of the human rights case initiated by displaced, former Heron Gate tenants as well as a critical discussion on housing crises and tenant justice.

Chapter 2 – Liveability and Domicide in the Settler

Colonial City

This chapter introduces the two dominant theoretical threads of this dissertation: settler colonial property relations and domicile. As a starting point, I interrogate the designation of Ottawa as a liveable city on stolen Indigenous land through an examination of Ottawa as a settler city and the colonial implications of land, property relations, and urban development. I instead suggest that the national capital of the Canadian state must first be considered as a settler colonial city that depends on the unlawful acquisition and domicidal destruction of Algonquin land in order to become “liveable”, and that these ruling property relations are reproduced in various present forms, including urban development. I then unpack the prominent theoretical threads of property relations and domicile to open up space to explore further how discourses of improvement (such as liveability) are mobilized in settler colonial societies through a broader examination of ruling relations, accumulation, and urban governance, all of which tie-together in broader trends of gentrification. This chapter positions racialized settler colonial property relations as the impetus behind revitalization efforts that serve to reproduce space through the production of unliveable and liveable subjectivities in urban development and economic growth initiatives. This research explores how the application of improvement discourses in the field of urban development—in this case “liveability”—are mobilized to produce life, flourishing, enjoyment, and fulfilment for some, and create conditions of death, marginality, displacement, and disposability for others. Alongside iterations of liveability, there are corresponding representations of dilapidation, ghettoization, and

criminality, discursive forms that underwrite the domicidal forces that destroy the homes and displace the communities of the racialized and the poor, although domicile does not go uncontested.

Property Relations in Urban Settler Formations

Cities have become a key focus of interdisciplinary inquiry, as human migration and urbanization intensify on a global scale. The increased reorganization and settlement of humans into urban environments has had the effect of mobilizing sociologists, geographers, economists, ecologists, architects, urban planners, and engineers to approach urban processes, forms, and experiences as objects of analysis. Urban sociologists contend that city-making is a social process (Amin 2007; Macionis and Parrillo 2016; Parker 2004). For Tonkiss (2013), material structures and physical spaces are only made legible when considered alongside social, economic, legal, and political modes of organization and interaction, that city-making “emerges from the complex interaction of socio-economic with spatio-technical processes and practice” (2).

Implicated and involved in these processes are various social actors engaged in an array of formal and informal interactions, including those involved in settlement, policy, law, planning, development, producing, consuming, struggle, and resistance. For Tonkiss (2013), “such a range of actors raises questions about differential rights to make decisions about and interventions in urban environments, and variable claims to use, make and inhabit city spaces” (3). City-making is determined by the interplay between various modes of organization and interaction, where urban space is produced and reproduced

through various social and economic arrangements and divisions. In other words, the making of cities and the reproduction of space is contested.

This approach to city-making, however, largely ignores how urban space is produced and reproduced in settler colonial societies, and how city-making and urban development are enacted and contested on stolen Indigenous land. To better understand the contemporary social and spatial formations of settler colonial urbanism, the following work moves to contextualize contemporary socio-spatial struggles over urban space through an examination of the history of the development of Ottawa under processes of colonial settlement in the heart of the Algonquin Anishinaabe homeland.

1. Settling and Unsettling Ottawa

The lands comprising the 148,000 square kilometres of the Ottawa River watershed have been occupied by the Algonquin Anishinaabe peoples³ for millennia (Lawrence 2012; Morrison 2005; Richardson 1993). Algonquins have lived on these lands for thousands of years, dating back to around the time of the glacial melting associated with the closing of the last Ice Age, which led to the draining of the Champlain Sea and the emergence of the Ottawa valley (Russell, Brooks, and Cummings 2011). Archaeologists have dated roughly 4,500–4,900 years of Algonquin use around the Gatineau River delta, comprising seven meeting areas on both sides of the river (Pilon and Boswell 2015). In the settler imaginary, the Ottawa River watershed has come to represent the “heartland” of the

³ The terms Algonquin Anishinabeg and Omàmiwininiwag are also used to refer to Algonquins. Algonquins living in different areas of the Ottawa River watershed refer to themselves largely based on their locations within the watershed (Lawrence 2012).

Canadian state, where the three founding nations—Indigenous, French, and British—first met (Wilcox 2018).

Since their early encounter with Samuel de Champlain in the early 1600s, the Algonquins have experienced over four hundred years of extensive contact with European squatters and settlers in the Ottawa River watershed. In the early 1800s, settlement concentrated around the Kichi Sibi (Ottawa River) near the Algonquin sacred site of Akikodjiwan, which includes the powerful waterfall, known as Akikpautik to the Algonquins and Chaudière Falls to settlers, and surrounding islands. As an urbanizing frontier on the periphery of empire, Bytown and Hull (present-day Ottawa and Gatineau) were developed around a logging industry and the construction of the Rideau Canal, both developments largely serving the interests of the British Empire.

The development of Bytown and Hull facilitated the intensification of resource extraction and settlement, as Algonquin territory was licensed to logging companies and surveyed into townships. Mass incursions by white settlers from the British Isles proceeded throughout the 1800s to the point where Algonquins in Ontario faced displacement in every part of their territories (Lawrence 2012). The Kichi Sibi at Akikodjiwan—representing the spiritual, cultural, and economic heartland of the Algonquin nation—was appropriated without consent or consideration and came to represent the future epicenter of the Canadian settler state. In a few short decades, European settlers constructed the institutional arrangements of state function and power—Canada’s executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government—including the Parliament Buildings, on unceded land.

Over two hundred years of settler engulfment of the Algonquin homeland within the Ottawa River watershed has been accompanied by the remapping and renaming of much of the territory (Gehl 2014). The remaking of the Algonquin homeland involved the imposition of numerous jurisdictional boundaries, beginning with the creation of the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, present-day Ontario and Quebec. This act of colonial mapping centered around the Kichi Sibi, which was converted into “a waterscape of Algonquin division” (Gehl 2014, 42) that produced “Ontario and Quebec Algonquins” (Lawrence 2012, 52), as well as a source of immense wealth for settler society. The fracturing of the Algonquin homeland along the provincial boundaries of the developing colonial state was accompanied over time by numerous layers of federal, provincial, regional, and municipal jurisdictions, which “carved out spatial patterns of land use and population control that defy easy mapping” (Pasternak 2017, 21). Settler engulfment and jurisdictional claims through colonial mapping mechanisms and regimes of private property attempted to eradicate Algonquin nationhood, as well as their rights to use their land (Gehl 2014; Lawrence 2012). The partition of the Algonquin nation through techniques of settler statecraft was not limited to geospatial configurations, and also included linguistic, legal, religious, social, and political divisions. While these divisions and experiences are complex, the result today is that there are many status and non-status Algonquins (those whom the Canadian government recognizes as “Indians” or not), and there are only ten federally recognized Algonquin First Nations (nine of which are in Quebec). As a result, different and complex strategies have been adopted in response to the eliminatory mechanisms and domicidal techniques of settler colonialism, as evident in recent conflicts over the redevelopment of Algonquin land in Ottawa.

Different communities employ diverse and complex strategies when responding to colonialism, and the various groupings of status and non-status Algonquins in Ontario and Quebec are no exception. This is evident in the various legal battles including a comprehensive land claim and a territorial title claim currently in progress, as well as varying levels of support for and opposition to the Zibi development and Tewin development proposal. The Zibi development is a highly contentious, large-scale redevelopment of a brownfield site situated within the sacred Akikodjiwan waterfall and islands on the Ottawa River (and Gatineau shoreline) (Crosby 2021a), and the Tewin development proposal is a recent City-approved plan to build a new rural city in the southeastern boundaries of a sprawling Ottawa. Supporters of these developments include the Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn First Nation and the Algonquins of Ontario—a group that officially formed in 2004 comprising nine federally unrecognized Algonquin communities in Ontario along with Pikwàkanagàn. This group of Ontario Algonquins also filed a land claim that was accepted by the Ontario and federal governments in the early 1990s and is currently in the final stages of negotiation. The land claim falls under the Canadian government's comprehensive land claims policy, which grants parcels of land—in this case, 175,000 acres or 475 km², according to the 2016 Agreement-in-Principle—and limited rights to the land along with \$300 million in exchange for the extinguishment of title (see Lawrence 2012; Gehl 2014; Pasternak 2017). The Algonquins of Ontario land claim—which does not include lands in the national capital region—has been a source of considerable contention, as, among other things, it excludes Algonquins living in Quebec.

In a similar vein, other Algonquin communities and organizations—particularly those in Quebec—continue to oppose the Zibi and Tewin developments, with arguments based on treaty, title, constitutional, and international rights. In December 2016, the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation, on behalf of members of the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation, filed a territorial title claim with the Ontario Superior Court of Justice over a tract of land—the “Kichi Sibi lands”—in the heart of Ottawa that includes Parliament Hill and the Akikodjiwan islands (Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg v. Attorney General of Canada 2016). The statement of claim asserts Algonquin jurisdiction at the time of the Crown’s assertion of sovereignty over what is now Ontario in 1763. The claim asserts that the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation “had the intention and capacity to retain exclusive control over the Kichi Sibi Lands”, including “a system of rules and laws aimed at confirming and enforcing exclusive ownership of their lands”, and that title to these lands has never been surrendered. The claim seeks recognition of Algonquin title and to confer the right to control the lands and how they are used. The territorial title claim over a portion of Ottawa, home to Canada’s most sacred political institutions, is quite significant and was filed at a period when the ruling federal government was openly committed to reconciling the relationship with Indigenous peoples, going as far as to recognize that the Canadian legislature functioned on traditional Algonquin territory.

It is not my intention here to articulate or fixate on inter-Algonquin conflict in the settler colonial present. These divisions are a product of the divide-and-conquer techniques of settler colonial governance and property relations, a result of the “many layers of colonial history and policies” (Majaury 2005, 45) that attempt to eliminate Indigeneity and Algonquin connections to the coveted land base that serves to enrich the

ever-developing settler society. My aim here is instead to highlight the long-standing and ongoing contestations over land in the Algonquin homeland, and more specifically within the City of Ottawa, emphasizing that the land is unceded and unsurrendered; moreover, my aim is to shed light on the socio-spatial orders of urban development and municipal governance that unfold through the reproduction of urban space in the settler colonial present.

2. Tools of Dispossession: Surveying, Mapping, and Imposing Property Relations in Ottawa

How exactly does Indigenous land get converted to settler property, and how did that play out in the neighbourhood that came to be known as Heron Gate? While a detailed history and trajectory of property relations in the area is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is worth briefly charting the appropriation and development of Algonquin lands in what would become known as Ottawa South to understand the dual technologies of domicide that: 1) unmake and remake Indigenous homelands into settler property; and 2) unmake the homes of a racialized migrant community that rent shelter on this property.

European invasion and subsequent settlement were permeated by the creation of a new regime of property relations. Armed with geographical tools—the survey, the map (cadastral) and the grid—and legal fictions and colonial ideologies that the land was empty and Natives incapable of productively “owning” property, the British reconfigured systems of land ownership in the settler colonies (Blomley 2003; Harris 2004). To transform Indigenous land into settler property, spatial strategies of colonial cartography are continuously deployed, from early survey maps to the contemporary remapping of

Indigenous land (Crosby 2021a). Harris (2020) describes how settler colonial technologies of dispossession such as surveying were deployed in the attempt to craft property boundaries over Indigenous land. While Indigenous peoples engaged in a micropolitics of resistance to disrupt the surveying process, Harris (2020) further describes the imposition of a new settler geography—through acts of surveying and mapping Indigenous land—as a “pervasive disciplinary technology” (259). Settler colonial tools of mapping and surveying imposed a legal (and violent) order of property by implanting a system of land allotment to settlers over existing geographies of Indigenous territorial governance (Blomley 2003; Fawcett and Walker 2020). Space, property, and violence were enacted simultaneously to dispossess and displace Indigenous peoples from their land (Blomley 2003).

Land in what is commonly referred to as eastern Ontario was appropriated by the British in a series of what is referred to in colonial discourse as the “Upper Canada Land Surrenders.” While lands in the current geographical boundaries of the City of Ottawa have never been ceded or surrendered by the Algonquin peoples, British manoeuvres surrounding a series of “land surrenders” served to justify the surveying and sale of Algonquin territory. The “Rideau Purchase” covers some land in the west of the city and was made with a small group of Mississauga people, the details of which are well documented (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada 2016). The “Crawford Purchase”, on the other hand, was made with one Mississauga elder for a fraction of land north of the St. Lawrence River, also known as a “gunshot treaty.” The story goes that the Mississauga elder agreed to share land with the British—as far north from the river that a man could walk in one day, or as far as a gunshot could be heard—in

exchange for some clothing and rifles (Reimer 2019; Surtees 1983). While this arrangement was made regarding a small fraction of territory, colonial mapping today indicates that the Crawford purchase covers the entirety of eastern Ontario and stretches north to the Ottawa River. Moreover, these “purchases” were consummated without Algonquin presence or consent (Huitema, Osborne, and Ripmeester 2002). Aside from a letter discussing the arrangement, no other documentation—legal, deed, or otherwise—exists. In other words, British and Canadian claims to this land—and in particular land in the City of Ottawa—are dubious at best.

Settlers spatially reconfigured Indigenous land into districts, counties, and townships which were in turn divided into concessions and then lots that were sold to settlers. For Huitema, Osborne, and Ripmeester (2002), this all-encompassing system “constituted the Procrustean bed upon which the new system of land-control and ownership was developed. Land became reconstituted as parcels of property, fixed spatially on cadastres, legalized in Land Registries, and legitimated by periodic municipal tax-assessments and government censuses” (90). Algonquin lands in Ottawa South were incorporated into the Township of Gloucester in the late 18th Century. An early survey map of the township shows that the land was parcelled into lots and sold to settlers as early as 1857 (see figure 4).

Around 100 years prior to the development of Heron Gate into a rental community, the land was surveyed and sold to Patrick Finn and William Heron. This early survey map demonstrates the settler colonial approach to property relations depicting the “schedule of improvements” through surveying and documenting fee simple ownership of stolen Algonquin land. For Blomley (2004), settler colonial cartography enacts a practical significance in the spatial visualizations of colonial dispossession, where maps can play an “important persuasive role in displacement, both by conceptually emptying a space of its native occupants, and by reassuring viewers of the unproblematic and settled occupation of urban space by a settler society” (122). The implementation of a private property regime on Algonquin land served to redefine the social, spatial, and legal relations around land ownership. As Tomiak puts it (2011): “The normalization of a Western property regime was part and parcel of the spatial imperative of colonization” (102). Indigenous dispossession and the introduction and cementing of private property relations was essential to the development of cities as spaces of white settlement and entitlement.

3. The Socio-spatial Reproduction of Settler Colonial Urbanism

The urban implications of colonial practice in settler colonial contexts—the production of settler urban space on unceded and contested lands—are multifaceted. They include the expropriation of Indigenous territory and resources, the establishment and maintenance of hierarchical social relations undermining Indigenous peoples’ self-determining authority (Coulthard 2014), and the removal, or deterritorialization (Tomiak 2011), of Indigenous

peoples from emerging settler urban environments. In other words, settler colonialism seeks to reterritorialize space to establish and nurture an ever-developing settler society (Tomiak et al. 2019). Combined, these processes amount to the clearing and transformation of expropriated land for settler use and “the incorporation of that territory into the regulatory ambit of settler institutions of governance” and accumulation (Hugill 2017, 6). While the colonial city was grounded in an imperial mechanics of unfettered exploitation, the settler colonial city embodies a different function premised on the accessing of land and resources, settlement, and the elimination of the original inhabitants and their structures of governance, political orders, spiritual places, and lifeworlds. While a settler colonial politics of recognition (Coulthard 2014) is increasingly normalized through the display and extension of overtures and acknowledgement of Indigenous traditional territories, the reproduction of space in settler urban formations embodies attempts at the elimination of Indigenous political and social orders, and their replacement by a majoritarian settler polity.

Towns and cities played a major role as the “nerve centers” of developing settler states, where the mechanisms and machinery of state institutions were established and developed, and where colonial ideas, practices, and commerce were expanded (Gagné and Trépiéd 2016, 3). In addition, settler colonial cities served as “central nodes for circulating capital wealth and colonial expansion” (Halpin 2017, 75-76). Within the colonial imagination, the settler city is inculcated by an array of dominant discourses that portray sites and processes of settler urbanization as symbolizing development and progress, as representing spaces of liberalism and democracy, as manifesting as hubs of globalization, international migration, commerce, capital, and power—all of which serve

to conceal the city's violent colonial foundations and present (Porter and Yiftachel 2019). Discursive renderings of urban improvement are still prevalent today—although evolving and manifesting as liveability, sustainability, and revitalization, among others—as evident in the dominant discourses surrounding the Heron Gate redevelopment and the City of Ottawa's New Official Plan.

Focusing exclusively on the idea of the settler city is problematic, however, in that it risks reifying assumptions that cities are spaces of settler entitlement in the absence of acknowledging Indigenous agency (Tomiak et al. 2019). Tomiak, McCreary, Hugill, Henry, and Dorries (2019) argue that “‘the city’ is not a neutral, discrete container in which things happen but an active, expanding social process entwined with both the reproduction and contestation of settler colonial relations” (4). The city should instead be understood, as Hugill (2019) suggests, “as a spatial reflection of the colonial relation, a site where the social, political, and distributional inequity of colonization continues to be produced” (85). The inherent inequity of the urban colonial condition centers around the reproduction of space and the elevation of real estate, home ownership, and development as the driving forces of settler colonial property relations.

A growing body of scholarship examines the interconnectivity of the roles of race, capital, and space inherent within settler logics of dispossession and displacement in urban formations (McClintock 2018; Miller 2020; Rucks-Ahidiana 2021). Settler colonial city-making, as an ongoing process, requires continuous strategies of racialization and spatialization, discursive techniques for depicting Indigenous bodies as savage and presenting Indigenous spaces as uncivilized (Edmonds 2010). In this discursive repertoire, Indigenous bodies and spaces have been transformed into something deviant

and out of place, as “not native to the space (or idea) of the settler city” (Cavanagh 2011, 157). For Blomley (2004), “settler cities have also long been imagined as spaces of civilization, set against a world of savagery”, with the colonial town imagined as an outpost of progress within the wilderness (119). Settler colonial city-making relied upon dichotomous narratives of civilized/savage and progress/primitive, in which racialized categories and binaries were established and now permeate the development and reproduction of the settler city (Mar and Edmonds 2010; Tedesco and Bagelman 2017). The attempted rendering of Indigenous bodies as antithetical to progress and improvement serves to naturalize dispossession and racialize Indigenous peoples in colonial territories, where “racial and spatial ideologies coalesced to form part of the bedrock foundations of settler colonialism” (Cavanagh 2011, 154). Ideological discourses continue to be deployed in urban settler formations and real estate development projects which serve to dispossess and displace Indigenous and racialized populations, as evidenced in the Zibi and Heron Gate developments in Ottawa.

The production of urban space is central to the settler colonial project of acquiring and transforming Indigenous lands into settler property (Dorries et al. 2019; Porter and Yiftachel 2019; Tomiak et al. 2019). Settler colonial urbanism is a socio-spatial formation that works to consolidate a particular system of production and social reproduction that is grounded in inequitable and racialized property relations (Tomiak et al. 2019). The construction and reproduction of racialized hierarchies and legal regimes of private property—as two intersecting and mutually constitutive ideologies—are crucial to the ongoing project of settlement, dispossession, and exclusion (Dorries, Hugill, and Tomiak 2019). Underlying dispossession and displacement in processes of settler

colonial urbanism is the primary logic of racialized property, “for it is through property that dispossession and settlement are performed and creatively enacted every day”

(Blatman-Thomas and Porter 2019, 42). For Osterweil (2020):

Racial settler colonialism is thus at the core of all modern notions of property. All our beliefs about the righteousness of property, ownership, and commodity production are built on the history of anti-Black violence and settler-colonial extraction. The right to property is innately, structurally white supremacist: support for white supremacy involves a commitment to property and the commodity form (16).

My theoretical approach places property relations at the heart of settler colonialism’s underlying logic (of accessing, claiming, and developing land) and racialized struggles in urban space against housing insecurity. Racialization as a social process is deeply implicated in regimes of property relations, a process that serves to hierarchically order the value of life (Crosby 2021b). Settler colonial urbanism reproduces itself through the elimination of racialized spaces that do not conform to settler property ideals and the reconfiguration of those spaces according to highest and best use. Toews (2018) refers to this as the spatial elimination of non-conforming places. The elimination of racialized space includes attempts to exclude, isolate, stigmatize, and disperse “non-preferred” (Thobani 2007) migrant populations who are perceived as obstructing urban development, settler progress, and the perfecting of property relations in settler states. Heron Gate is a neighbourhood where these processes are playing out in the settler colonial present.

4. Reverberations of Empire: The Coloniality of Migration and Settler States

Heron Gate was built as a large, predominantly rental community in the 1960s. Beginning in the 1990s, the neighbourhood developed into a majority racialized, largely migrant community as families from Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia fled situations of violence and conflict. The diasporic space of Heron Gate has been described as an ethno-racial enclave (Mensah and Tucker-Simmons 2021). Mensah outlines the social theory behind the conceptualization of ethnic or ethno-racial enclaves, which develop as the result of the spatial concentration of cultural institutions and businesses in diaspora communities (Mensah 2019). This designation can be attributed to communities with a high spatial concentration of ethnic minorities in a given neighbourhood who share a common heritage, such as culture, language, ethnicity, or custom (Mensah 2019; Walks and Bourne 2006). While ethno-racial enclaves can develop as a result of voluntary or involuntary segregation, contemporary flows of migrants and refugees can be linked to legacies of empire.

One of the legacies of European/British imperialism is that it has left in its wake a patchwork system of postcolonial and settler colonial states and dominions throughout the globe. European and settler states have experienced waves of migration in recent decades from former colonies. Hundreds of years of European imperial conquest has resulted in the extraction of vast amounts of wealth and created enduring divisions in many countries, violence exacerbated by contemporary and ongoing military ventures into the former colonies. Colonial legacies and ideologies are deeply implicated and

embedded in the unprecedented contemporary flows of human migration and the reception of asylum seekers at the borders of Western European countries and the North American and Australasian settler colonies. Examining the British state's response to asylum seekers as an example of what Quijano (2000) coined "the coloniality of power", Mayblin's (2017) work is instructive here for understanding the roots and role of global colonial histories and webs of racial power relations informing these patterns and processes. The coloniality of power, as historically emergent and ever evolving, has and continues to privilege white mobility while limiting racialized mobility, while colonial ideologies inform the treatment of immigrant and refugee populations. The coloniality of power has clear implications for current migration flows, diasporic space, and the establishment of ethno-racial enclaves in settler states.

Critical approaches to diaspora can further our understanding on how migrant populations become subjects of empire and subjected to domicide in the lands where they seek asylum. Brah's (1996) theorization of diaspora as moving beyond a descriptive category to encompass its analytic qualities enables an investigation into the relationalities of population migrations across fields of social relations, subjectivity, identity, and power. Here, Brah (1996) links the concept of "diaspora space" and entanglements of "genealogies of dispersion" with those of nativist subjectivities and discourses, which in the settler colonies came to be represented by British diasporas (English, Welsh, Scottish, Irish), although themselves internally differentiated by class, gender, and ethnicity (16). These differences, however, were subsumed under discourses of Britishness which assumed and attempted to assert a positionality of superiority over Indigenous populations (Brah 1996; Cohen 1996). In settler colonial states, the

cohabiting of space between Indigenous, settler, and migrant populations represents an entanglement of genealogies of dispersion as reverberations of the British Empire (Crosby 2021b).

The reverberations of empire represent the relations of power embedded within discourses, institutions, and practices. They implicate white settlement and dominance, the attempted elimination of Indigenous populations, and the processes of exclusion that mark certain racialized populations as suspicious and undesirable. For Brah (1996), “Diaspora space is the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of ‘us’ and ‘them’, are contested” (205). Approaching diasporic space, as genealogies of dispersion and belonging, can help inform relational understandings of the coloniality of power and migration as it pertains to the inscription of racialized modes of subjectivity and identity in social relations and diasporic formations. It can help us to understand the formation of settler states, contemporary migrancy, and the voluntary and involuntary segregation of diasporic communities into ethno-racial enclaves, the role that property relations play in disrupting these enclaves and dispersing racialized populations, and resistance. Together, Indigenous dispossession and racialized exclusion as imbrications of the coloniality of power are deeply informative for understanding how racialized migrant populations are coded as non-preferred others, and how their established communities—such as at Heron Gate—are subjected to domicide.

Domicide in the Liveable City

To understand the complex processes that have led to the demolition of Heron Gate, my project weaves together understandings of settler colonial property relations with

domicide—what Porteous and Smith (2001) conceptualize as the destruction of home—and the notion of liveability. As the City of Ottawa’s New Official Plan centers the bold entrepreneurial slogan to remake Ottawa into “the most liveable mid-sized city in North America” (City of Ottawa 2021c, 2), I position the idea of liveability as forming the political and discursive urban context in which Heron Gate is destroyed and remade. Some of the queries thus driving this project include: How can Ottawa be a liveable city when hundreds of marginalized people are evicted from their homes and their ethnic neighbourhood destroyed? How do domicile and liveability co-exist in the settler colonial city? The following sections engage the concept of domicile in conversation with critical understandings of liveability to examine how discourses and social relations of rule and resistance inform and influence urban development, and to understand how mechanisms and techniques of displacement are operationalized in the liveable city. I reconceptualize domicile as a socio-spatial process that works alongside the discursive application of urban liveability, where urban redevelopment and revitalization efforts work to unmake homes, communities, and homelands for some (marginalized, racialized, and Indigenous populations), and remake homes, communities, and homelands for others (affluent, white, settler populations). I argue that domicile is structured through discourses of improvement and that the process of developing a “liveable city” has both productive and repressive elements, aimed at particular places, spaces, and populations.

1. Urban Liveability

The notion of liveability is increasingly invoked by numerous public and private sector actors engaged in housing and urban planning. Critically engaging with the discourse of

liveability provides a valuable analytical entry point to understand the production and performance of techniques of urban governance and the re-making of urban landscapes (Valverde, Johns, and Raso 2018; Siemiatycki, Enright, and Valverde 2020; Valverde and Moore 2019). An investigation into the deployment of these types of discursive devices of improvement that accompany the reconfiguration of urban landscapes provides insight into local developments, as well as into the larger ideological and social contexts in which these mechanisms are operationalized at multiple scales and locales.

The concept of liveability has been deployed and harnessed by a variety of political and economic actors, as well as social movements, for decades (Alexander 1970; Cassidy 1980; Jacobs 1961). Urban liveability is broadly defined as the extent to which the physical and psychological needs and demands of a city's residents are met (Chiu 2019). Kaal (2011) suggests that how people define or attempt to improve liveability "reveals much about their visions on society, on the relationship between human beings and the social environment in which they live" (535). Kaal's suggestion echoes that of Pacione (1990, 1), who notes that defining urban liveability is subjective: "the precise meaning depends on the place, time, and purpose of the assessment and on the value system of the assessor." For Ley (1990), contestations over defining what liveability means and entails reveal "much about the various publics who have competed for the power to define the quality of urban life" (34). Ley (1990) recognizes liveability as an ideological construct of a polyvocal discourse, and that liveability could mean entirely different things to different urban residents depending on income levels. According to Hankins and Powers (2009), the idea of urban liveability "suggests that there is an ideal relationship between the urban environment and the social life it sustains", where the

concept of liveability has often and historically been used interchangeably with the notion of “quality of life” (848). The definitional terrain of urban liveability is contested, where proponents have historically tied ideas surrounding liveability to resident wellbeing and quality of life.

Liveability as a concept and a device has gained increasing traction and experienced mounting popularity in public policy, urban planning, and academic circles in recent decades. Over the last 20 years, the notion of urban liveability has been largely deployed as a performance indicator in the service of business, marketing, and competition (of entrepreneurial governance), with less emphasis on the daily lives of urban dwellers. Liveability has garnered sustained international focus from all scales of government, with cities being increasingly ranked according to various measurements of wellbeing and quality of life (Leach et al. 2016; Ling and Yuen 2009). Liveability rankings—such as the Economist Intelligence Unit’s Liveability Ranking, the Mercer Quality of Life Index, and the more recent Global Liveable Cities Index (GLCI)—have been criticized as emphasizing business, marketing and investment indicators that say little about residents’ experiences or quality of living (Conger 2015). These types of quantitative performance measuring indexes imply a level of affluence surrounding the notion of human wellbeing or satisfaction, which may overlook or ignore systemic social and racial inequalities. While liveability as a marketing tool is an increasingly important component of competitive advantage, where liveability ranking indices provide the evidence from which officials can market their cities, they fail to account for gentrification, eviction, and displacement, such as what is currently transpiring in Heron Gate.

Within the deployment of liveability as a mechanism of entrepreneurial governance, profit is prioritized over people. This has led to the observation that liveability is often invoked in city planning and municipal discourse “to describe every urban nicety except the two most closely aligned with people’s ability to live – the prices of labor and shelter” (Stein 2019, 69). Critical research has shed light on how liveability is deployed discursively to justify entrepreneurial policy initiatives (McCann 2004), and the role of business improvement districts and their claims to improve urban liveability through revitalization strategies (Ward 2007). Other critical studies have attended to the role of liveability discourses to social production, urban politics, strategies of governance, and gentrification (McCann 2007; McGuirk and Dowling 2011; Tolfo and Doucet 2022). Lloyd, Fullagar, and Reid (2016) implore the careful consideration of the social dimensions of liveability in relation to urban development and redevelopment efforts that incorporate and reflect the everyday experiences of urban dwellers; these social dimensions are identified as community, social interaction, and social cohesion. Douglass (2002) sees the emergence of two contrasting approaches to urban liveability—the “neoliberal city” characterized by mass consumption and corporate ownership, and the “convivial city” emerging from smaller scale place-making and grassroots-oriented mobilizations—while acknowledging that both can exist simultaneously in a given urban environment.

Judith Butler’s work on liveability is insightful for bridging the existing liveability literature with my focus on domicide through her questioning of what makes for a liveable or disposable life. Butler contemplates the idea of liveability in terms of posing the question: which lives are deemed liveable, and which can be expunged in

particular socio-political contexts? For Butler (2004), precarity and liveability are distributed unequally in contemporary social and political relations and institutions. Precarity is a politically induced condition in which “certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” (Butler 2009, 25). When social structures or institutions fail or are withdrawn, conditions of unliveable precarity ensue (2020, 50). Precarity and precarious life form the basis for Butler’s thinking around liveability, which is assigned or attributed to an individual or group of people, or not, either by a group of people or within the terms of a discourse, a policy, or institution (Butler 2020, 105). McNeilly (2016) describes Butler’s idea of liveability as “the ability to sustain a viable social life in conditions of inherent precariousness and the socio-political operation of precarity.” A viable social life—a liveable life—is first determined in terms of access to the basic necessities of life (e.g., food and shelter) but also by “conditions which shape who may be recognised within contingent socio-political cultures as a subject capable of living a life that counts” (McNeilly 2016). A life can only be rendered liveable when certain conditions are fulfilled.

Liveability, as an ideological discourse of urban improvement, is cast as a normative application to create conditions where life can persist and flourish, but in actuality liveability is distributed unevenly based on an individual’s social position and conditions in settler society, with underlying racialized, classed, and gendered characteristics. The application of liveability is highly subjective, which in essence works to create both liveable and disposable subjects, those worthy of flourishing and

experiencing a liveable life, and those that can be excluded from their homelands or expunged from a community.

Within these broad and diverse understandings of urban liveability, my research contributes to critical scholarship examining discourses of urban improvement in relation to housing and neighbourhood revitalization. I conceptualize liveability as an ideological discourse of improvement that works alongside domicide to reproduce ideal (affluent) social spaces to be consumed and enjoyed by ideal (affluent) subjects. These productive processes of liveability work alongside domicidal processes to unmake the homes and social spaces of those subjects that do not qualify for wellbeing and are thus determined to be disposable.

2. Domicide and the Unmaking of Home

Domicide denotes the unmaking of home and is typically characterized by its repressive elements. Porteous and Smith (2001) define domicide as “the deliberate destruction of home by human agency in pursuit of specified goals, which causes suffering to the victims” (12). In their flagship book bearing the conceptual title, Porteous and Smith (2001) examine over 200 cases of domicide ranging on multiple scales from a single dwelling to entire ethnic homelands in 70 countries, in order “to ensure the emergence of an adequate global picture of the motives for, processes of, and results of domicide” (20). For Porteous and Smith (2001), “domicide has a special trauma, because the victims are not killed but must watch their homes being destroyed as they are wrenched forcibly from them followed by an attempt to overcome relocation trauma and to build a new life” (15). Domicide denotes the “murder” or the “deliberate killing of home”, distinct from

topocide—the murder of place—and genocide—the deliberate killing of a group of people. The nature of domicide is not necessarily to kill or to end life.

Domicide's central concept is home (Latin: *domus*) with the suffix "cide" indicating deliberate killing (Porteous and Smith 2001). The concept of home has been studied widely across disciplines and is a central socio-spatial theme of human geography (24). Prior to the 1960s, social scientists focused on the physical manifestation (of home) as a dwelling yet recognized the "greater depth of meaning" implicating the home (24). Drawing on the work of Rybczynski (1987) and others, Porteous and Smith (2001) examine the concept of home across a variety of scales to understand home as a space and place constituting centredness and identity for both individual and group (20). This multiscale typology includes home as place, home as symbol, the psychological meaning of home, and the relation of home to domicide.

Overall, the work on domicide has largely been carried by geographers, including Mel Nowicki (2014, see also 2017, 2018) who has argued for a rethinking of domicide toward expanding a critical geography of home. Nowicki's work helps to shed light on a number of gaps in the conceptual framework of domicide worth pursuing. These include approaching domicide beyond the physicality of home to consider the inherent socio-symbolic destructiveness of domicide, challenging the heteronormative assumptions of home in domicide scholarship, disentangling linear representations of home that obscure domicide's inherent complexities, and centering agency and resistance to domicide. My research aims to both address gaps in domicide's original conceptual framework by centering and emphasizing resistance to domicide, as well as to contribute analytically to

understandings of domicide as a socio-spatial process of home unmaking that embodies both repressive and productive elements.

The notion of home unmaking stems from a reaction to the focus in the literature on practices and methods of homemaking at the expense of the injustices associated with the unmaking of home (Baxter and Brickell 2014). For Nowicki (2017), “home unmaking extends the concept of homemaking, exploring the fluidity and unpredictability of the homespace across the lifecourse, and the ways in which the home may be dismantled and/or reconstructed in a wide variety of circumstances” (69). Nowicki aligns home unmaking with domicide as a means to understand the complex processes and politics associated with the destruction and remaking of home. Engaging with domicide as a socio-spatial process of home unmaking opens up scholarly space to examine domicide in relation to policies, processes, and institutions surrounding eviction, displacement, and dispossession in affluent, settler colonial cities such as Ottawa. This includes approaching urban development as driven by settler colonial logics of acquiring Indigenous lands for the exclusive benefit of settler society, and the role of domicide in the production and reproduction of space within processes of settler colonial urbanism. Some scholarly work has embraced the notion of domicide to examine the Canadian government’s wilful destruction of Indigenous homes and homelands as part of a systemic and ongoing process of settler colonialism. These include Donnan’s (2016) argument that domicide contributes to deteriorating housing conditions and Indigenous homelessness, and Basso, Ciaschi, and Akesson’s (2020) conceptualization of “cumulative domicide” to challenge the idea of domicide as an event and instead denote domicide as perpetrated steadily over

time and space, where Indigenous peoples are displaced from their homelands and prevented from remaking home on their terms.

Domicide as home unmaking is a useful concept to explore ongoing settler colonial expansion and nation-building, in terms of understanding the destruction of Indigenous homelands and the reconfiguration of Indigenous spaces and places into zones of affluent, settler consumption. The two largest residential developments in Ottawa at the time of writing are illustrative of that. For example, the Zibi development involves the federal transfer of sacred Algonquin land (Akikodjiwan) to a private developer despite decades of Algonquin demands to have the site returned (Crosby 2021a). Branded as “world-class”, “master-planned”, and a “waterfront city”, Zibi is being marketed as the most sustainable community in Canada and one of the most sustainable communities in the world. The development of this National Capital Commission-designated “national interest land mass” is touted as key to the revitalization of Ottawa’s downtown core. When completed, the development will facilitate a population transfer of some 5,000 settlers—what the developers refer to as “pioneers” (Osman 2018)—to take up residence on the site, with 2,000 high-end condominium units, one million square feet of commercial space, and three million square feet of density.

Heron Gate, on the other hand, is about the physical destruction of a working-class neighbourhood as well as the symbolic destruction of diasporic space. The demolition of Heron Gate serves to disperse already marginalized populations to the margins of a sprawling city but at the same time destroys more than households and homes: domicide serves to eradicate socio-symbolic space, unmaking strong socio-cultural networks and institutions that have come to define and embody the

neighbourhood. Women may be most adversely impacted by the dissolution of community bonds and networks of support and care, more specifically in the areas of childcare, enterprise, and the reliance on shared first languages. Moreover, domicide as a productive force works to remake tattered townhomes into twinkling towers and to reproduce social space by replacing Black and Brown communities with a whiter, more affluent demographic. These urban redevelopment examples open further space to examine domicide as driven by discursive logics of improvement, key among them revitalization and liveability.

Analyzing domicide as experienced in the unmaking and redevelopment of Heron Gate has further implications for housing policy in a broader settler-Canadian context. This includes understanding the hierarchy of tenureship as it relates to housing and homeownership, where homeowners are emphasized at the top while renters and social tenants occupy the bottom (Nowicki 2018). My research aims to contribute to knowledge about the various ways in which homes can be unmade, both symbolically and physically (see Cheshire, Easthope, and Have 2021), and also to shed further light on the role of housing policies, urban planning, and governance strategies within the domicide literature. Of particular relevance is research engaging with eviction and displacement, including policies targeting squatters in London, England (Nowicki 2017), the impact of renovations-induced displacement on renters in Sweden surrounding urban redevelopment and renewal projects (Pull and Richard 2021), and the housing precarity experienced by renters leading to widespread evictions following the latest pre-COVID-19 global financial crisis (Paton and Cooper 2017). Other research has also associated demolition-driven evictions (or demovictions) with domicide and the long-term physical

and emotional impacts of home unmaking and dislocation, including a wave in Edinburgh which affected tens of thousands between 1950-73 (Johnston-Smith 2019), in Puerto Rico public housing projects (Arrigoitia 2014), and in East Delhi “slum” clearances (Read 2014). One point of this dissertation’s departure with the domicide literature is that these studies tend to emphasize the repressive qualities of domicide whereas my work seeks to also elucidate its productive characteristics.

3. The Productive Side of Domicide

Domicide is often associated with explicit violence and destruction (Akesson and Basso 2022). While Porteous and Smith (2001) acknowledge that domicide can be justified by appealing to the public good, more broadly domicide is not often associated with narratives surrounding and justifying urban redevelopment efforts, narratives structured by progress and improvement. While the unmaking of Heron Gate is an undeniably violent act characterized by mass evictions and displacement, I will argue that domicide in Heron Gate embodies a productive aspect of home unmaking and *remaking* that helps to expand our thinking about domicide. In particular, this research is interested in the domicidal remaking of Heron Gate into a “liveable” zone of affluence through the reproduction of space and improvement of property relations in the settler colonial city.

Domicide is about the destruction and reproduction of space. Domicide is first enacted with the appropriation of Indigenous land for urban development and settler urbanization. As settler societies establish in urbanizing environments, settler colonial property relations strive to constantly improve urban space and perfect real estate to maximize the exchange value of land. Settler colonial urbanism is the attempted

conversion of and reconfiguration of property for the highest and best settler use. Herein lies settler colonialism's domicidal violence, that targets Indigenous populations and their land as well as those non-ideal subjects—typically racialized populations, immigrants, and refugees—who are faced with the reality and configuration of settler property relations. Settler property relations relegate lower-income, racialized, immigrant populations to the margins of tenureship—rental housing that is more likely to be inadequate and unsuitable—and subjected to gentrification and demolition. Within the hierarchy of housing tenureship—where homeownership is the pinnacle of settler success, to own a piece of Indigenous land—renter households, especially those non-preferred racialized migrants, are subjected to precarity and precarious life under housing and property regimes in settler societies.

While already marginalized populations are subjected to housing precarity, improvement discourses such as those that surround the liveable city, serve to perpetuate precarity by ignoring or downplaying its root causes. That is in part because liveability, as an ideological discourse of settler colonialism, is primarily concerned about settler vitality. Although masked within the discursive language of improvement in the New Official Plan, such as the notion of “injecting new life” into certain urban areas (City of Ottawa 2021d), liveability is first and foremost about property relations and the attempted perfection of them. Property relations are central to the underlying logics of settler colonialism, where “injecting new life” is about the revitalization of Indigenous lands and migrant communities for the highest and best settler use. Ideological discourses surrounding urban improvement and the City of Ottawa's New Official Plan—such as liveability, intensification, renewal, revitalization, resilience, regeneration, and

sustainability—are rhetorical moves that do not acknowledge the living situations of lower-income people, do not prioritize renter households, do not offer protection to below-market rental units being lost at record paces to demolition and conversion, and do not seriously engage with options to build new affordable dwellings anywhere close to the numbers needed. In this vein, liveability initiatives can reproduce urban marginality and subject lower-income, racialized, Indigenous, and migrant populations to gentrification and domicide.

The liveable city is an emergent vision for settler society, where the self-perpetuating project of settler colonialism seeks to perfect both Indigenous dispossession and the improvement of property for particular settler subjectivities. This framework is useful to analyze urban revitalization efforts—efforts aimed at producing and reproducing the vitality of settler society through the improvement and perceived best use of property—and applications of domicide in the liveable city. In particular, which subjects are afforded access to quality housing and which subjects are excluded from the opportunity of suitable and adequate housing; and further, which subjects are rendered so disposable that they can be expunged from their homes and their communities in acts of domicide? In other words, whose lives count as liveable within this framework of liveability and domicide in settler society, and whose lives do not? This research sheds light on the racialized and spatial logics of settler colonial urbanism by examining how liveability is discursively mobilized alongside processes of domicide.

The situation at Heron Gate offers the opportunity to investigate domicide as a form of home unmaking enacted through the ideological discourse of liveability in an affluent settler colonial city. Although hundreds of lives have been deemed disposable

and expunged from Heron Gate and displaced from the community to allow for redevelopment, revitalization efforts are not viewed or presented as acts of forced dispossession or “violent expulsion” (Sassen 2014). Instead, the redevelopment of Heron Gate has been encouraged by public officials, facilitated by mechanisms of municipal governance, and ultimately propelled by urban planners. Revitalization efforts at Heron Gate demonstrate the enactment of domicide through a discursive violence of improvement. Revitalization is about producing new forms of vitality or life—as liveable subjects—and dispersing or expunging disposable, non-preferred subjects. Revitalization is also about the vitality of a given place, of revitalization as a socio-spatial process, insinuating that Heron Gate once had life but is now unviable (unprofitable) and unliveable. While extrinsically violent, the discourse in which revitalization as domicidal home unmaking plays out in the public sphere is one of improvement, of injecting vitality into a place under auspices of improvement, of creating “liveable homes” in a liveable city, for those affluent ideal subjects that can afford it (City of Ottawa 2018).

The destruction and revitalization of Heron Gate that is explored in the coming chapters provides valuable insight on liveability, domicide, and social relations of rule and resistance in the affluent, settler colonial city. I argue that building “liveable homes” at Heron Gate is about enhancing the quality of life and wellbeing of desirable (affluent, typically white) demographics, while unmaking the homes and community of a lower-income, racialized, family-oriented neighbourhood. Domicide in this regard is directed at physical places, social spaces, and populations. Domicide is both repressive in that it destroys one group of peoples’ homes or communities and renders those people disposable and dispersible, and at the same time productive by replacing these homes and

communities with those of a more privileged group. Liveability in this regard, I argue, is about a racial ordering of valuable life (Story 2019) where the socio-spatial processes of domicile produce subjects worthy of living a liveable life and determine the disposability of others, where liveability for some coexists and depends upon domicile for others. Those lives deemed disposable are dispersed to the social and geographic margins of a sprawling city where they do not disrupt the circuits of economic growth and accumulation or interfere with the enhancement (and advancement) of property. The theoretical framework of settler colonial property relations and domicile foreshadows the empirical themes unpacked in the following chapters, including gentrification, the financialization of rental housing, and tenant organizing against ruling relations.

Chapter 3 – Methodological Approach and Research

Design

Introduction

In this chapter I explore and unpack the methodological foundations of my doctoral research project. The design of this research and guiding qualitative methodological framework revolve around the principles and values of political activist ethnography in conversation with institutional ethnography and movement-relevant theory. Political activist ethnography is a qualitative research method that focuses on how everyday experiences are represented, organized, and mediated through institutional and social relations of rule. Movement-relevant theory centers the knowledge produced by social movements and supplements political activist ethnography by encouraging the production of research that is relevant and useful for social movement struggles. Both of these approaches have their roots in institutional ethnography, a method of sociological inquiry that investigates social organization and social relations based on how people's everyday experiences are mediated through texts and discourses. I therefore begin by introducing and outlining institutional ethnography as a critical starting point for investigating social relations in the first section, before delving into political activist ethnography as the core methodological framework of this dissertation in the second section. I then briefly explore movement-relevant theory and activist scholarship before outlining the research design.

The following sections of this chapter are then dedicated to the nuts and bolts of data collection and analysis and are broken down into several sub-sections. First, I contextualize and begin to chart my position vis-à-vis this research project, how I came to study it, and how my position has evolved with respect to the struggle in Heron Gate. I first became involved and engaged with the organizing and activism work of the Herongate Tenant Coalition prior to entering my degree program; as this work progressed alongside my degree, I eventually began to approach this work from an academic standpoint and embraced this struggle to conduct research as part of my doctoral program. This came to involve the meticulous documentation associated with conducting academic fieldwork alongside efforts to confront evictions and the redevelopment of the neighbourhood. I only began to understand how this shift was even possible through being introduced to and reading the literature associated with political activist ethnography and its parent framework, institutional ethnography.

As part of this section, I then outline and detail the complementary methodological approaches informing this project. While flexible depending on the researcher and the project, the framework of political activist ethnography tends to involve a three-fold research design: 1) starting with activist experiences (through participant observation and interviews); 2) analyzing interviews and field notes to discover references to institutions and relations of rule; 3) tracing these relations of rule to uncover their textual mediation (Rodimon 2018). The sub-sections that follow my explanation of how I entered the field involve my approach to recruiting participants and interviewing, participant observation and fieldwork, and textual analyses of the large repertoire of diverse archival materials I have collected as part of this project. Altogether,

this methodological approach to producing movement-relevant research was designed with the goal of being able to move beyond explicating social conditions. Instead, I have embraced political activist ethnography as a method, and as part of a larger political project, that attempts to disrupt ruling relations by centering the perspectives of tenants and community organizers and by producing research that is hopefully insightful and useful for tenant and housing-based struggles for social justice.

Institutional Ethnography

Political activist ethnography has its roots in, and is indeed a reformulation of, institutional ethnography (IE). Institutional ethnography, as an alternative sociological method of inquiry, was developed and advanced by Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith (1987, 1990, 2001, 2005) and has evolved into a critical, yet increasingly popular method of social research. Against the prevailing sociological discourse of her time, Smith set out to develop an alternative sociology based on her lived experiences as a feminist sociologist active in the women's movement in the 1970s. Smith coined this alternative sociology as institutional ethnography, which is a method of sociological inquiry that investigates the social relations that structure people's lives based on how the experiences of people are mediated through texts and discourses. Institutional ethnographic investigation is empirically rooted in the experiences of people and how texts and discourses coordinate and organize the activities of individuals across space and time (Devault and McCoy 2001; Devault 2006; Smith and Turner 2014). Institutional ethnography developed alongside feminist standpoint theory, of which Smith was also an

architect, a framework that centers the social situation of experience, knowledge, and power relations, or what Smith coined “ruling relations.”

For Dorothy Smith (1990) ruling relations are those intrinsic to and manifesting from “institutions of administration, management, and professional authority, and of intellectual and cultural discourses, which organize, regulate, lead and direct, contemporary capitalist societies” (2). These diverse and prolific societal apparatuses permeate liberal democratic and settler colonial societies such as Canada. Relations of ruling stem from the visible and invisible systems of governance, bureaucracy, and authority. Yet, Smith also saw ruling relations manifest in academic disciplinary methods and sociological lines of inquiry. Through her scholarly training, Smith experienced the discipline of sociology as impervious to developing “inquiry from the standpoint of a subject situated in the local actualities of her life” (D. Smith 1990, 2). Through her work developing sociological lines of inquiry from the standpoint of the experiencing embodied subject, of women and the women’s movement, Smith not only articulated the role of ruling relations, but also pioneered the methodological approach of institutional ethnography. For Mykhalovskiy (2018), “institutional ethnographic inquiry begins with and returns to the embodied site of actual people as they experience the world” (297). The embodied experience of people—including how their lives are organized by, and from their encounters with, institutions—is central to apprehend social organization and relations of rule. Moreover, as a materialist ontology of the social, institutional ethnography is preoccupied with mapping or explicating relations of rule (Mykhalovskiy 2018). To map and explain ruling relations necessitates embodied engagement where institutional ethnographers “orient to language, discourse, and representation as social

practices” (Mykhalovskiy 2018, 297). Through such embodied engagement, institutional ethnographers are better positioned to illuminate established and often taken for granted practices of governance and rule.

Political Activist Ethnography

Institutional ethnography is a form of sociology that allows the researcher to investigate social organization and provide critical explanations about the social relations in which they are engaged. Yet how does political activist ethnography differ from institutional ethnography? Political activist ethnography—while similar to institutional ethnography in that it investigates social relations of ruling through textual and discursive institutional mediations—differs in that it begins from an activist standpoint. Political activist ethnography emphasizes that activists hold particular social and political insights into the institutions and social organization of issues they struggle against. Sarah Rodimon (2018) puts it this way: “While [institutional ethnography] offers researchers a method for tracing social organization by starting from people’s everyday experiences, [political activist ethnography] provides researchers with a firmer orientation toward social change by beginning its inquiry from the perspective of activists” (23). While institutional ethnography seeks to explicate social relations, political activist ethnography seeks to change them by centering the perspectives of activists whose work investigates and attempts to disrupt the organizing logics of ruling relations (25-26).

First conceptualized by George Smith (1990)—and since taken up by a handful of others (most pivotally the collection of chapters in Frampton et al. (2006) along with Hussey and Bisailon’s anticipated forthcoming volume)—political activist ethnography

aims to produce knowledge that is useful for activists and social movements. Drawing from the institutional ethnographic framework of social inquiry, the embeddedness of the political activist ethnographer in social struggle enables what George Smith (1990) refers to as a form of sociology that can assist the activism and organizing efforts of the movement in which they are engaged. The political activist ethnographer works to center activist/organizer knowledge, investigate pertinent socio-political questions, and provide critical explanations that ultimately produces knowledge that is relevant to and useful for the struggle in which they are engaged. For George Smith (1990), this method of investigating social relations represents a “new paradigm for sociology” because of its unique ontological and epistemological grounding in the real world through the actual life experience of the researcher (630-631).

Through engaging with George Smith’s (1990) pioneering work developing political activist ethnography as a method of sociological inquiry, Mykhalovskiy (2018) positions the embedded scholar as “someone who uses extensive and long-lasting involvement in the activities of a social movement not as a basis for writing or theorizing about the movement, but as an ethnographic resource to study the ruling relations that the movement seeks to challenge” (300). This work is distinct from the empirical sociology of social movements as internal object of analysis where “the political activist as ethnographer turns investigation outward to the complex ruling practices that the movement confronts” (Mykhalovskiy 2018, 300). George Smith’s involvement with AIDS ACTION NOW! and the Right to Privacy Committee in the 1980s investigated how the Toronto bathhouse raids actually happened through existing legal structures as opposed to offering more shallow explanations related to the existence of police

homophobia or a right-wing election strategy at the time (Mykhalovskiy 2018; G. Smith 1990). This earliest work of political activist ethnography centered activist demands for changes in the law rather than merely recommending police sensitivity training. Legal challenges are one of many diverse tactics that activists and social movements can deploy. However, while legal reforms can lead to positive social change, seeking justice through the law may not necessarily disrupt ruling relations. More militant groups increasingly use disruptive measures commonly referred to as direct action which, aligning with political activist ethnography, seeks to challenge and disrupt relations of rule.

Direct action moves beyond forms of state-sanctioned dissent to pressure and disrupt ruling relations. Gary Kinsman (forthcoming) took up the idea of direct action as a form of activist research through involvement with anti-poverty activist organizing in Sudbury, Ontario. For Kinsman, direct action is not only a form of political activism but also a form of research that is driven by the needs of the struggle (2-3). By disrupting ruling relations, direct action can make an important contribution to knowledge production that learns from and informs social movement struggles. Building off the work of Dorothy Smith and George Smith, Kinsman's contribution to political activist ethnography is in the terrain of mapping social relations of struggle. Mapping social relations of struggle involves activists locating themselves within the webs of social relations in which they are engaged, but also moving beyond mere investigation toward strategizing against and attempting to transform ruling relations. (Kinsman 2006, forthcoming). Mapping social relations of struggle can involve identifying allies, explicating movement capacities, strengths, strategies, and tactics, and identifying weak

points and contradictions in which to target ruling relations (3). Through Kinsman's work with various initiatives and aspects of struggle with the Sudbury Coalition Against Property, he was able to map social relations of struggle and identify various actors, positions, and lines of fault. This work shows the potential for direct action as activist research and the role of knowledge production, yet Kinsman concludes by posing some important questions for further research based on experiences in Sudbury. These questions include how to engage with bureaucratic textual regulations, city state formation, and legal terrains of struggle without becoming subsumed within them.

Both institutional ethnography and political activist ethnography focus on how everyday experiences are represented, organized, and mediated through institutional and social relations of rule (or ruling relations), and these methods of sociological inquiry are useful to attend to differences in social location (Bisailon 2012; Rodimon 2018). Dynamics of institutional relations of power can be examined in moments of confrontation to explore disjunctures or lines of fault "between our experiences and knowledges of the social world and the ways in which the world is represented in authoritative discourses" (Rodimon 2018, 38). In George Smith's (1990, 631) work, a line of fault is identified as existing between the knowledge and everyday experiences of gay men and the objective bureaucratic domain of a political-administrative regime. Rodimon (2018) also identifies lines of fault through studying abortion access in New Brunswick, including the disjuncture between federal and provincial health regulations and the provincial government's representation of abortion access and the reality of abortion care. Through the course of carrying out my research I have identified a number of lines of fault, among them the seeming incompatibility between the discursive

application of liveability and the reality of the domicidal practices of urban development in Ottawa, as well as the disjuncture between tenant articulations of needs and demands and how they are interpreted, obfuscated, and ultimately ignored by the dominant private (landlord) and political (City of Ottawa) actors within a veneer of claims to active listening and consultation.

1. Movement-relevant Theory

A gap exists—that was identified by Rodimon (2018)—in the political activist ethnography literature in that guidance on *how* to align this type of research with the struggles and goals of activists and social movements remains undertheorized. Rodimon (2018) works to connect movement-relevant theory and knowledge production with political activist ethnography, using Bevington and Dixon’s (2005) work that underlines that researchers can learn from the epistemological and theoretical work in which activists are already engaged. Knowledge production is an integral aspect to the everyday work and experiences of activists and social movements (Choudry 2013, 2014, 2015, 2019; Dixon 2014; Kinsman 2006). Social movement settings act as key sites of knowledge production where researchers can investigate experiences and practices that are organized by and through ruling relations (Rodimon 2018, 37). Relations of rule can be further examined by analyzing the institutions confronted by activists in the struggle for social transformation

Social movement participants have long engaged in research work and generating theory⁴ about their struggles and tactics against dominant ideologies and power structures, as well as producing visions for social change; however, social movement scholarship up until recently has obscured the relevance of this knowledge production work (Choudry 2020; Choudry and Kapoor 2010; Bevington and Dixon 2005). Choudry and Kapoor articulate this tension as an understanding that: “the voices, ideas, perspectives and theories produced by those engaged in social struggles are often ignored, rendered invisible, or overwritten with accounts by professionalized or academic experts” (Choudry and Kapoor 2010, 2). Although there is a rich history of social movement scholarship going back to the 1960s, Bevington and Dixon (2005) chart the trajectory and growing disjuncture between activists and academics leading to the turn of the century and the rise of the global justice movement. They point to a small handful of works at the time of their writing that consider the relevance of social movement theory to social movements themselves (Flacks 2004; Croteau, Hoyness, and Ryan 2005; Kelley 2002). Bevington and Dixon (2005) argue that the vast majority of social movement scholarship at the time lacked meaningful relevance for active participants within movements, so they offer movement-relevant theory as a promising path toward bridging the gap between theory and movements.

⁴ Chris Dixon (2014) also speaks of movement-relevant theory in terms of “movement-generated theory” (14).

2. Activist Scholarship through Direct Engagement

Political activist ethnography and movement-relevant theory necessarily involve what Bevington and Dixon (2005) theorize as “direct engagement” with movements struggling for social change. Direct engagement involves “putting the thoughts and concerns of the movement participants at the center of the research agenda and showing a commitment to producing accurate and potentially useful information about the issues that are important to these activists” (Bevington and Dixon 2005, 200). Relationship building with movements in the service of producing movement-relevant scholarship necessitates dynamic and reciprocal engagement. Direct engagement enables researchers to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of social movements which is more likely to produce better research and useful theory (Bevington and Dixon 2005).

Notwithstanding the potentiality of political activist ethnography as a research method that works to explicate, challenge, and transform social relations of rule, there are potential limitations and cautions worth exploring. One challenge worth identifying is the role of the “activist scholar” (Bisaillon 2012; Mayer 2020) in building and maintaining relationships with activist groups yet remaining attuned to the dynamics within and among groups, and the importance of maintaining a receptive yet critical stance to activist ideas and strategies (Rodimon 2018). Conflicting dynamics can emerge and exist within particular activist groups and certainly across different activist formations within a particular social movement milieu. Neighbourhood residents and tenants organizing within their particular communities are understandably suspect and can even be hostile toward outside organizations that they interpret as self-interested, working to divert

resources, and overall distracting from radically-articulated goals that involve taking direct action to defend homes and communities rather than engage with ruling actors to negotiate concessions or a more acceptable form of domicile, for example. These dynamics were certainly at play surrounding the Heron Gate struggle, and although my point of entry into this struggle and allegiances lie with the Herongate Tenant Coalition, I have also engaged with a broad range of relevant actors when conducting this research. I did this to gain a fuller perspective of the broader struggle and the numerous actors and how they articulate their goals and operationalize their strategies. The challenge of activist scholars within these types of circumstances is to remain reflexive of our social location and privilege as academics, and of how that may impact knowledge production.

My approach to political activist ethnography in this project is one of doing, not studying. I work sometimes from within and often alongside the Herongate Tenant Coalition, I am not studying them from the outside. However, I have maintained a formal distance through my independent media work so as to be able to write publicly about the struggle in conforming to established media norms around objectivity and bias; this caveat must be contextualized by my decade-long work with *The Leveller*, a progressive newspaper that publicly confronts and challenges mainstream media claims to objectivity and non-bias. Further, although I have connections with the Heron Gate and Heatherington neighbourhoods, I am not a resident of this area and thus would not embrace full membership⁵ in a tenant-based group from a neighbourhood in which I do

⁵ The Herongate Tenant Coalition has no formal membership structure. The Coalition is an informal collective of tenants from Heron Gate Village and the surrounding Herongate and Heatherington areas that came together to organize against the 2018 mass evictions (detailed in Chapter Eight).

not live. Instead, I position myself as working alongside the Herongate Tenant Coalition in support of the struggle to confront the landlord and defend the neighbourhood.

In my personal circumstances, although I have lived most of my life in rental housing, including in lower-income housing when I was younger, I have not experienced housing precarity in Ottawa-Gatineau in the 12 years that I have lived in the region. Moreover, my overall lived experience is not shaped by interlocking dimensions of various forms of oppression. To the contrary, I have been able to thrive and raise a family, but I recognize that my existence here is dependent on the ongoing theft and exploitation of Indigenous land by a predominantly white settler majority. As I occupy this privileged position, I believe that I have a responsibility to work toward dismantling systems of oppression that prop up the settler state. While admittedly inadequate, this involves in part identifying and exposing the role of these systems and structures that work to reinforce ruling relations. As I embraced and continue this project, my work is informed and driven by a question initially posed by Rodimon (2018): If we are complicit in relations of ruling while also struggling against them, then how can we possibly be thought to exist outside of them?

I embrace this critical stance on a path carved out by others before me with humility and as a reminder to be constantly and consistently reflexive of my social position and my overall positionality in relation to the Heron Gate struggle. I came to this struggle initially from a standpoint of participatory solidarity. Embracing it now as a doctoral student has been unsettling as I have always been wary of academia as an emancipatory venue. It has been through further reading, reflection, and learning about the importance of foregrounding relevance and relationships in activist research that I

came to feel comfortable embracing political activist ethnography as a methodological approach. This approach centers the knowledge produced by tenant organizing as well as the theoretical permutations generated through this work. Much of what my work sets out to do is to understand the dominant interests at play here, the ruling relations produced by financial real estate capital and municipal governance actors. In addition to centering the knowledge produced and the theories generated from Herongate Tenant Coalition organizing, a goal of this project is to bring various theoretical lenses to bear from my position as a doctoral student on how the landlord-developer manoeuvres and operates within the built environment and the property relations produced therein. Bridging movement-relevant theory with political activist ethnography and investigating social relations of struggle through a diversity of tactics serve an important goal of this research to understand and articulate ruling relations, and also relations of resistance, a goal that centers the work of social movements.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection and analysis process in this project was inspired and driven by the research design strategy adopted by institutional and political activist ethnographers.

While the sociological literature on political activist ethnography is still relatively sparse, a common thread that runs through the scholarship is that those conducting movement-relevant, activist research are already engaged in activism and social movement support work (see Rodimon 2018; Withers 2019; Kinsman forthcoming). This activist-research ethnographic work is naturally iterative and inductive, in both the traditional qualitative sense that iterative-inductive research is a process of discovery (O'Reilly 2011) but also

in the sense that activists are already doing the work as opposed to studying the work. This is also where movement-relevant theory is useful to understand activist work as research and knowledge production, and the role of political activist ethnographers approaching the work from an academic standpoint is to aid in articulating research and mobilizing knowledge for the benefit of social struggle against ruling relations.

Political activist ethnography's methodological approach to data collection and analysis is flexible and open to interpretation (Rodimon 2018). The choice of methods for both approaches include interviews, participant observation, and textual/archival research, but proponents of political activist ethnography have argued that this should remain flexible as opposed to imposing or embodying strict parameters. This ethnographic approach to doing research is "explicitly political, emergent in design, and embedded in social movement practice" (Mykhalovskiy (2018, 302). Likewise, data collection in both the institutional and political activist ethnographic traditions is considered non-linear, in that the process of discovery through these methods can lead to other points of inquiry and analysis.

With a theoretical framework oriented toward examining gentrification and domicile within a settler colonial context, and a methodological approach embracing political activist ethnography and movement-relevant theory, my research design was developed with the intent of gathering extensive and diverse nodes of data in order to investigate social relations of struggle surrounding the Heron Gate redevelopment. Before delving into the processes behind each of this project's methodological approaches—participant observation, interviews, and textual/archival research—I first discuss my entrance into the field.

Entering the Field

I first became involved with the Herongate Tenant Coalition in June 2018, shortly after the group formed in response to the landlord—Timbercreek Asset Management Inc., which owns the entire Heron Gate neighbourhood—announcing the demolition of a large parcel of townhomes and issuing eviction notices. At the time I was working as a Coordinator with the Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) at Carleton University; I was also a frequent contributing writer with *The Leveller* newspaper. I received an email at OPIRG in early June 2018 from an organizer with the Herongate Tenant Coalition, asking for assistance with material needs such as making newsletters and flyers, and helping with printing and photocopies. OPIRG is an activist hub of sorts on the Carleton campus with a decades-long history of supporting various groups in different social justice struggles. I offered to assist with printing and photocopying and suggested that the group apply for funding to cover related costs, as OPIRG has a budget line to support local groups and initiatives; I would later facilitate the Coalition becoming a Working Group which opened further avenues for funding and campus networks. While processing the first funding request I offered to become further involved in research and building awareness, more specifically offering my assistance in submitting freedom of information (FOI) requests and helping to write about this struggle and publish through independent media. This is how I became involved with research and publishing efforts surrounding the struggle in Heron Gate.

Shortly thereafter, members of the Herongate Tenant Coalition received a cease and desist letter from Timbercreek and I wrote my first news article covering this story in

ricochet on July 23, 2021 which was republished by *The Leveller* (Crosby 2018a, 2018b). Our small team then worked to uncover financial and political links between the developers and city officials/planners, filing a series of FOI requests that also included research into City of Ottawa bylaw enforcement around the systemic neglect and lack of maintenance enforcement in the Heron Gate community. This initial work would eventually bear fruit in tandem with our media work: several years later, in 2021, the head of the City of Ottawa Planning Committee (Jan Harder) would resign her seat as a result of corruption exposed by our research and media work, and taken up by the City's Integrity Commissioner (Lord 2021); a freedom of information request I filed as part of this research also would become the focal point of a lawsuit brought by former tenants against Timbercreek seeking damages for neglecting to make necessary repairs and then lying about making those repairs to the City's Property Standards and Licensing Appeals Committee (this case is still before the courts at the time of writing).

In the early stages of my involvement, in the summer of 2018, I had not yet entered the PhD program and had no intention at the time of pursuing this work in an academic sense. I entered my degree program in September 2018 and remained engaged as an activist with the Heron Gate struggles working on media articles and FOI research. However, I also began to engage with Heron Gate in an academic research sense through my coursework in the Sociology department—*Urban Inequality and the Neoliberalization of Cities*—which was a joint collaboration with a class in the geography department at Carleton University. As a point of reflexivity, to reflect back on the evolution and trajectory of this research project, I was initially hesitant to register for this course. After all, my ideas at the time regarding a dissertation project were far

removed from what was happening in Heron Gate. From my perspective at the time, I was already engaged with the struggle from an activist standpoint (doing media and research support work with the Herongate Tenant Coalition). I was already engaged with the struggle through activist work which included media, FOI, and campus organizing at the student level to garner ongoing grassroots support for the struggle. In my mind at the time, I was wary about whether academia could play a meaningful or immediate role in Heron Gate; I was more focused on and convinced that media work would be more immediately useful to the struggle there. Yet, thanks to the encouragement of my professor, Dr. Jacqueline Kennelly, I registered for the course and set out to research and develop a plan in order to counter what I believed at the time was an impending SLAPP-style lawsuit to demobilize the Herongate Tenant Coalition. I also became increasingly interested in understanding the landlord's tactics used against the Coalition, in addition to the cease and desist letters and efforts to shut down their Twitter account. After gathering the existing legal letters and reading the contents, I was interested in understanding how and why the landlord increasingly framed and depicted Herongate Tenant Coalition members as criminals and extremists, as my earlier academic interests were critical toward the use of 'extremism' labels in policing (Crosby and Monaghan 2016, 2018). This latter element closely correlates with my longstanding research interests on the policing of social movements. At the same time, through conversations with activist, researcher, and sociology instructor Chris Dixon I became introduced to the methodological approach of doing research known as political activist ethnography, where I understood that I could continue to do the activist work with the Herongate Tenant Coalition while integrating it with academic research. As part of this pivot toward

academic research and adopting the struggle as my dissertation project, I began to engage more thoroughly in events surrounding the redevelopment of the neighbourhood which included the City of Ottawa's efforts to create a "liveable city", as well as broader housing issues and struggles locally and beyond.

Participant Observation

After shifting focus in my PhD program toward Heron Gate, I began to meticulously document my involvement with the struggle there. In early 2019 I began to keep an ethnographic timeline spreadsheet of events tracking my encounters, as well as a notebook for the purpose of crafting field notes. I also recorded notable events and happenings during my involvement in the prior year, in addition to gathering and organizing associated documentation. To broaden my knowledge and experience beyond one particular micro-geographical context, I also immersed myself in the wider Ottawa and Canadian milieus of housing justice activism, advocacy, and education. I joined various networks and have participated in dozens of events organized by a diverse variety of national groups including the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, the National Right to Housing Network, the Planners' Network, the Expert Community on Housing, as well as the Healthy Cities forums organized by Carleton University. I also became involved with Horizon Ottawa, an activist group that advocates for progressive change at the municipal level. In addition, I have also participated in events and actions organized by more localized, grassroots groups such as ACORN Ottawa. I have paid particular attention to activists participating in these events and to their articulations of what is required to realize a just city where residents have access to affordable housing

and not living precariously under the threat of eviction. I have also participated in other tenant struggles, including protests and research work for groups both lobbying for reforms and those fighting landlords and the Landlord and Tenant Board in Ontario (including contributing to the research efforts surrounding landlordsoftoronto.com).

While this research is ongoing, I have participated in 90 unique events and documented my field observation work. I have organized these events into particular categories, which include community forums organized by both developers and opponents, strategy meetings organized by tenant activists, Landlord and Tenant Board hearings, protests, webinars, real estate investment conferences, and numerous legal proceedings. Out of these 90 events I have pinpointed 35 to take forward to the coding and analysis stage, after dividing them into coherent categories. These categories include instances related to court proceedings; public open house “consultation” sessions organized by the landlord-developer in the neighbourhood; events and meetings organized by the Herongate Tenant Coalition and other community groups; real estate investment conferences (of which I participated in two); public events organized by housing activists; and City of Ottawa-related events, including meetings of council, the planning committee, and public education and/or consultation sessions related to the Heron Gate Official Plan Amendment and the New Official Plan. Since embracing this research project, I have participated in every relevant event surrounding the Heron Gate redevelopment and the City of Ottawa’s New Official Plan process, which has allowed me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the social organization of city politics and urban development. I am also embedded in the organizing efforts at Heron Gate and other tenant struggles surrounding evictions and rent increases. I have participated on various

panels and contributed to wider efforts to document financialized landlords in Ontario and the spike in evictions during the pandemic. I have also continued to write media articles on financialized real estate, evictions, and tenant resistance.

One interesting point of intervention involving my field work in this project has been my participation in court proceedings. I have been involved with organizing, strategizing, and contributing to the work surrounding the legal cases emanating from the 2018 Heron Gate demoviction. This experience has served to add an extra layer of observational analysis from which to understand the legal tactics and strategies deployed by landlords and tenants that play out in the court as an institutional site mediating social relations of rule. I have also continued to participate in all relevant events up to the time of finalizing writing and will continue to do so post-defence. From these ongoing experiences I have developed a solid understanding of what I believe is useful for housing rights activists in terms of academic research as well as where I can be most useful doing activist work (FOI research, publishing media articles, fundraising, and contributing to activist research documenting financialized landlords and evictions). My research questions are formulated based on these experiences and my location as a researcher.

Interviews

I interviewed 25 people as part of this research project. My first phase of interviewing took place while completing the *Urban Inequality and the Neoliberalization of Cities* course in 2019. I interviewed four individuals as part of the initial coursework and

incorporated the interview data into my dissertation project. This was indicated on my Research Ethics Protocol Form submitted to the Office of Research Ethics.⁶

My approach to interviewee recruitment for this project was purposeful, targeted sampling. I set out to complete between 12 and 25 interviews with participants that would provide further insight and understanding into the tactics and strategies behind development initiatives and evictions defence, as well as into how these groupings of social actors conceptualize and envision liveable communities. In the following months I kept and regularly updated a list of potential interviewees based on my ongoing fieldwork and participation in a wide variety of events. The list included many individuals associated with activism around Heron Gate and tenant justice, as well as representatives from the landlord-developer, City of Ottawa (housing/planning department staff, councillors and staff), community organizations (non-profit and social agencies involved in proximity to the community), as well as other experts in affordable housing, financialization, and urban development that I believed would help inform knowledge production around the critical issues of this project. I recruited participants through the networks fostered through my fieldwork around the time of defending my research proposal. I reached out to around 40 people in total and once I completed 25 interviews, I discontinued the recruitment process. The demographic make-up of my research participants is noteworthy. While over half were white, including the majority of City of Ottawa representatives being white males, the activist sub-group of research participants were in the majority women of colour.

⁶ I obtained ethics approval for this project—Certification of Institutional Ethics Clearance—dated July 13, 2020 (Ethics Clearance ID: Project # 112995).

I categorized the 25 individuals into five types of interviewees: these included members of the Herongate Tenant Coalition, developer employees, City of Ottawa officials and staff, legal and other experts, and community leaders relevant to Heron Gate. Of these, the two sub-groups with the most representation included tenant activists (n=8) and City of Ottawa employees (n=7). Not included in this group of interviewees are the people I interviewed as part of doing media work surrounding the Heron Gate development, evictions, and other struggles surrounding the financialization of rental housing and affordability, the majority of whom were tenants and activists. While I would have liked to have interviewed more current and former employees of the Heron Gate developer (n=2), I was able to gather sufficient insight from participating in multiple forums where developer representatives participated and presented materials (including community “consultation” events, City of Ottawa-organized events, as well as real estate investment conferences). Overall, I have gathered considerable amounts of data from three dominant groups of actors in this struggle: those working for the City of Ottawa, and for the landlord-developer, and tenant activists.

While the original interviews in 2018-2019 were conducted in person, the remainder of interviews conducted in 2021 were all of a virtual nature due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Research participants agreed to semi-structured interviews which for the most part were conducted as exploratory conversations. While the interviews varied depending on whom was being interviewed and their affiliations, I predominantly explored four core themes related to planning/urban development, gentrification/displacement, activist tactics/strategies, and understandings of revitalization/liveability. This structure allowed the key themes that I had set out to study

to be covered in the majority of the interviews, but also allowed the interviewee to shape the conversation with me.

Textual Record Collection

Texts are key components of the architecture for social relations of rule. As such, collecting texts is a central focus of institutional ethnography and political activist ethnography. Texts from a variety of sources have played a pivotal role in documenting and understanding the social relations of rule and resistance surrounding the ongoing struggle at Heron Gate. Texts can refer to diverse forms of writing and representation from a variety of institutional sources, including media, policy, judicial, legislative, etc., from different organizational sectors, including public, private, non-governmental, and social movement based. I have collected hundreds of documents through a variety of methods that include online searches, on-site research, email requests for documents, documents obtained from participating in events, documents obtained through organizing with the Herongate Tenant Coalition, and documents obtained via FOI requests (which have added a significant layer of depth to understanding the social relations of rule in this work). I have collected these textual materials from three main protagonists involved in this struggle: the City of Ottawa, the landlord-developer, and from tenant and other housing activists and organizers.

First, the City of Ottawa is a major player in the redevelopment of Heron Gate and in planning the development trajectory of the larger municipal region. My interest in researching and understanding the City of Ottawa's role is multi-faceted. First, the City of Ottawa refused to intervene in the 2016 and 2018 mass demolition-driven evictions.

Second, the City of Ottawa is responsible for permitting the rezoning, demolition, and redevelopment of the Heron Gate neighbourhood, as well as enforcing maintenance and repair standards of rental properties. Third, the City of Ottawa recently approved (September 2021) the Heron Gate Official Plan Amendment submitted by the landlord-developer to redevelop the entire neighbourhood which includes demolishing 559 more homes (in addition to the 80 in 2016 and 150 in 2018) in the coming years. A plethora of textual materials have been created surrounding the Official Plan Amendment and redevelopment agenda, including over 40 planning proposal documents submitted by the landlord-developer. Intertwined with this agenda is the charge levied by Heron Gate residents and activists that the landlord-developer purposefully neglected the property and failed to maintain adequate living conditions by refusing to make necessary repairs. I have led the FOI research as part of the Herongate Tenant Coalition's efforts since 2018, a major part of which was attempting to understand the role of the city and the bylaw department in enforcing work orders and maintenance in the neighbourhood. As mentioned above, one of my files has led to a lawsuit being filed against the landlord in small claims court.

I have also submitted FOI requests with the City of Ottawa to learn more about planning, development, and the background work behind the decision to designate Ottawa as North America's most liveable mid-sized city. I have supplemented these internal records with the collection of publicly available annual reports, economic development reports, growth management strategy reports, records associated with the Community Safety and Well-being Plan, as well as documents associated with the Building Better Revitalized Neighbourhood strategies targeting specific low-income

communities in Ottawa for improvement (including Heatherington). This portion of data collection also specifically targets documentation surrounding the City of Ottawa's process to develop a New Official Plan, which is led by the Planning, Infrastructure, and Economic Development (PIED) department. Altogether I have collected over 150 unique documents related to the City of Ottawa's overall planning strategy on how to pursue growth through urban development. The culmination of this work rendered in the New Official Plan (the final version of which was approved by City Council in October 2021) aspires Ottawa to become North America's most liveable mid-sized city.

Second, working closely with the Herongate Tenant Coalition, I have collected a large number of textual materials produced by Heron Gate landlord Timbercreek (now Hazelview). Timbercreek Asset Management is a financialized real estate investment firm comprised of numerous entities and subsidiaries. Part of the research I have undertaken with the Herongate Tenant Coalition is to understand the composition and strategy of this type of ruling actor as it pertains to reconfiguring the built environment and hyper-commodifying housing in order to earn profits for investors. We have collected promotional materials, media articles, and financial documents spanning the company's history dating back twenty years. In addition, in order to better understand this type of actor I have also researched and collected documents on other large real estate investment players in Canada. A broad survey of materials—including annual reports, brochures, conference presentations, memoranda, presentation slides, prospectus, and other materials these firms produce for their investors—helps shed light on the characteristics, motivations, and business strategies of apartment investors and their approach to both urban redevelopment and to responding to tenant activism.

Third, as part of conducting research with and in support of the Herongate Tenant Coalition, I have access to the extensive repertoire of the group's organizing documents and legal materials, allowing me to conduct extensive document-based analysis. Textual materials include landlord communications with tenants surrounding the 2018 mass eviction, assorted media articles, and extensive documentation of the Coalition's social media campaign. There is also a trove of legal documents and background and supplementary materials associated with the numerous court cases surrounding the Heron Gate redevelopment from which I have been involved. These include all of the legal letters and cease and desist notices filed by both the landlord and the Herongate Tenant Coalition, all court submissions (including statements of claim, evidence, and books of authorities, etc.) associated with the five ongoing cases, and documents associated with my FOI research supporting one of the court cases. This vast array of materials also includes documentation of neighbourhood demographics compiled through results from a survey conducted of the 2018 demoviction zone in comparison with Statistics Canada and census data. The neighbourhood demographic survey and census analysis outlining income disparities and core housing need in the neighbourhood is a valuable tool that can be used with other indexes that measure liveability, including the [Canadian Index of Wellbeing](#), the [Community Data Program](#), and the [Neighbourhood Equity Index](#), from which to juxtapose varying and competing understandings of Ottawa as a liveable city.

Data Mapping and Coding

Following Rodimon's (2018) lead, my approach to data collection and analysis, using the methodological approaches to sociological inquiry outlined above, is a non-linear,

emergent process of generating knowledge for further exploration. This methodological approach is best suited to addressing my research questions because my positioning as an activist enables me to approach these queries from the standpoint of tenant movements that challenge social relations of rule. This project will contribute to various bodies of literature across sociological, geographical, and legal disciplines, but ultimately aims to produce knowledge that informs communities struggling for housing justice-related issues. Through this work I am bringing a political activist ethnographic lens to bear on urban development, gentrification, evictions, and affordable housing within a settler colonial context. This project is ambitious, tackling a mammoth urban development project that involves multi-pronged strategies deployed by the landlord-developer to reconfigure the built environment and suppress tenant opposition. The redevelopment is also informed by multi-pronged strategies of urban governance that include an historic reconfiguration of the City of Ottawa's Official Plan alongside enabling support for domicile at Heron Gate, as well as multi-pronged activist strategies and tactics deployed by tenants on multiple fronts. The data collected from these multiple actors and sites has been analyzed to understand the social relations of rule and resistance based on peoples' experience in the struggle over Heron Gate.

A challenge of this project has been to sift through and organize large amounts of data. I organized the hundreds of files compiled as part of this research into four overarching electronic folders. These included files associated with the City of Ottawa, with the landlord-developer and the redevelopment of Heron Gate, with the Herongate Tenant Coalition, and a master methods folder. The first three sets of files or master folders contained all textual materials related to the research process, while the master

methods folder was further categorized into sub-folders according to events, field notes, and interviews. Together, these four folders contained a combined 2,716 files. I then organized a data mapping exercise document so as to break down the research into the main themes so that the associated data could be coded and analyzed. The major themes identified were: 1) City of Ottawa / municipal politics / urban development; 2) Herongate Tenant Coalition court ethnography; 3) community organizing / events; 4) Timbercreek / Heron Gate. After I organized all of the electronic data into folders and completed the data mapping exercise, I commenced uploading the relevant data files into NVIVO software and set out to code my qualitative data for further analysis.

Coding refers to systematizing and labelling the data, of organizing data into meaningful categories. For Tracy (2013), “Coding is the active process of identifying data as belonging to, or representing, some type of phenomenon” (189). The coding schema for qualitative data analysis involves the creation of conceptual labels and categories for analysis, and locating themes that will be continually refined and organized according to proposed theoretical and empirical contributions. Drawing upon the broad themes identified through my data mapping exercise, I then determined which files I would extract from each thematic category to code into further sub-themes and categories using NVIVO. I further organized these files by classification type into NVIVO, which included events, interviews, real estate conference presentations, and reports. Coding categories included affordable housing, City of Ottawa, community wellbeing framework, engagement/consultation, evictions and demolition, gentrification and Alta Vista, Heron Gate neighbourhood characteristics, human rights case, intensification, landlord tactics, liveability/liveable city, real estate investment, renewal/revitalization,

tenant organizing, and HG7/Vista Local. Through the coding process I further identified potential quotes from interviews to incorporate into the dissertation, as I was able to transcribe the interviews directly in NVIVO. During this process I have employed a political activist ethnographic approach to coding that traces connections among and between the institutions and organizations involved in practicing and resisting domicidal social relations.

Institutional and political activist ethnographic analytical approaches center peoples' experiences in an attempt to understand and connect these experiences to social relations of rule (Rodimon 2018). From this process I was able to craft an outline and map of how the empirical chapters would take shape based on the various themes, actors, and data collected as part of this project. I did this while remaining cognizant of the importance of telling a compelling, chronological, and ultimately coherent narrative. The following mini chapter offers a personal vignette situating myself in relation to the research. Chapter Five then offers a profile of Heron Gate's owners and the financialization of rental housing. Chapter Six then offers a profile of the Heron Gate neighbourhood and recent trajectory of racial stigma and strategic neglect to set up Chapter Seven, which examines the demoviction of the first parcel of land in the neighbourhood in 2016, as well as its redevelopment. Chapter Eight offers a profile of tenant resistance in Heron Gate surrounding the 2018 demoviction, including the emergence of the Herongate Tenant Coalition to fight evictions, as well as the landlord response to tenant opposition. The final empirical chapter then examines the larger redevelopment proposal for the entire neighbourhood, including the social framework negotiated between the landlord and the City of Ottawa governing the terms of

community wellbeing in a redesigned Heron Gate. The concluding chapter offers a window into the human rights case brought forward by evicted tenants and revisits some of the broader themes explored throughout this dissertation. I also reflect on my experience there, as I have attempted to remain reflexive throughout the research process, which has included navigating multiple groups that often have conflicting approaches and relationships. As a bridge into the empirical chapters I offer the following personal vignette of my family's experience with housing.

Chapter 4 – Rental Housing Precarity and Property

Ownership: A Personal Vignette

The following personal vignette acts as a transition point launching from the theoretical and methodological foundations of this dissertation into the empirical components that follow. When I was a teenager living with my Mother, we lived in a section of the north end of Summerside, Epekwitk (formerly known as Île-Saint-Jean and now known as Prince Edward Island). Epekwitk is part of the Mi'kmaw homeland of Mi'kma'ki. The north-end neighbourhood is comprised predominantly of rowhouses, townhomes built in the 1960s to house military personnel that worked at the Canadian Forces Base in the town of Summerside. During the height of the Cold War, hundreds of these homes were constructed in the town where I grew up, and when the base closed in 1991, this type of housing left vacant by military families offered affordable living for residents of an economically depressed town. The homes themselves were large, two storey townhomes with a basement; they had multiple bedrooms and plenty of living space. The make-up of the neighbourhood offered a sense of community, with lots of greenspace and room for children to play, and thrive. I never felt a sense of stigma living there, even though it was considered lower-income housing, and even if some of my friends' parents owned their own homes. The vast majority of the homes in the town were modest, there was no visible wealth, and while I couldn't apply this type of terminology at the time, there was a real working-class feel to it all. When I moved to Ottawa and was introduced to the broader Herongate and Heatherington neighbourhoods, there was a remarkable similarity in the look and feel there compared to where I spent my formative teenage years.

When I left home, I moved into various apartment rental units in Summerside, before eventually leaving the island altogether, renting in cities such as Halifax and Ottawa. My Mom also moved around, a lot. She left Epekwitk/Prince Edward Island for Nova Scotia, before settling into New Brunswick (all of these what are referred to as Maritime provinces are part of Mi'kma'ki, which stretches beyond imposed provincial and federal borders to encompass parts of Newfoundland, Quebec, and Maine). My Mom moved into an apartment complex in Dieppe (adjacent to Moncton) in 2007. This would be our family's first experience living in a complex that was owned by a large corporation that would end up flipping the property to a financialized landlord. Actually, this apartment complex changed ownership three times in less than two years, and my Mother's testimony of her experience there represents an anecdotal microcosm of what tens of thousands of renters across Canada have likely experienced as their homes are flipped among, and become the property of, real estate investment firms.

When my Mom moved into the bottom floor of a three-storey apartment complex in Dieppe, NB, her landlord was Richard Homberg, an infamous east coast real estate baron. Homberg had an uncanny reputation of soapboxing his ideologies to lavish rooms of elite décor and high stakes corporate players in Halifax (Kimber 2012). Unlike my hometown, wealth can be quite visible amid poverty in Halifax, which has a troubling history as a British military outpost and launching pad for purposes of carrying out colonial conquest and genocide against the region's Indigenous inhabitants. The British were armed militarily but also had legal power in the form of a scalping decree that authorized and encouraged the murder of Indigenous men, women, and children, their scalps rewarded with five guineas each (Paul 2022). The attempted elimination of the

Mi'kmaq served the British goal to assert sovereignty and dominion over the lands of Mi'kma'ki, to reconfigure property relations by transforming Indigenous lands into settler real estate. This is relevant because immense wealth has been generated from the carving up and development of Mi'kmaw land in the east, very similar to how Algonquin Anishinaabe land has been carved up to enrich a thriving propertied class in what is now known as Ottawa.

My Mom's apartment building in Dieppe was sold to a company called Metcap Living around 2012. Metcap Living is a Toronto-based property management company boasting over \$2 billion in assets and owning over 20,000 rental units in Canada. Metcap Living is featured on landlordsofontario.com, an initiative of housing and tenant rights activists documenting large-scale wealthy and abusive landlords in Toronto, to which I was a contributor. Metcap was the target of a successful rent strike in the Parkdale neighbourhood in Toronto in 2017. My Mom was not completely discontented with her experience under Homberg or Metcap, although she preferred the former. She valued personal interactions with her landlord and their staff, and the understanding that they cared about her as a tenant, a resident of their building. She recalled interactions with their office staff when she would drop off rent cheques every month; she valued that. In the meantime, however, the property deteriorated as previous levels of regular maintenance and upkeep declined. The demographic of the building changed as well. When my Mom moved into the building, the residents were predominantly seniors, but, as her neighbours moved out or passed on, a younger demographic took their place and my Mom reported several incidences of petty vandalism targeting her and her neighbours. Regardless, the rent was affordable, around \$650 for a good-sized two-

bedroom apartment, heat and lights included. However, amid declining maintenance levels and increasing rents, Metcap flipped the building.

Shortly after acquiring the building where my Mom lived, Metcap Living sold the property to Transglobe in 2012. This is where my connection to Heron Gate becomes a little bit more uncanny. Around that time, Transglobe gained international notoriety under Daniel Drimmer for being one of the leading slumlords in Canada, embracing an enrichment strategy that at its core embodied systemic and purposeful neglect. Drimmer inherited a real estate empire from his parents (Hawley 2018). By 2012, Transglobe had to strip itself of its image. At the same time that it underwent a self-propelled transformation and maintained ownership over my Mom's building, it sold its Heron Gate holdings to Timbercreek Asset Management (which would also have to rebrand in the coming years as Hazelview). At the time, Transglobe morphed into True North Apartment Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT). A version of True North Apartment REIT maintains ownership over the Dieppe property to this day.

In August 2012, True North Apartment REIT issued a news release announcing a proposed acquisition of 26 properties comprising over 2,000 apartment units as well as a \$50 million public offering on subscription receipts (True North Apartment Real Estate Investment Trust 2012). One of those properties included the building that my Mom lived in. In the release we can see that True North Apartment REIT meticulously documents its apartment portfolio in terms of rent paid and living space. The release notes that approximately 98 percent of the 2,076 units rent for under \$1,000 per month, and lays out its vision for increasing rents. It provides a monthly rent breakdown of the existing units

at the time of acquisition along with a “pro forma” (or projection) of increases in rent.

Daniel Drimmer’s quoted comment within the release is worth capturing in full here:

We are very pleased with this strategic acquisition which will further develop our national footprint by expanding into Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and significantly increase our presence in the Province of Ontario. This is a logical move for us to enhance our platform in markets with significant upside potential. One of our stated goals is to expand and further diversify our portfolio in high-growth markets across Canada. This represents a unique opportunity for the REIT to take advantage of a high quality portfolio with below market average rent of \$686 per suite which is being purchased at an attractive price per suite of approximately \$67,000, well below replacement cost. Over time, we expect to reduce operating costs, streamline marketing and drive rental growth, thereby providing long-term unitholder value.

Here, Drimmer is providing a window into the types of strategies deployed by financialized real estate investment firms that are explored in more detail next chapter.

These players approach their “portfolios” in terms of enhancing potential and increasing value, by reducing costs and driving rental growth, which means raising rents and downloading costs to tenants. The predatory nature is revealed here, honing in on below-market rents and envisioning units not in terms of the household that lives there, but in terms of its replacement cost.

Further, while encrypted in finance-laden language, the release is explicit in that Daniel Drimmer is both the seller (via Blue-Starlight LP) and purchaser of the 2,076 suites. The privatization of Transglobe REIT resulted in the Dieppe property being acquired by Blue-Starlight LP (“an entity controlled by Daniel Drimmer”) and sold to True North Apartment REIT, of which Drimmer is the president and CEO (True North Apartment Real Estate Investment Trust 2012). True North Apartment REIT merged with Northern Property REIT in 2016 to become Northview, of which Drimmer is chairman and controls the largest shareholder stake (Dmitrieva n.d.). Drimmer’s other company,

Starlight Investments, manages Northview, and boasts some \$25 billion real estate assets under management in 2022 (Starlight Investments 2022). If this all seems confusing or unsettling, it is because it is both. The next chapter will examine and further unpack the world of real estate investment firms and their strategies for maximizing profit via rental housing. This transaction of my Mom's former home, and the connection to Heron Gate's previous landlord, is at the same time both common in the world of real estate investment capital, and incredibly eye-opening. It is worth exploring further to get a sense of the thinking behind the phenomenon referred to as the financialization of rental housing.

Yet, there is more to this story that links my family's personal experiences with the seeming inevitable encounter with property ownership. Displeased with the deteriorating living conditions at her apartment in Dieppe, my Mom moved to Sackville, New Brunswick, a few dozen kilometres east down the Trans Canada Highway. She fell into a cycle of renting cheaper units in poorly maintained low-rise apartment buildings. Discouraged with the conditions in her first building, she moved into an old, drafty house that was converted into apartment units. Sadly, this house burned to the ground a few months later, with my Mom and stepfather lucky to make it out with minor injuries, as the unit had no working smoke detectors nor fire extinguishers. Overnight, they had lost all of their worldly possessions and were rendered homeless. Due to their situation, they were able to secure a tiny apartment in a housing complex for seniors that includes small four-unit cottages surrounding a long-term care home facility. At the time I viewed this as a blessing as the affordable rental units were highly sought after with a years-long waitlist. However, after a few years, the low quality of living that the unit offered was

evident with poor air quality and cramped living conditions. My Mother wanted out, but the rental market was persistently spiralling out of reach for low-income households.

My Mother was desperate to move but could not find even a half-decent place on her budget. This desperation prompted me to begin to scout the local housing market for an opportunity to purchase a house. I was a bit resigned that this was presented as the only viable option to get my Mother into a liveable and adequate living situation. To own property in Canada, to own a piece of Indigenous land, is one of the most sought-out aspects in settler society and considered a pinnacle of achievement. Home ownership is a settler norm, a culture that has been driven for decades by federal housing policy. While politically fraught, it almost seems inevitable despite the ethical violations involved. For example, most people that I know, including some on the farthest left of the political spectrum, either own property or are seeking to get into the game. And what a game it is, engaging in relationships with bankers and lawyers and a lifetime of debt just to receive a certified piece of paper validating ownership of a very small piece of Indigenous land. To cut to the chase, I found a very nice bungalow that was completely modified for seniors' living, and spent my doctoral scholarship savings on a down payment. I later added my Mom to the deed and now we are joint tenants of this home, according to the legal terminology. After years of precarious living as a renter, my Mom now enjoys decent and stable living conditions, only made possible by attaining the ultimate objective of homeownership in a settler society that necessitates contributing to the ongoing theft and occupation of Indigenous land.

Chapter 5 – Heron Gate and the Financialization of Rental Housing

Introduction

The previous chapter vignette provides a unique gaze into the world of settler colonial property relations and real estate investment transactions through a personal story that is far removed but at the same time oddly linked to Heron Gate. It provides a window into how real estate investment firms deploy various strategies to enhance revenue streams, which in the case of the Heron Gate rental neighbourhood and its landlord Timbercreek Asset Management Inc. (now Hazelview Investments), includes targeted gentrification, mass demoviction, the destruction of an ethno-racial enclave, and the displacement of hundreds of households. The story of Daniel Drimmer and firms like Timbercreek/Hazelview and the latter's development into one of Canada's largest financialized landlords, owning billions of dollars worth of property, is not an anomaly. Rather, the rise of financialized real estate firms and the enrichment of their executives is part of a story of how racialized property relations evolve in a settler colonial society. This is an example of how gentrification is enacted and propelled, of how typically white, male Canadians profit from buying, selling, owning, and renting Indigenous land, and from displacing lower-income tenants from affordable housing. Sometimes gentrification can include the destruction of distinct socio-cultural urban spaces, including ethno-racial enclaves, such as at Heron Gate. Yet, under the corporate capture of housing and proliferation of apartment investors, buildings and neighbourhoods are not thought of in

these terms; instead, rental housing and urban space is approached exclusively in terms of value-creation in relation to returns on investment. In the last 15 years, Heron Gate tenants have lived under financialized ownership, and the following sections and chapters document this trajectory to the point of the neighbourhood's demolition and redevelopment.

The Origins and Ownership Trajectory of Heron Gate

Heron Gate encompasses a 21-hectare residential area in Ottawa South between Heron Road and Walkley Road before they converge. It is one of a small handful of large rental complexes in Ottawa, comprised of hundreds of townhomes and a handful of mid-rise and high-rise towers, home to around 4,500 residents in some 1,200 households. Heron Gate was sold by Daniel Drimmer's Transglobe to Timbercreek Asset Management in 2012 and 2013 in two tranches. The recent trajectory of changes in ownership structure can be confusing, although ongoing research carried out by the Herongate Tenant Coalition has shed light on these dynamics.

Heron Gate was built in the mid-to-late 1960s by the local Greenberg family's Minto Construction Ltd at a time when the larger Alta Vista area was undergoing urbanization. Minto has since grown into a real estate empire worth over \$4 billion today (Minto 2021).⁷ A survey document that Herongate Tenant Coalition member Josh Hawley and I retrieved from the Land Registry Office (while we were waiting for a small claims court hearing surrounding one of the Herongate Tenant Coalition's legal cases in the same building) shows how the Heron Gate parcels (or "blocks") were divided over a

⁷ For a description of the family, its real estate trajectory, and role within municipal politics, see Hawley (2018).

number of lots (see figure 5). The survey certificate and map reveal that Minto, under president Irving Greenberg, took ownership of these parcels of land in August 1965. The ownership certificates as part of the map are illustrative of the ease of how Algonquin land is transferred from one settler entity to another, as well as the role of the survey and map in carving up Indigenous land for development as an exercise in settler colonial urbanization (Blomley 2003).

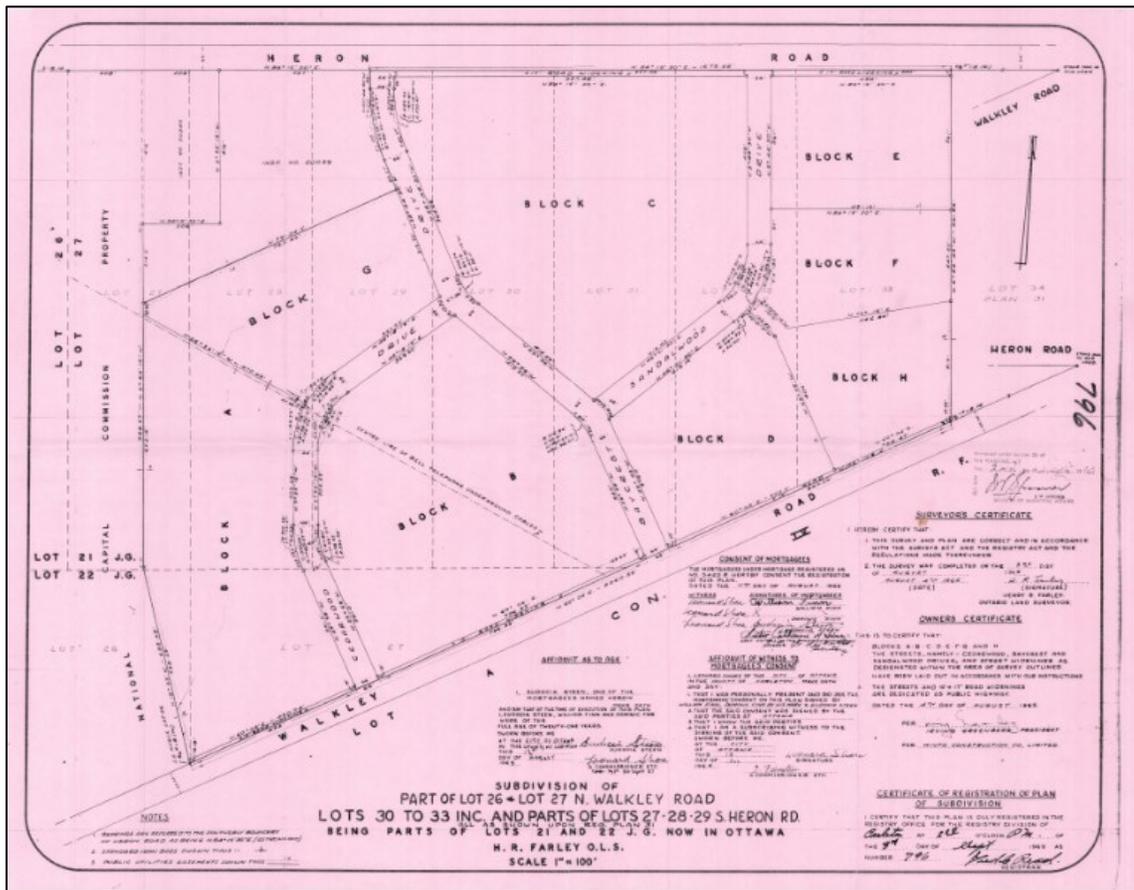


Figure 5. A 1965 land survey document shows the subdivision of various blocks of what would become the Heron Gate neighbourhood (Obtained from the City of Ottawa’s Land Registry Office, November 8, 2019).

With an ownership monopoly over the neighbourhood, Minto designed and developed a planned community with thousands of rental units, maintaining ownership for decades. In 1997, following the death of one of the founding brothers, Irving Greenberg, Minto's properties were split up amongst the family heirs, and Dan Greenberg created Otnim Properties Ltd. (Otnim is Minto backwards). Otnim took over ownership of the Heron Gate properties from 1997 until the neighbourhood was sold in 2007 to Drimmer's Transglobe, or so it seemed.

Heron Gate's new ownership structure was far from straight-forward, and the Herongate Tenant Coalition and its research team have been relentless in identifying Heron Gate's owners. The research efforts to identify Heron Gate ownership were led by Josh Hawley, who outlined the ownership structure and connections in an article in *The Leveller* newspaper in 2018. Heron Gate was branded under Transglobe, but the ownership structure was more nebulous and linked to Drimmer's larger family real estate dynasty, which Hawley (2018) described as a "serpentine ownership network of corporations, partnerships and trusts." Transglobe was not named as an owner within documents obtained by the Land Registry Office; instead, Heron Gate was owned by a numerically ordered series of companies under Kanco Heron Gate Ltd., that corresponded with the neighbourhood's various parcels of land (see figure 6). This research sheds some light on how real estate investment firms approach land ownership and branding.

2013 for under \$200 million.⁸ The Herongate Tenant Coalition’s research revealed that Timbercreek was not the owner, however, according to documents obtained from Ottawa’s Land Registry Office (Hawley 2018). Instead, the names on the deeds are Mustang Equities Inc., TC Core General Partnership Inc., and TC Core Limited Partnership. Hawley also discovered that partnerships were formed between Mustang Equities and companies affiliated with Daniel Drimmer: Mustang-Master Limited Partnership, Mustang DDAP Partnership, and DD Mustang Holdings GP Ltd., in 2012. The “mustang” connection, according to Hawley (2018), links Drimmer with Timbercreek co-founder Ugo Bizzarri; the two graduated from Western University’s Ivey Business School in 1993, where the university’s athletics teams are branded the Mustangs. Timbercreek co-founder Blair Tamblyn also graduated from Western in 1994. These partnerships all have the same business address in Toronto, along with many of Drimmer’s other companies (Hawley 2018). The insidious connections between key real estate juggernauts provide valuable insight into the intricacies of the corporate capture and financialization of rental housing in Canada, but they also form part of a story of property, privilege, and success in settler colonial Canada. Success in settler society is often attributed to hard work, acquiring a formal postsecondary education, and savvy entrepreneurship. These aspects of settler success form a powerful and persistent myth around entrepreneurial achievement and property ownership. Dependent on the ongoing theft and exploitation of Indigenous lands, settler business ventures and the attempted

⁸ Two separate purchases are noted in real estate investment market reports, including a purchase in 2012 for \$143,500,000 (and devoid of detail), and another purchase in 2013 for \$51,377,193 equivalent to \$122,619 each for 167 garden home units and 142 apartment units in four buildings.

perfecting of property relations through real estate are central to settler life, flourishing, and value. The executives that form real estate investment entities and target and gentrify lower-income, working-class, immigrant neighbourhoods in Canadian cities, have capitalized on the social, political, and economic conditions and policies of an evolving settler colonial society centered around, and driven by, racialized property relations.

Housing Policy, Corporate Capture, and Financialized

Gentrification

While various social, political, and economic forces drive gentrification, the situation at Heron Gate provides insight, I argue, into how the financialization of rental housing and settler colonial property relations drive the displacement of lower-income, racialized demographics and their replacement with whiter, settler subjectivities. The rise of financialized real estate and accompanying affluent group of (white) apartment investors was enabled by significant state withdrawal from the provision of housing and related responsibilities in the 1990s (Suttor 2016). Although finance has always been an important component underpinning economic activity, the phenomenon of financialization has garnered increasingly scholarly attention since the 1990s. Sawyer (2013) defines financialization as “the expanded role and volume of financial markets, institutions and agents, and products within global circuits of capital since the decommodification of world money in 1971” (315). Nineteen seventy-one was a key year marking the collapse of the Bretton Woods Keynesian consensus that would trigger the ascent and institutionalization of finance-led growth birthing the modern neoliberal era. Before examining the literature on the role of finance in urban development, which David

Harvey (1974, 1978) initiated in the 1970s following the collapse of Bretton Woods, Rutland (2010) has identified four distinct approaches in the literature that attempt to define financialization. These include the increasing significance of financial institutions and activities, the drive by corporate governance to maximize shareholder value, the shifting emphasis from interest-bearing to fictitious capital, and the increasing embeddedness of worldwide economic activities in financial markets (Rutland 2010). As we will see, real estate and the housing sector have become primary targets for financialization and neoliberal policy prescriptions.

Since the 1990s, urban restructuring has dramatically altered the housing landscape (Suttor 2009), reaching a critical juncture in 1993 when federal legislation slashed social housing funding, enabled investment firm access to the real estate market, and downloaded responsibilities for housing to lower levels of government (Walks and Clifford 2015; August and Walks 2018). Further deregulation occurred at the provincial level in Ontario in 1997 with the *Tenant Protection Act* (precursor to the *Residential Tenancies Act, 2006*) which removed rent controls and further facilitated investor access to multi-family rental housing. These conditions allowed new players to enter the housing investment field, where real estate investment firms could emerge, capture, and financialize the rental housing sector. Meanwhile, increasing wealth gaps and decreasing purchasing power have rendered lower-income renter households increasingly vulnerable to gentrification and displacement, exacerbated by longstanding housing and municipal policies that emphasize homeownership, single-detached dwellings, and suburban sprawl.

Housing has become a key site for commodification and deregulation activities prompting researchers to increasingly turn toward extending a framework of

financialization to understand transformations in the political economy of the housing sector (Fields 2017; Jacobs and Manzi 2019; Hofman and Aalbers 2019). A UN Human Rights Council (HRC 2017) report focusing on the financialization of housing—penned by Leilani Farha, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing at the time—traces the rise and infusion of finance capital into the housing sector with the advent of mortgage-backed securities in the 1980s—which enabled the grouping of multiple mortgages into portfolios that were sold to investors. The use of mortgages as an investment product arose alongside a neoliberal trend of deregulating housing markets that signaled the “increased use of housing as an investment asset integrated in a globalized financial market” (Rolnik 2013, 1,059). The rise of residential mortgage-backed securities has enabled a shift toward what Walks and Clifford (2015) describe as “an unsung policy of encouraging private sector investors to become landlords to fill the demand for rental housing” (1,639). Since the 1990s, the Canadian housing landscape has undergone a shift from the state provision of social rental housing toward supporting a rental market increasingly characterized by landlord-investors (Walks and Clifford 2015, 1,624).

Farha (2018) refers to the commodification and financialization of the sector as the “corporate capture of housing.” Corporate finance is rapidly commodifying the housing sector as a site of significant investments of global capital, as a source of security for financial instruments traded on global markets, and as a means of accumulating wealth (Aalbers 2016; HRC 2017). Farha’s HRC report (2017) charged that the housing sector is at the centre of an “historical structural transformation in global investment and the economies of the industrialized world” (3). The corporate capture of housing thus

signals an intensification of real estate investment activity by large corporate and financialized firms.

Financialized real estate investment firms have capitalized on the state's withdrawal from housing provision to capture and redevelop rental housing stock. By the end of the 1990s and into the 2000s, multi-family rental housing was increasingly approached as a financial asset (Fields and Uffer 2016). In discussing the transformation and financialization of rental housing in Germany, Wijburg, Aalbers, and Heeg (2018) identify a shift from speculation and short-term investments to a focus on stable cash flows in long-term investments. The financialization of rental housing was initially characterized by a "buy low, sell high" ethos involving the acquisition of land and real estate by private equity and other investment funds; however, the financialization of rental housing increasingly involves a renewed interest in rentiership that treats real estate as a long-term investment strategy (Aalbers 2019, 381).

Rental housing is an important node for financialization projects on a global scale (Fields 2017) and recent research helps to shed light on the socio-spatial dynamics of the corporate capture of housing and neighbourhood interventions by landlords, contributing to enhanced understandings of the impacts of real estate finance on rental housing. Fields and Uffer's (2016) study of the rise of private equity real estate investment in New York and Berlin and August and Walks' (2018) examination of the rise of financialized landlords in Toronto highlight not only the impacts on lower-income renters and heightened inequalities, but the gentrification and reconfiguration of buildings and neighbourhoods. Gentrification practices undertaken by financialized real estate entities serve to produce and reproduce social and spatial inequalities. In the rental housing

sector, financialized gentrification is an outcome ensuing the corporate capture of housing, which involves “unscrupulous demographic engineering in search of profits: replacing poor and vulnerable people with those who possess greater purchasing power” (Farha 2018). Within these conditions, financialized gentrification involves the displacement and replacement of lower-income (and typically racialized and marginalized populations) with more affluent (and typically white) higher-income tenants as a result of the corporate capture of an apartment building or neighbourhood by a financialized real estate investment firm (Crosby 2020a).

“The Apartment as Saviour”: Unpacking the Strategies of Real Estate Investment Firms

The real estate investment industry acknowledges that the acquisition, refinancing, and development of real estate are “top-of-mind for owners, developers, and investors” (Canadian Real Estate Forums 2019), so how can we distinguish between these groupings of real estate actors? Although similar accumulation and management strategies are adopted across the sector, there are some underlying factors which help signal a shift in the types of property owners entering real estate markets in Canada and beyond.

Real estate investing is an increasingly favoured method of building wealth, and a variety of financial vehicles are available for individual and institutional investors in both the public and private sphere. Real estate investment trusts (REITs) and private equity funds have emerged as powerful players in the market, along with other asset management companies and investment firms. Whereas single-family properties have long been a primary focus for individual investors, institutional investors have moved

into the real estate market and have increasingly targeted multi-family rental properties. A broad survey of materials produced by financialized real estate actors—including annual reports, brochures, memoranda, prospectus, summaries, and presentation slides—help shed light on the characteristics, motivations, and business strategies that signal a steady shift toward the desire and ambition of owning and controlling rental housing stock on a global scale. In their own words:

Multi-unit residential has moved to the top of the preferred property portfolio for a growing number of real estate organizations across Canada. What was once an asset class dominated by smaller privately-owned firms has now also become the domain of major institutional investors, REITs and private equity funds. Predictable yields, record returns and strong cash flows have made apartments one of the most reliable property classes (Canadian Real Estate Forums 2019).

Materials produced by the real estate industry provide insight on investment strategies and approaches in the multi-family rental sector in Canada, as well as a breadth of data and statistics on “rental market performance” in what the industry refers to as the “rental market universe” (Chandler 2017).

Financialized real estate actors are increasingly cornering the rental housing market in Canada. A survey conducted by Canadian Apartment magazine in 2015 demonstrates that the largest players—those owning over 7,500 suites—are dominated by REITs and other investment and asset management firms (Canadian Apartment 2015).⁹ Martine August’s (2020) research provides more recent numbers, documenting the top 25 landlords in Canada in terms of apartment units. According to 2017 figures, all but three

⁹ These include Timbercreek Asset Management, True North Apartment REIT, InterRent REIT, Canadian Apartment Properties Real Estate Investment Trust (CAPREIT), Boardwalk Rental Communities (REIT), Realstar Management, Starlight Investments, Homestead Landholdings Ltd (private company), Minto Properties Inc. (conversion to REIT in 2018), Killam Properties Inc. (conversion to REIT in 2016), Skyline Apartment REIT, Northern Property REIT, and Drewlo Holdings Inc. (private company).

of the top 16 landlords owning over 7,500 suites are financialized real estate investment firms (August 2020). Recent and ongoing conversions of private equity funds and private corporations to real estate investment trusts, as well as REIT consolidations, demonstrate that institutionalized investment players increasingly dominate the rental housing market. One presentation at the 2017 Canadian Apartment Investment Conference touts “the apartment as saviour”, and outlined that the “multi-residential transaction volume” in Canada has remained steady between \$3.5 and \$4.5 billion annually since 2011 (Chandler 2017). The same presentation sheds light on the real estate market players, and the growth of financialized firms entering the fray: the “purchaser profile” of the top ten buyers of apartments in Canada over the previous 24 months shows that all but one are real estate investment and asset management firms—including in the top five: CAPREIT, Starlight Investments, Northview Apartment REIT, Skyline Apartment REIT, and Timbercreek Asset Management—totaling over \$3 billion in purchases (Chandler 2017). Real estate investment conferences provide a unique opportunity to witness those at the upper rungs of the apartment investment industry share strategies and discuss annual returns on capital and income growth, capitalization rates, development projects, new regulations and legislative changes, rent control and rent increases, and the results of tenant surveys.

Private equity funds, real estate investment trusts, and asset management firms are increasingly representative of the ownership and management of multi-family rental apartments (August 2020). These financial entities bring a new set of investment objectives and management strategies characterized by a renewed interest in rentiership (Blakeley 2019; Christophers 2020). With up to half of Canadians investing in stocks

(Randall 2021), your everyday retail investor (individual, non-professional investor) is enticed to benefit from sustainable and growing rent profits without the hassle of engaging in property management themselves. Investing in companies that own and manage apartment units is a method in which your average settler citizen can participate in the real estate market and profit from the development of Indigenous land. The investment objectives and strategies of real estate investment firms are relatively uniform, as captured in the 2018 annual report of Canada's largest landlord CAPREIT: to provide shareholders with long-term, stable, and predictable monthly cash distributions (CAPREIT 2018). In order to provide regular cash flow to investors, investment firms engage in aggressive property management strategies to improve rents, reduce expenses, and increase efficiencies to maximize asset value. These strategies can lead to processes of gentrification and displacement where lower-income tenants get squeezed out of buildings captured by financialized real estate.

Gentrification driven by the financialization of rental housing—or financialized gentrification—can occur when a property acquired by a financial instrument or entity—such as private equity funds, real estate investment firms, and asset management companies—is subjected to real estate investment strategies to “add” or “create value” to the obtained assets. According to August and Walks (2018), financialized landlords engage in two key strategies to extract value from their properties. First, they “squeeze” profits from tenants through a series of tactics including implementing cost-cutting measures, efficiency upgrades, new costs for tenants (such as ancillary fees and sub-metering utilities), and rent increases which, in Ontario, can include formal requests submitted to the Landlord and Tenant Board for increases in rent above the annual

maximum amount (also known as AGI for “above guideline increase”). The AGI is part of a larger trend of neoliberal deregulation of the rental housing sector, initiated in Ontario with the 1997 *Tenant Protection Act* along with vacancy decontrol, which enabled landlords to increase the rent of a vacant unit by an unlimited amount (Crosby 2020b). Second, financialized landlords engage in a strategy of “repositioning” buildings, what August and Walks (2018) refer to as “gentrification-by-upgrading” to transform its tenant base. Repositioning involves converting affordable units into luxury suites in coveted market locations, where sharp increases in rents can be applied by hastening the removal of existing tenants and renovating vacant units. Ottawa-based InterRent REIT’s 2014 annual report provides further insight into how financialized real estate firms approach existing tenants when considered alongside the attempt to “drive and enhance revenue streams” as part of an overall “value creation strategy” (August 2020; InterRent REIT 2014, 5). InterRent seeks to “grow the rental revenue base organically while at the same time improving its stability by removing undesirable tenants and implementing policies and processes to attract more desirable tenants” (InterRent REIT 2014, 5). This approach both promotes displacement and capitalizes on gentrification (August 2020). Enabled and facilitated by state policies and legislation, REITS and financialized property management firms have risen and thrived as apartment investors, bringing with them evolving sets of accumulation strategies that have accelerated the gentrification of lower-income buildings and neighbourhoods, as well as eroded affordable housing stock, in Canadian cities.

Timbercreek Asset Management: “Actively Creating Value”

In addition to investigating the ownership structure of Heron Gate, as well as the accumulation strategies of financialized real estate investment firms, research was undertaken with the Herongate Tenant Coalition and as part of this project to understand the composition of Timbercreek Asset Management and its investment strategies that produce gentrification. Timbercreek has emerged as a major player in Canada’s rental market. Founded in 1999, Timbercreek is a Toronto-based multi-billion-dollar firm that caters to real estate investors. Timbercreek has steadily evolved from its made-in-Ontario roots and local acquisitions to a global player with asset-management offices in three continents. Timbercreek manages billions of dollars of property and other assets through its lending, development, and property management operations, as well as public securities (Wong 2019).

While the ownership structure of real estate firms like Timbercreek is opaque, so too are the investment entities and vehicles with which it conducts business. Timbercreek offers a wide variety of public and private investment vehicles for its clients that have been marketed around the firm’s slogan, “actively creating value.” In an investment brochure, Timbercreek (2019a) self-describes as an “active investor, owner and manager of global real estate and related assets focused on delivering sustainable and growing returns” to investors. An older version of its website elaborates on the firm’s mandate and vision:

We maximize value by employing a value-oriented investment philosophy combined with an active, hands-on asset management platform, to identify opportunities that will generate predictable and sustainable long-term cash flow. We have earned a reputation for providing conservatively managed, risk-averse

investment opportunities for both retail and institutional investors (Timbercreek Asset Management 2019b).

Timbercreek boasts as its “core competency” the ability to identify high-quality real estate opportunities across three key investment strategies—private equity, private debt, and global real estate securities—by applying “bricks-and-mortar knowledge”, which refers to the “ability to accurately value cash flows based on a comprehensive analysis of the quality and sustainability of a property’s current and future revenue streams” (Timbercreek Asset Management 2019b, 2019c). According to Timbercreek, private equity refers to investing directly in real estate, private debt refers to investing in mortgages and other debt secured by real estate, and public securities refers to investing globally in publicly traded companies that own investment-grade real estate (Timbercreek Asset Management 2019d). In their own words, Timbercreek “focuses on accessing stable, inflation-hedged cash flow by investing in real estate directly, investing in debt secured by real estate and investing in companies (publicly and privately) that own real estate” (Timbercreek Asset Management 2019a). Timbercreek claims to have one of the leading public real estate securities teams and the ability to access a network of co-investors that includes Canada’s largest funds and leading real estate private equity teams (IPE Real Assets 2015). Timbercreek’s multi-pronged approach to investing in and managing real estate assets and debt further set it apart from traditional landlords and developers.

Financialized real estate investment firms are always looking for new market sectors to corner (August 2020). For example, Timbercreek’s 2019 market outlook report identifies industrial REITS and Canada’s senior housing sector as promising

opportunities, along with diversifying beyond a traditional tenant base to include data centres, cell towers, hotels, and casinos (Timbercreek Investment Management Inc. 2019; Wong 2019). The logic behind targeting property with singular tenants is expressed by Corrado Russo, Timbercreek's senior managing director of investments and global head of securities: "Your rent is very close to 100 per cent profit, and while you typically get less rent, there's no risk to expenses going up longer term so it behaves like a bond but a bond that gives you equity-type returns because you still have the ability to release that space at higher rents as market rents go up" (Wong 2019). Timbercreek's approach to real estate investment is to engage in lower-risk acquisitions, that accumulate stable, high yields over the long-term, maintaining the option to sell their properties at a profit if market conditions are favourable. The promise of predictable, stable yields relies on gentrification, tenant turnover, and steady increases in rent.

Timbercreek's slogan at the time of the 2018 mass eviction in Heron Gate was "actively creating value." Underpinning the firm's "value-oriented investment philosophy" is the drive to seek out and obtain "real estate assets that [are] undervalued or had been overlooked by the market" (Threndyle 2009, 24). The firm has deployed a breadth of strategies to create or add value across the rental market universe.

Timbercreek's co-founder, Ugo Bizzarri, once likened the company's business strategy to a carwash, which involved the purchase and transformation (cleaning) of neglected (dirty) properties for high-profit resale (August and Walks 2018, 132). Describing Timbercreek's foray into the US market with a \$100-million multi-residential value-added fund, co-founder Blair Tamblyn explained the carwash approach: "On the front end, you put in a multi-res asset that, in our view, has not been operated to its fullest

potential, and about two and a half years later, it comes out the other end looking squeaky clean and ready for an institutional buyer to acquire it” (IPE Real Assets 2015). However, Timbercreek’s strategies continue to evolve, and while flipping properties remains an option, Timbercreek has shifted its approach in Canada as a property manager and active landlord, targeting lower-income buildings and neighbourhoods in urban areas ripe for gentrification.

1. Gentrification and Intensification

Timbercreek’s business approach to buy and improve “undervalued” apartment buildings is based on a strategy of displacing lower-income tenants. In an interview with *Western Investor* (O’Brien 2018), Russo reveals the importance of capitalizing on gentrification and displacement in the rental housing sector. Predicting big returns for real estate investment firms developing land in growing Canadian cities, Russo underlines that: “Large cities in Canada are currently experiencing a wave of gentrification”, which “is creating a number of compelling opportunities for REITs to experience outsized growth and offer increasing value for investors.” Russo’s admissions are not unique to the industry and, similarly to pronouncements made by Bizzarri (see August and Walks 2018, 132), reveal Timbercreek’s predatory approach of “cherry picking” properties in perceived gentrifying communities and then repositioning buildings and properties which both contribute to and exacerbate gentrification-induced displacement. Companies like Timbercreek capitalize on gentrification trends but also work feverishly to produce gentrification conditions through the targeting of certain areas, typically home to lower-income and racialized populations; the displacement of tenants is not a concern, only the

potential for “outsized growth” and “increasing value for investors.” As Timbercreek continues to capture what it deems as “undervalued” properties throughout North America—totalling over 200 multi-unit buildings comprising some 23,000 suites (Timbercreek Asset Management 2019e)—the investment firm is not merely a passive player capitalizing on shifting demographic trends. Conversely, Timbercreek is an active gentrifying agent engaging in demographic restructuring and socio-spatial reengineering of buildings and neighbourhoods as it fulfills management strategy promises to investors.

Timbercreek has strived to become a leading real estate investment player in the Canadian rental housing market. Timbercreek officials explicitly set themselves apart from traditional private firms, noting that small owners do “a less than exemplary job of squeezing all the value out of their buildings” (Threndyle 2009). Timbercreek explicitly avoids investing in “developers and homebuilders which don’t offer that opportunity for recurring revenue”, according to Russo (Valiquette 2019). Instead, Timbercreek’s strategy is predicated on “hunt(ing) for companies”, in “trophy markets”, on “finding gems” that “are under-loved and underpriced” in order to “build” value. According to Russo, “the more upside potential the better, whether that is achieved through retrofits and upgrades to the property, improvements to the lease structure or having the property rezoned for a more lucrative use” (Valiquette 2019). Improving the lease structure, which Russo enthusiastically referred to as “triple net leasing”, renders tenants responsible for paying for the maintenance and operating costs of the property. For Russo, triple net leasing is a means of “really getting equity-type returns for a bond-like risk.” Of further interest in Russo’s statement in relation to Timbercreek’s investment and management strategies is the tactic of rezoning properties. Eviction, demolition, and rezoning are

necessary precursors of a new intensification strategy deployed by financialized real estate firms to extract “more lucrative use” from their assets.

Intensification has the potential to generate new profitable assets either by way of new-build developments on vacant land (otherwise known as infill developments), or by demolishing existing structures and redeveloping the already-built environment. Real estate investment firms and asset management companies increasingly consider what they call “site intensification” or “intensification opportunity” when acquiring properties. At a 2017 Canadian Apartment Investment Conference session, apartment owners and investors shared strategies and discussed the importance of embracing intensification. A representative from CAPREIT forewarned: “If you want to control your destiny as an apartment owner in Canada now, you have to be in the new construction game because there’s not a flow of deals anymore” (McLean 2017). Following municipal planning trends, apartment investors have embraced demands for density and the intensification of urban areas. CAPREIT’s President and CEO Mark Kenney simplified the approach from a property investment perspective: “[Apartment buildings are] not being valued on cash flow. Cap rates are irrelevant in the conversation. It’s all about land and speculation on density” (McLean 2017). Apartment investors’ insatiable thirst for access to cheap land and high rents, as well as the opportunity to enhance profits from properties through intensification initiatives, is synergetic with the municipal governance turn toward densification and partnering with property developers.

The City of Ottawa’s New Official Plan identifies intensification as one of six “milestone new directions” or “cross-cutting issues” that will help transform the municipality into North America’s most liveable mid-sized city (City of Ottawa 2021a).

The Official Plan's emphasis on intensification is illustrative here as a discourse of improvement that aims to enhance liveability through gentrification. In particular, intensification "refers to the notion of renewal and *injecting new life* into existing areas of the city by allowing new generations of residents to inhabit existing neighbourhoods" (City of Ottawa 2021d; emphasis added). In the city's view, intensification creates "opportunities for housing choice" and "will enliven existing neighbourhoods by bringing new residents to support local services." Intensification, or regeneration as it was referred to in initial draft versions of the New Official Plan, is not just about creating density and increasing neighbourhood populations. Instead, intensification is about regenerating state-led gentrification and slum clearance efforts in the name of urban renewal. Urban renewal efforts are often associated with large-scale state-led demolition and displacement projects targeting the urban poor, often disproportionately targeting lower-income and racialized populations for dispersal (Hyra 2012; Triece 2016). Despite the negative connotations associated with urban renewal and the mounds of research documenting its racist underpinnings, the architects of the City of Ottawa's New Official Plan invoke improvement discourses of "renewal and injecting new life" to establish gentrification as a municipal policy direction toward enhancing liveability. In the municipal imaginary, the path toward liveability involves encouraging new residents to inhabit and enliven existing neighbourhoods, to inject new life into areas where existing life is deemed as waning.

Apartment investors latch on to municipal policy prescriptions and harness popular discourses of improvement to become major players as property owners in the urban built environment. The sentiment surrounding improvement discourses—

intensification, revitalization, and liveability—along with not-so-subtle references to gentrification, is shared across the major apartment investors in Canada. For example, Timbercreek executives presented slides at real estate investment conferences in 2016 promoting the Vista Local complex on the HG7 land parcel—the first phase of redevelopment in Heron Gate on the site of the 2016 demoviction—as an example of the successful “intensification of an existing asset” (see figure 7) (Tsourounis 2016).

South Ottawa – Development

- Intensification of existing asset
- 3, 6 storey assets
- Developing approximately 400 new residential rental units
- Robust amenity package
- Larger suite sizes
- Anticipated completion – Q2 2018



*Based on preliminary concept review. Design is subject to change.

5



Figure 7. Presentation slides presented by Timbercreek executives at a real estate investment conference in 2016 (Tsourounis 2016; Bizzarri 2016).

The new development was promoted as creating a “vibrant and sustainable rental community, catering to a balanced target market of young professionals and active adults” by offering, among other things, “resort-style amenities” (Bizzarri 2016). At the conference, Bizzarri claimed that the first phase of redevelopment in Heron Gate represented 400 of an anticipated 5,000-10,000 new-build units as part of Timbercreek’s intensification efforts (McLean 2017). Not mentioned on the slides is that dozens of families had to be displaced and their homes demolished in order for this intensification project to be realized. The creation of a vibrant and sustainable community with a new

target demographic is an example of financialized gentrification, necessitating the displacement and dispersal of those demographics—lower-income, racialized, immigrant families—not covered within Timbercreek’s “balanced target market.” The human element of urban redevelopment is removed not only from the images presented at real estate investment conferences, but from the worldview of apartment investment executives.

2. Repositioning to Hazelview

The hubris with which Timbercreek approached its mass eviction and displacement of hundreds of Heron Gate residents is part of what Farha describes as “dehumanized housing”, which is predicated on eviction, displacement, and replacement (HRC 2017, 9). Timbercreek’s investment jargon—such as returns, yields, and equity—do not account for nor anticipate the backlash from and mobilization of tenants. The mobilization, organizing, and activism work of the Herongate Tenant Coalition (detailed in Chapter Eight) directly confronted the people—Timbercreek executives and employees—behind this dehumanized approach to housing, as well as their brand. Following relentless social media, news media, and legal campaigns carried out by the Coalition, Timbercreek rebranded its company and disassociated its name from the neighbourhood.

The priorities and branding of real estate investment firms can shift over time in response to economic and social forces. Researching firms like Timbercreek in recent years has revealed some of the numerous entities with which the larger brand navigates the world of real estate investment—including Timbercreek Asset Management, Timbercreek REIT, Timbercreek Financial, Timbercreek Capital, Timbercreek Equities

Corp., Timbercreek Communities, Timbercreek Investment Management Inc.—as well as various publicly-traded and private equity investment funds. As mentioned, Timbercreek’s brand in the Heron Gate neighbourhood has been replaced by Hazelview, but Timbercreek as a financial entity still exists, slightly rebranded as Timbercreek Capital. Upon further investigation, it appears that the two Timbercreek co-founders—Ugo Bizzarri and Blair Tamblyn—have split up the original Timbercreek into Timbercreek Capital (Tamblyn) and Hazelview Investments (Bizzarri). Regardless of the corporate rebranding and repositioning efforts, the ownership structure of Heron Gate has not changed. The organizational entities that formed Timbercreek Asset Management and related investment vehicles, and that purchased and hold fee simple title to the Heron Gate lands, maintain their original legal structure and name. This is documented in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) accompanying the approval of the Heron Gate Official Plan Amendment in September 2021 (where the City of Ottawa approved Hazelview’s plan to redevelop the rest of Heron Gate); the MOU was made between the legal entities of the City of Ottawa and “Mustang Equities Inc. & TC Core LP (together, ‘Hazelview’)” (City of Ottawa 2021e).

A press release in November 2020 further details the repositioning of Timbercreek into Hazelview (Timbercreek Asset Management 2020). More specifically, the entity known as Timbercreek Equities Corp. was rebranded as Hazelview Investments. The release notes that: “Timbercreek will continue to offer commercial real estate financing solutions, while Hazelview will continue to focus on providing opportunities for investors to access real estate both privately and publicly, and will continue to operate its property management service, now known as Hazelview

Properties” (Timbercreek Asset Management 2020). Timbercreek is no longer in the multi-residential property development and management game and is instead focused on commercial real estate lending and investment through two principal entities: Timbercreek Capital and Timbercreek Financial. Timbercreek retains its focus on commercial real estate and Hazelview has taken on residential development and management. Hazelview has adapted the original Timbercreek mission statement, maintaining committed to “creating value” and investing in “sustainable long-term cash flow”, according to the press release. While Timbercreek was once focused on finding “hidden gems” like Heron Gate, Hazelview’s current focus is on finding “hidden opportunities”, according to its website, which is about “getting the most value by digging a little deeper to uncover opportunities for growth that others missed” (Hazelview Investments 2022). Hidden gems or opportunities is a euphemism for urban spaces that real estate investment executives target for gentrification.

Rethinking Gentrification: The Financialization of Rental Housing and Settler Colonialism

Gentrification processes are driven by various socio-cultural and political-economic forces that shape living conditions in settler society. Various social, cultural, political, and economic forces shape who gets to live where, who gets excluded and included, who gets displaced, and who is able to navigate housing markets and the built environment with more ease and privilege than others. While a mammoth body of literature and various debates surround the notion of gentrification, the capture of Heron Gate by financialized real estate, and the destruction of an ethno-racial enclave within a settler

colonial context of racialized property relations, offers an opportunity to contribute to gentrification scholarship in conversation with liveability and domicide.

A rich scholarly discussion on gentrification has spanned generations, the (at times intense) debates ebbing and flowing over the decades (Brown-Saracino 2013; Smith and Williams 2013). Ruth Glass first coined the term “gentrification” in her description of the “invasion” by the middle class into the working-class areas of London, resulting in mass displacement and the transformation of the affected areas’ social character (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2010, 7). Since Glass’s seminal work, dozens if not hundreds of studies and scholarly interjections have contributed to evolving debates surrounding gentrification. Perhaps the most widely read contributors to the gentrification literature include David Ley and Neil Smith in the 1980s (Ley 1986, 1987; Smith 1979, 1987), where they battled over the idea of the “rent gap” theory, a debate that has continued more recently (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2010). The rent gap has been defined as “the gap between the actual *capitalized* ground rent (land value) of a plot of land given its present use and the *potential* ground rent that might be gleaned under a ‘higher and better’ use” (Smith 1987, 462). In addition to, and as an extension of, debate over the rent gap, Slater (2011) has outlined the principal gentrification debates as revolving around two divergent schools of thought—one liberal, one critical—that have come to define the field, although not exclusively (Wacquant 2008). The liberal position reframes gentrification in cultural terms as inevitable processes of “redevelopment, renewal, revitalisation, regeneration and reinvestment” (Newman and Wyly 2006) while the critical work tends to focus on the role of class (see Paton 2016) and the impacts of displacement.

Key among the gentrification debates has been the issue of displacement (Atkinson 2000; Freeman and Braconi 2004; Marcuse 2013; Slater 2009). Critical scholars have attempted to address and debunk the arguments put forward—particularly by certain urban planners, planning scholars, conservative think tanks and politicians, and economists (see Slater 2009; Stein 2019)—that displacement is a negligible feature of gentrification (Newman and Wyly 2006; Slater 2011). Henig (1980, 638) describes gentrification-induced displacement as “the process in which the poor, minorities, the elderly and the moderate-income working class may gradually be squeezed out of their neighbourhoods.” For Stein, gentrification is at the same time a political, economic, and social process that involves three sets of actors: the state as planners of gentrification through revitalization initiatives and land-use policies, developers as producers of gentrification through the manipulation of land and the built environment as property owners, and the affluent—typically higher-income, white demographics—as consumers of gentrification (43).

Gentrification, like domicide, embodies productive and repressive elements. Gentrification, like domicide, works to unmake the homes for some while remaking those spaces as homes for others. Gentrification is a process of “un-homing”, argues Elliott-Cooper, Hubbard, and Lees (2020), as it always serves to rupture the connections between people and place. Gentrification and domicidal processes are facilitated by discourses of improvement that invoke life and vitality, such as liveability and revitalization. Gentrification has long been linked to neighbourhood revitalization initiatives. This was initially identified in the late 1970s and 1980s (Auger 1979; Palen and London 1984), suggesting that revitalization as gentrification is not a new

emergence. At the same time, with the current push to revitalize neighbourhoods in Ottawa and other cities, new scholarly discussions have emerged around the myth of “revitalized” urban spaces (Burns and Berbary 2021) and around the idea of “just revitalization” and the exacerbation of social and spatial inequalities (Ehrenfeucht and Nelson 2020). The revitalization of urban space, I argue through the Heron Gate case, is about reproducing the vitality of settler society and its most sanctimonious element—property. Yet, settler colonialism, like domicide and gentrification, also embodies repressive and productive elements. While settler colonialism relies on the coercive authority of the state to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land, it also embodies a productive character that works to produce what Coulthard (2014) calls “forms of life” that work to naturalize settler colonialism’s constitutive hierarchies (152). Settler colonialism attempts to produce and reproduce land and life—land in the form of property and real estate, and life in the form of ideal white subjectivities. Through property relations, settler colonial urbanism works to produce and improve social spaces and places for white consumption, while non-ideal racialized, migrant populations can be subjected to domicide.

The roles of land and life (of producing and reproducing property and white/racialized subjectivities) are central to the social, political, and economic relations of settler colonialism. Recent scholarship has attended to the interconnectivities between settler colonialism, gentrification, and racialized property relations. For Ellis-Young (2022), “gentrification is not just a contested class-based remaking of urban space that displaces lower-income residents, but also a contested remaking of urban space that perpetuates the dispossession of Indigenous people from their land” (2). Ellis-Young

argues that gentrification research must be attentive to settler colonial relations so as not to reproduce Indigenous erasure and settler dominance over urban futures, both in scholarship as well as at the local level of resistance. Scholars have also been increasingly careful to not label the gentrification of racialized neighbourhoods as colonization. Quizar (2019), for example, takes issue with the creeping trope in the gentrification literature that equivocates the gentrification of Black neighbourhoods with settler colonialism. The notion that gentrification is a form of colonization has been contested, with scholars challenging gentrification research to move beyond mere abstractions, metaphors, and false equivalencies (Ellis-Young 2022; Launius and Boyce 2021; Quizar 2019). Instead, some scholars have approached gentrification in terms of its racial and colonial dimensions (Kent-Stoll 2020), and racialized property relations in terms of whiteness. Approaching gentrification through a settler colonial framework, Montalva Barba (2021) argues, can help illuminate the workings of white supremacy. Launius and Boyce (2021) argue that urban real estate markets are structured through the devaluation of non-white spaces and relations. Centering the role of the heightened value of whiteness, as well as the devaluation of non-white lives, in gentrification is useful for unpacking how settler colonial property relations are reproduced in urban redevelopment projects. Gentrification entails the social reproduction of settler colonial relations to land (Parish 2020) as real estate, and the financialization of rental housing both facilitates and accelerates the social reproduction of urban space in processes of settler colonial urbanism.

The Heron Gate case offers the opportunity to contribute to emerging scholarship on gentrification within a framework of settler colonial urbanism and racialized property

relations. While there are many circumstances in which a home can be unmade, the worldviews and actions of apartment investors—operating within the parameters of settler colonial property relations—accelerate gentrification, displacement, and ultimately domicide. The financialization of rental housing facilitates the destruction of the homes of those deemed as and determined to be undesirable tenants. The financialized landlord does not necessarily view the undesirable tenant through a socio-cultural lens; the landlord purports to be colour-blind and gender neutral. Timbercreek executives refute the charge that the firm’s redevelopment plans are based on racial or gendered considerations, or that they are destroying an ethno-racial enclave. What they fail to see or acknowledge is the reality that, like themselves, the founders and executives of large corporate and financialized real estate investment firms are white men of privilege, and the biggest impacts on their efforts to gentrify urban space is on women who rely on communities like Heron Gate for their support networks and income, as primary caregivers of large, extended families. In terms of race, it is predominantly white real estate executives, city officials, and urban planners who initiate and facilitate the displacement of these racialized households; at the same time, it is largely white demographics that replace the existing population, and benefit from gentrification and domicide. The destruction of home at Heron Gate demonstrates how settler colonial property relations are structured around the value of whiteness and the devaluation of non-white lives.

Instead, Timbercreek/Hazelview’s purported position is that they care about the wellbeing of the community and that their actions are nothing but benevolent. Efforts to improve the community unfortunately result in some tenants being relocated; relocation

(eviction and displacement) is an unfortunate by-product of the revitalization (gentrification) of urban space, is their public-facing position: this is how neighbourhoods become liveable. The message to investors, on the other hand, about desirable and undesirable tenants, boils down to the ability to pay rents. Tenants are judged in terms of their purchasing power. Tenants in Heron Gate and other buildings and neighbourhoods captured by financialized real estate are from the outset considered undesirable because they pay below-market rents. Financialized landlords determine the desirability of tenants based on their ability to pay above-market rents. At Heron Gate, Timbercreek desires what it refers to as “premium” tenants paying premium rents (City of Ottawa 2020-424; McCracken 2016a). Landlords like Timbercreek are adamant that business is not conducted or coloured by lenses of race and gender, much the same as how many average white settler Canadians defensively deny the absence of systemic racism, despite the prevalence of anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, anti-Asian and Islamophobic sentiment which one could expect from a settler society and state built upon the pillars of colonization and white supremacy.

Chapter 6 – The Heron Gate Community and the Onset of Racial Stigma and Strategic Neglect

Introduction

While the previous chapter offered a profile of Heron Gate’s landlord, the following chapter explores Heron Gate as a community. As a majority rental neighbourhood Heron Gate faces structural discrimination and racialized poverty. With an average median income around half of the city-wide average (Statistics Canada 2017), Heron Gate has one of the highest concentrations of poverty in the region, as well as some of the highest rates of core housing need in the city. Despite the systemic barriers that the neighbourhood faces, there exists a profound sense of community that comes with its identification by some as an “ethnic enclave” (Yussuf et al. v. Timbercreek 2019) or “ethno-racial enclave” (Mensah and Tucker-Simmons 2021), across diasporic space shared by its large East African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian ethnic communities. While socially and culturally nurtured, Heron Gate has suffered from racial stigma and physical neglect, both of which have contributed to justifications behind demolishing parcels of the neighbourhood. I provide a unique window on strategic neglect at Heron Gate through an investigation of a municipal committee where developers can appeal city-issued maintenance orders without the knowledge or participation of tenants.

Heron Gate: A Liveable Community?

The story of Heron Gate’s origins and contemporary remaking involve state- and developer-led processes of urban renewal and revitalization. Heron Gate was originally

constructed to house those displaced from the working-class district of LeBreton Flats, adjacent to the west of Ottawa's downtown core (Hussein and Hawley 2021). LeBreton Flats was demolished in 1965, the destruction of which was authorized by Ottawa city planners in the name of slum clearance and urban renewal (Picton 2010). The "territorial stigmatization" associated with working-class districts like LeBreton Flats contributed to these areas being viewed as "unnatural 'slums', and also as sources of disease and immorality that negatively affected the quality of family life and citizenship" (Picton 2010, 310). At the time, Picton (2010) describes a post-war urban planning agenda that centered renewal and social redistribution that targeted low-income areas for demolition and their inhabitants for dispersal; "urban reconstruction" sought to transform congested areas in order to "create new, clean, functional cities" (305). While urban renewal efforts embodied different flavours throughout cities in Europe and North America, Ottawa city planners' version of urban renewal was inspired by the work of French architect and planner Jacques Gréber (Picton 2010). Despite the key role that Gréber played as an architect in the Vichy regime, Gréber was commissioned to draw up plans for beautifying Ottawa, which materialized as the 1950 *Plan for the National Capital* (Picton 2010). The Gréber Plan:

provided the design details for a restructured central core, an expansive creation of parks and green spaces (including a greenbelt), the decentralization of industry and housing and the development of an extensive network of parkways and expressways. [Gréber] called for the relocation of inner-city residents in blighted and congested neighbourhoods to pristine, clean, low-density suburban environments. The [Gréber Plan] would beautify and rationalize the national capital and create a more hygienic and morally secure future for the National Capital Region (NCR) (Picton 2010, 310).

While Gréber's plan instilled urban ideals that arguably continue to inform planning and development in the national capital region, the working class and lower-income residents of LeBreton Flats bore the brunt of beautification—or urban renewal. Victims of the Gréber-inspired urban renewal demolition-driven evictions of the 1960s in LeBreton Flats were displaced to the city's margins at the time, including Heron Gate. The larger neighbourhood at the time, today known as Ledbury-Heron Gate-Ridgemont, was considered suburban before Ottawa amalgamated in 2001, although today it is considered as outer-urban or an inner suburb. For Hussein and Hawley (2021), outlier areas on the perimeters of cities—as the broader Herongate area was considered at the time of its initial development—are important to understand uneven development and exploitation, as working-class and new immigrant populations once lived on the peripheries of cities in the era of urban renewal. Today, neighbourhoods like Heron Gate are considered central more so than peripheral, with rising property values reflecting their geographic locations.

While the LeBreton Flats evictees were once displaced to the periphery of the city in neighbourhoods such as Heron Gate through processes of urban renewal, working-class tenants are once again being displaced to the peripheral margins of the city where rents are most affordable (albeit decreasingly so), as Heron Gate undergoes contemporary gentrification processes of renewal and revitalization. For Komakech and Jackson (2016, 415), urban renewal interventions aim to “inject new vitality” through planned adjustments to the built environment. Renewal, like zoning and other land use policies, is designed to create and maintain rational and orderly landscapes (Stein 2019, 27). However, in reality these urban planning tools, Stein (2019) argues, are often deployed “to target one racial group for exclusion or expulsion while clearing the way for another's

quality of life” (28). Revitalization is but a new iteration of renewal and increasingly invoked in urban planning interventions.

LeBreton Flats and Heron Gate shared some commonalities at the time of their respective demolitions, such as inadequate housing, poverty, neglect, and stigma. Yet, while both neighbourhoods were demonized by outsiders, they offered a strong sense of community, vibrancy, and socio-cultural support to their residents. The neighbourhoods offered a strong sense of home and community identity and despite facing structural discrimination, they embodied qualities that one may associate with liveability.

1. Ottawa Neighbourhood Study: Ledbury-Heron Gate-Ridgemont

Heron Gate is part of what the Ottawa Neighbourhood Study identifies as Ledbury-Heron Gate-Ridgemont (see figure 8). Conducted by researchers at the University of Ottawa, the Ottawa Neighbourhood Study provides data on neighbourhoods which are drawn according to residents’ experience, perception, and knowledge of geographical areas, as opposed to municipally determined administrative boundaries. For a detailed description of this larger constituent area, see Xia (2020). This area includes Heatherington to the south and adjacent neighbourhoods to the east and west to Bank Street. In this neighbourhood, 75 percent are renters compared to the Ottawa average of 34 percent (Ottawa Neighbourhood Study 2021).

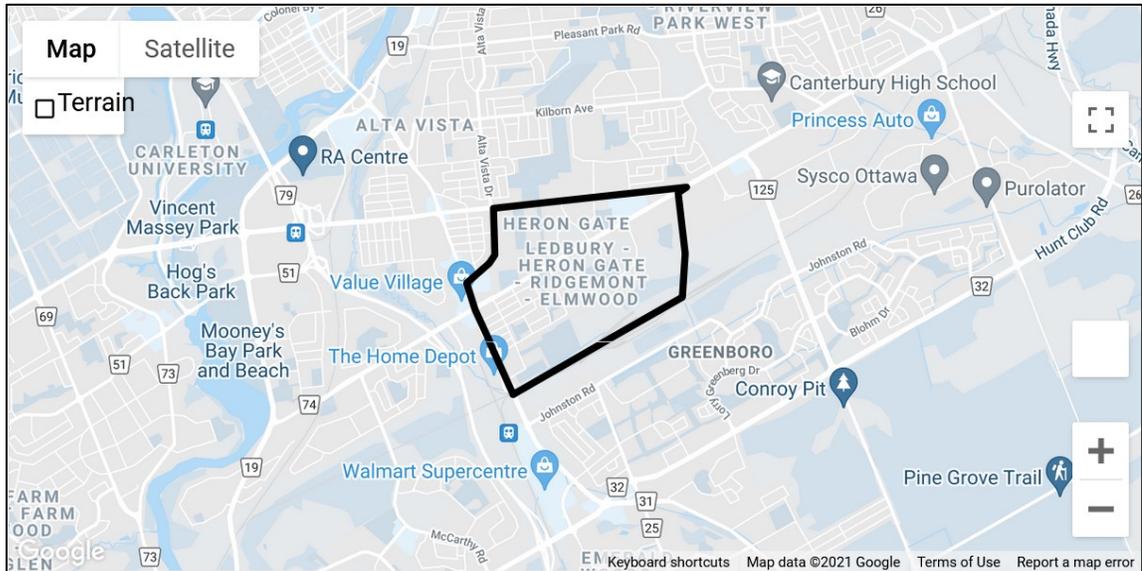


Figure 8. Geographic outline of the Ledbury-Heron Gate-Ridgemont area (Ottawa Neighbourhood Study 2021).

Rates of core housing need and low-income prevalence are far higher than average rates in Ottawa (see figure 9). Compared to the rest of Ottawa, residents of Ledbury-Heron Gate-Ridgemont are more likely to live in unaffordable housing, require major repairs, and are four times more likely to live in unsuitable housing (Ottawa Neighbourhood Study 2021). Further, residents are much more likely to live in low-income households, at all age groups, according to the low-income measure which refers to a fixed percentage (50 percent) of median adjusted after-tax income. Households are over three times more likely to meet the low-income measure compared to the Ottawa average, at 41.2 percent compared to 12.6 percent. Moreover, demographic and immigration numbers reveal that two-thirds of the population of Ledbury-Heron Gate-Ridgemont are racialized, compared to just over one-quarter of the Ottawa population. Significantly, 27.4 percent of area

residents are Black and 15.1 percent Middle Eastern, compared with 6.6 and 4.5 percent in Ottawa, respectively. Reflecting the large immigrant and refugee population, residents are over four times more likely to speak neither English nor French compared to the wider city. Over half of the population are first-generation immigrants, more than double the Ottawa figures. Immigrants are over 3.5 times more likely to settle in Ledbury-Heron Gate-Ridgemont than elsewhere in the city, and refugees are over five times more likely to settle there; Ledbury-Heron Gate-Ridgemont houses 22.8 percent of the city’s refugee population. It is not apparent, however, to what extent the settlement and segregation patterns are voluntary or involuntary, and to what extent that social service and settlement organizations steer newcomers into the community.

Core Housing Need		
Indicator	Ledbury – Heron Gate – Ridgemont	Ottawa
% Unsuitable housing	18.2	4.6
% Major repairs needed	7.8	5.3
% Unaffordable housing (all households)	41.6	23.8
% Unaffordable housing (tenant households)	45.6	42.3
% Tenants in subsidized housing	33.9	15.9
Median monthly rent cost (\$)	1022	1112
Low Income prevalence		
Indicator	Ledbury – Heron Gate – Ridgemont	Ottawa
Low income prevalence (LIM-AT)	41.2	12.6
Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among children (0-14)	58	16.3
Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among youth (15-24)	48.4	18.8
Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among adults (25-64)	33.1	10.7
Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among seniors (65+)	33.8	9.4
Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among young children (0-5)	57.7	16.3

Figure 9. Table of core housing need statistics as compiled by the Ottawa Neighbourhood Study (Ottawa Neighbourhood Study 2021).

These statistics are important for understanding domicile in Heron Gate. Mensah and Tucker-Simmons (2021) argue that “Herongate’s socio-economic composition makes it an archetypal example of an urban space that is susceptible to the encroachments of contemporary gentrification”, with a high density of relatively poor people of colour and immigrants (83). The Herongate Tenant Coalition and its allies and supporters interviewed as part of this research project have persistently argued that Timbercreek targeted the neighbourhood because of these demographics. They argue that the predatory nature of financialized real estate targets lower-income and racialized areas for transformation, in part because newcomers and those who do not speak English or French as a first language are seen as less likely to challenge eviction.

2. Heron Gate’s Census Profile

The Ottawa Neighbourhood Study statistics for Ledbury-Heron Gate-Ridgemont are important to understand what is happening in the larger area south of Alta Vista. Supplementing these figures is Statistics Canada census data which allows for a more tightly focused picture of neighbourhood demographics and core housing need specific to Heron Gate itself, the property owned by Timbercreek/Hazelview; indeed, Heron Gate is large enough to be its own census tract (#5050007.02). The following comparisons between the 2016 census profiles for Heron Gate and the City of Ottawa reveal even starker differences than the Ottawa Neighbourhood Survey revealed for Ledbury-Heron Gate-Ridgemont in terms of race, income, and housing. Visible minorities comprise 70 percent of Heron Gate’s population of 4,681, compared to 26 percent of the City of

Ottawa's population of 934,243; within, 30.9 percent of residents are Black compared with Ottawa's 6.6 percent, 15.2 percent are Arab compared with Ottawa's 4.5 percent, and 11.8 percent are South Asian compared with Ottawa's 4.2 percent (Statistics Canada 2017). In terms of language, 9.5 percent of Heron Gate residents speak neither English nor French compared to Ottawa's 1.5 percent. Over half of Heron Gate (52.3 percent) are immigrants compared to less than one-quarter of Ottawa (23.6 percent). Refugees comprise the vast majority of immigrant types at 65.3 percent as measured between 1980 to 2016, compared to 23.8 percent of immigrants for the whole of Ottawa during the same period. Migrants were most likely to arrive from African and Asian countries, with Somalia, Iraq, Syria, and Nepal representing the highest concentrations of recent immigrants (2011-2016) at 54 percent of the total.

In terms of housing, the Heron Gate census tract records that 93.3 percent of the population of 4,681 are renters, compared to 34.3 percent of Ottawa (Statistics Canada 2017). Neighbourhood households also disproportionately experience core housing need, measured in terms of suitability, disrepair, and affordability (see figure 10). Regarding suitability—which measures whether the dwelling has enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the household—27.6 percent of Heron Gate households are living in unsuitable conditions, compared to 4.6 percent of Ottawa households. This is further reflected in that over 12 percent of households have more than one person per room, compared to Ottawa's 1.6 percent. Further, the rates of households requiring major repairs are disproportionate to overall Ottawa figures, at 10.2 percent to 5.3 percent. Finally, over half of Heron Gate households (51.6 percent) spend 30 percent or more of total household income on shelter costs, compared to less than one-quarter (23.8 percent)

throughout Ottawa (owners and renters). Moreover, the median total income of households is less than half the Ottawa average, at \$40,594 compared to \$85,981. Overall, these figures paint a grim picture of housing inequality, structural racism, and spatial segregation.

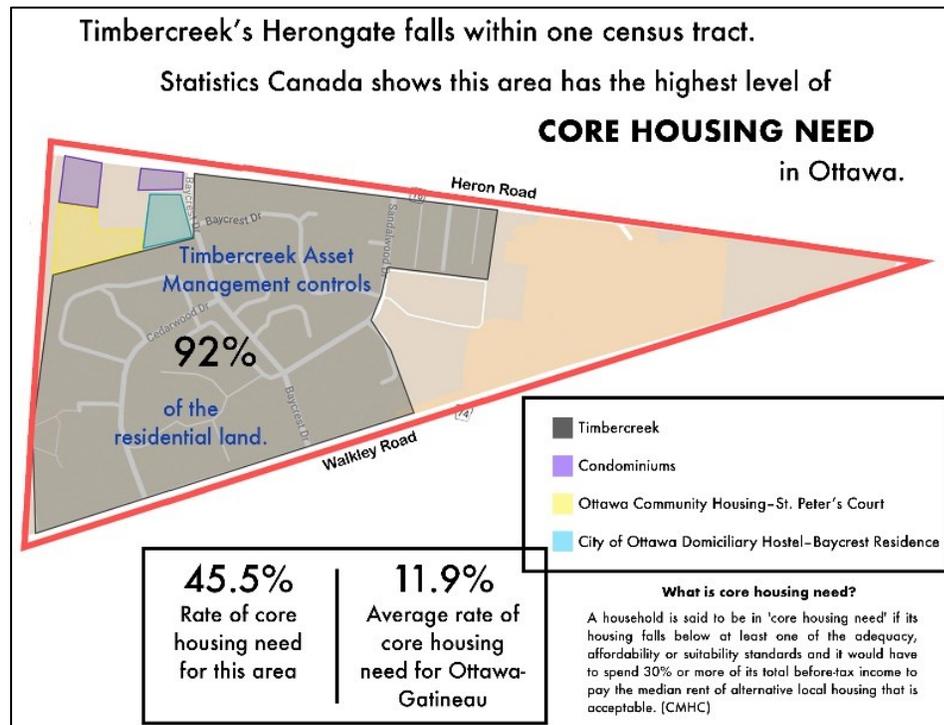


Figure 10. Infographic of core housing need for Heron Gate as compiled by the Herongate Tenant Coalition (In the author's possession).

3. The Social Fabric of Heron Gate as an Ethno-racial Enclave

Beginning in the 1990s, the neighbourhood became home for considerable numbers of immigrants and refugees fleeing conflict in Somalia, then Iraq, then Syria. Significant numbers from South Asia, in particular Nepal, also settled in Heron Gate. The

neighbourhood developed into what Mensah and Tucker-Simmons (2021) describe as an “ethno-racial enclave”, adapting this concept from “ethnic enclave”, as Heron Gate was referred to in the application submitted by evicted tenants to the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal (Yussuf et al. v. Timbercreek 2019). Geographically, an ethnic enclave is an urban area with a high concentration of ethnic groups with shared cultural identities; an ethnic enclave can also be comprised of one singular ethnic group. Sociologically, as a result of the clustering of immigrants and refugees in specific geographic areas, an ethnic enclave develops through the formation of migrant networks and the development and fostering of intersecting relations and forms of capital (social, economic, cultural) (Pullés and Lee 2019).

The terminology associated with ethnic enclaves has evolved and includes, for example, “immigrant enclave”, “co-ethnic enclave”, and “ethno-racial enclave.” The word enclave is sometimes used interchangeably with neighbourhood. Surveying the research of immigrant neighbourhoods in Canada, Xia (2020) identifies a prominent theme around settlement patterns, spatial assimilation, and segregation. Xia’s assessment is that the spatial clustering and concentration of immigrants in particular geographic areas is “influenced by a mix of structural factors and individual agency that leads to a variety of outcomes for immigrant groups that is impossible to generalize” (12). Structural factors may prevent immigrants from settling in particular residential areas outside of the ethnic or co-ethnic neighbourhood. According to Tucker-Simmons, the high concentrations of racialized people in a few specific areas around Ottawa, such as Heron Gate, is a result of structural racism that includes housing discrimination, employment discrimination, and inequality of income distribution (Crawford 2022).

There have been rigorous and ranging debates over, and critiques of, the ethnic enclave hypothesis; my interest and purpose here is not to necessarily engage with these debates (which go back decades), but instead to differentiate the community in terms of its racialized and ethnic composition from typical majority white neighbourhoods in Canadian cities (although a number of racially diverse communities exist in multiple Canadian cities). By making this distinction I extend the argument initiated by those displaced from Heron Gate that the mass eviction and destruction of their ethnic community is a violation of human rights (their argument) and an example of domicide as the material and socio-symbolic destruction of home (my argument).

As with the earliest residents displaced from LeBreton Flats, research has shown that many settle in the neighbourhood out of necessity rather than choice (Xia 2020, 54). Although Heron Gate is one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the city, it also contains a vibrant mutual support network of the kind that tend to emerge in neighbourhoods of concentrated poverty with a shared identity (August 2014a). While the neighbourhood is not devoid of its share of issues—key amongst them core housing need—newcomers have ready access to existing social supports, networks, and amenities, some of the key necessities of life (Xia 2020, 54). For those living within the community, Heron Gate offers many aspects of what we may consider as the constituent components of liveability. As described by one resident:

If you walk by one area you smell Nepali food, you walk by another area you smell Somali food, you walk by another area you smell Arabic food. You hear a multitude of languages just walking in the neighbourhood. It's a culturally and ethnically diverse area and there's no area like it.... it's so interconnected and actually is what a community is supposed to be, like neighbours depending on their neighbours for things like food, babysitting, transportation, and so I think that is something that gets lost. It's an extremely unique neighbourhood and

people are extremely interdependent and interconnected (Herongate Tenant Coalition 2020).

Heron Gate offers support networks and a refuge for newcomers, immigrants, and refugees, who can survive and even thrive within an enclave of others who speak their first languages.

Lily Xia worked closely with the Herongate Tenant Coalition doing organizing work in the Heron Gate neighbourhood while she completed her master's degree at the University of Ottawa. Xia's research documents a deep yet complex sense of belonging in the community among the diverse immigrant communities that comprise the neighbourhood. According to Xia (2020), residents "have built a sense of belonging and community, providing each other support and solidarity in spite of challenges such as (in)accessibility, discrimination, and disinvestment" (2). Heron Gate residents are keenly aware of the structural barriers that they face; however, residents refuse to allow these barriers to define or disrupt their sense of belonging and support for their neighbours (Xia 2020). Residents' shared sense of belonging is not based exclusively on ethnicity—as the community is comprised of multiple ethnic groups—but also on mutual difference and shared struggle (148). Heron Gate residents have built a sense of community around common difference, "where the differences between individuals are acknowledged but not used as a marker for exclusion" (148). The sense of community belonging that is documented by Xia is demonstrative of the socio-symbolic value of home in Heron Gate.

Communities like Heron Gate offer some insulation from the wider exclusionary sentiments of Canadian settler society. The Herongate Tenant Coalition (2018a) described the community as "a phenomenally tight-knit neighbourhood, where doors are

always open, where many members of racialized communities don't feel like the "Other" and don't have to live always braced for being told to "go back to your country" (7). In an interview, one organizer with the Herongate Tenant Coalition spoke of the valuable social fabric that exists amongst the population there, that immigrant and refugee communities rely upon, and the impacts of that being disrupted by mass eviction and displacement:

Some of them are brand new to the country and are trying to still get their head around Canadian culture, which is very bizarre, depending on what part of the world you come from, and understanding how health care works, access to childcare, education, religion, faith-based stuff, like all kinds of things that people would normally need to figure out, right? You're coming to a strange foreign land of Canada and people were able to make a better go of it, particular Somalis coming to this neighborhood because there is like a network of other people that were there, people who spoke the same language, understood each other. There's the classic example of like neighbours, two or three homes, people, women would like drop their kids off across the street at one of their neighbour's homes to babysit while they went off to work and then they trade off. So like the community was very reliant on each other. It's like there is actually a huge economic and cultural value towards these people being able to live and relying on one another. And so, you know, people, working class immigrants brand new to Canada are particularly vulnerable towards that kind of disruption.¹⁰

My interviewee returned to this notion of disruption shortly thereafter, in relation to the disruption of the valuable social fabric of the community:

It's a common integration pattern (for migrants) across the country. People are going to look out for, you know, are going to move to a place where there's actual support from other people, possibly even people they knew from home. In the case of Herongate, there were people who knew each other from refugee camps, and met in refugee camps and then were reunited. That's the shit that gets disrupted by these mass evictions as well...like tearing down any homes and mass evicting anyone is bad; however, disrupting what I've tried to just describe, disrupting the fact that there are people who know each other from refugee camps and were then reunited in this neighborhood and then look after each other's

¹⁰ Interview with Herongate Tenant Coalition organizer, June 7, 2021.

children, that thing, which is hard to put a monetary value on, was disrupted and taken away from a vulnerable population.¹¹

This description captures some of the social and symbolic intricacies around how a community gets disrupted, how a community of immigrants and refugees that rely upon each other, and enact mutual aid in common difference, gets eliminated. In these examples, Heron Gate offers a semblance of familiarity in a foreign and at times hostile place. In this regard, an ethno-racial enclave offers a sense of security, even though outsiders fixate on aspects of insecurity that in their view contribute to making the neighbourhood unliveable. Herein lies a tension between perceptions and realities of what makes a neighbourhood unliveable or liveable. Researchers have highlighted the positive attributes of such enclaves which can contribute to an enhanced quality of life for their inhabitants, in terms of maintaining cultural values and practices, strengthening social networks and social cohesion, and supporting economic enterprises and sociocultural institutions (Mensah and Tucker-Simmons 2021; Mensah and Williams 2017). However, ethno-racial enclaves can carry stigma and be viewed negatively by the dominant white settler majority, in that spatial concentrations of minority populations can be associated with poverty and crime (see Walks and Bourne 2006).

Heron Gate and Racial Stigma

As Heron Gate has undergone a demographic and socioeconomic shift since the 1990s, the neighbourhood has been increasingly stigmatized. Although strong social supports and cultural networks are created by and exist for its residents, creating a deep sense of community belonging and liveability, the perpetuation of racial stigma associated with

¹¹ Interview with Herongate Tenant Coalition organizer, June 7, 2021.

the neighbourhood has worked to justify systemic and strategic neglect. In addition, racial stigma has served to fuel a narrative that Heron Gate homes were not worth saving and should be demolished; in this narrative driven by public officials, mainstream media, and the landlord, the neighbourhood was devoid of liveability.

1. “Apartment Watch” and the Perception of Crime

Heron Gate has been the focus of crime prevention and “apartment watch” projects going back to the late 1980s (Meredith and Paquette 1992). Apartment Watch was a crime prevention program in Heron Gate’s five apartment complexes from the mid-to-late 1980s. Apartment Watch was based on the Neighbourhood Watch model which is a method of social control that, following the upward trend in mechanisms of neoliberal governance, responsabilizes citizens to engage in crime prevention and surveillance activities (Lub 2018; McConville and Shepherd 1992; Moores 2017). Neighbourhood Watch was part of a broader shift in policing methods in the 1980s that reflected the interests of the business community and conservatism more generally (Moores 2017). McConville and Shepherd’s (1992) study of Neighbourhood Watch programs in London found that suspicion was heavily racialized, where over one-third of white respondents associated crime with Black people (109-112). Overall, the authors found that the purported goal of Neighbourhood Watch programs to effect positive social change through mechanisms of civic surveillance is not attainable; instead, these types of programs can serve to fracture social relations by stigmatizing and labelling segments of a community (114). The authors also found that the Neighbourhood Watch model not only exploits fear of crime, but can also actually increase fear of crime (McConville and

Shepherd 1992, 105). Apartment Watch in Heron Gate did just that (Meredith and Paquette 1992).

Heron Gate's Apartment Watch program was largely unsuccessful. It failed to meet the 90 percent participation threshold due in large part to lack of interest and tenant turnover (Meredith and Paquette 1992, 163). However, post-program surveys reveal that the *perception* of crime increased. Following the program, survey respondents were more likely to perceive the existence of high amounts of crime (from 16 to 23 percent) and average amounts of crime (29 to 51 percent) in the neighbourhood, while the proportion of tenants believing that their building had a serious crime problem increased from 23 to 35 percent. Respondents also felt less safe in terms of walking alone at night (from 76 to 56 percent) (165). The Apartment Watch program in Heron Gate is illustrative of efforts of social control serving to enhance suspicion and fear of crime in the neighbourhood. These early attempts to securitize Heron Gate contributed to stigmatization and shaping the neighbourhood as a problematic place and undesirable space. This in turn would enable and facilitate the rental community to fall into disrepair when the property changed hands and was sold to Transglobe in 2007. While crime levels have decreased over the long-term, perceptions of crime have increased with the presence of police and private surveillance programs (Meredith and Paquette 1992), as well as with crime-centric media coverage.

2. From Perception to Narrative: Crime, Violence, and the Media

The onset of stigmatization in Heron Gate was fueled by media coverage and increasing public sentiment associating the neighbourhood with crime and violence. In particular,

Black male youth of Somali heritage have borne the brunt of crime-centric news coverage. Jiwani and Al-Rawi (2021) identify representational clusters around Somali-Canadian youth, including radicalization, terrorism, and gang violence. Stereotypical tropes attached to diaspora communities—such as crime to Somali-Canadian youth—become associated with their homes and neighbourhoods. Media coverage over the last 20 years of the Somali diaspora in Ottawa South has been consistently negative and crime-focused, with direct references to Heron Gate (Saxena 2021; Xia 2020). Heron Gate is often portrayed in media accounts as a bastion of criminal and gang activity, with significant racialized and anti-immigrant undertones. Astha Saxena’s (2021) research into media coverage on the Heron Gate neighbourhood found that almost half of the articles appearing in the *Ottawa Citizen* from 1986 to 2019 reported on criminal activities. I ran a supplementary search in the ProQuest database on coverage in the *Ottawa Sun*, a right-wing newspaper infamous for sensationalizing crime, over the past decade. Notably, in 2013 and 2014, the *Sun* ran several articles with sensationalist headlines that associated Heron Gate with “rampant crime” (Bell 2014a), “residents living in fear” (Bell 2014b), “plagued by gun violence” (Bell 2014b), and a “troubled ‘hood” (Bell 2013). The timing of the coverage is significant in terms of the trajectory of financialized ownership and the impending first mass eviction-demolition in 2015-2016. Media coverage emphasized resident fear and fixated on the lack of policing in the neighbourhood. Heron Gate has been referred to as a ghetto—a descriptive term that associates the neighbourhood with poverty and crime. The interrelated social processes of ghettoization, on the other hand, are constituted by racial stigmatization, economic disadvantage, segregation, and social policy (Chaddha and Wilson 2008). Part of the association of Heron Gate with a ghetto

relates to the design and layout of the townhome complexes as conducive to facilitating criminal behaviour. Timbercreek's redesign plans were promoted as providing a diverse approach to density by not having low-rise buildings segregated from high-rise buildings.

Lily Xia has also researched media coverage on Heron Gate. As part of her research, Xia (2020) interviewed neighbourhood residents who self-identified as immigrants and spoke about the positive qualities and experiences within the community, including access to amenities and social networks and community supports. Xia then juxtaposed these resident experiences with the negative perceptions of Heron Gate that outsiders held as demonstrated through news media and social media. Xia examined 335 articles between 2008 to 2019, of which over 40 percent focused on crime. Xia compared crime-centric coverage with that of the evictions that commenced in 2016 and found that a spike in articles surrounding the demolitions was accompanied by an increase in articles about the neighbourhood's crime problem and a desire to "clean up" the area (92). Xia also analyzed social media, including Reddit forums where a largely young, white male user-base demographic discussed the negative qualities of the neighbourhood. Xia documents racist attitudes against the Somali community where the neighbourhood is simultaneously described as "little Mogadishu" and "lil Somalia" and called "a complete shit hole" or "absolute shit holes" (96-97). These racist tropes associating Somali youth with crime and Heron Gate as a ghetto are driven in part by media but also served to further fuel a wider public narrative that Heron Gate deserved to be demolished.

Strategic Neglect

Narratives of criminality and racial stigma enable and facilitate patterns of neglect. One resident I interviewed made the link between the issues of stigma and housing, where the townhomes were allowed to fall into disrepair:

If I tell people that I live in Herongate, automatically their first response is to kind of like raise eyebrows and be like, “oh, you’re from there.” And I’m like, “well yeah, it’s not a bad area.” I know that it has a narrative to it for sure, but that narrative, I think, is one that is based essentially in white supremacy, in a falsehood. Because there is that idea of like, oh, you walk there at night, you’ll get snatched up or something bad will happen to you. But I’ve never felt unsafe walking here until 2016, until 2018, when our area started getting torn down, when things started to get really dilapidated in this area, when housing became a huge issue. It was always an issue in this area, but it became even more so of an issue.¹²

The cycle of stigma, neglect, dilapidation, and demolition described by this resident, who lives in a parcel of townhomes that the Herongate Tenant Coalition believes is the next slated for demolition, is palpable. Racial stigma associated with the neighbourhood and its residents justified larger patterns of neglect specifically targeting Heron Gate’s parcels of townhomes.

Timbercreek often blamed neglect on the previous landlord, and was quick to highlight investments and “improvements”, including repaired sidewalks, parking garages, re-facing buildings, and landscaping (McCracken 2015). Timbercreek Communities president David Melo explained the rationale, that improvements “typically come with higher rents, or *improved* rents from when we acquired a property” (Brent 2016; emphasis added). Implementing aesthetic “improvements” is part of the “gentrification-by-upgrading” strategy to reposition buildings in order to raise rents and

¹² Interview with Herongate Tenant Coalition organizer, May 27, 2021.

transform communities to attract more affluent newcomers with greater purchasing power (August and Walks 2018). However, no improvements were directed within the parcels that contained the hundreds of rental townhouse units. Instead, “rehabilitation” and “rejuvenation” efforts directed toward some parts of the neighbourhood—the apartment buildings—were mobilized alongside a redevelopment strategy “to increase the number of leasable units” (Momentum Planning & Communications 2021). Even so, the improvements to the apartment buildings were largely aesthetic, and Timbercreek used the associated expenses to justify an application to the Landlord and Tenant Board for an above-guideline increase (AGI) in rent to cover the costs. The aesthetic upgrades, which residents argued were undertaken in order to improve the view for the new residents in the new redevelopment, would be paid for by tenants. Meanwhile, the townhomes continued to fall into disrepair. Beginning in 2015, Timbercreek would roll out a steady narrative that the townhomes were “no longer viable”, that they were “at the end of their life cycle” (Willing and van der Zwan 2018), and that it was “not economic to make patches anymore” (McCracken 2015),

The landlord’s repeated declarations that Heron Gate townhomes were beyond repair belies the experiences of tenants who claim that their work orders were systematically neglected since Timbercreek’s acquisition of the neighbourhood. The Herongate Tenant Coalition (2018a) believes that purposeful neglect has been “weaponized” as an instrument of mass displacement. As Egal (2018) notes, “Many tenants feel that Timbercreek has purposefully neglected the houses in Herongate because they knew they intended to evict the tenants, demolish the houses, and build housing that is targeted towards higher income tenants.” Residents believe that Timbercreek—and

previous landlord Transglobe—had purposefully allowed the properties to decay to the point where demolition could be justified (Egal 2018; McCracken 2015; Rockwell 2018a).

Suspicion is supported by internal documents obtained through freedom of information (FOI) requests from the City of Ottawa (City of Ottawa 2018-621, 2018-629, 2018-744). These disclosures demonstrate a disproportionate number of tenant complaints and City-issued work orders in Heron Gate, including in the demoviction zone. Neglect can be interpreted within the wider strategic repertoire of financialized landlords to squeeze profits—by not paying for repairs and maintenance—as well as purposefully neglecting homes to the point of justifying their demolition to intensify the property. Further, the patterns of neglect illuminate how real estate actors both benefit from deregulation and attempt to manipulate and subvert state bodies to renege on maintenance obligations. Revealing an overarching strategy of maintaining disrepair of the properties, these documents help shed light on how Timbercreek subverted the City’s property standards and bylaw regime by challenging maintenance and repair orders issued by the City following tenant complaints. Yet, there is a more insidious aspect of this story that goes beyond neglect alone to further demonstrate how mechanisms of municipal governance facilitate and enable landlord misconduct that contributes to unjust enrichment.

1. Property Standards

Freedom of information (FOI) requests that I filed with the City of Ottawa as part of organizing efforts with the Herongate Tenant Coalition have led to the discovery of a

quasi-judicial board known as the Property Standards and License Appeals Committee (PSLAC) (City of Ottawa 2018-744). The PSLAC enables landlords to appeal repair work orders issued by the By-Law and Regulatory Services Branch of the City of Ottawa without informing tenants. These types of committees that exclude tenants take on different forms in different municipalities and were legislated into existence in Ontario with the larger *Tenant Protection Act* rental housing deregulation regime. One tenant organizer—who was familiar with the Toronto version of the PSLAC—referred to these types of committees as “law optional”, meaning that landlords could opt to use this type of municipal mechanism to renege on maintenance obligations required by law. Effectively, landlords can opt out of their legal obligations to fulfill maintenance duties ordered by the City’s By-Law branch by appealing to the PSLAC.

Obtaining this FOI disclosure was significant as it included the release of an audio recording of a PSLAC hearing regarding repair work ordered by the City for a Heron Gate townhome. During the hearing, a Timbercreek employee explicated a creative version of alternative events, or in legal terms “fraudulently misrepresented the facts”, regarding fulfilling a By-Law work order at a Heron Gate townhome address slated for demolition (Payne 2019). The address belonged to Saido Gashan and Abdullahi Ali who were members of the Herongate Tenant Coalition; their flooded basement had rendered the area unliveable, destroyed their possessions, and created a health hazard for their large, multi-generational family that resided there. Their family moved to the address in question on Sandalwood Drive in 2015 after their previous home was slated for demolition in the first round of neighbourhood demovictions in 2016. Their new home was in considerable disrepair with a number of serious defects, and they struggled

relentlessly with Timbercreek and the City of Ottawa to make repairs. Among them included a leaking basement where maintenance requests and work orders were submitted beginning in May 2017 (Gashan and Ali v. Timbercreek 2019; see also City of Ottawa 2018-632).

Timbercreek was very slow in carrying out various maintenance and repairs, or non-responsive altogether, when requested from Heron Gate tenants. Tenants often had to escalate and submit work orders to the City's bylaw office. In Gashan and Ali's case, they had submitted six written communications to Timbercreek between May 2017 and June 2018 to fix the leak, before a major flood in July 2018. It was at that time that they escalated to the City's bylaw office. Shortly thereafter, City of Ottawa bylaw officer Jean Sarault informed Ali that he had issued a repair order to Timbercreek to fix the basement. A few weeks later Ali followed up with Sarault who then informed Ali that Timbercreek had indicated to him that they had made the repairs. Neal Rockwell (2021), an independent journalist who worked closely with the community in 2018 and documented residents' experiences surrounding the mass eviction, notes that Ali was incensed, as repairs had not been carried out and the problem remained:

For Abdullahi this highlighted again the way he and the other residents were never listened to, never taken seriously, no matter how reasonable their position, no matter how many people corroborated the story, versus the company [Timbercreek], which, by any one official, with some power or authority, was always heard, regardless of how implausible their account might be (146).

Moreover, we discovered that this was not simply a matter of a bylaw officer taking the word of a landlord over a tenant; instead, there was a legal decision made by the PSLAC, that only came to light as a result of the FOI disclosure. Before receiving the FOI disclosure, Gashan and Ali had no prior knowledge of the PSLAC decision; they had not

been notified about the hearing nor about the decision. Sarault indeed had issued an order to Timbercreek to repair the basement in early August. However, the disclosure reveals that instead of abiding by the repair order, Timbercreek appealed to the PSLAC in a letter dated August 20, and a hearing was held on September 19. The audio recording of the hearing was included in the disclosure package, and the FOI request has now led to an unjust enrichment small claims lawsuit brought by Gashan and Ali against Timbercreek, seeking \$25,000 plus legal costs.

The statement of claim draws from the materials in the FOI disclosure, including the letter and the audio recording of the hearing. During the hearing, Timbercreek's John Loubser claimed that there was no history of water infiltration in the basement and that the tenants had never complained of such. Instead, he suggested that Gashan and Ali made the claim because of their involvement with the Herongate Tenant Coalition, which he refers to in the hearing as a "tenant representative group", and claimed that the two "are very resistant to having to move." Loubser attempted to convince the PSLAC that Gashan and Ali's actions—in attempting to have their home maintained and repaired—were malicious:

Our perspective is that they have, they have gone this route, called property standards and caused this order to issue under the circumstances, um, simply to use the Property Standards Bylaw to be punitive against us when there's really no merit to it (City of Ottawa 2018-744).

Loubser is attempting to divert blame for the disrepair to the tenants' desire to assert their rights to organize to try and stay in their home. However, the truth behind the landlord's efforts to renege on their maintenance and repair responsibilities is revealed shortly thereafter in the hearing transcript. Loubser tells the committee that "there are a number

of homes in this area that are literally not viable from an economic perspective. It doesn't make sense to repair them at this point." It is noted in the letter and in the hearing that it would cost over \$12,000 to repair the foundation, but that it was not a reasonable consideration to do so since the home had been slated for demolition. What is missing from this narrative, and what would have surely been raised if the tenants were notified of and given the opportunity to participate in the hearing, is that their requests for maintenance and repairs were submitted over a year earlier with no response. Based on a review of the audio recording, the demeanour surrounding the hearing was jovial, with a tone of general agreement that the tenants' requests for repairs were both unreasonable and malicious, and that Timbercreek had acted reasonably and appropriately.

The revelations arising from the PSLAC hearing materials, as well as the existence of a municipal committee that can overrule repair orders without the knowledge of tenants, exemplifies and enforces a clear class hierarchy in the realm of property relations. This hierarchy is informally (repair requests ignored) and formally (repair requests are successfully appealed) exacerbated when tenants are racialized, live in a stigmatized neighbourhood, and lawfully advocate for their legal and human rights. Heron Gate tenants were forced to live in unliveable conditions, their requests for maintenance and repairs were ignored—even though the landlord is legally obligated to make repairs as set out in the tenancy agreement. According to the statement of claim, Timbercreek interfered with Gashan and Ali's freedom of speech and association by alleging that they were part of a Herongate Tenant Coalition conspiracy (19). In addition, Timbercreek "fraudulently misrepresented material facts before the PSLAC", and "prioritized their commercial interests over their statutory duties" to their tenants,

according to the statement of claim (Gashan and Ali v. Timbercreek 2019). In addition, the lawsuit alleges that Timbercreek “displayed reckless disregard for the Plaintiffs’ safety, health and overall wellbeing”, and “allowed the Plaintiffs’ Unit to dilapidate for the purpose of encouraging them to find alternative housing” (Gashan and Ali v. Timbercreek 2019, 18-19). These patterns of systemic and purposeful neglect help shed light on the rationale behind demoviction as a gentrifying tactic under the financialization of rental housing. Landlords are able to benefit both from the deregulation of the housing market and the use of municipal mechanisms to ensure that repairs are not completed and maintenance is neglected, at the expense of the most marginalized.

This chapter examined the Heron Gate community in greater detail as an ethno-racial enclave with high levels of core housing need and income disparity compared to the wider City of Ottawa. Stigma surrounding the neighbourhood was also examined, where Heron Gate is often associated with crime, poverty, and urban decay. These forms of racial and territorial stigma have been fueled by media and serve to justify levels of neglect that have specifically implicated the parcels of townhomes, ripening them for demolition. Demoviction and domicide are made possible through the applications of racialized stigma and strategic neglect, through the dehumanization of Heron Gate tenants and the strategic neglect of their homes. Yet this chapter has attempted also to humanize the neighbourhood’s inhabitants by arguing that the valuable social fabric in Heron Gate embodies life despite the best efforts of apartment investors to prep the neighbourhood for demoviction.

Chapter 7: Demoviction 2016: Domicide and Redevelopment in Heron Gate

Introduction

The following chapter investigates the first phase of demoviction in Heron Gate in 2016.

I examine some of the discourses surrounding demolition-driven eviction (or demoviction) at Heron Gate, including revitalization and intensification, through an examination of materials produced by ruling actors that frame eviction as relocation and redevelopment as renewal. In particular, the Vista Local first phase of redevelopment that was built on the HG7 parcel, was marketed as producing “liveable homes” (City of Ottawa 2018) and “resort-style living” (Shaw 2017), as a way to align Heron Gate with the predominantly white, affluent Alta Vista neighbourhood adjacent to the north.

Drawing from materials produced surrounding the HG7 demoviction and Vista Local redevelopment, this chapter shows how efforts to harmonize the neighbourhood with Alta Vista necessitate the exclusion and erasure of those Black and Brown bodies living in the Heron Gate townhomes and replacing them with white people.

Revitalization and Relocation

With the onset of neglect and disrepair, racial and territorial stigmatization can serve to justify intervention into a neighbourhood or community in the form of revitalization initiatives (August 2014a; Horgan 2018). For Burns and Berbary (2021), “revitalization and renewal suggest a progressive upscaling and improvement that conceals legacies of displacement. Revitalization is, in many instances, a friendlier way of describing

gentrification in progress” (2). Research surrounding stigmatization and revitalization initiatives in Toronto’s Regent Park are insightful for what is currently happening in Heron Gate. James (2010) argues that the revitalization planning initiatives informing the demolitions and redevelopments in Regent Park are driven by efforts of moral regulation that target the urban poor and working class, in particular racialized minorities and newcomers. August (2014a) argues that discourse surrounding pro-revitalization initiatives in Regent Park “reinforces geographic patterns of socio-spatial polarization, in which racialized poverty is shifted away from the gentrifying core and reconcentrated in the city’s increasingly stigmatized inner suburbs” (1,330). In an assessment of Heron Gate, Xia (2020) argues that Timbercreek used negative stigma associated with the neighbourhood as justification for demolition and redevelopment (54).

As mentioned previously, Timbercreek purchased the Heron Gate property, consisting of multiple land parcels that contained thousands of townhome and apartment units, in 2012 and 2013. In late 2015, 54 families were issued eviction notices on a block in Heron Gate where Timbercreek deemed that it was “not economic to make patches anymore” (McCracken 2015). The block, commonly referred to by Timbercreek as “HG7” (after the parcel of land legally known as Kanco Heron-Gate 7), consisted of a total of 80 townhomes that were targeted for demolition.

Timbercreek hired a public relations firm—Momentum Planning & Communications—to produce communications materials related to the eviction and redevelopment, in order to manage Timbercreek’s brand during the process. An excerpt from a promotional piece on the company’s website provides insight into the initial

objectives of Timbercreek acquiring the property as a prime location for the purposes of redevelopment, and describes the trajectory leading to eviction and demolition:

Timbercreek Communities acquired an ideally located piece of property in 2012 known as Heron Gate, situated in Ottawa's south end. In response to years of neglect and poor maintenance, Timbercreek Communities immediately began a comprehensive rehabilitation project and as of late 2015, had spent more than \$30 M in property reinvestments. The next phase in the rejuvenation of Heron Gate was to redevelop the site to increase the number of leasable units...The Timbercreek project fits in well with the City of Ottawa's revitalization plans of that particular section of Ottawa South (Momentum Planning & Communications 2021).

The excerpt notes an oft-used line by the landlord emphasizing the property upgrades; what is never mentioned is that they were directed at the apartment complexes, not the townhomes, which continued to be systematically neglected. The excerpt also makes an explicit link between demoviction and redevelopment as revitalization, in particular fitting in with wider municipal planning aspirations to have that section of the city gentrified.

The mass eviction of dozens of lower-income families and the demolition of their homes is an undeniably violent act. Yet the attempt is made to soften the violence of displacement and unhoming through improvement discourses such as revitalization, as well as reframing eviction as relocation. Timbercreek has consistently attempted to reframe Heron Gate evictions as relocation, insisting that no tenants were ever evicted as part of its efforts (that tenants voluntarily left). However, public relations firm Momentum Planning & Communications makes explicit the equating of relocation and eviction in the website excerpt:

To clear the way for the demolition, Momentum Planning and Communications was mandated to initiate a Relocation and Communications Program in October 2015 to assist with the *eviction* of the existing tenants of HG7. The goal of this

initiative was to ensure a smooth relocation process for the tenants and to manage the potential media and public impacts of the process on Timbercreek as a corporate landlord (Momentum Planning & Communications 2021; emphasis added).

Ironically, the public relations firm's promotional piece deploys language that Timbercreek would never publicly associate with the demoviction of Heron Gate parcels, including demolition, eviction, and even landlord, as corporate and financialized landlords tend to refer to themselves as property management companies. Momentum's promotional piece provides insight into the role that public relations firms play in the gentrification and redevelopment initiatives of corporate and financial landlords, clearing the way for mass displacement. In addition to discourses such as revitalization and liveability, intensification is an urban development objective that has been embraced by Timbercreek at Heron Gate.

Intensification and Demoviction

Intensifying existing built assets inevitably requires demolishing existing buildings, as land increasingly becomes a scarce resource in urban settings. Community resistance to such manoeuvres has framed opposition around demolition-driven eviction, or “demoviction.” Demoviction can be conceived of as a gentrifying tactic that involves the demolition of existing housing stock for the redevelopment of new-build, higher-rent units. The mass eviction precipitating demolition facilitates the preparation of land for an influx of new investment in construction, simultaneously destroying rental units that typically offer below market rents. In the case of financialized real estate, redevelopment serves to create a new asset class that can be easily rated and securitized to develop a new revenue stream. Intensification creates many more additional rental units than previously

existed before, at what Timbercreek refers to as “improved” or “premium” rents. As an example of how the financialization of rental housing produces gentrification, demoviction facilitates the socio-spatial reconfiguration and restructuring of housing, neighbourhoods, and community demographics. Similar to strategies of squeezing and repositioning, demoviction is facilitated by the regulatory mechanisms of the state.

In Ontario, demoviction has no legal repercussions. Whereas the 2006 *Residential Tenancies Act*—the legislation governing relations between landlords and tenants in Ontario—incorporates safeguards for tenants threatened by renoviction—where tenants enjoy a “right of return” or “right of first refusal”—demoviction provides no such rights. Section 53(3) in the legislation stipulates that a tenant has the right to return to the renovated unit at the original rental price (*Residential Tenancies Act* 2006), although this seems to rarely happen in practice (Diwan et al. 2021). On the other hand, under Section 52 of the *Act*, where a landlord terminates a tenancy for purposes of demolition, no such allowance is granted. This legal mechanism allows landlords to systematically neglect their properties to the point where landlords like Timbercreek can determine that it is “not economic to make patches anymore”, or that buildings have reached the “end of their life cycle” and are “no longer viable” (McCracken 2015; Willing and van der Zwan 2018), viability being a euphemism for profitability.

In addition to regulatory mechanisms that disadvantage tenants and benefit landlords, municipal actors and mechanisms of governance play a significant role in facilitating and legitimating development-induced displacement. For example, city officials openly supported the redevelopment of Heron Gate. Local ward councillor Jean Cloutier expressed publicly at the time that he was “a little bit relieved that it’s finally

happening”, adding that Heron Gate needs some “tender loving care” (McCracken 2015). In tandem with Timbercreek’s vernacular surrounding “improved rents”, Cloutier deployed oft-stated rhetoric of “improvement” and that “development will benefit the entire community” (McCracken 2015). Cloutier, as noted by Xia (2021), has also come under fire for his financial ties to developers (Osman and Chianello 2018; Willing 2018).

In addition to municipal governance mechanisms of planning and rezoning, public officials and urban planning professionals are also implicated in facilitating gentrification-induced displacement. One such area is permitting the rezoning of properties such as Heron Gate for “more lucrative use” (Shaw 2017). Timbercreek’s first phase of intensification in Heron Gate was allowed to forego restrictions on height and parking spaces (Shaw 2017), which is a common mechanism granted to property developers, but also demonstrates the degree of influence that developers perform in housing governance (Robin 2018). Large landlords like Timbercreek also receive significant sums from city coffers. Hussein and Hawley (2021) document the public money that Timbercreek receives as a landlord, noting that they received over \$1.7 million in “municipally funded grants” from the City of Ottawa from 2012 to 2019 (149), the details of which are not explicitly defined by the City. The Coalition notes that despite receiving hefty amounts of public funding, that Timbercreek “has failed to do regular maintenance and repairs, particularly to their Herongate properties, even when issued work orders by the City” (Egal and Hawley 2018). By granting demolition permits, allowing properties to be rezoned, and approving larger redevelopment plans—such as the Official Plan Amendment in 2021 that greenlighted the demolition of 559 additional Heron Gate homes—the City of Ottawa is an active agent of gentrification.

With considerable municipal support for its neighbourhood restructuring efforts, and despite community opposition, Timbercreek successfully demolished dozens of townhouses in the first round of demovictions in 2016. Over fifty families had been displaced, but without objection or opposition from the city; on the contrary, the demolition occurred with the support and approval of local politicians and city officials. Once the HG7 townhomes were cleared of their inhabitants, the Ottawa Police Service moved in to conduct urban warfare training on the former homes of the displaced.

The “Bombing of Heron Gate”

Ottawa police capitalized on the displacement of 54 Heron Gate families from the first parcel of land slated for demolition in the winter of 2016. The Ottawa Police Service’s Tactical Unit used the abandoned buildings in the neighbourhood for urban warfare training with firearms and explosives. In addition to blowing holes in the abandoned homes—what the Herongate Tenant Coalition (2021a) referred to as the “bombing of Herongate”—Ottawa Police staged a public relations stunt, inviting local media who aired video recordings of tactical officers destroying the homes of former tenants. Ottawa Police Staff Sgt. Paul Burnett told *CTV Ottawa* (2016) that: “It’s not every day that we have a venue like this where we can actually, for lack of better words, destroy it.” Police set up numerous cameras inside and outside of homes to capture the explosions, as walls, doors, and windows were blown to bits. Documents obtained through an FOI disclosure outline a number of types of trainings and occurrence dates (Ottawa Police Service 19-494). One of the scenarios included an “emotionally disturbed person” which begs the question of why police would consider deploying the Tactical Unit for somebody

experiencing a mental health crisis. The Ontario Provincial Police's Tactics and Rescue Team were also invited to participate.

In a video segment produced by *CTV Ottawa*, officers boasted about the accuracy of their detonations, as entry points were destroyed yet light fixtures in the room spared. A post on the Herongate Tenant Coalition's website attempts to humanize the dehumanizing situation by drawing attention to water damage and mould above the light fixture as evidence of landlord neglect that enabled these buildings to be emptied and bombed, as well as noting the children's art on the fridge in the background: "The police were happy to show off for the cameras. The media got to show homegrown explosions on the 6 o'clock news. The child's art on the fridge door tells a different story. The water damage and mould around the ceiling fan, a reminder of strategic neglect" (Herongate Tenant Coalition 2021a).

The bombing of Heron Gate was invited by the landlord and cheered on by local officials. Ward Councillor Jean Cloutier called the presence of the tactical unit in the neighbourhood a "win-win" for police, Timbercreek, and tenants, as "police presence gives a layer of security to the area" (McCracken 2016b). Cloutier noted that it was Timbercreek who reached out to Ottawa Police, offering use of the space and handing over the keys to several units. Apparently lost on the police, the landlord, and the city councillor is how extremely distasteful it is to bomb the former homes of refugees who have escaped war zones.

The police operation rendered material the heavy symbolic and emotional harms of domicide, where homes rendered unviable are pre-destroyed by police after their residents have been evicted and dispersed. Demoviction at Heron Gate represents both

the socio-symbolic destruction of home (the unmaking of home and community) followed by the material destruction of home (demolition); the bombing of Heron Gate sandwiches a third layer of violence in between the social and material aspects of domicile, where the physical home is desecrated in the name of security/insecurity by coercive agents of the state. The bombing of Heron Gate served to both prep the Ottawa Police for urban combat as well as to prep the HG7 homes for demolition, ultimately paving the way for the “Vista Local” redevelopment.

“Vista Local”: Revitalization and “Resort-style living” in Heron Gate

Following the 2016 eviction, bombing, and demolition of 80 townhomes in the Kanco Heron-Gate 7 land parcel (commonly referred to as HG7), Timbercreek designed and submitted a proposal to build what was dubbed by local residents as “the three monsters” (McCracken 2016a). The three monsters were large, six-storey complexes containing hundreds of rental units covering 1.64 hectares in the northeastern most part of the neighbourhood. The new modern complex—which includes three large, six-storey buildings—offering “resort-style living” is a stark contrast to the 80 townhomes which previously existed on site (Shaw 2017). The redevelopment of HG7 was the first phase of neighbourhood revitalization and of the attempt to build “liveable homes” in the neighbourhood (City of Ottawa 2018). Timbercreek’s design brief document displays a map of the area highlighting the first phase of development in red, as well as an overhead image of the demoviction zone (see figure 11) (Timbercreek Asset Management 2016a).

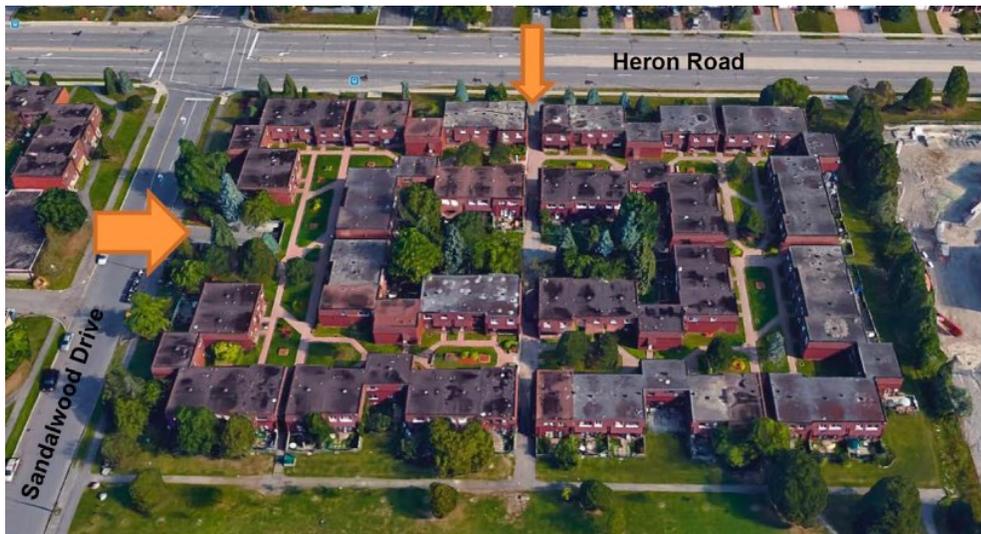


Figure 11. Images contained within Timbercreek’s design proposal of the HG7 parcel of townhomes slated for demolition (Timbercreek Asset Management 2016a).

In Timbercreek’s design proposal, the redevelopment was pitched as embracing the trendiest aspects of urban improvement, including environmental sustainability and social

responsibility, as prioritizing pedestrians and supporting multi-modal forms of transportation, as strengthening the quality of open spaces, and so on.¹³ These elements of urban liveability to be infused in the new development are what Timbercreek characterizes as revitalization efforts. One press release notes that: “Vista Local is part of a larger revitalization plan that will support a wide range of household structures, affordability, striking greenspace and resident interests” (Timbercreek Asset Management 2019f). These broader appeals to the liveable city serve both to mask and to promote gentrification. Discourses of urban improvement that Canadian cities have mobilized to improve settler colonial property relations have been embraced by developers, where developer iterations are in lockstep with municipal goals and plans, such as the City of Ottawa’s New Official Plan. Some of the earliest iterations and planning efforts around the development are worth recounting further here, as well as ongoing efforts to rebrand and market the neighbourhood to non-Heron Gate demographics; critically, the landlord has undertaken considerable efforts to “harmonize” its Heron Gate holdings with the wealthier, white Alta Vista neighbourhood adjacent to the north (Timbercreek Asset Management 2016a; City of Ottawa 2021f, 5).

1. Harmonization as Gentrification

At the same time as pitching environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and other liveability niceties, Timbercreek’s marketing materials reveal the overarching desire to realign Heron Gate with Alta Vista. The first two planning principles contained in

¹³ In fact, in these early design briefs and proposal documents, we see the early blueprints of a “wellbeing framework” forming the basis of a social framework and MOU signed between the developer and the city as part of the redevelopment proposal for the entire neighbourhood in 2021 (see Chapter Nine).

Timbercreek’s July 2016 design brief document for Heron Gate 7 that was submitted to the City of Ottawa express the desired aim to “(re)shape a vibrant community identity that enhances the quality of life for all” and to “recognize the future for Heron Gate as a unique, diverse and healthy sense of place” (see figure 12) (Timbercreek Asset Management 2016a, v).

1.4 PLANNING PRINCIPLES

	
1	2
(Re)shape a vibrant community identity that enhances the quality of life for all.	Recognize the future for Heron Gate as a unique, diverse and healthy sense of place.

Figure 12. Timbercreek planning principles for HG7 land parcel (Timbercreek Asset Management 2016a).

Within this discursive rhetoric of urban improvement that emphasizes quality of life in a healthy community, there is an implied message that the existing neighbourhood, prior to

redevelopment, is devoid of vitality. The existing community identity—shaped around an immigrant, ethnic neighbourhood—needs to be “(re)shaped” in order to be made viable again. Reshaping the community’s identity necessitates reinvigorating a vibrancy only made possible through demoviction, revitalization, and the replacement of a racialized community with one that is white. The renditions of a redeveloped Heron Gate are evident of the planning principles that reflect this, in that the images of residents living in and enjoying the neighbourhood are of white people. In landlord imagery and in the broader settler imaginary of improving property, whiteness is what will make the neighbourhood vibrant and healthy again.

The image of an older white couple dominating the image of Timbercreek’s first planning principle, to reshape a vibrant community identity, is likely to appeal to the affluent, predominantly white, aging, retiree in the Alta Vista neighbourhood adjacent to the north. This Alta Vista homeowner may be looking to relinquish responsibility for maintaining their property and sell their home in order to cover retirement living expenses. What the Heron Gate 7 redevelopment offers to Alta Vista retirees with accumulated wealth are “resort-style” services and amenities that cater to their particular quality of life, while being able to stay in proximity to their former home and neighbourhood. The apartment ads on the Vista Local website reflect this, tempting would-be renters to “choose freedom”, and embrace “recreation over renovation” in their new “liveable homes” (for over double rent of what previously existed on site) (Vista Local 2019).¹⁴

¹⁴ The rental range for Vista Local units in 2021 was \$1,325 (463 square feet) on the low-end for a bachelor unit and \$3,165 (1,427 square feet) for a three-bedroom apartment (Hazelview Properties 2021).

Timbercreek’s strategy to remake Heron Gate as part of Alta Vista is further evident in its July 2016 design brief. Within, Timbercreek’s stated vision for the neighbourhood is as follows: “Heron Gate is a complete, vibrant and sustainable community that enhances the quality of life for new, as well as long-time residents, while harmonizing with surrounding communities” (Timbercreek Asset Management 2016a). “Harmonizing with surrounding communities” is a clear reference to Alta Vista. As one member of the Herongate Tenant Coalition put it: “Harmonizing it. It is as though because, you know, the small primarily Black population here, the Muslim population, it’s not in harmony, I guess, with AltaVista.”¹⁵ To see the link one must only look so far as the branding of the HG7 development, first considered as “Vistas South” (McCracken 2017; see also Delamont 2019) but ultimately manifesting as “Vista Local.”

The intentions behind harmonizing Heron Gate with surrounding communities and the link with Alta Vista becomes blatantly clear when examining landlord iterations in local media. For example, Timbercreek’s Greg Rogers expressly stated at the time that Timbercreek was contemplating the HG7 redevelopment branding, that: “the intent is to bring the community in line more with what’s north” (McCracken 2017). With the demolition of the HG7 townhomes and their replacement with suites offering what is pitched as “resort-style living”, Timbercreek officials trumpeted Vista Local as embodying “a completely different product than what used to exist on this site” (Shaw 2017). At a September 2016 “public meeting consultation” over Timbercreek’s redesign of HG7, Rogers pitched the “resort-style” rental accommodations as a way to “build an

¹⁵ Interview with Herongate Tenant Coalition organizer, June 7, 2021.

alignment” between Heron Gate and Alta Vista, where the price of rent will “reflect the premium nature of the community” (see figure 13) (McCracken 2016a). Rogers was one of Timbercreek’s prominent public figures surrounding the 2016 and 2018 mass evictions. Rogers’ LinkedIn page describes his role as project lead at Heron Gate involving the “intensification and redevelopment of existing properties through large scale master planned communities.”



Figure 13. An image of Vista Local with Alta Vista to the north. With the second demoviction zone now an empty lot adjacent to the west, any association of Vista Local with Heron Gate in this particular image is erased (Vista Local 2021)

The only thing standing in the way of complete alignment with Alta Vista and reconfiguring Heron Gate into a “premium”, “master planned” community was the so-called “‘mess’ to the west, that is, the other Timbercreek-managed townhome complexes in Herongate” (McCracken 2016a). The “mess” was how Heron Gate was referred to by an Alta Vista resident in a public meeting regarding the redevelopment of HG7, as documented in a local newspaper (McCracken 2016a). To address this “mess”, Rogers pitched Vista Local as “seed[ing] change” in the neighbourhood, assuring Alta Vista opponents of the redevelopment that: “We’re not investing \$100 million as a bet on rent... This is an important investment for Timbercreek and its pension plans” (McCracken 2016a). Rogers was apparently attempting to assure Alta Vista residents that Timbercreek was serious about a long-term strategy to gentrify the neighbourhood and deal with the perceived “mess” of the existing community, permanently. The firm’s institutional investors depend on the long-term, sustainable yields that the “premium” rents at Vista Local would produce.

2. “Seeding Change”: Renditions of Whiteness and “Liveable Homes”

The idea of seeding and infusing change in the neighbourhood through the inspiration of the Vista Local investment is captured in a presentation slide at a January 2018 open house event organized by the City of Ottawa and Timbercreek that depicts the inevitable spread of HG7’s “resort-style living” to the other parcels of Heron Gate. In the image, the parcels are already emptied out of homes and lives, the accompanying image of a drawing of the neighbourhood notes the location of HG7 with arrows stretching out into

the community accompanied by question marks (see figure 14). This image is suggestive of Timbercreek's intentions to spread what have been branded as Vista Local's "liveable homes" and version of "resort-style living" throughout the neighbourhood—but what of the hundreds of homes and thousands of residents currently residing in the various neighbourhood parcels? They are replaced by three question marks and what looks like a treetop, perhaps signifying a park. The text accompanying the image suggests that "the community is improving" with the redevelopment of HG7 and the onset of "Heron Gate renewal." Renewal at Heron Gate and the replacement of the existing townhome parcels by the gentrifying effects of HG7 spread are made possible by what is presented as a "team effort" between Timbercreek, Dialog (the design company), the City of Ottawa, and, as an add-on, "you – our community" (City of Ottawa 2018). The declaration demonstrates that large-scale demoviction in affluent cities such as Ottawa is best served through a united front of ruling relations agents, including city planners and politicians, urban designers, and landlord-developers, where all three actors collaborate to co-produce domicide. The demovicted Heron Gate residents are discursively positioned as not part of "our community", while the rest of Ottawa's majority white residents, as "team players", should support the expulsion of the largely-racialized Heron Gate residents.

**Heron Gate:
Now & Future**

The community is improving:

- Heron Gate Mall - 2012
- Finn Court/Cobbert Court - 2010
- LeBury - 2008
- Heatherington/City Works Yard - Under Review
- Canada Lands

Heron Gate Renewal:

- Heron Gate phase 1 - 348 residences - 2017
- Future phases?

Heron Gate: 39.54 acres in Alta Vista

Timbercreek

- Purchased Heron Gate site in 2012
- Invested \$40M in upgrades
- Investing \$120M in a new building
- Future investment is best coordinated starting with a Secondary Plan
- This is a team effort:
 - Timbercreek
 - Team of international experts in community design
 - City of Ottawa
 - And you – our community

Figure 14. Presentation slides prepared for an open house event outlining a preliminary sketch for “Heron Gate renewal”, undertaken as part of a “team effort” between the landlord-developer and the City (City of Ottawa 2018).

In addition to representing a team effort dedicated to Heron Gate renewal, a subsequent slide presented at the open house event describes Vista Local as producing “liveable homes” (see figure 15).



Figure 15. A presentation slide prepared for an open house event promising “liveable homes” and “safe and healthy communities” for Heron Gate (City of Ottawa 2018).

In this imaginary, the future of Heron Gate is liveable, the premium lives inhabiting these new homes hold value; all that is required is mass demoviction and domicide of the less worthy to achieve this potentiality, and the rendering of existing lives in Heron Gate as devoid of value. Renditions of Vista Local in the planning and design stage demonstrate that these “liveable homes” are only produced by the inhabitancy of white bodies (see figure 16), a depiction not lost on members of the Herongate Tenant Coalition:

This type of destructive behavior of financialized landlords disproportionately targets people of colour...literally you're dealing with like an ethnic historic Somali neighborhood where there is a highly valuable social fabric that exists amongst the population there. And you are replacing it with a completely different group of people that are middle to upper middle class white people that don't

know each other. And so it's a huge shift. And they made fucking paintings of that.¹⁶



Figure 16. Design rendition of the new HG7/Vista Local redevelopment with no sign of the existing Black and Brown families that live in Heron Gate (Timbercreek Asset Management 2016b).

One person I interviewed who still lives in the neighbourhood emphasized that those racialized families remaining in the neighbourhood were highly aware not only of their replacement, but also that the gentrification and displacement that was happening in Heron Gate was part of wider and historic trends in Canada.

Even in their visual graphics...if you actually look at the little stick figures they used to kind of represent people and their little coffee shop in the development, like it's ALL WHITE PEOPLE, and they're actively replacing the demographic here. And that's definitely interesting to me. It definitely speaks to, I think, a lot of what's been happening not only in Ottawa, but across Turtle Island, like what

¹⁶ Interview with Herongate Tenant Coalition organizer, June 7, 2021.

happens in Jane and Finch and Regent Park and in Parkdale, in all of these places like Africville. It is not lost on us... people here are very aware of this.¹⁷

They spoke of another graphic that was displayed at one of the open house meetings

organized by Timbercreek and the City of Ottawa:

There was a graphic that had been going around talking about how wouldn't it be so clean and lovely to have a little coffee shop here, completely disregarding the fact that there were families and children who had lived here. But, you know, it's fine for wealthy people to have a coffee shop in place of that.¹⁸

References in developer visualizations to “retail” as some vague promise of consumer trinkets, as well as to coffee shops and leisure, speak to the settler desire for consumable spaces in pristine settings, where property is neat and tidy and welcoming to a white, affluent lifestyle, despite the real human costs of what it has replaced. Erasure here is apposite to the settler imaginary, where settler advantage and wealth is only attainable through the theft of Indigenous land. White enjoyment of Heron Gate is only realizable through the displacement of the existing inhabitants and the demolition of their homes.

3. Urban Revanchism and Eliminating the “Mess” of Heron Gate

Media coverage of the September 2016 public consultation event discussed above is supplemented by documents I obtained from the City of Ottawa under the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. These documents contain a “public meeting consultation report” produced by Suzanne Valiquet of Momentum Planning & Communications (City of Ottawa 2020-424). Valiquet has worked for Timbercreek as a public relations consultant tasked with “overseeing the

¹⁷ Interview with Herongate Tenant Coalition organizer, May 27, 2021.

¹⁸ Interview with Herongate Tenant Coalition organizer, May 27, 2021.

Communications and Relocation Program at Timbercreek’s Heron Gate Development” according to her LinkedIn page (Rockwell 2021, 79-80). In the Momentum report, Valiquet documents in detail the conversations that were held largely between Timbercreek’s Greg Rogers, planning consultant Jack Stirling, and the group of majority Alta Vista homeowners. The report documents the disdain that some Alta Vista property owners hold for lower-income Heron Gate tenants, especially the Black residents. Supplementing the media article mentioned above, one question documented by Valiquet asks: “What are you going to do with the rest of the mess (garden homes)?” The next question begins with a statement: “This is a ghetto. How do you make sure those people don’t move into this new place? Even in smaller apartments, two Somali families can live in one unit?” (297). According to Valiquet’s notes, Rogers appears to ignore the racist aspects of the comment and simply replies: “The short answer is price – large units in an expensive building” (297).

These types of vengeful and exclusionary iterations within the so-called community vision and consultation forums surrounding the Heron Gate redevelopment demonstrate what Neil Smith (1996) identifies as a form of revanchist attitudes toward lower-income and racialized residents. Revanchist politics embody the desire of non-Heron Gate residents to remove racialized tenants from the neighbourhood. According to August (2014b): “Rather than a benign or natural process, revanchist politics reveal how gentrification is a product of political and cultural struggle in which elite groups seeking to defend race and class privilege assert their entitlement to desirable areas and valuable real estate” (1,162). Alta Vista revanchism represents a desire not to only defend lines of white privilege, what Smith (1997) refers to as a defensive “rehardening of white middle

class identity” (122, cited in August 2014b), but to spread their socio-economic and racial identity beyond Alta Vista in order to destroy and remake Heron Gate.

The Momentum report documents Rogers reiterating the purpose of redeveloping Heron Gate to align with Alta Vista. During the meeting, Rogers stresses to Alta Vista residents that: “My goal is to convince you that you want to live there” (300). When questioned on whether or not the new development would contain affordable family units, Rogers replied that “large premium units...will be offered at a premium price. They will not meet affordability housing requirements in any way” (City of Ottawa 2020-424, 298). The absence of affordable housing would work to ensure that existing Heron Gate residents would have no home in the Vista Local redevelopment. Rogers also admits that the redevelopment is not designed to accommodate the large, multi-generational, and predominantly racialized, families that live in the townhomes: “Townhomes were occupied by families as large as 10, etc. The building we want to build would be occupied by smaller families, young professionals, retirees, probably an average of 3 per unit” (299). Valiquet’s documentation is insightful for further understanding Timbercreek’s approach to redeveloping, revitalizing, and gentrifying Heron Gate. Timbercreek’s approach to creating a revitalized Heron Gate involves mass eviction, demolition, and creating conditions where the existing residents are unable to relocate within the neighbourhood.

One resident I interviewed for this research project discussed the impacts of the broader effort to exclude Somalian families from a redeveloped Heron Gate.

So there’s very much a feeling of like honestly, almost collective trauma from seeing everyone that you love and know in this area who you’ve grown up with, knowing now that they are in a precarious housing situation, that they’ve lost their

community, that our parks are empty, that there are no more kids hanging out, having a good time growing up, seeing people who look like them, you know, knowing that kids as Black and Brown kids, especially in this area, no longer feel safe, and they feel overpoliced. They feel policed in general, they feel uncomfortable, seeing gentrified units come up. It's just, it's not the same area we knew and that we grew up in.¹⁹

They spoke about the insecurity for their family and the remaining residents, in that they feel that they could receive an eviction notice at any time giving them three months to leave. They also spoke about the emotional effect of watching their neighbourhood be dismantled in terms of Black and Brown residents being replaced with new white residents (in the new development), where the new residents treat the remaining racialized tenants with suspicion:

And I remember a few weeks ago I was walking late one evening and I have to walk past the area that has been demolished and replaced with luxury condos. So I have to walk past there at night. And it's so funny because I always feel a very real sense of like being very unnerved walking past that area at night. And it's funny to me because there's also a sense of rage, because I frequently see security patrolling around this new development. And it's like insane to me that this company will force out Black and Brown families, displace them and then replace them with wealthy white people and then have the audacity to hire security to save these white people from the Black and Brown people left in the area.²⁰

This is a powerful observation from one remaining resident when gazing upon the new structure. The gaze, however, is returned from those now living in Vista Local, and it is not necessarily a friendly one.

It's very funny because I get dirty looks now when I walk past it and I'm like, "Okay, all right. I've lived in this area for a while now, you can relax. Like I'm not doing anything to make you feel uncomfortable...(but)...I have no sense of feeling any type of rage at you." But then I do often feel slightly resentful that, you know, my home and my community is being destroyed so that people can

¹⁹ Interview with Herongate Tenant Coalition organizer, May 27, 2021.

²⁰ Interview with Herongate Tenant Coalition organizer, May 27, 2021.

come and live here and feel, you know, comfortable in this area. “But again, what is the human cost of this, of your comfort?” So I think about that sometimes.²¹

This experience demonstrates the revanchist attitudes that have accompanied the gentrification of Heron Gate. In this example, white residents who have moved into the new Vista Local redevelopment seek to assert their entitlement and defend their race and class privilege by attempting to make long-time residents feel unwelcome in their neighbourhood.

The revitalization of Heron Gate served to produce “liveable homes” on the remains of the affordable dwellings of an ethno-racial enclave. To justify demoviction and domicide, the existing homes and community had to be rendered unliveable, the existing residents embodying unliveable life, life that has less value, life that does not count. This is what domicide looks like under practices and processes of financialized gentrification in a white settler society. In the case of Heron Gate, these settler colonial logics of racialized property relations and revanchist urbanism are infused into an area where the dominant (white, settler) views hold that lower-income and racialized tenant subjects are incapable of increasing land values, and therefore preventing desirable subjects (property owners) from extracting the highest and best use (the exchange value) of the land. The attempted obliteration of an ethno-racial enclave through mass demolition-driven eviction to build “premium units...at a premium price” for Alta Vista demographics is the subject of a human rights legal challenge that will be discussed in more detail in the concluding chapter.

²¹ Interview with Herongate Tenant Coalition organizer, May 27, 2021.

Conclusion

What has materialized, and continues to materialize, in the Heron Gate neighbourhood provides us with an eye-opening case study of how gentrification and demoviction plays out, and how ruling relations are enacted in a variety of settings. An investigation into the Vista Local redevelopment has provided a window into the various approaches and strategies that financialized real estate firms deploy in the built environment in order to attempt to perfect property relations over the longer-term to build more wealth for its investors. The motivations for, and discourses deployed surrounding, the redevelopment of Heron Gate, further inform how revitalization efforts and ultimately domicile materialize in the quest to create liveable communities and cities. In the Heron Gate case, liveability requires the elimination of an ethno-racial enclave and the erasure of its peoples.

Representing a 21st Century version of urban renewal efforts under the benevolent guise of revitalization, demoviction is a distinct tactic deployed within the broader contemporary trend of financialized housing capture. While gentrification is produced through discourses of improvement—through mechanisms of intensification, revitalization, and liveability—and enacted through financial mechanisms, domicile is not inevitable nor is it uncontested. The following chapter examines the role of tenant resistance to financialized gentrification, and also looks at how landlords respond in turn. Resistance at Heron Gate is ongoing and has played out in the streets and in the courts.

Chapter 8 – Demoviction 2018: The Struggle for Heron Gate and Tenant Resistance to Domicide

Introduction

The first phase of demoviction and redevelopment at Heron Gate was just that, only the first. While it was not necessarily evident at the time, Timbercreek had mobilized a plan to demolish all of the remaining parcels of rental townhouses in the neighbourhood.

When referencing the new development as “seeding change” throughout the area (McCracken 2016a), Timbercreek’s Greg Rogers stated that Timbercreek was looking at similar options elsewhere in the neighbourhood (Shaw 2017). As part of Timbercreek’s long-term strategy for redeveloping Heron Gate and reconfiguring the neighbourhood into a zone of affluent consumption for a less-racialized, more-affluent demographic, a “similar option” was being considered and would be unveiled to tenants in 2018. Having faced little opposition from the first round of mass evictions, an emboldened Timbercreek was set to announce plans for an even larger demoviction project.

On May 7, 2018, Heron Gate residents were called to a “resident information session” with Timbercreek officials and ward councillor Jean Cloutier, where they were each given an eviction package. A letter included in the package implicated over 100 families living in low-rent townhouses between the borders of Heron Road, Baycrest Drive, and Sandalwood Drive in the Heron Gate neighbourhood. In the letter, Property Manager Paul Boutros declared that the homes are “reaching the end of their building life

cycle” and that 25 percent of these were “no longer viable” (Timbercreek Communities 2018a) (see figure 17).

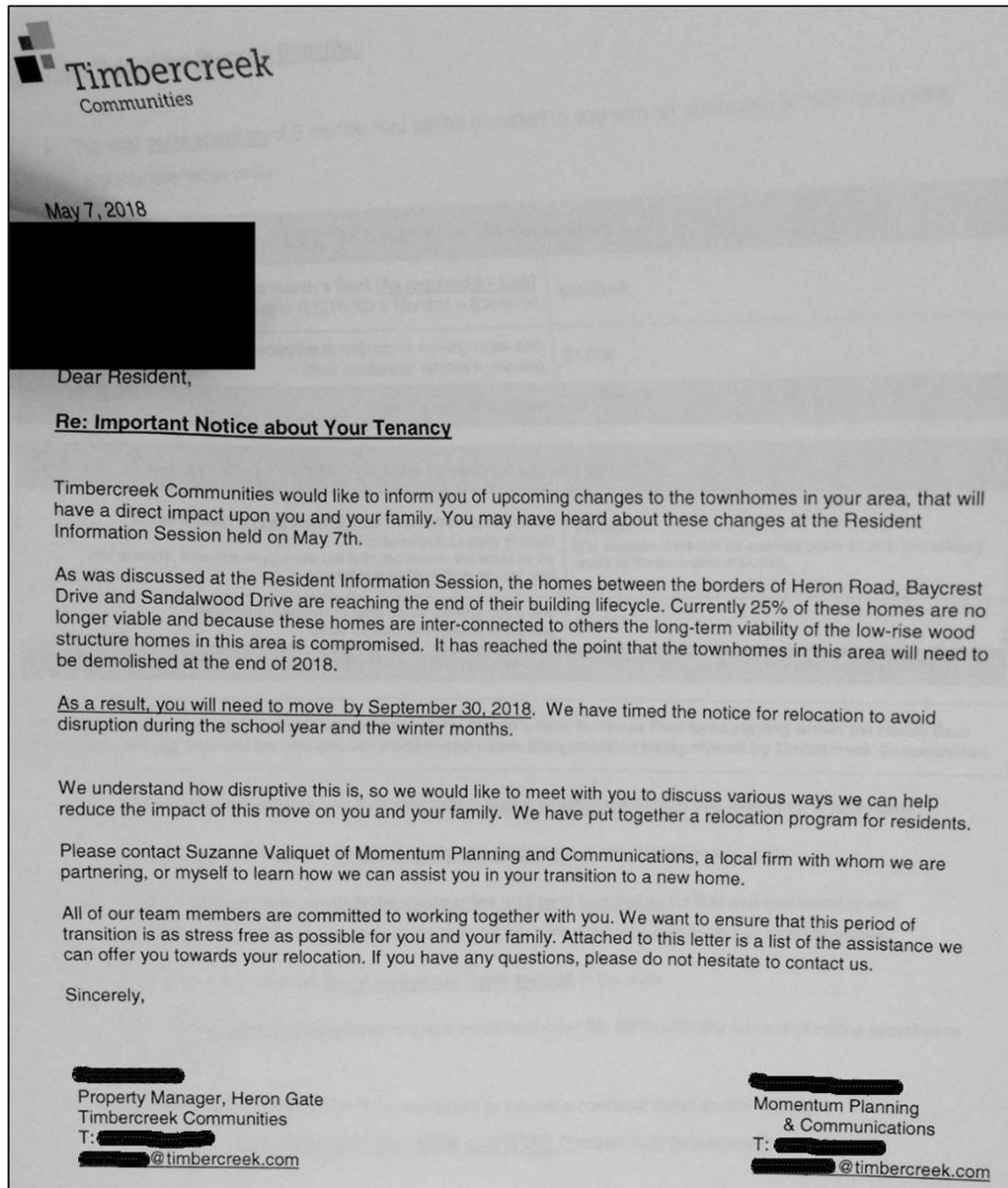


Figure 17. Letter distributed to Heron Gate tenants at Resident Information Session, May 7, 2018 (Timbercreek Communities 2018a).

As in 2016, Timbercreek officials justified the demoviction by claiming that it was the only viable option. Residents were given until September 30 to vacate. While the first demoviction in 2016 had angered tenants and the wider community, the announcement of the second set of mass evictions in 2018 prompted residents to organize and fight back.

The Herongate Tenant Coalition as Unwilling Subjects of Financialized Gentrification

Recent scholarship has examined the dynamics of contention and negotiation between developers and social actors over housing policy in urban environments (Domaradzka 2019; Chisholm, Howden-Chapman, and Fougere 2020), including the evolving strategies of developers to establish and maintain legitimacy over the production of space (Hyde 2022; Mosselson 2020; Robin 2018). With the increasing creep of finance capitalism into the social sphere and housing sector, insecurity and inequality become heightened and exacerbated (August and Walks 2018; Fields and Uffer 2016; Soederberg 2018, 2021). As a result, community organizations and other social actors have engaged in an oppositional politics to contest and resist the adverse effects wrought by the financialization of the housing sector, chief among them displacement (Fields 2015, 2017; Teresa 2019).

Of course, tenant organizing has not only emerged in response to the financialization of rental housing and to the corporate capture of apartments by large real estate investment firms. Tenant organizing has a long history on a global scale. While beyond the scope of this present work to engage with the full breadth of tenant

organizing, in temporal or geographic terms, movements of tenants in Ontario in recent years is an appropriate starting point from which to further engage with the struggle at Heron Gate and the mobilization of the Herongate Tenant Coalition. August and Webber (2019) document the recent emergence of grassroots groups of tenants organizing around housing justice issues in their Ontario communities. The authors outline some of the best practices for grassroots community organizing, including directly targeting adversaries, linking struggles, remaining independent, and organizing at the local level. August and Webber (2019) refer to this last point as “district-based scale”, while Webber and Doherty (2021) refer to it as “territorial organizing.”

This type of organizing is targeted toward and situated within the neighborhood- or building-level. The emphasis is on localized struggle that mobilizes directly-impacted residents, while not succumbing to larger social and political forces (such as outside groups, non-profits, and other organizations with goals and mandates not directly related to the struggle). Parkdale Organize, which embraces this model and organizes on a variety of fronts, including tenant and housing justice, has been more militant in their approach. Parkdale Organize has organized successful rent strikes (Shilton 2021) and inspired other movements such as the Hamilton Tenants Solidarity Network to attempt to organize rent strikes of their own against landlord InterRent REIT (Risager 2021; Power and Risager 2019). The Herongate Tenant Coalition has organized in the spirit of directly targeting its adversaries while focusing on organizing residents at the local level. At the same time, the Coalition has successfully sought out a range of allies to assist with other aspects of their struggle (e.g., media, fundraising, and legal). They have launched fierce and effective media campaigns, including mobilizing social media for purposes of public

shaming of their adversaries, working with independent media to publish stories about the struggle, as well as garnering significant local, national, and international mainstream media attention surrounding the mass evictions.

The protracted battle between the Herongate Tenant Coalition and Timbercreek (now Hazelview) is detailed in the pages below. I argue that analysis of the actions of the Herongate Tenant Coalition against Timbercreek helps build on Fields' (2017) theorizing of tenants as "unwilling subjects of financialization", further challenging the notion that the financialization of rental housing is an uncontested inevitability. Within these pages I articulate the tactics deployed by the Herongate Tenant Coalition to try and stop the evictions as well as to challenge the landlord, underlining the important theorizing and knowledge production work in which they have necessarily engaged as part of this struggle. While I contribute to scholarship that has examined the tactics deployed by tenant movements resisting the corporate capture of their homes, this chapter extends to also highlight the tactics deployed by apartment investors in response to this opposition, contributing to scholarship documenting landlord efforts to demobilize tenant resistance (August 2016). The dual purpose of this chapter is to document both tenant organizing against ruling institutions and examine how ruling institutions respond to tenant resistance. In the Heron Gate case, the threat of mass eviction served as a catalyst to mobilize tenants to attempt to stop the evictions.

1. Mobilizing against Mass Eviction

Shortly after Timbercreek issued eviction notices at the May 7, 2018 "resident information session", the Herongate Tenant Coalition formed to challenge and resist what

they described as the “largest eviction and displacement campaign in Canada” (Herongate Tenant Coalition 2018b). The Coalition was comprised largely of tenants in the Herongate and Heatherington neighbourhoods that organized with and mobilized tenants in Heron Gate that had received eviction notices. On June 2, the Coalition held a tenant rights meeting in the community that was facilitated by Coalition member Ikram Dahir and attended by dozens of residents (Herongate Tenant Coalition 2018c). At the meeting, Dahir, Daniel Tucker-Simmons and Leilani Farha fielded questions from residents about their legal rights under domestic and international law, with Dahir providing translation. That meeting was a galvanizing moment when dozens of Heron Gate tenants, in particular a significant number of racialized women, joined the Coalition and embraced leadership roles. According to its website, the Coalition is organized and run by the working-class people of Herongate, and “was formed to build power, strength and solidarity...in this moment of crisis so we can have each other’s backs, care for each other and defend our neighbourhood from development, speculative and political forces that want us out of here” (Herongate Tenant Coalition 2018d). One member described in an interview the group’s formation with the aim to “formalize a tenant-based neighborhood organization specifically of tenants, and to make it mainly associated with people that actually live and rent in the neighborhood, as opposed to it being sort of a pet project of city progressives.”²² While other more established community organizations are attempting to influence the landlord through negotiation, the Herongate Tenant Coalition, as a small collective with no formal structure, has adopted a radical analysis

²² Interview with Herongate Tenant Coalition organizer, June 7, 2021.

This campaign represented a significant threat to Timbercreek's authority and control over the neighbourhood, its objectives for reconfiguring the community in line with the more affluent demographics of Alta Vista, and relatedly, profit margins and returns on investment. In response, Timbercreek issued a series of letters to tenants which threatened an application to the Landlord and Tenant Board for a forced removal as "a last resort" if tenants chose to stay after the September 30 deadline. If residents defied the order and stayed in their homes past the deadline, Timbercreek would be forced to take their case to the Landlord and Tenant Board to apply for forcible eviction orders, potentially creating an ugly political scene that would no doubt further damage the landlord's reputation.

In response to the Herongate Tenant Coalition's efforts to organize tenants to stay put in the face of Timbercreek's request for them to voluntarily end their tenancy by signing the N11 form, a poster was designed and displayed throughout the neighbourhood. Containing no logo or signature, the poster (one would have to assume was designed by people working on behalf of either Timbercreek or Momentum), urged tenants to "Know Your Rights" in a font style that looked more like the work of an activist group than a corporate or financial landlord. Attempting to counter the Coalition's message to stay put and not sign the N11 form, the poster empathized with the soon-to-be displaced victims, stating: "You deserve honest advice from someone who will tell you and your neighbours the truth" and to "make the right call about having to move" (see figure 19). The poster would have been confusing to unsuspecting residents, as it does not look like something created or sanctioned by the landlord; instead, the

poster encourages tenants to “make the right call about having to move.” Coalition members viewed this tactic as part of a wider disinformation campaign meant to discredit and undermine their organizing efforts, by sowing doubt and fear about the implications of not abiding by the landlord’s suggestion to move, and stating that demolition was an impending inevitability. This tactic was interpreted by the Coalition as part of a broader campaign by Timbercreek to paint them as illegitimate, outside agitators, as non-Heron Gate residents who were trying to implement a malicious agenda on genuine Heron Gate tenants.

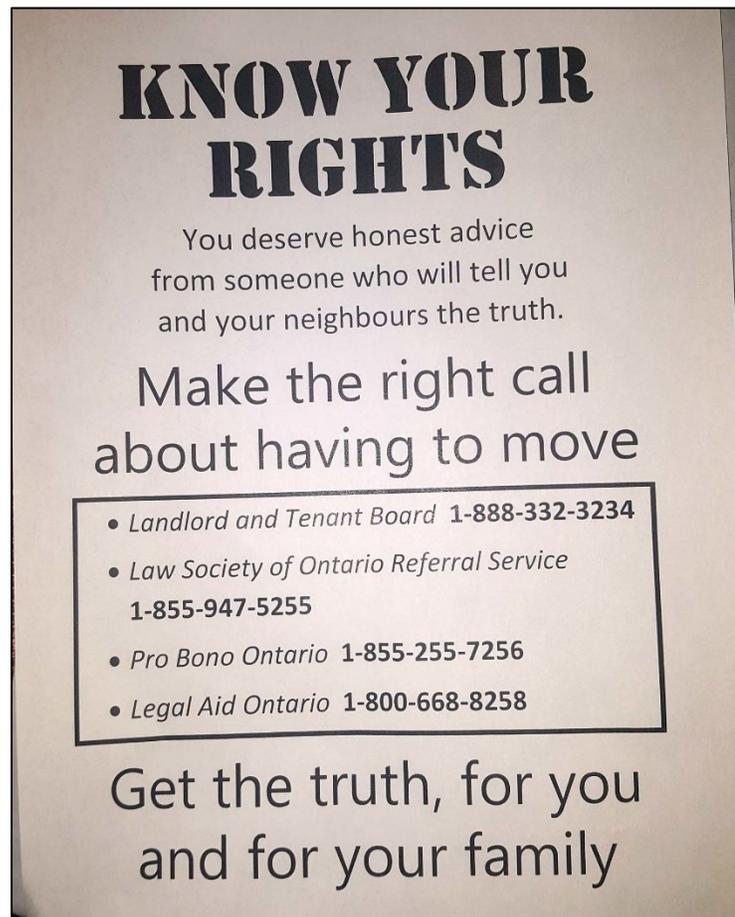


Figure 19. “Know Your Rights” poster, presumably circulated by agents of Timbercreek or Momentum (Timbercreek Communities 2018b).

To counter the “mass eviction” narrative of the Herongate Tenant Coalition, Timbercreek framed the mass displacement operation as a “relocation program” through various forms of communications, including posters. As with the 2016 demoviction, Momentum Planning & Communications orchestrated efforts to facilitate the removal of residents from their homes and have them find alternative housing. However, while the 2016 demoviction allowed some displaced families to move within the neighbourhood, often into vacant townhouses in considerable disrepair, the 2018 demoviction attempted to relocate households outside of the community. Timbercreek communications to tenants about the relocation program initially indicated the option of being able to move elsewhere within the landlord’s Heron Gate holdings; however, a relocation drop-in session notice indicated that there were no homes available in Heron Gate and that Timbercreek would assist in finding accommodations outside the community (see figure 20) (Timbercreek Communities 2018c, 2018d). The notice encouraged residents to move out as soon as possible warning that there would be fewer units available elsewhere in the city at the end of the summer. The Herongate Tenant Coalition insists that measures such as these were undertaken to hasten the removal of tenants and sow fear that there would be less affordable units available in September and that it was in their best interest to move as quickly as possible.

Timbercreek Relocation Program Benefits:

- The total **compensation** of 3 months rent will be provided to you with an additional \$1,500 for moving and miscellaneous costs

Option 1: Residents Who MOVE OUT of the Heron Gate Community	
Three Month's Rent (As required by Law) <small>In your case, your portion of the rent amounts to: \$291 x 3 Months = \$893</small>	\$893
*Moving Incentive to help cover moving costs and other incidentals related to moving	\$1,500
Total Compensation	\$2193

Option 2: Residents Who STAY WITHIN the Heron Gate Community	
*Three Month's Free Rent at your new Timbercreek unit <small>(Timbercreek Loyalty Bonus) (For example, if your portion of the rent on your new unit is \$350/month, this would be the equivalent of \$1,050 – three months' rent)</small>	Variable <small>(For example, if your portion of the rent on your new unit is \$350/month, this would be the equivalent of \$1,050 – three months' rent)</small>
*Moving Incentive to help cover moving costs and other incidentals related to moving	\$1,500
Total Potential Compensation	\$2,550 (Free Rent PLUS Moving Incentive)

*The Moving Incentive for ALL Residents and the Three Month's Rent for those Residents staying within the Heron Gate Community are **not** required by Law and are an over-and-above compensation being offered by Timbercreek Communities.

- Timbercreek will provide you with **relocation agent assistance** to help you search for a new home
- Timbercreek will negotiate **moving company discounts** in order to decrease costs
- Timbercreek can **pre-pay moving companies and new Landlords** for first and last month's rent deposits on your behalf and deduct the amount from the amount owed to you as detailed above
- On moving day, you can **leave unwanted items behind** in the suite
- You can **move at any time** between now and September 30, 2018 with any amount of notice provided to Timbercreek
- Updated information** will be communicated to you on a continual basis on the website www.timbercreekcommunities.com/trp (Timbercreek Relocation Program)

Relocation Drop-In Sessions!

Every Wednesday, starting June 20
at the
Timbercreek Rental Office Boardroom

Dear Relocating Residents,

We are pleased to invite you to drop in at our office on Wednesdays, starting June 20, from 5:00 to 8:00. We'll be available, with interpreters, to discuss relocation concerns, opportunities, and to have your questions answered by our Relocation Program Team.

It will be our pleasure to provide you the most up-to-date information concerning the Relocation Program, to help you understand the process, and to explore new home opportunities available to you and your family.

Although we have no homes available in Heron Gate now, last week we arranged more than 20 showings of affordable homes, \$1500 a month or less, outside of Heron Gate. If you weren't one of the families that saw those homes, contact our Relocation Consultant today!

Most 3 and 4 bedroom rental homes come available in the summer. That's because most of them house families with kids in school, so they want to move outside of the school year – from July 1 to September 1.

Now is the time to find your new home! If you wait, even until next month, you might find nothing available to rent. So, start your search today and plan to drop in on June 20 or any Wednesday after that to meet with our team in person.

Of course, when you need answers or advice, we are here to help you every day of the week.

Don't hesitate to call to discuss or arrange a meeting with us at your convenience.

Our contact information is on the back of this sheet.

All the best,

The Timbercreek Relocation Program Team

Figure 20. Timbercreek relocation information and notices distributed to residents (Timbercreek Communities 2018c, 2018d).

2. Demoviction Survey and Demographic Comparisons

To document neighbourhood demographics and understand who exactly would be impacted by the evictions, the Herongate Tenant Coalition undertook a door-to-door survey of the implicated parcel of townhomes. On their website, the Coalition documented the addresses in a map as well as their findings in an infographic (see figure 21). While Heron Gate is large enough to have its own census tract, the Coalition wanted to compile more concise data as part of its research and mobilizing efforts to understand the impacted demographics and communicate the findings to the broader public in order to mobilize sympathy and support for their campaign. Of the 150 townhomes slated for demolition, the Coalition documented 105 households, noting that at least 34 of the 150 were vacant. The survey of the 105 impacted households revealed that 93 percent were racialized, including 49 percent of Somalian descent (Herongate Tenant Coalition 2018a, 2018b). Almost 600 people were captured by the survey of 105 households, including more than 200 children. The survey also revealed the gendered dynamics at play, as many households were led by single mothers, according to the Herongate Tenant Coalition (2018a). The families were also large, with an average of 5.4 people per household.

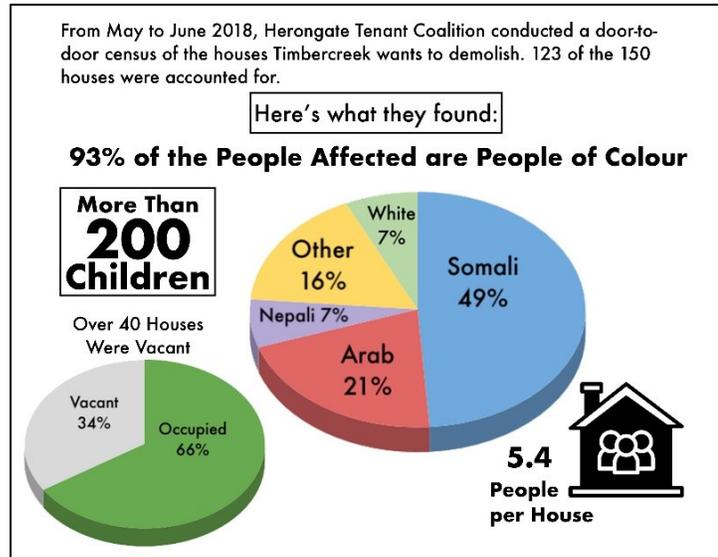


Figure 21. Infographic created by the Herongate Tenant Coalition depicting the results of the survey of the 2018 demoviction zone (Herongate Tenant Coalition 2018f).

In addition, the Herongate Tenant Coalition compiled and organized specific data on poverty, housing, and immigration obtained from the 2016 Statistics Canada Census to compare quality of life and social indicators in Heron Gate with the largely white, affluent Alta Vista neighbourhood across Heron Road, as well as with Ottawa as a whole. The results, which further supplement the data presented in Chapter Six, demonstrate the prevalence of low-income residents, a high percentage of children in low income homes, high rates of core housing need, the presence of visible minorities (around 70 percent compared to Ottawa's 20 percent), and the high percentage of residents whose mother tongue is not English or French (Canada's two official languages) (Herongate Tenant Coalition 2018g). The Coalition visualized these aspects of structural inequality and discrimination, where poverty intersects with racism and housing, into a variety of charts that compare Heron Gate with Alta Vista and the City of Ottawa (see figure 22).

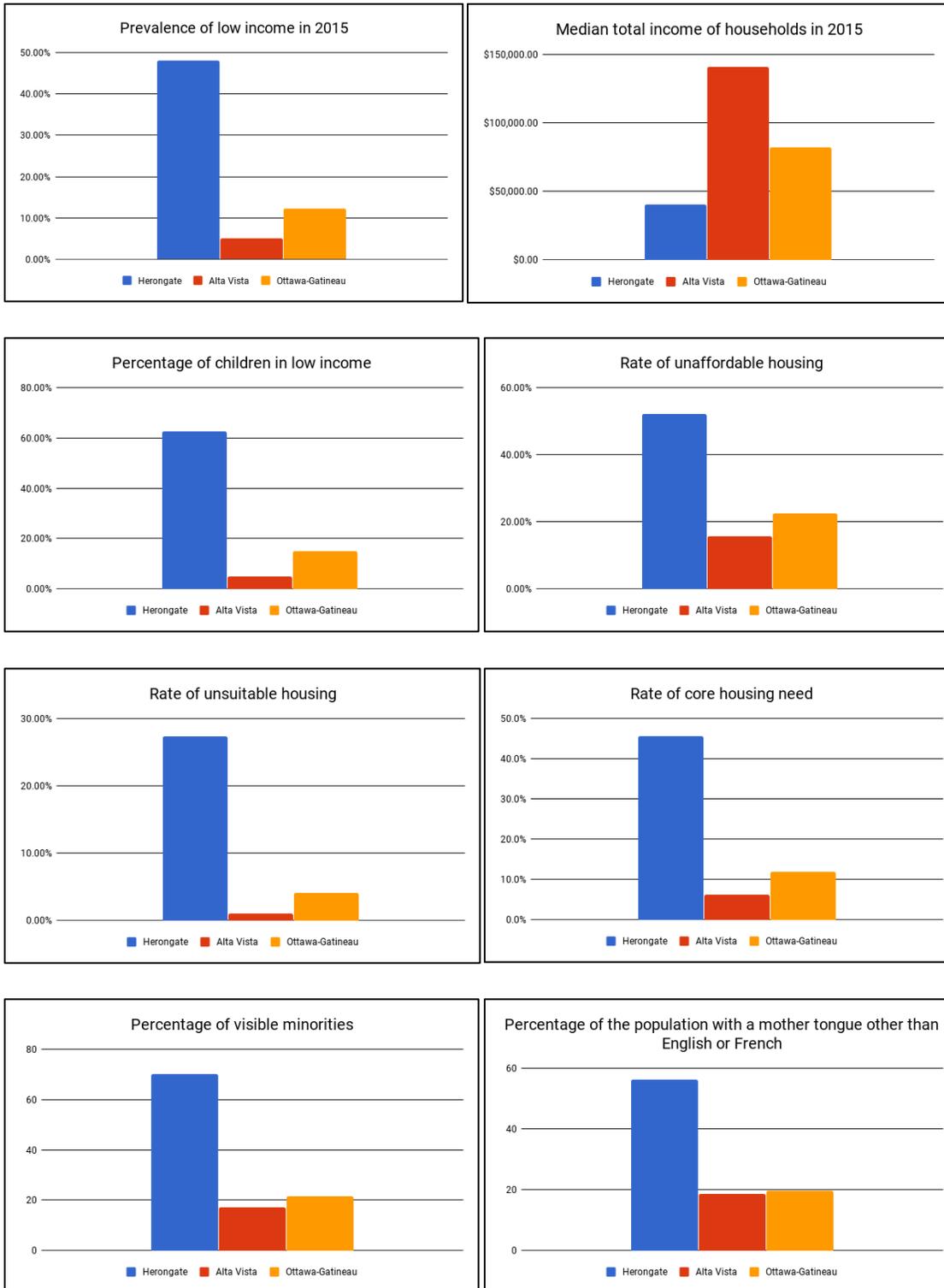


Figure 22. Bar charts created by the Herongate Tenant Coalition depicting what they refer to as “severe inequality in Canada’s capital” (Herongate Tenant Coalition 2018g).

The Coalition's description accompanying the charts on its website is worth recounting here:

The links between housing, inequality and structural racism are very present in Herongate. In fact, nowhere in Ottawa are these issues tied so deeply together. While every level of government and Timbercreek are determined to destroy our neighbourhood, a neighbourhood that should in fact be treasured, celebrated and supported, they fail to realize the organizational capacity we possess and our own determination in fighting to save our neighbourhood. Herongate sits across the street from one of Ottawa's wealthiest areas – Alta Vista. The inequality between these two neighbourhoods is huge (Herongate Tenant Coalition 2018g).

The inequality that the Coalition documents in these bar charts is indeed significant.

According to the 2015 figures, the prevalence of low-income households in Heron Gate was almost 50 percent compared to just over 10 percent in Ottawa-Gatineau and around five percent in Alta Vista. Likewise, the percentage of children in low-income households, at over 60 percent, is staggering compared to the Alta Vista and wider regional figures. The high rates of visible minorities and residents speaking a first language other than English or French is reflective of Heron Gate as an ethnic neighbourhood comprised of many immigrant and refugee families. Housing statistics in relation to core housing need, which were explored earlier in Chapter Six, are striking when visualized alongside levels in Alta Vista and Ottawa-Gatineau. Perhaps most significantly, the median total income of Heron Gate households is less than half of the City of Ottawa average and less than one-third of the average in Alta Vista. This stark contrast is crucial for contextualizing and understanding Timbercreek's harmonization and alignment efforts with Alta Vista—and the demographic the firm is attempting to attract to the neighbourhood in terms of purchasing power—as well as the relevance of

affordability metrics in the wider redevelopment proposal (the Heron Gate Official Plan Amendment examined in Chapter Nine), as existing Heron Gate residents will not be able to afford the rents that will be earmarked as “affordable” in the new development.

3. The Plot Thickens: Social Media, Public Shaming, and the Landlord Response

The Herongate Tenant Coalition has engaged in a variety of tactics with the ultimate aim of organizing tenants to refuse to move. To that end, the Coalition organized community meetings, demonstrations, neighbourhood walking tours, and organized residents to submit maintenance work orders to pressure the landlord to repair their homes. In addition, the Coalition made very effective use of a variety of research tools as well as media platforms, which was an entry point for me into the movement. I became involved assisting the Coalition with filing FOI requests attempting to draw links between city officials and the landlord, as well as collect data around property maintenance and the role of the City of Ottawa’s bylaw office. On the media front, a small group of independent journalists were documenting and publicizing the struggle; I published my first of many articles on these issues in July 2018 (Crosby 2018). Neal Rockwell helped create a series of online newsletters—“We are Herongate”—for the Coalition, including many video interviews and images that were used to communicate the struggle to a wider audience and document the impacts on the community, with many Somalian voices, in particular women, amplified.

The efforts of the Herongate Tenant Coalition helped to galvanize media coverage, as national and international news outlets—such as Al Jazeera (Kestler-

D'Amours 2018)—covered the struggle. These efforts were used in tandem with an unrelenting social media campaign that directly targeted Timbercreek and City of Ottawa personnel for their roles and responsibilities in mass evicting and displacing a largely ethnic community. The social media tactics the Coalition engaged in are part of a larger strategic repertoire of social movements known as public shaming. According to Fox (2020), “Public shaming occurs when large numbers of people engage in the collective shaming of some individual or organisation perceived to have done something morally wrong” (177). While targets of public shaming can find it deeply distressing and degrading (Fox 2020), the tactic can be an effective tool of grassroots movements with limited resources struggling for social change against powerful actors (Mielczarek 2018; Vanderheiden 2021). While public shaming can be used in a variety of contexts and settings, tenant organizers have embraced the tactic of public shaming to communicate the abuses of landlords to the wider public. This can take the form of a poster campaign, going directly to the home of a landlord to stage a demonstration, or to engage in social media. In the case of the Heron Gate mass evictions, the Herongate Tenant Coalition used social media to profile Timbercreek executives and employees, their roles in and impacts of the evictions, as well as their ties to other powerful actors, including city officials. While the landlord responded to other Coalition tactics with alternative information campaigns, such as the Know Your Rights poster mentioned above, Timbercreek responded to the public shaming efforts with legal mechanisms, ultimately attempting to demobilize the Coalition’s social media campaign.

Landlord: “Cease and Desist”

The Coalition’s social media campaign had drawn a wide range of support, sympathy, and media coverage by calling attention to the practices and tactics of Timbercreek executives and their connections with city officials. In response, the landlord unleashed a campaign of legal threats and intimidation. Timbercreek’s efforts to demobilize the Herongate Tenant Coalition’s social media campaign provide insight into how landlords may respond to tenant organizing through tactics of repression that include threats of lawsuits.

Over the course of four months, Timbercreek lawyers issued a series of cease and desist notices to the Herongate Tenant Coalition. The first letter, dated July 9, threatened legal action claiming damages to Timbercreek and its employees as a result of a series of six social media posts, including posts made by non-Coalition members who merely tagged the Coalition’s Twitter handle. Timbercreek’s lawyers claimed that materials posted on the Coalition’s social media accounts constituted defamatory statements in violation of the *Libel and Slander Act*, and ordered the posts removed immediately. Coalition members perceived Timbercreek’s cease and desist strategy as a scare tactic with the primary aim to intimidate people away from organizing and speaking out against the evictions. Refusing to concede to Timbercreek’s threats, the Coalition continued to post regularly to social media. Persistent, Timbercreek followed up with similar letters on August 7, August 30, September 6, and October 5, outlining what it considered to be defamatory social media posts and demanding the Coalition to “cease and desist.”

Timbercreek also took considerable issue with the Coalition publishing the cease and desist letters online. Herongate Tenant Coalition lawyer Daniel Tucker-Simmons explained the Coalition's perspective that being transparent with the larger community was important for drawing attention to Timbercreek's intimidation tactics. In a response letter to Timbercreek lawyer Michael Polowin, Tucker-Simmons asserted the Coalition's legal right to publish the letters as they saw fit. In his response, Tucker-Simmons eloquently captures the crux of these battles between the metaphorical David and Goliath:

Though you are unfamiliar and uncomfortable with activism, and likely consider it "unprincipled" in comparison to principled discussions between lawyers, you'll appreciate that my clients and their allies recognize that their limited resources put them at a great disadvantage in legal proceedings. For that reason, they prefer to engage your client in an arena in which the playing field is somewhat more level (Tucker-Simmons 2018).

I asked Tucker-Simmons to elaborate on some of these points in an interview. He noted that corporations are typically not agile at engaging in the activist arena and prefer to use legal resources and methods as a multi-pronged strategic approach. Beyond the immediate objective to suppress and silence criticism, there is a secondary objective to drain resources away from an activist campaign. Tucker-Simmons explained that when activist campaigns or public interest organizations are forced to engage well-resourced corporate entities in the legal arena, it has the threefold effect of draining financial, human, and emotional resources.²³ And that is precisely the political intention of corporations engaging in these tactics against social movements, to divert resources and energy away from the campaign to the court, to divert adversaries from their activism in a transformative manoeuvre into passivity and docility (Landry 2014). The threat of a

²³ Interview with Daniel Tucker-Simmons (Herongate Tenant Coalition lawyer), October 13, 2018.

lawsuit is a tactic on its own, as a tool of censorship and intimidation. Through legal threats, corporations attempt to gain the upper hand by either baiting or compelling a campaign or movement that is opposing their practices into the legal arena. The Herongate Tenant Coalition's defiance and refusal to engage was an attempt to level the playing field against a powerful economic actor.

1. Legal Repression: SLAPPING Social Movements

A wide body of scholarship has emerged surrounding what has been described in varying forms as the repression, suppression, or demobilization of social movements. Much of the literature has focused on policing protests (Della Porta 2013; Fernandez 2008), political repression and social control (Earl 2011), and the role of the state (Davenport 2007; Honari 2018; Monaghan and Walby 2012) in stifling dissent. Within, a smaller body of literature has examined the role of private security (Walby and Monaghan 2011), the tactics of corporations (Lubbers 2015), and the criminalization of resistance to gentrification (Naegler 2012). In parallel, a growing body of scholarship has also emerged discussing strategic lawsuits against public participation, or SLAPP-suits. While much of the literature is dedicated to examining specific legal cases, I, following Canan (1989), engage with the small interdisciplinary sociolegal literature surrounding SLAPPs (see also Beder 1995; Hilson 2016; Landry 2014; Sheldrick 2014) in an attempt to make sense of the cease and desist threats made by Timbercreek against the Herongate Tenant Coalition as a form of legal repression. Moreover, my aim at the time of initiating this research in 2018-2019, when the cease and desist threats appeared to be an inevitability, was to develop a strong understanding of the SLAPP landscape and devise ways that the

Coalition could defend against and potentially counter a lawsuit if Timbercreek ever followed through with their threats, which they never did.

Drawing from a number of scholars specializing in political repression (Boykoff 2007; Davenport 2007; Earl 2011), Ellefsen (2016) defines legal repression as “a process whereby the state and/or non-state elites attempt to diminish dissident action, collective organization, and the mobilization of dissenting opinion by inhibiting collective action through raising the costs and/or minimizing the benefits of such action, by way of law and criminal justice” (445). While much of the political repression literature has been state-centric and focused on protest control, Ellefsen conceptualizes legal repression to include non-state parties as relevant agents who seek to use the law as a tool of control to dismantle social movements. Borrowing from Ellefsen, I invoke the notion of legal repression to refer to the deployment of demobilizing tactics that move beyond state actors and frames of protest control to incorporate the threat of sanction under civil law as a creative form of repression within liberal democracies. Viewed in this way, and following Landry (2014), the SLAPP can be viewed as an intentional action of intimidation and as a tool of legal repression deployed by non-state actors to attempt to demobilize or suppress the activities of social movements.

In the realm of social movement suppression, SLAPPs are an increasingly deployed legal tactic to silence opposition. SLAPPs can involve an actual lawsuit as well as the threat of a lawsuit (White 2005). The associated imagery of the SLAPP connotes a sudden violent affront, intended to shock, as a metaphorical slap in the face of the targeted victim (Landry 2014) but also representing a “SLAPP in the face of democracy” as Donson (2000) suggests. Landry (2014) describes SLAPPs as a “deliberate

instrumentalization of legal proceedings as a weapon of intimidation, censorship and political reprisal in social and political conflicts” (7). As a tactic of legal repression to demobilize social movements, SLAPPs are invoked as a measure to counter defamation—broadly defined as a false statement intended to inflict reputative harm—by capital interests against opposing social actors, with the goal to stifle dissent. For White (2005), SLAPPs are deployed as a tactic “not to ‘win’ in the conventional legal sense, but to intimidate those who might be critical of existing or proposed developments” (272). SLAPPs are featuring more prominently in the corporate arsenal as associated costs are rationalized on balance sheets as a minor matter of the cost of doing business, whereas for individuals or groups a court case would result in bankruptcy (White 2005). Pring and Canan’s (1996) research examining thousands of cases in the U.S. shows that 1) the legal system is ineffective at controlling SLAPPs; 2) that SLAPPs profoundly effect political outcomes; 3) SLAPPs seldom win in court yet achieve political goals; 4) SLAPP defendants rarely lose in court yet are “frequently devastated and depoliticized”; and 5) SLAPPs institute a chilling effect where others are discouraged from speaking out (xi-xii).

Real estate development SLAPPs represent the single largest category of strategic lawsuits in the United States, with over one-third of all cases examined by Pring and Canan (1996). While the legal and constitutional landscape differs considerably in Canada (see Landry 2014; Sheldrick 2014), the experience in the U.S. can help provide insight into the motivations of corporate developers and financialized landlords in Canada. According to Pring and Canan (1996), real estate SLAPPers can be motivated by a diverse variety of reasons—both material and value-laden—including obligations to

investors, commitment and contribution to economic growth, and the perceived need to sanction opponents they feel are acting in bad faith. One U.S. attorney who has represented both sides of development SLAPPs maintains that in certain circumstances SLAPP-suits are “viable weapons in the arsenal of real estate developers”, when the SLAPPER has a good reputation, the profit stakes are high, the opponent engages in personal attacks, and “the targets are relatively unsophisticated individuals” lacking institutional support (Pring and Canan 1996, 42).

It is interesting to consider these attributes in the case at hand: first, in the lead-up to the 2018 mass eviction notice, Timbercreek had a relatively unsullied reputation; however, as we saw in Chapter Five, the firm completely repositioned and rebranded. This, potentially in part, could explain why Timbercreek did not follow through with legal action, because its reputation was sullied as a result of Coalition activism. Second, the profit stakes are unbelievably high as Heron Gate represents a valuable asset and investment with billions of dollars at stake in the redevelopment. Third, the Herongate Tenant Coalition has engaged in personal attacks, targeting Timbercreek executives on social media to personalize the struggle, to show that there are human beings behind decisions made to displace and remove racialized people from their community. Tenant organizers across multiple sites and struggles have led public campaigns to expose the people—typically white, wealthy men—involved in relations of rule as a way to put a human face and a name (and sometimes an address) behind evictions and other abuses against tenants. Finally, the last point on targeting “relatively unsophisticated individuals” factoring in the decision-making of ruling institutions to pursue SLAPPs may help explain why Timbercreek did not pursue legal action. Despite engaging in

unconventional tactics, the Herongate Tenant Coalition has led an incredibly sophisticated, well-researched, and principled campaign to inform tenants of their rights under landlord-tenant law as well as to attempt to keep people in their homes. For their efforts, the Coalition has been vilified by the landlord, city officials, and even local civil society leaders. In the end, the lawsuit never materialized and the 105 families moved out of the neighbourhood. The Coalition's mobilization efforts continued, however. A neighbourhood protest would become a flashpoint in the next stage of the fight between the Herongate Tenant Coalition and Timbercreek.

2. The Timbercreek Twitter Affair

Despite the Coalition's best efforts, Timbercreek's attempt to remove Heron Gate residents from their homes in 2018 was successful. Exacerbated by the fearmongering campaign and the threats levied by Timbercreek employees, tenants felt that it was too risky to stay and defy the eviction order. By the first week of October 2018, most families had moved out of the neighbourhood. To coincide with the mass displacement, the Herongate Tenant Coalition organized a rally and walking tour of the neighbourhood on October 4. The rally drew support from outside the community as well as an ongoing media presence. The rally toured the mainly empty streets, showing the derelict buildings for neighbourhood outsiders bearing witness to the systemic neglect that pushed these homes to the "end of their life cycle", with some families still pushing their belongings on carts, as the last people vacated their properties. The walking tour concluded at Timbercreek's neighbourhood office. Despite the peaceful nature of the rally, and its relatively small size, employees locked themselves inside and called the Ottawa Police

Service. The involvement of Ottawa police became a central element in what unfolded surrounding what I refer to as the “Timbercreek Twitter affair.”

Timbercreek faced unrelenting opposition from the Herongate Tenant Coalition, including ongoing community mobilization and resistance. The landlord had signaled on September 25 its intent to increase pressure on the Coalition’s online activities when the Coalition received an email from Twitter’s legal team that included an attached letter from Timbercreek’s law firm that asked Twitter to remove three Coalition tweets. Twitter’s letter specified that they had not taken any action with regards to the Coalition’s account. This tactic demonstrates the measures that Timbercreek will take to try and silence opposition to their gentrifying efforts. Despite most people moving by the September 30 deadline, Timbercreek is still invested in silencing the public criticism of their record. On October 11, Timbercreek’s lawyers sent another letter to Twitter, using the October 4 rally to fabricate a narrative of criminality and extremism in an attempt to silence the Coalition by requesting Twitter to “permanently disable” the group’s account. The letter claimed that the Coalition’s Twitter handle was used to organize an “escalating campaign of harassment” which culminated in the October 4 “incident” where a group of 30 people “attempted to force their way into Timbercreek’s offices.” Timbercreek claimed that five of its employees were “trapped” and forced to leave under police escort. Timbercreek further claimed that two Coalition members were arrested and charged with trespassing.

However, these accounts were entirely false. There was no attempt to forcibly enter the office, Timbercreek employees did not leave under police escort, and no arrests or charges were made. Timbercreek specifically targeted Coalition organizers, as the

company had done in the past, with this exaggerated and untruthful account. The letter continued:

HTC is responsible for an ongoing and escalating campaign of harassment and intimidation against the employees of Timbercreek, which has already required police intervention...Ottawa authorities have described to us the principals responsible for @herongatetc as “unstable”, “unhinged” and “extremist” and have warned our clients of the likelihood of further escalating activity. Should Twitter fail to permanently disable @herongatetc, it will be responsible for facilitating a campaign that has already resulted in criminal behaviour and is likely to continue resulting in such criminal acts.

Timbercreek’s claim that Coalition organizers are “unstable”, “unhinged”, and “extremist” is a crass appeal to racialized discourses surrounding criminality and terrorism, as well as to discourses of violence, given that mental health, crime, and extremism have racialized components. The “extremist” label is particularly revealing given its blurring with broader narratives of the war on terror (Onursal and Kirkpatrick 2021). Activists “being maligned as terrorists”, was particularly troubling and malicious behaviour on the part of Timbercreek for one resident and Coalition member that I interviewed: “...they knew at the time of 2018 when we were going around and doing the work that the majority of them were Black women, Black, Muslim, visibly Muslim women as well, and they felt comfortable literally calling us terrorists.”²⁴ Timbercreek’s efforts serve to stigmatize its opponents as faulty subjects, as failed citizens incapable of exalting good, desired Canadian values (Nagra 2017; Thobani 2007). The contents of the letter reveal the tactics that landlords are willing to employ to marginalize opposition. It also reveals how financialized firms respond to public demonstrations and unwanted media attention generated by the protest actions of social movements. The desperate

²⁴ Interview with Herongate Tenant Coalition organizer, May 27, 2021.

nature of Timbercreek's efforts is indicative of the strength of grassroots organizing and the tactical response of landlords.

Timbercreek efforts to cajole Twitter into permanently disabling the Coalition's account continued beyond the October 4 protest. On October 25, Twitter's legal office sent another email to the Coalition stating they had received a court order claiming that four referenced tweets were illegal. No details about the court order were provided. Twitter specified that it may be obligated to take action but for the time being was merely inquiring to see if the Coalition would voluntarily remove the tweets from the account. The Coalition has adopted a pragmatic strategy of refusal when faced with threats, remaining for the most part uncompliant and confident in maintaining the moral, legal, and ethical upper hand.

The Herongate Tenant Coalition and other grassroots tenant movements have targeted landlords in a personal sense to humanize the social relations of rule and resistance. Public shaming ruling actors—high-powered real estate players and their political and legal backers who harm tenants—can be part of an effective political strategy of resistance and refusal that could potentially signal higher levels of risk to investors. These actors tend to present themselves as family men and benevolent contributors to the wider community (such as by playing golf for charity). Thus, exposing these wealthy landlords and executives is a tactic that grassroots organizing can leverage in the absence of financial resources against a firm worth billions of dollars.

The Timbercreek Twitter affair raises important questions: Why would a financialized landlord go to such extraordinary lengths—as to submit false and misleading statements to discredit the Coalition in the eyes of the Twitter legal team?

Where did Timbercreek obtain information regarding the characterization of Coalition members as “unstable”, “unhinged”, and “extremist?” Were these labels obtained by external authorities conducting surveillance, or simply imagined and deployed by Timbercreek officials and its private security team? The search for answers to these questions is ongoing, and may be answered as part of legal proceedings initiated by the Herongate Tenant Coalition. In a surprising twist of events, as a result of the Timbercreek Twitter affair, the Coalition has flipped the landlord’s defamation threats on its head.

Flipping Defamation: Suing the Landlord

The struggle between the Herongate Tenant Coalition and Timbercreek has been referred to as a David and Goliath type of struggle, where a grassroots mobilization of tenants has taken on their multi-billion-dollar landlord, armed with unlimited resources and the hubris to imagine that it could continue to evict hundreds of racialized people without facing opposition. Timbercreek does have the law on its side, and engaging in the legal system from a grassroots social movement perspective can be risky as well as politically fraught for more militant groups that are skeptical of and ideologically opposed to recognizing the legitimacy of ruling institutions and criminal justice actors. With that said, members of the Herongate Tenant Coalition decided to take the offensive against Timbercreek through court action.

In May 2019, three members of the Herongate Tenant Coalition filed statements of claim with the Small Claims Court of the Superior Court of Justice of Ontario. Two of the plaintiffs are seeking maximum relief of \$25,000 each from Timbercreek Asset Management Incorporated while the third plaintiff is seeking \$20,000 in damages. In

response, Timbercreek filed a motion for the case to be dismissed and heard instead by the Superior Court. Timbercreek also filed a motion to combine the three cases into one. I was present for this hearing and took notes outlining Timbercreek's position and argumentation in an attempt to further understand how they think about and approach the legal terrain. Despite unlimited financial resources, the landlord sent seemingly inexperienced lawyers with frivolous arguments; the motions were interpreted by the Coalition's legal team as delay tactics meant to drag out the cases and increase the Coalition's legal costs. Monetarily, these cases represent minuscule sums when considering overall revenues and assets—"nuisance money" according to the Coalition's legal team—but they represent an opportunity to land direct hits against the landlord in the event of favourable rulings while also minimizing damage in the form of legal costs in the event of losses at the small claims level.

The statements of claim articulate how Timbercreek attempted to suppress the organizing efforts of the Herongate Tenant Coalition. Within, the plaintiffs claim that: "the Defendant has engaged in a defamatory campaign to silence the lawful advocacy efforts by herself and HTC in order to protect its image and commercial interests." The plaintiffs give their version of events of the October 4, 2018 rally in the community which acted as the catalyst for the Timbercreek Twitter affair described above. The plaintiffs assert that they did not impede or disrupt the activities of Timbercreek employees and that Ottawa Police officers were called and arrived after most rally participants had dispersed. Interactions with Ottawa Police officers were limited to a brief conversation; there were no arrests or charges, or any further interactions with police following that day. One of the benefits of engaging the landlord in the legal arena is the

ability to request the production of documents, where documents relevant to the case can be requested and ordered by the court. The production of court documents in this case has supplemented Herongate Tenant Coalition research in identifying other players involved in efforts to criminalize and demobilize tenant resistance.

Disclosure packages obtained from Timbercreek as part of the Coalition's defamation suits help stitch together missing pieces of information and some of the hitherto unknown players involved. Take for instance Suzanne Valiquet, Timbercreek's public relations consultant and overseer of tenant relocation in Heron Gate, as discussed in previous chapters. Valiquet has served multiple terms on the Ottawa Police Services Board and the disclosure documents shed light on the relevance of her relationship with both Ottawa Police and Timbercreek. One of the goals in requesting documentation from the defendants as part of the defamation suits was to uncover the labelling and framing of Coalition members as "unstable", "unhinged", and "extremist" in the Timbercreek Twitter affair following the October 4, 2018 rally in the community. On that day, a 911 call was made from Timbercreek's office requesting Ottawa Police assistance to disperse the rally. We learned of this call through an FOI request. Emails written by Valiquet to Timbercreek officials, and produced in the court disclosure documents, indicate that Valiquet received advice directly from the chief of police on how to escalate the police response and build a further case against Coalition organizers: "At 5:39 pm I called 911. I called a second time (on the advice of the Chief of Police). This way our call went from a priority 2 to priority 1 emergency call. Six police officers arrived around 6:03 pm." Valiquet further indicated that the police officers advised her to continue to call for assistance in the future if there were further demonstrations, noting in particular that:

“The more times you call the bigger the file against [them] will grow.” The email is a damning indictment of police efforts to criminalize activists and landlord tactics deployed to criminalize tenant opposition, where a Timbercreek consultant may have used her professional connections with the chief of police to obtain advice on how to escalate a police response to a peaceful demonstration. Valiquet’s performance from within the Timbercreek rental office indicates a layer of inter-institutional synergy and strategy, in this case between a large developer and the Ottawa Police Services Board. One of the Coalition plaintiffs made this observation in an email with the legal team: “The advice from the Chief was extremely reckless and an abuse of the 911 system. Escalating a non-violent, orderly protest and constitutionally protected form of free speech to a life-threatening emergency could have put Black lives in danger.”

While this case is ongoing at the time of writing, the Coalition make a compelling case that Timbercreek’s conduct was “reckless, high-handed, and malicious” in their statements of claim. While the economic stakes are low, the political stakes are high. In essence, the Coalition has turned Timbercreek’s threats of legal action on its head. The Coalition calculated that it was a politically strategic move to engage the landlord in this manner. The landlord’s response in the legal arena is further evidence that its brand and reputation is crucial to its commercial interests.

Landlords: “How to Handle a Crisis”

Tenant rights organizations like the Herongate Tenant Coalition, however small and lacking in resources, have been effective in their efforts to pressure landlords and draw attention to issues of injustice. Wary of the potentially negative impact of unfavourable

media coverage, landlords in Ontario are organizing and fighting back. The Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario (FRPO) organized a seminar in Toronto in March 2019: “How to Handle a Crisis: The Media, AGIs and Tenant Actions.” The event was promoted as a way to “strengthen members’ knowledge and skills to effectively deal and communicate with tenants, and to handle media in a crisis.” The sessions offered included “Changing the Landlord Image”, “Crisis Communications and the Media”, and “Managing the AGI Process.” Various themes running throughout the panels included “changing the perception of landlords”, managing the “AGI/rent strike experience”, in the media, and responding to “rent strikes and emergencies.” Landlords clearly recognize that as a result of engaging in aggressive investment strategies and facing tenant resistance as a result, the “landlord image” is in increasing disrepair despite extensive resources dedicated to advertising and public relations. The FRPO seminar is further evidence of how landlords are strategizing in a climate of escalating gentrification practices and tenant organizing.

The Herongate Tenant Coalition presented a serious challenge to Timbercreek’s efforts in the neighbourhood. Coalition opposition challenged not only the “relocation” narrative trumpeted by the landlord, but the eviction itself, thereby creating uncertainty and potential volatility surrounding Timbercreek’s investments. Across various financial instruments and risk forecasts, Timbercreek entices would-be investors with predictable, stable, long-term high yields in a “low-volatility” environment, having “earned a reputation for providing conservatively managed, risk-averse investment(s)” (Timbercreek 2019c; 2019e). Timbercreek’s marketing language when compared to its framing of the Herongate Tenant Coalition to Twitter reveals the investment-driven

logics driving its interpretation of tenant resistance. Timbercreek's investment products are marketed as stable, predictable, risk-averse and minimizing volatility, compared to its framing of tenant opposition as unstable, unhinged, criminal, and extremist.

This chapter has explored the emergence of the Herongate Tenant Coalition and grassroots mobilization efforts to stop evictions and prevent the dismantling of the existing community. It has further detailed corporate responses to community resistance and the measures employed by a multi-billion-dollar financialized real estate investment firm to attempt to suppress and demobilize a small, grassroots movement with limited resources. Coalition organizing and resistance has led to a number of legal challenges, but moreover caused the landlord to pivot. In the months following the 2018 demoviction and surrounding the completion of the Vista Local redevelopment, Timbercreek disassociated its name completely with the property, repositioning and rebranding as Hazelview. In addition, the landlord was forced to rethink its redevelopment strategy for the entire neighbourhood and was compelled to include concessions in its redevelopment proposal that included affordable housing and no future displacement of existing tenants. Although Timbercreek/Hazelview personnel would likely never admit that these actions were a result of tenant organizing, the interventions of the Herongate Tenant Coalition have had a wider impact in a complex struggle against gentrification, eviction, and displacement (Gamson 2009; Meyer 2003). Although many Coalition members were displaced from the neighbourhood in 2018, a core group continues to mobilize and oppose the redevelopment process and plans for the wider neighbourhood, which is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 9 – Community Wellbeing in the Liveable City:

A Social Framework for Domicide

Introduction

This chapter investigates the production of the discourse of liveability within the context of Heron Gate, particularly in association with a social framework of community wellbeing governing the redevelopment of the neighbourhood. The following pages document the unveiling of Timbercreek’s master plan for Heron Gate, and how it was presented through a variety of public events. The master plan proposed large-scale neighbourhood redevelopment, including demolishing hundreds more homes and building thousands of new units. The master plan for Heron Gate is based on the Community Wellbeing Framework, which establishes a blueprint for designing and redesigning communities that emphasizes the role of liveability in producing a return on investment while productively shaping resident conduct. Heron Gate represents a test subject for this particular model of liveability, with Timbercreek announcing that the neighbourhood will become Canada’s first community to be modeled after the Community Wellbeing Framework (Link2Build Ontario 2021).

The Community Wellbeing Framework also formed the basis for what came to be known as the social framework that was negotiated as part of the landlord-developer’s application to the City of Ottawa seeking approval for the larger redevelopment. The social framework, as it was referred to by the landlord, was also referred to as a social contract or a form of community benefits agreement by others. A variety of actors

participated in negotiations surrounding the social framework which culminated in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) governing the redevelopment agreement (officially known as an Official Plan Amendment) between the landlord-developer and the City of Ottawa. While the Herongate Tenant Coalition refused to engage in a process that they deemed legitimized the ongoing dismantling of the community and displacement of existing residents, many other actors intervened to challenge the affordability metrics calculated as part of the social license granted to the landlord-developer from the City of Ottawa to demolish an additional 559 more homes on the property.

Manufacturing Consent for the Heron Gate Master Plan

This chapter investigates the practices of property developers and processes of municipal governance in urban environments, contributing to research that examines how developer actions and agendas are shaped by particular localized and place-based dynamics (Mosselson 2020). While property developers are often presented as powerful actors capable of exercising dominion over land in a linear fashion, Mosselson (2020) argues that a socio-spatial perspective is warranted to account for how particularized settings influence developer approaches to urban landscapes. In particular, Mosselson (2020) demonstrates the “contingent, socially and spatially embedded nature of developer”, that adopt a “spatial praxis that requires adaptability and adjusting dispositions and practices” depending on the particular environments in which they operate (278). Timbercreek’s experience with and approach toward developing the Heron Gate neighbourhood provides a rich case study to understand the socio-spatial praxis of developers who, in

this case, respond to various contingents of social and political actors with unique requests, demands, levels of bargaining power, and pressure tactics.

In the aftermath of the 2018 demoviction, Timbercreek and the City of Ottawa organized a number of meetings in the neighbourhood to unveil what they referred to as the “master plan” for redevelopment (Timbercreek Asset Management 2019g). The events were branded as “community visioning sessions” and “public open houses”, and framed as a form of “pre-consultation”, by ward councillor Jean Cloutier who always led these meetings with opening remarks. In the final report from the City of Ottawa’s planning department recommending approval of the redevelopment plan, these sessions are referred to as formal consultations (City of Ottawa 2021h). They were promoted as ways in which community members could directly influence the design of the neighbourhood. I attended all events beginning in January 2019 right up until the final approval of the Official Plan Amendment in September 2021. At these events I collected audio data, took photos, talked to people, and recorded field notes. Throughout the process, I witnessed similar sets of presentation slides displayed at the events, all sharing photos of previous sessions and emphasizing community engagement and the role of the public in providing input into the design process.

The dynamics around public consultations for both the Heron Gate redevelopment as well as the City of Ottawa’s New Official Plan involve professionally certified designers and planners developing blueprints for redevelopment and liveability, and then engaging in performative acts that seek buy-in through forms of community engagement and consultation. Research undertaken by August (2016) demonstrates how community engagement sessions enable developers to market redevelopment projects as “tenant-

driven”, as well as how consultation processes are actually designed to limit tenant interaction. These processes, although marketed as “community visioning” or “consultations” instead serve to largely manufacture consent through informing residents of redevelopment plans (29). A municipal employee who works for a city councillor put it this way in an interview: “We have this culture of consultation that usually produces results that are totally disconnected from what people actually said, and there are no teeth in that process.”²⁵ Community engagement and consultation processes serve to create the impression that it is community members themselves informing and partnering in design processes.

Both in-person events in February and March 2019 were held at the Heron Road Community Centre, and were organized similarly in terms of scope and layout. The main presentations were delivered in the community centre’s third-floor theatre, which had a large screen and progressively inclined seating for roughly 75 people. Outside of the main theatre room, the hall featured a number of large print-out displays featuring the vision and principles guiding the redevelopment, as well as various design concepts (see figure 23). At the in-person events in 2019, Timbercreek set up different rooms where staff from urban design firm Dialog would display various visual aspects and present design concepts with the stated aim of soliciting feedback from attendees. I visited the three rooms where Antonio Gómez-Palacio, an urban planner with Dialog, and two other Dialog staff fielded questions in relation to the three different design concepts. I noted that the designs did not significantly differ from each other in terms of the layout and

²⁵ Interview with City of Ottawa councillor staff, June 18, 2021.

height of the buildings, and that the major differences seemed to coalesce around greenspace layout. I spoke to Dialog staff about how the final design would be determined, and if these “consultations” were definitive. I was told that input received from community members would be considered alongside the primary decision-makers including city officials, planners, and Timbercreek staff.

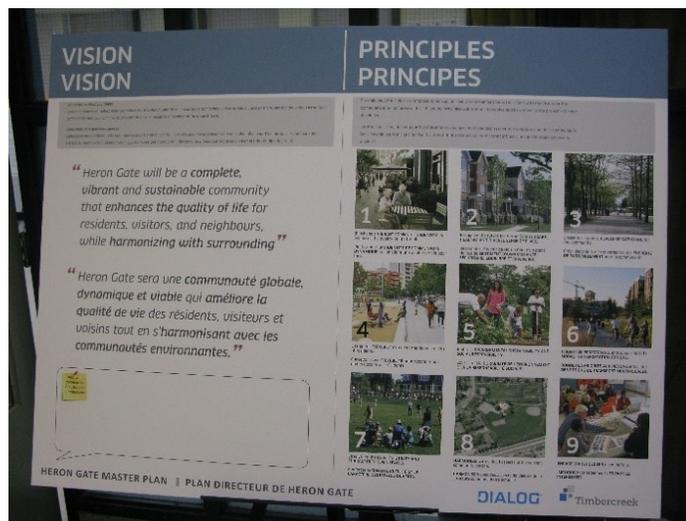


Figure 23. Photos taken from the March 25, 2019, open house event at the Heron Road Community Centre.

The in-person open house events in February and March 2019 followed a similar format. What ward councillor Jean Cloutier framed as “pre-consultation” events involved a “team effort” between the City of Ottawa, Timbercreek, and Dialog. Cloutier would deliver some opening remarks, Timbercreek’s Greg Rogers would then offer a presentation repeating the landlord’s public relations lines, that Timbercreek approached the Heron Gate redevelopment as a long-term investment and that the current event was only the most recent in a series of community engagement initiatives undertaken by a benevolent and caring landlord. Rogers was then followed by a more in-depth presentation by Gómez-Palacio. Dialog’s presentations included numerous slides outlining the visioning plan and various design concepts for the redevelopment. I collected all open house materials including the presentation slides as part of the broader archival research effort to trace relations of rule through their textual mediation. The public presentations and slides themselves reveal much about the redesign of the community to erase its current composition and replace its inhabitants through a more liveable, sustainable, redeveloped built environment.

Timbercreek officials have consistently attempted to reframe the mass eviction narrative around voluntary relocation, and Rogers’ framing of the displacements as “impacts” at the February 2019 open house is interesting to note:

One of the most important things we heard, and one of the most challenging things about redevelopment are the impacts it has on the people that are directly impacted. We’re trying to create a lot more housing on site, we’re trying to create a lot more affordable, diverse, family-oriented housing, and unfortunately in the process some people have been...impacted. We’ve done our best to try and help people find new homes and to help them with costs of moving, but at the end of

the day nobody likes to leave their home...Redeveloping property involves impacts like this.

The “impacts” that Rogers refers to are evictions on a large scale. Rogers’ assertion that Timbercreek is trying to create a more affordable, diverse, family-oriented community is ironic given that existing residents pay below-market rents, and cohabit one of the most diverse neighbourhoods in the city often in large, intergenerational families. The claim of creating an affordable community also contradicts what Rogers said to Alta Vista residents in the September 2016 meeting, documented in Chapter Seven, that the aim in the HG7/Vista Local redevelopment was to offer “premium” rents and smaller units that, in particular, large Somalian households could not afford and could not accommodate their size. While admitting that nobody likes to leave their home, these types of impacts are inevitable, suggests Rogers, when it comes to the business of redeveloping property.

During the March 2019 event, Rogers was pressed by audience participants about which definition and metric of affordability Timbercreek would apply to its new units. In a moment of honesty, Rogers awkwardly articulated Timbercreek’s approach to affordable rental housing as a financialized real estate investment firm: “At the end of the day, if you’re renting a place for less than market, you’re doing stuff by definition that’s not market, and what we do is market.” When confronted with the fact that existing Heron Gate units rent at below-market, Rogers countered by saying that in the end Timbercreek would be offering more affordable units than what had been demolished thus far. Opponents rightfully pointed out that the master plan’s redevelopment scheme would ultimately result in the loss of more affordable units than would be built;

moreover, as details emerged later in the proposal process, none of the new units would rent anywhere near below-market. At the time, Rogers’ admission that Timbercreek is not in the business of, or interested in, offering below-market rental units served as a premonition for the final terms and metrics of affordability as outlined in the social framework and MOU as part of the Official Plan Amendment later approved by the City of Ottawa.

Community Wellbeing: A Social Framework for Heron Gate

It was at the February 2019 open house event where Timbercreek first introduced the idea of a social framework for the Heron Gate redevelopment. The print-out displays and slides, along with the presentations delivered by Rogers and Gómez-Palacio at both events, depict the social framework commitments as well as the Community Wellbeing Framework of which it is based upon (see figure 24).

Social Framework Commitments:	
1 Housing Security	No further demolitions for occupied units will occur until affected tenants are able to transfer their leases and relocate within the community to newly constructed units at the same rents.
2 Affordability	Continue to work through the planning process with the City of Ottawa with the goal of building up to 20% of the total units as affordable
3 Housing Diversity	Provide a diverse mix of housing types and sizes that will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 and 4 bedroom family style units • Ground floor accessible units to accommodate wheelchairs and seniors’ needs
4 Social Enterprise	Continue to work with the City of Ottawa and others to create training and employment opportunities for Heron Gate community members.
5 Green Space	Provide new amenities and green space and work with the City to enhance and improve Sandalwood Park – an important community asset.

Figure 24. Slide from Feb 11, 2019, Timbercreek presentation of social framework principles (Timbercreek Asset Management 2019g).

What Timbercreek calls the social framework has been referred to as a social contract by ward councillor Cloutier as well as a form of community benefits agreement by some community groups. All of these actors—Timbercreek, Cloutier, and the community groups—have taken credit for catalyzing what they all consider to be a landmark agreement in the context of Canadian rental housing redevelopment. At the February event Gómez-Palacio said that never in his career had he heard of developers committing to anything like this, “so let it sink in”, he prompted the audience. The social framework is presented by redevelopment proponents as a benevolent gesture that goes above and beyond what is legally or morally required by real estate developers. The social framework pledges no further displacement (that residents will have the opportunity to relocate within the community before their homes are demolished) and a commitment to producing new affordable units (although the affordability metrics have received widespread criticism).

Timbercreek’s social framework for the Heron Gate redevelopment is based on the Community Wellbeing Framework that was developed by the Conference Board of Canada. The Conference Board of Canada is an affiliated but independent operation of Conference Board, Inc., which specializes in “business intelligence” (Conference Board of Canada, Inc. 2022). The Conference Board of Canada describes itself as “the country’s largest private economic analysis and forecasting unit” (Conference Board of Canada 2022). It may come as no surprise then that the framework for community wellbeing is business-oriented in its outlook and intended outcomes.

The Community Wellbeing Framework was developed out of a research report co-produced by Dialog and the Conference Board of Canada in July 2018—*Community Wellbeing: A Framework for the Design Professions*—the stated purpose of which was to study the relationship between the built environment and the wellbeing of people (Dialog 2022). According to the report, the research was prompted by a growing interest in “design decisions that foster health, vitality, and wellbeing” (Markovich, D’Angelo, and Dinh 2018, ii). A blueprint for revitalization and liveability, the Community Wellbeing Framework is premised upon intervening in and changing the built environment in order to facilitate the living of healthier lives. The Community Wellbeing Framework is depicted on a concentric circle (see Figure 25), where the key indicators, or domains, of wellbeing include social, cultural, political, environmental, and economic dimensions. The Community Wellbeing Framework circle was displayed in the presentation slides during the 2019 open house events. Heron Gate was earmarked to become the first community to be modeled after the Conference Board of Canada’s Community Wellbeing Framework (Link2Build Ontario 2021).



Figure 25. Slide from Feb 11, 2019, Timbercreek presentation of Community Wellbeing Framework circle (Timbercreek Asset Management 2019g).

1. Defining Liveability in Designing Wellbeing

A redeveloped Heron Gate would serve as the test subject for the application of community wellbeing as defined by the Conference Board of Canada, warranting a deeper look into the Community Wellbeing Framework’s foundational report. The report dedicates considerable space to defining what is meant by community wellbeing (Markovich, D’Angelo, and Dinh 2018). Within, the synonymous relationship of wellbeing and liveability is discussed. The definition of liveability used by the Conference Board of Canada in the report—which is adapted verbatim from Lowe et al.

(2013)—characterizes a liveable space as “safe, attractive, socially cohesive and inclusive, and environmentally sustainable; with affordable and diverse housing linked to employment, education, public open space, local shops, health and community services, and leisure and cultural opportunities; via convenient public transport, walking, and cycling infrastructure” (Markovich, D’Angelo, and Dinh 2018, 11). The report notes that the concept of liveability is concretely related to community wellbeing and is relevant to the design professions, as liveability “reflects the wellbeing of a community and comprises the many characteristics that make a location a place where people want to live now and in the future” (11). The report authors derive this definition from a draft report of the “Liveability Inquiry” undertaken by the state of Victoria, Australia, which notes that: “Enhancing liveability is important not only from the point of view of the quality of life of existing citizens, but it also impacts on the competitiveness and future prosperity of the State” (Victoria Competition and Efficiency Commission 2008). Liveability’s dual function is emphasized here, linking the wellbeing and quality of citizen life with state prosperity. The way that community wellbeing is determined is through particular understandings of liveability and quality of life, with the ultimate aim of enhancing growth, performance, and prosperity.

2. The “Business Imperative”: Wellbeing Return on Investment

The Conference Board of Canada’s report on community wellbeing approaches liveability in entrepreneurial terms, emphasizing economic growth, performance, and prosperity. Large portions of the report are dedicated to expanding these ideas and making the case to developers and other consumers of the report on the potential

economic benefits associated with applying the Community Wellbeing Framework to urban design. The title of Chapter Two in the report is “Building a Business Case in Support of Designing for Wellbeing.” The first section of the chapter opens with a question: “Why is community wellbeing important from a business perspective?” (Markovich, D’Angelo, and Dinh 2018, 18). According to the report, community stakeholders and project investors ought to approach development and design through this particular lens in order to identify and realize the “economic benefit opportunities” that accompany community wellbeing (19).

The chapter then proceeds to “build a business case for wellbeing” (20) by examining project examples across five sectors: workplace, academic, hospital, retail, and residential. Wellbeing design infused into residential projects is pitched as directly correlating with improved profits and property values. According to the report, housing and neighbourhoods with improved mental and physical health conditions leads to “improving resident satisfaction and increasing capital and rental values” (37). Designing for wellbeing can also enhance lifestyle benefits which “translate into economic gains” directly through impact and indirectly by producing “more attractive, marketable neighbourhoods” (37). “Healthier, more comfortable homes”, reads the report, are “more likely to have higher rental and capital value” (38). Enhanced tenant satisfaction will also work to “support or improve a business’s brand recognition and equity.” Within the Community Wellbeing Framework, health is approached as a method of creating and enhancing value, and tenant satisfaction is harnessed as a marketing tool.

Chapter Two also directs readers to an appendix for examples of calculated returns on investment where the design framework has been implemented to re-engineer

“the full potential of spaces” (17). Appendix D provides six pages worth of “return on investment tables”, as a supplement to Chapter Two, which are worth examining in further detail. This section of the report provides project case studies for each of the five sectors identified as capable of producing “economic benefit opportunities” (19). The tables set out to identify “where projects calculated a return on investment (ROI) for wellbeing” (136) across these five sectors. The tables include columns for “improved wellbeing outcomes”; “savings or increased revenue” or “return on investment” (depending on the table); and “design details.” For example, the improved wellbeing outcomes in workplace settings include human resource cost savings and increased worker productivity (137). The primary interest here though, as when examining Chapter Two of the report, are the homes and residential communities tables. Within, some of the improved wellbeing outcomes include increased property value, increased rental rates, increased tax revenue, increased business revenue, and decreased crime (141-142) (see figure 26).

Return on Investment for Homes and Residential Communities

Table 5
Examples of ROI for Specific Design Features Associated With Homes and Residential Communities

Improved wellbeing outcomes	ROI	Design details
Increased property/house value	Residential property values 10 per cent higher ¹	Proximity of project to public transit and mobility within neighbourhood ¹
	\$1,000 more for each 100 feet closer to a station (in Atlanta) ¹	Making sure paths are optimized for pedestrian traffic and connection to transit can make the difference
	Residential property values are 5.2 to 15 per cent higher ^{1,2}	High walkability/walk scores of neighbourhood ^{2,3}
	\$4,000 to \$34,000 increase in premiums ³	
	\$700 to \$3,000 increase in home resale values ³	One-point increase in Walk Score (i.e., proximity to amenities such as restaurants, coffee shops, schools, parks, stores, libraries)
	Increase in home prices ⁴ (e.g., increase in annualized housing costs by \$350 to \$1,500) ³	Higher Walk Score ³ 10-point increase in Walk Score ³
Increased rental rates	Premiums of 4 to 25 per cent for homes in areas designed according to “New Urbanism.” ⁵	Areas redesigned to promote walkability, environmental sustainability, and diversity of housing and employment
	Housing prices 4 to 5 per cent higher ⁶	Improving quality of landscaping from poor to excellent
	Average of 7 per cent increase in rental rates ⁶	Improved landscaping aesthetics coupled with large shade trees

Figure 26. Return on Investment table for homes and residential communities as part of Community Wellbeing Framework report (Markovich, D’Angelo, and Dinh 2018).

For example, the table highlights increased rental revenues of seven percent with improved landscaping aesthetics, and increased property values with enhanced mobility and walkability scores (one of the defining features of the City of Ottawa’s New Official Plan’s focus on 15-minute neighbourhoods).

One final note on the return on investment tables is that they overwhelmingly correlate increased economic value, not only with high walkability scores but also with a strong emphasis on sustainable environmental design and “naturalized environments” across all sectors. With its focus on the physical environment and urban sustainability, frameworks seeking to enhance community wellbeing have been likened to producing a

form of “green gentrification” (Jelks, Jennings, and Rigolon 2021). In turn, research has signaled the negative impacts on health and wellbeing induced by processes of gentrification (Iyanda and Lu 2021; Thurber and Krings 2021), providing further insight into the relational aspects of community wellbeing design that seek to produce liveable conditions for some but result in displacement for others. In the context of the Community Wellbeing Framework, liveability and wellbeing are discourses of improvement that are mobilized with a “business imperative” to both enhance and further commodify the social relations of property, shedding light on how community wellbeing is to be applied to Heron Gate. In addition, liveability also serves the dual functional purpose of modifying undesirable behaviours and generating productive settler life.

3. Governing through Community Wellbeing

As the Conference Board of Canada report demonstrates, there is a “business imperative” behind designing community wellbeing and producing liveability. However, reproducing wellbeing and liveability also involves shaping the conduct of populations into adopting desirable lifestyles and mitigating undesirable behaviours. The Community Wellbeing Framework’s calculations of liveability and return on investment go beyond measurements of rental revenue and property value to also include worker productivity. For example, the return on investment under “labour productivity” emphasizes the role of transportation in designing for wellbeing, with the effect of “increasing the quantity and quality of the lower-wage labour pool, which can reduce business costs and increase productivity and competitiveness. Improving affordable transport options also tends to expand the labour pool for industries that require numerous lower-wage employees, such

as hospitality and light manufacturing” (Markovich, D’Angelo, and Dinh 2018, 142). Designing liveability under neoliberal urbanism not only calculates economic value in terms of property enhancement, but also embodies a class dimension of creating and enabling flexible and cheap labour pools for the efficient functioning of capitalist enterprise. The report provides insight into evolving mechanisms of entrepreneurial neoliberal governance in settler colonial societies which centers and elevates property relations through ideologies of urban growth as well as the role of class relations.

Community wellbeing design methodology is not restricted to focusing exclusively on the built environment, but also on governance, population management, and the shaping of conduct, where “the design of spaces and places can be used to promote better or healthier choices and constrain undesirable behaviours” (Markovich, D’Angelo, and Dinh 2018, ii). Instead, “The focus is on creating conditions that promote desirable lifestyle behaviours and foster healthy community living through design features” (19). The Community Wellbeing Framework is not limited to urban design, but also includes behaviour modification in moulding the ideal neoliberal, settler subject, akin to what Miller and Rose (2008) refer to as “government through community.” Governing through community involves the deployment of strategies of governance to build allegiance between citizens and communities “in the service of projects of regulation, reform, or mobilization” (92).

Governing through community, in the present case, involves constraining undesirable behaviours as well as producing desirable behaviours. Designing for community wellbeing enables a “healthier and more productive life” (Markovich, D’Angelo, and Dinh 2018, 38), where improved health and wellbeing leads to enhanced

productivity and more productive citizen subjects. In this regard, the discourse of liveability and application of community wellbeing design are not only directed at the improvement of property, but at the shaping of settler (colonial) subjectivities. The improvement of property and the reproduction of urban space in settler societies works in tandem with shaping the conduct of the people who will occupy urban space. In the case of Heron Gate, non-preferred tenants are evicted and displaced, replaced by a more preferred settler citizen subject. Through the remaking of Heron Gate, both liveable *and* disposable subjects are produced alongside enactments of domicide in this reconfiguration of the social relations of property, where those deemed liveable or embodying more value replace those deemed disposable or having less worth. Liveability is produced through designing for community wellbeing and development of new “liveable homes” for the affluent, while domicide is produced through the destruction of homes and the sociality of home embodied in the old community and its once thriving social and cultural networks. Thus, community wellbeing is designed for the optimal, productive settler subject who can contribute to the improvement of property through home ownership or higher rents.

“A Termination Plan”: The Heron Gate Official Plan

Amendment

In order to achieve its vision for community wellbeing at Heron Gate, Timbercreek sought approval from the City of Ottawa to demolish 559 more homes. Ongoing demoviction was necessary to fulfill the master plan of intensifying the property with dozens of new apartment towers comprising thousands of new units. In order to acquire

approval to redevelop Heron Gate, Timbercreek was required to submit a proposal for its master plan to the City of Ottawa in the form of an Official Plan Amendment (OPA).

Urban development policy at the municipal level is largely directed through provincial legislation such as the *Ontario Planning Act* and the Provincial Policy Statement (which mandates municipalities to create official plans) (Government of Ontario 2020). Municipal official plans are legal documents governed by the Provincial Policy Statement under the *Ontario Planning Act*. Official plans serve to provide a vision for the future growth of a city and guide the physical development and use of land over the long-term. However, landowners can request an amendment to an official plan if they wish to develop their properties in a manner that conflicts with its provisions.

In the case of Heron Gate, the landlord-developer sought taller buildings and more units than the existing official plan allowed. An OPA application was thus submitted to the City of Ottawa for approval to permit the neighbourhood's redevelopment through the implementation of a new Site-Specific Policy for the area. This policy, according to city planners, would implement a vision, guiding principles, and various strategic policies pertaining to land use, built-form, public realm, transportation, circulation, sustainability, housing, and community benefits (City of Ottawa 2021g, 11). Weeding through the technical language, it becomes clear that an OPA is a land use tool that enables property developers to bypass regulations and limitations on development established by municipal policy and provincial law. Existing zoning allowed for a maximum of nine storeys and 4,988 units, and Timbercreek's OPA application originally sought as high as 40 storeys and 6,427 units; with intense opposition coming from Alta Vista homeowners to the north concerned about shadows cast by tall buildings,

Timbercreek eventually settled on a maximum 25 storeys, but was able to retain the original number of units by spreading out the height loss to other buildings throughout the property in the proposal (see figure 27) (City of Ottawa 2021g).

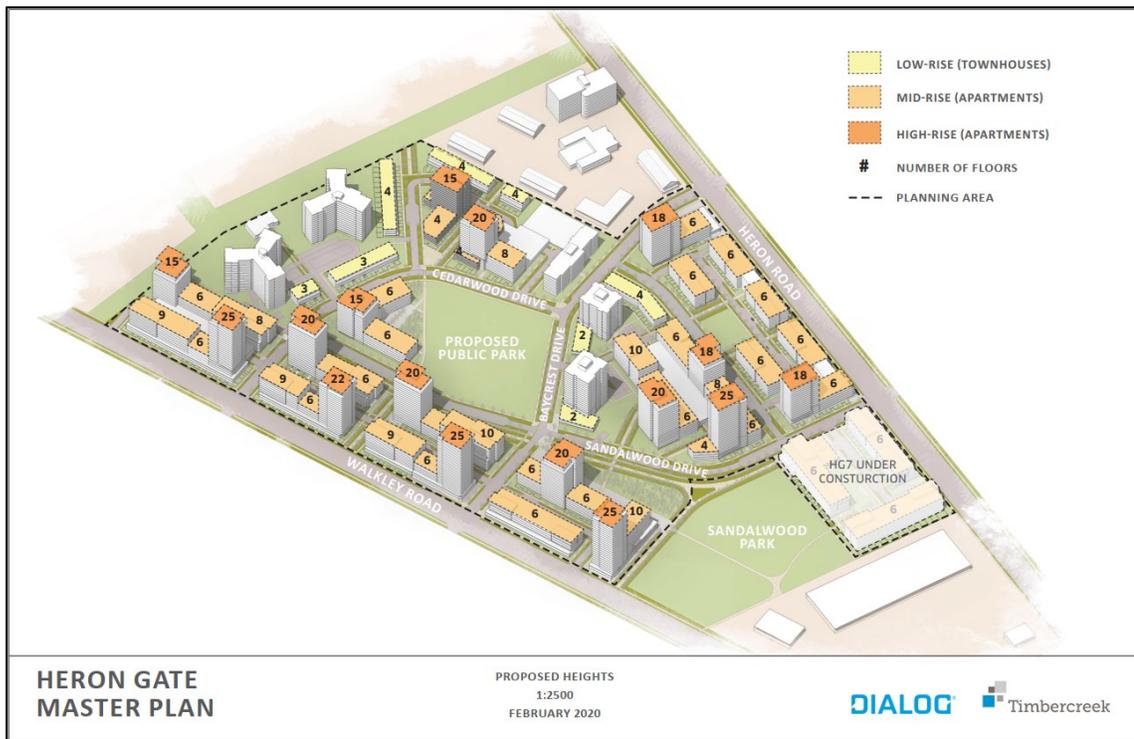


Figure 27. An image outlining building heights for the Heron Gate master plan (City of Ottawa 2021g).

Timbercreek originally submitted the OPA proposal to the City of Ottawa on April 24, 2019. The proposal was accompanied by a number of plans, designs, surveys, and assessments. Over the next two years the proposal made its way through various phases of review and more documents were submitted in February and December 2020. Toward the end of this period, Timbercreek repositioned and rebranded as Hazelview. In

all, around 50 documents associated with the application were produced and made available to the public. The Official Plan Amendment process for Heron Gate came to a head in August and September 2021. On August 13, the Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development Department tabled a report and other relevant documentation, including a MOU with Hazelview, for Planning Committee review on August 26. If approved, the OPA would be brought for further debate and a City Council vote on September 8.

The main 49-page report submitted as part of the Official Plan Amendment provides the numbers of demolished, remaining, and to-be-built units. The report notes that 230 townhouses had been demolished thus far in the neighbourhood, facilitating the construction of 348 units in HG7/Vista Local and enabling another 6-hectare parcel of land to be rendered vacant (City of Ottawa 2021h). The report documents the current layout and composition of the community, which contains 1,864 rental units—including 957 units in five apartment towers (ranging from 8 to 19 storeys), 307 remaining townhouse units, 252 units in low-rise apartment buildings, plus the 348 HG7 units. The report then acknowledges that the majority of non-HG7 units are currently rented at below the average market rent and house numerous linguistically and racially diverse households, notably Arabic, Somali, and Nepali families. While the five existing apartment towers and their 957 units will remain, the remaining 559 townhouse and low-rise units are to be demolished.

The MOU provides further detail on the number of units to be built. With the 1,305 existing units in the five towers plus HG7, Hazelview will add an additional 5,122 new units of which 1,439 are enabled through density bonusing (see figure 28) (City of

Ottawa 2021e). Density bonusing enables property developers to exceed the density limits in zoning bylaws in exchange for providing public amenities, in this case allowing Hazelview to increase permitted heights up to 25 storeys.

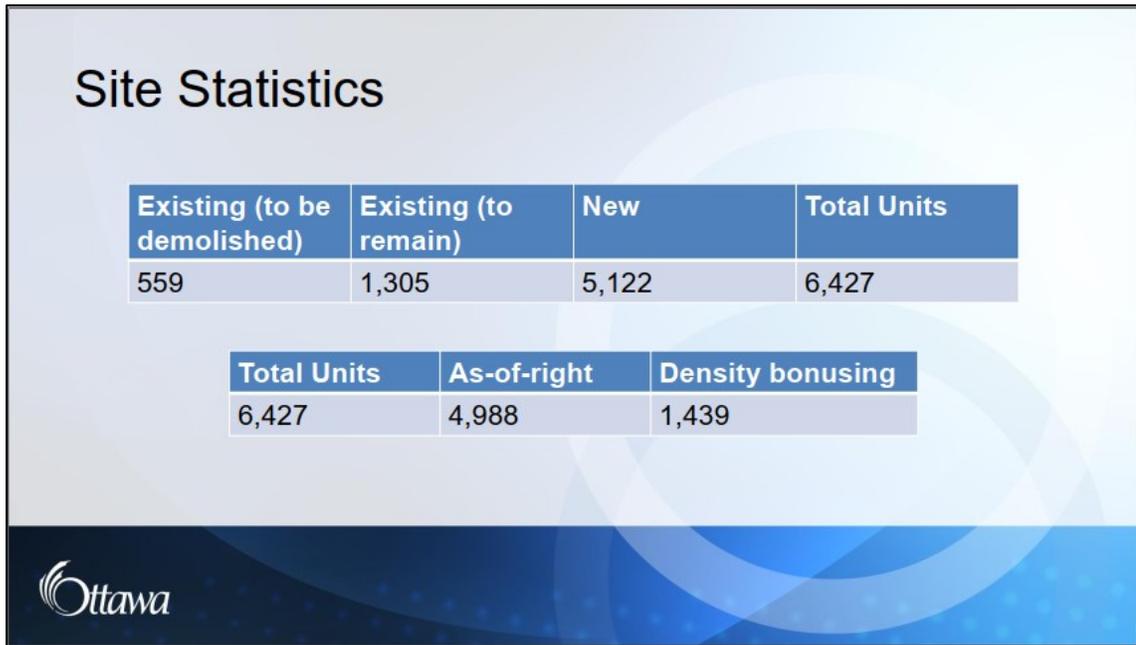


Figure 28. Site statistics slide from a City of Ottawa presentation, August 26, 2021 (obtained via email request) (City of Ottawa 2021g).

The MOU is a formal agreement outlining the terms of the social framework. The contents of the MOU were unique points of contention and discussion, as were negotiations around the formalization of the social framework itself. Timbercreek first introduced the principles of a social framework that it promised to apply to Heron Gate in the 2019 open house meetings in the community. Timbercreek claimed that it was introducing this framework as a benevolent property owner, that cared about the

wellbeing of its residents. Ward councillor Cloutier claimed that his office had initiated the social framework. Cloutier referred to the framework as a “social contract”, and demanded that Timbercreek/Hazelview sign on to it. Immense public pressure was put on Cloutier who was the local elected official where some 800 people were evicted and dispersed while he held office. Community organizations such as ACORN applied consistent pressure tactics, and also claimed credit for bringing about the conditions of the social framework. For instance, ACORN wanted a commitment for housing security, meaning no more displacement; instead, would-be evicted tenants should be able to transfer the leases and relocate within the community to newly constructed units at the same rents (ACORN Ottawa 2021). ACORN also wanted to see up to 20 percent of total new-build units made affordable.

ACORN also conducted a survey of Heron Gate tenants on the social framework principles as put forward by Timbercreek/Hazelview (ACORN Ottawa 2021). The survey of 104 neighbourhood tenants showed overwhelming support for affordable housing options and the right of already-evicted tenants to return. The survey results also showed that 86 percent of respondents had not attended a public consultation session.

Timbercreek had to contend with the wrangling of multiple social and political actors surrounding the social framework. Timbercreek insisted that the framework be one in principle only, and not legally binding. Timbercreek insisted to those who wanted a signed agreement that the firm’s public, verbal commitment would be sufficient, as a lot was riding on what they purported as the integrity of their brand. Hazelview representatives, Cloutier, and city planners negotiated the terms of the agreement leading up to the Official Plan Amendment’s approval on September 8, 2021. What appeared to

be intense negotiations were carried out right up until the day that the MOU was signed, where the gritty details on the numbers of and time periods for affordable units were ironed out. The MOU further restricts the City of Ottawa to attempt to secure any additional affordable units within Heron Gate as part of any future planning approvals or redevelopment. “Relocation” is framed differently in the MOU compared to when it was deployed by Timbercreek during the 2016 and 2018 mass evictions. Facing intense opposition, the landlord-developer agreed to no demolition or renovation of occupied units until tenants were offered a newly constructed equivalent unit of the same type and rent (City of Ottawa 2021e). While this type of policy should be a legislated standard, it was only won through fierce grassroots tenant organizing and opposition as well as intense pressure levied by other groups that led to the no-displacement commitment.

The municipal planning vision for Heron Gate mirrors that of the developers. According to the City of Ottawa’s vision for the neighbourhood, “Heron Gate will be comprised of approximately 6,400 units and will be a complete, vibrant and sustainable 15-Minute Neighbourhood that enhances the quality of life for residents, while harmonizing with surrounding communities” (City of Ottawa 2021f, 5). The City’s vision for revitalization of the area aligns cohesively with that of the landlord-developer, in particular the emphasis on harmonizing Heron Gate with Alta Vista. Likewise, the first guiding principle is aimed to “shape a vibrant community identity that enhances the quality of life for all” (5). As articulated throughout this dissertation, the efforts to revitalize Heron Gate have included the replacement of a particular community identity—that of a racialized, working-class neighbourhood, with something more affluent in line with existing Alta Vista demographics. The production of liveability—

vibrancy, vitality, quality of life—requires gentrification, displacement, and the elimination of an ethno-racial enclave in order to achieve this particular vision. Attempted erasure at Heron Gate is further reflected in the City’s amendment specifications around affordable housing, which “supports the development of a *more* inclusive and equitable community by maintaining a supply of affordable housing for low- to moderate-income households” (City of Ottawa 2021f, 5, 17; emphasis added). The phrasing and framing around affordability, inclusivity, and equity on the part of the City of Ottawa implies that, through the OPA, the city and developers are able to create a more inclusive and equitable community than what already exists on site. The amendment and area-specific policy documents, as well as previous document submissions, contain original neighbourhood images as well as renderings and maps of the phases of redevelopment (see figure 29).

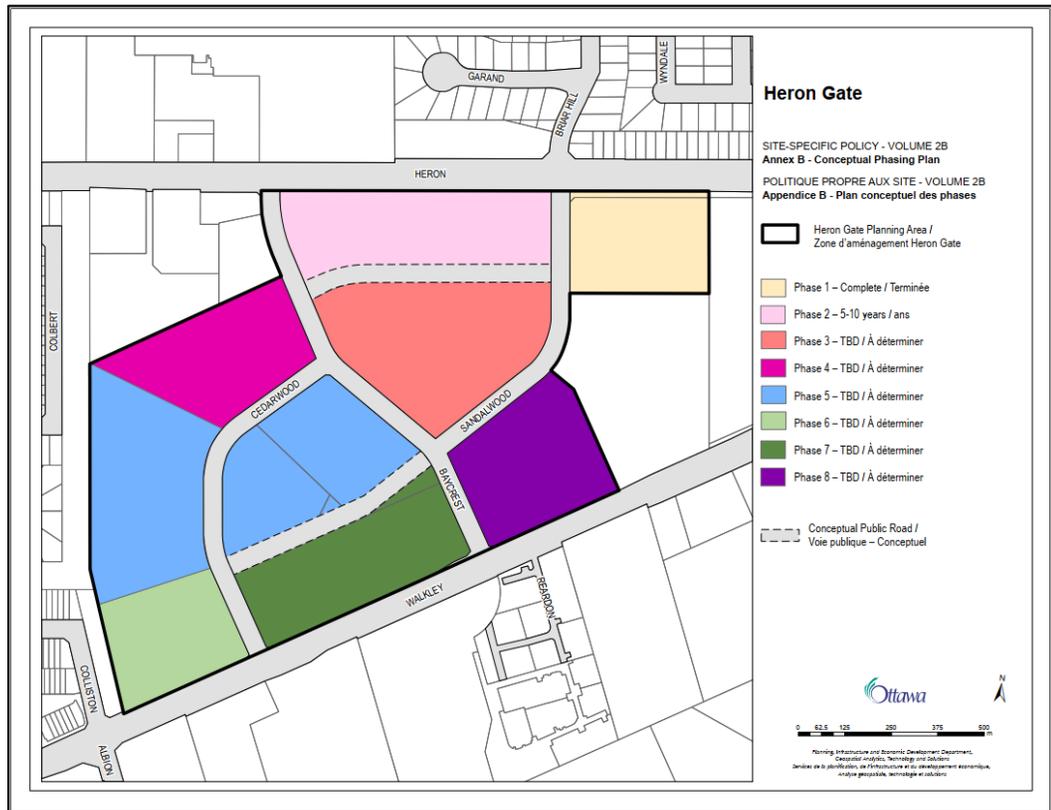




Figure 29. Images created as part of the Heron Gate master plan (City of Ottawa 2021f).

1. The Devil is in the Details: Affordable Housing Metrics and Gentrification

In order for the Official Plan Amendment application to go to Ottawa City Council for a vote, it first required approval from the Planning Committee. The Planning Committee meeting on August 26, 2021, was held online. The meeting lasted all day and consisted of separate presentations by city staff and the landlord-developer. A number of public delegations also signed up to speak to the Official Plan Amendment, all of which were in opposition. At this event, as well as the subsequent City Council meeting on September

8, I recorded audio, took notes, and gathered textual materials (agendas, planning documents, and presentation slides).

The City of Ottawa's Planning Committee heard from 15 public delegations at the August 26 session. Delegations included local community groups, housing advocates, and current and former Heron Gate tenants. One tenant spoke powerfully about what they interpreted as the purposeful neglect of their home by the landlord:

I'll tell you my experience has been quite horrible, and one of the key factors is in terms of maintenance of the property. The developer doesn't maintain the property, I've never lived in such a situation. I come from Africa, but I've never lived in such an unlivable situation anywhere else in the world. And to see people struggling in terms of getting facilities, in terms of getting maintenance service, in terms of having consultation with the developer is really deplorable. I don't want to believe these are the values that Canada is known for...And I believe if we all come together and work together, we can find a lasting solution to the housing situation in Herongate.

According to the tenant's testimony, the landlord had rendered the neighbourhood unliveable through neglect and disrepair. They referred to the Official Plan Amendment as "a termination plan" to remove poor residents from the neighbourhood.

The major issues raised by the public delegations, along with progressive councillors opposed to the OPA, surrounded how affordable housing would be measured and implemented under the agreement. There was broad consensus from the range of opponents that the existing socio-economic demographics in Heron Gate would be unable to afford the new affordable housing scheme detailed in the MOU. Director of Housing Services Saide Sayah admitted this during the city staff presentation, that the affordability measurements that city planners negotiated with Hazelview are not necessarily affordable for low-income households.

The final MOU signed between Hazelview and the City of Ottawa details the numbers and levels of affordability. Within the first five years of the approval of the Official Plan, Hazelview would convert 510 existing units in the neighbourhood to what was designated as “secure affordable existing” for a period of 20 years. The definition of “secure affordable existing” provided refers to rents “at or below average monthly City-wide rents by unit type.” This metric of affordability redefines affordable rents as current average market value, as determined by CMHC numbers. Within this scheme, the average market rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$1,517 and a three-bedroom is pegged at \$1,850. Since existing rents in Heron Gate are below this determined average, converting—or “securing existing affordable”—units will result in rent increases. Through the MOU, the city and the landlord-developer have reimagined affordable housing for Heron Gate to be that of city-wide average market rents for a lower-income neighbourhood. At both meetings, OPA opponents decried city planners for not negotiating Heron Gate-specific affordability measurements in line with current resident income levels, given that the neighbourhood was far below the city average and that the neighbourhood had its own census tract to go by.

In addition to the scheme to convert 510 existing units from below-market rents into “affordable” at-market rents, another 510 units from the redevelopment were to be designated as “secure affordable new” for a period of 10 years. The “secure affordable new” designation is pegged to city-wide average income percentiles, which is based on average market rent and 30 per cent of average income. The MOU indicates that the average household income for a family living in a 3-bedroom unit as \$92,784; however, average household income in Heron Gate is \$40,594. The actual average affordable rent

in Heron Gate is \$1,015 based on Hazelview's own formula for calculating affordability (Mast and Hawley 2021). Meanwhile, existing tenants living in three- and four-bedroom townhouses on the property with front and backyards are currently paying around \$1,500. Under the MOU affordability scheme, new "affordable" three-bedroom apartments will rent for \$2,320 per month, which is well above what current residents pay (Mast and Hawley 2021). Opponents at the planning committee and council meetings further decried the length of time that the units would remain "affordable." Mavis Finnamore of ACORN Ottawa put it this way to the committee: "The poor are always going to be with us. Why are we pretending they are going to evaporate in 10 to 20 years." For Finnamore, the OPA finalized the "blowing apart" of a community, including support systems for new Canadians and the removal of housing security.

Affordability in a renewed and revitalized Heron Gate will be unaffordable for those who currently rely on rents below the market average. Moreover, as more and more parcels in Heron Gate are redeveloped and above-market renters move into the new buildings, rent gaps will impact the immediate neighbourhood and wider community. Both Hazelview and surrounding landlords will seek to close these gaps in rent through rent hikes, AGIs, and evictions. More racialized and lower-income people will be displaced by processes of gentrification that accompany the larger redevelopment. While existing tenants will be able to relocate within the neighbourhood at the same rent, according to the MOU, the overall percentage of units that are marked as affordable is relatively small. The affordability metric does not align with existing income levels in the neighbourhood, and is catered instead toward middle-income earners. Moreover, these units will only be priced as such for 10-20 short years, a generation or less in a

neighbourhood home to many multi-generational families. As the Herongate Tenant Coalition and others have emphasized, Hazelview’s redevelopment plans destroy much more actually existing affordable housing than it will ever create.

2. “A Home Run”: Planning Staff go to Bat for Hazelview

For a handful of more progressive-oriented inner-urban councillors, the measures of affordability and the duration that those units would remain affordable made little sense. Councillor Shawn Menard, who opposed the Official Plan Amendment, hit Hazelview representatives with some tough questions at the Planning Committee meeting. These included asking if the original intention around purchasing the property in 2012 was to tear it down, and if they did their homework and knew that around 70 percent of the neighbourhood was comprised of lower-income, racialized immigrant families. When Menard failed to receive a direct answer, he made the following statement to Hazelview’s representatives Michael Williams and Colleen Krempulec:

The selection of Heron Gate for redevelopment was not fortuitous. Generally, racialized and immigrant communities like Heron Gate are disproportionately likely to be selected by large scale redevelopment projects and thus subjected to mass evictions. Further results suggest that the dissolution of the Heron Gate community, and the attendant dislocation of its members has exacted a pronounced social and economic toll and compounded the racial discrimination already experienced by the former Heron Gate residents, most of whom are visible minorities... You’re an example of a black eye for this country, and I’d like you to respond to the people that have been calling you out and rightfully for what is racial discrimination so that you can profit off of it.

The Hazelview representative—Colleen Krempulec, senior vice president of brand marketing and corporate social responsibility—responded by stating that the predominant reason that the real estate investment firm was engaging in redevelopment was to add much needed affordable housing supply to the city: “There is no racial discrimination

here whatsoever, the merits of the application are based on the need to bring much needed housing, rental housing, across various affordability levels to not only the City of Ottawa, but to the Heron Gate community. And that's what we're here to discuss today.”

Menard replied:

If that's what you're here to discuss, then why is the MOU so weak? Why does it actually say it's only 16 percent affordable when the definition of affordable isn't actually affordable for the people that live in this area? Or, why is the length of time 10 to 20 years and 15 to 20 years when we have developments at Booth [Street] that are 25 years, developments in Toronto that are 99 years. If that's your intent to come in and say that you really just want to build new housing and be supportive of this community, then why is the MOU so weak and the very tenants that you're saying you want to protect are upset by the deal and agreement that you put in place here? So don't pretend that you're doing this out of the goodness of your heart.

Krempulec's claim, that Hazelview was only interested in redeveloping Heron Gate in order to add much needed affordable housing to the city's rental stock, is a bold public statement to make, given Greg Rogers' public meeting iterations in 2016 and 2019 that the landlord is not in the business of providing affordable housing, and not interested in renting to those families living in the townhomes. While Menard and two other committee members saw through this ultimate exercise in brand marketing, the Planning Committee voted 6-3 to approve the city planners' recommendations and move the file forward to City Council for a final vote.

Hazelview's representatives at the City Council meeting on September 8, 2021, had support from the City of Ottawa's planning department. In particular, Lee Anne Snedden, a planning director who officially submitted the OPA recommendation report on behalf of the planning department, stepped up to bat for the developers. At times it was difficult to know if Snedden was speaking as a public servant or a Hazelview

representative, as she at times responded defensively to critics of the deal city staff negotiated with Hazelview. At one point, Snedden responded to criticism of the 10-year timeframe for new affordable units. “To expect that a private developer is going to provide affordable housing in perpetuity is unrealistic, it’s completely outside of the *Planning Act*.” When councillors pressed Snedden on the affordability metrics and the numbers, she replied with incredulity: “They don’t have to provide us *anything*. We’ve never...we’ve got over *1,000 units* with this agreement. This is a landmark; this is a *home run* with respect to affordable housing and the number of units that we’re providing.” Some councillors were unconvinced and pushed for a better deal. In response Snedden remarked that Hazelview “can only take so much in terms of what they are able to financially able to afford to provide.” Anything beyond the MOU, according to Snedden, “would be going past what they can afford to build here.” City staff advocacy for the Heron Gate developer in turn summoned disbelief from skeptical city councillors.

Councillor Jeff Leiper responded:

Sorry, I’m just struck by the previous comment by Ms. Snedden in terms of, you know, the affordability of this deal for the developer. We’re not talking about what is affordable to the developer. This is what the developer feels that they can accomplish while still making the profit that they intend to make in this development. We’re talking about affordability of housing to people who actually can’t afford to pay more than they are paying for their housing today versus the affordability of whether or not profit can be maintained at the desired level on the part of investors...There is a housing shortage in most major North American municipalities, and in the wake of that housing shortage, there is the opportunity for profit and large companies like Hazelview are swooping in and they’re buying what they tell their investors are underperforming assets and they are squeezing greater profit out of them by redeveloping them. And the message that we have the opportunity to send to those developers today in this debate is that Ottawa City Council, Ottawa City staff are going to try to do better...we have the opportunity to say our cities are not going to be bought up by large developers backed by billions of dollars of investment to turn housing that is affordable for people today into a commodity from which the greatest possible profit can be

squeezed. And when we talk about is this deal affordable, if this deal is affordable to the developer, that leaves me queasy. We're not talking about the same affordability. We're talking about the affordability of housing which is a human right to the residents of Ottawa versus the profits that can be made by speculative large multinational firms.

Progressive inner-urban city councillors were not satisfied with the terms of the Heron Gate MOU and felt strongly that the city had a strong position from which to negotiate, given that the New Official Plan was to be approved in the coming weeks. The updated official plan would provide stronger mechanisms compelling developers to include affordable units. These councillors believed that City Council had the upper hand to negotiate a better deal, and were pressing for it. At one point, Snedden retorted that: "We don't have the staff capacity to continue these negotiations and discussions." Snedden explained that there are 23 wards in the city and that planning staff have other files and applications that they need to deal with, noting that applications are up 20 percent. Snedden insisted that: "This has been the strongest agreement that we've been able to acquire." From the planning department's perspective, going back and trying to negotiate a better deal was out of the question. Despite the best efforts of opposing city councillors who wanted a stronger MOU and for city planning staff to go back to the negotiating table with Hazelview, the Official Plan Amendment passed by a vote of 18-to-6.

A majority of Ottawa city councillors were convinced to support the Official Plan Amendment, despite strong opposition to the social framework and MOU. It would appear as if planning staff effectively pleaded the case for the redevelopment approval. A city councillor staff person that I interviewed explained from their perspective the role of urban planning in the approval process:

The planning department is basically in the business of facilitating investment for developers. That's kind of what they're doing, is they're like grooming plots of land and planning it and facilitating investment there. And the city, you know, is reliant on that, that industry continuing to do well. And they're reliant on continuing to facilitate that capital strategy because that's where the bulk of their revenue comes from for the city, in property taxes.²⁶

The relationship between developers and municipal governance is mutually beneficial, as city staff work within an urban planning bureaucracy designed around preparing property for investment and improvement.

3. The Municipal-Developer Nexus

The mutually beneficial relationship between city officials and property developers—a municipal-developer nexus—is built around the desire to obtain land, improve property, and increase revenue flows. Property relations are central to capital flows that enrich landlords and their investors, and provide cash-strapped municipal governments with a primary source of revenue. The municipal-developer nexus is a central component of what Stein (2019) classifies as the “real estate state.” The real estate state is a political formation and expression of governance that elevates real estate as a top political priority, a primary commodity, and a dominant revenue stream for cities (Stein 2019, 5, 39).

Within this framework, urban governance is increasingly preoccupied with elevating land as a commodity and upholding property rights and relations as sacred (Stein 2019). In the real estate state, urban planners “are tasked with anchoring municipal governments to the interests of developers and landlords” (114-115) which ultimately results in “maintaining the spatial dimension of racial inequalities” in urban property relations (27). In the real

²⁶ Interview with City of Ottawa councillor staff, June 18, 2021.

estate state, developers enjoy a privileged position within the planning bureaucracy, to participate in a mutually beneficial cycle of granting access to land for the purposes of development and redevelopment. While financially beneficial for both sets of parties, urban development is also associated with socio-spatial processes of improving and beautifying settler society. The reproduction of urban space, central to settler colonial urbanism, relies to a significant extent on the municipal-developer nexus. Improving land appeals to broader settler society, facilitated by discourses of liveability that lead to normative processes of gentrification. While there are numerous factors influencing the socio-spatial praxis of developers and apartment investors in the built environment, including social forces pressuring concessions, bureaucratic forces can work in other ways to facilitate developer access to property improvement.

One such way in the City of Ottawa is the developer ambassador program. Before being appointed as the Director of Planning Services in 2017, planning director Lee Anne Snedden chaired both the Development Industry Steering Committee and the Development Industry Sub Committee. At the time of her promotion, developer industry media positioned Snedden as having “a good reputation with the building and development industry” (CNGRP 2017). With Snedden’s reputation with property developers and other stakeholders, one of her first initiatives in her new position was to establish a developer ambassador program where developers have a seat at the table within the planning department. The developer ambassador program matches city staff as ambassadors with private developers, initiated to help facilitate and streamline the property development application process. These staffers were referred to as “client relationship leaders” and given authority to “override decisions by project managers or

the city staff member previously tasked with overseeing a particular planning file” (Pearson 2015). Internal planning documents obtained through an FOI request shed further light on the client relationship leader pilot program that was spearheaded by the Planning and Growth Management’s Development Review Services Branch. The program was described as a “business process improvement initiative that will provide one point of contact for the most active development firms” (City of Ottawa 2021-549). Among a number of identified issues and goals of the program included improving communications externally with developers and internally within municipal planning, as well as removing inefficiencies and accelerating timelines for application processing. A list of ambassador assignments was included (see figure 30).

CRL Assignments:	
Developer	CRL
Arnon Corporation	Joshua White
Ashcroft Homes	Christopher Moise
Brigil	Cody Oram
Caivan Developments	Louise Sweet-Lindsay
Campanale Homes	Chris Ogilvie
Cardel Homes	Ann O'Connor
Cavanagh	Carol Ruddy
Claridge	Doug James
Colonnade	Laurel McCreight
DCR Phoenix	Mary Ellen Wood
Domicile	Kerstin Nitsche
Mattamy	Mark Young
Minto	Sean Moore
Monarch	Jeff Shillington
Regional Group	Eric Surprenant
Richcraft	Mike Schmidt
Taggart	Lily Xu
Tartan	Erin O'Connell
Trinity-Group	Simon Deiacco
Uniform Developments	Jeff Ostafichuk
Urbandale	Matthew Wilson
Valecraft	Kevin Hall
Windmill Developments	Andrew McCreight

Figure 30. A list of developer ambassador program assignments (City of Ottawa 2021-549).

Perhaps not surprisingly, Barrhaven city councillor and planning committee chair (at the time) Jan Harder publicly backed the program in local media. Responding to criticism that developers were favoured over citizens and community groups through the privileged positioning of the ambassador program, Harder retorted that: “The communities have ambassadors and they’re called councillors...The No. 1 goal here is customer service and moving applications through the system in a timely fashion” (Pearson 2015). It is not surprising that Jan Harder—as planning committee chair at the time—went out of her way to defend and promote the developer ambassador program. Investigating major public figures in relation to property development in Ottawa can provide insight into ruling relations in municipal contexts.

When our small team of media activists and researchers convened with the Herongate Tenant Coalition in 2018 around the mass evictions, Harder was one city official whom we wanted to learn more about. Jack Stirling was another. Both figures have extensive intertwined histories in municipal politics, planning, and property development circles. Research undertaken by the Herongate Tenant Coalition drew connections between Harder and Stirling, where Stirling had a history of working for large property development firms before chairing the Nepean planning commission, at which time (in the late 1990s) Harder was a councillor in Nepean regularly seeking development approvals. The Herongate Tenant Coalition were first alerted to the possibility that Jack Stirling was somehow involved in the mass demoviction and redevelopment plan when mayor Jim Watson unexpectedly dropped his name in a meeting with Heron Gate community members in 2018. It also came to light that Stirling’s development consultancy firm—The Stirling Group—submitted a site plan

control application in relation to the first demoviction phase and HG7 Vista Local redevelopment. Then, at the February 2019 open house event at the Heron Road Community Centre, I picked up a printed copy of the presentation slides and noticed that, in addition to the usual partner’s brands being pasted on the materials—the “team effort” of Timbercreek, the City of Ottawa, and Dialog—the Stirling Group’s logo now appeared on the opening presentation slide (see figure 31). Stirling’s company was tasked with submitting the Official Plan Amendment application to the city on behalf of Timbercreek.



Figure 31. Opening presentation slide prepared for the open house event on February 11, 2019, for the Heron Gate Master Plan displays The Stirling Group logo (Timbercreek Asset Management 2019g).

While none of this is shocking or revelatory, our early media work and articles published in *The Leveller* newspaper in 2018 and 2019 bore fruit many months later in

the summer of 2021. First, in September 2018, Neal Rockwell published an article in *The Leveller*—“Disconnected Realities: Country club politics put vulnerable Herongate residents in peril.” Rockwell drew connections between some well-known former public officials that went on to form development consultancy firms and used their “insider knowledge and important connections” to assist developers with their applications and the planning process, with a particular focus on Jack Stirling, his firm The Stirling Group, and his position on the city’s Planning Advisory Council (Rockwell 2018b). Second, in March 2019, Rockwell published a follow-up article in *The Leveller*—“Herongate residents contend with below-grade conditions and a rent increase, while councillors and developers mingle” (Rockwell 2019). The subtitle read: “Broken heating, broken pipes and a rent increase in Herongate, while councillor Jan Harder and development consultant Jack Stirling keep it in the family.” Within, Rockwell revealed that Alison Stirling—Jack Stirling’s daughter—was working as an aid for city councillor Jan Harder while simultaneously working for The Stirling Group.

While our research and Rockwell’s keen investigative journalism had led to a number of articles drawing connections between the city’s powerbrokers and the money behind property development in Ottawa, this particular article struck a chord with a local reader who filed a complaint with the city’s Integrity Commissioner. On June 17, 2021, Integrity Commissioner Robert Marleau issued a report to City Council on an inquiry respecting the conduct of councillor Harder. The inquiry found that Harder, as city councillor and chair of the city’s planning committee, has “tainted the City’s planning and development process” through her business relationship with the Stirling family, violating the councillor’s code of conduct. The Integrity Commissioner recommended

Harder's removal from the Planning Committee, the Planning Advisory Committee, and from the Board of Directors of the Ottawa Community Lands Development Corporation (which oversees the selling of municipal lands to private parties). Harder resigned from Planning Committee before the council vote, and other recommendations and proposed sanctions against Harder were subsequently voted down at the behest of mayor Jim Watson. The "Watson Club", as it is known locally, is a relatively solid group of majority non-inner-urban city councillors that tend to vote as a block with the mayor upon his recommendation (Chianello and Porter 2021), such as what happened with the Heron Gate Official Plan Amendment vote.

For his part, Jack Stirling was sanctioned for violating a Lobbyist Registry bylaw and the Lobbyist Code of Conduct. Stirling was also forced to sign a compliance agreement and refrain from lobbying for 30 days (City of Ottawa 2021i). While both Stirling and Harder received slaps on the wrists as penalties for their arguably serious transgressions, our collective research and media work with the Herongate Tenant Coalition helped bring about events that were symbolically important, by exposing the linkages and relations between actors in ruling institutions.

Conclusion

Part of the political activist ethnographic work in this research project is direct engagement in the social relations of resistance, which includes working toward attempting to upset, disrupt, and change ruling relations. This research has also served to shed light on the relationships and inner workings of ruling institutions comprised of an entanglement of actors who attempt to carve up the city for profits with impunity, as the

earliest surveyors in Gloucester township had done. Algonquin Anishinaabe land that is now known as Heron Gate was once surveyed by settlers and incorporated into the township of Gloucester as private property. While the land has been subdivided, resold, and resurveyed over the years, the 2021 approval of the redevelopment of Heron Gate serves to reproduce settler colonial urbanism, redesigning for community wellbeing that replaces an ethno-racial enclave and reconfiguring private property for white, affluent, settler consumption.

The Herongate Tenant Coalition's approach has been to largely disengage from the "consultation" public relations exercises and negotiations over the ongoing destruction of the neighbourhood. The Herongate Tenant Coalition interprets the Official Plan Amendment and MOU as a framework for destruction that serves to justify the demolition of 559 more homes and eliminate affordable housing in the community. While the landlord-developer and city officials attempt to take the moral high ground on the social framework, the catalyst for this agreement, in my view, was the grassroots anti-eviction mobilization efforts of tenants and their supporters in 2018. The organizing and activism work of the Herongate Tenant Coalition, the drive to stop the evictions, the grueling social media conflict and subsequent legal battles, and the human rights case seeking a right to return for those displaced in 2018, served to cast a spotlight on the mass demolition-driven evictions that compelled the landlord-developer to modify its approach to redevelopment. While the majority of political agents and community actors surrounding the OPA process have sought to negotiate a gentler form of domicide at Heron Gate, the Herongate Tenant Coalition has remained steadfast in its socio-spatial praxis and politics of refusal.

Chapter 10 – Conclusion

Depending on whom you ask, the fate of Heron Gate is either a revitalization success story and beacon for affordable housing provision, or a resounding loss resulting in the eventual demolition of a total of 789 affordable (below-market rent) homes, the eviction and displacement of hundreds of people, and the elimination of an ethno-racial enclave. The approval of the Heron Gate Official Plan Amendment seems to have sealed the fate of the neighbourhood, greenlighting mass demolition and redevelopment of higher-end housing, and accelerating the gentrification of the wider community. The Herongate Tenant Coalition has refused to throw in the towel, however, and is still organizing against the community's dissolution. While the majority of Coalition members who were active in 2018 are no longer so—as they were evicted and dispersed from the neighbourhood—a small core group continues to organize in the community. One area where remaining residents and their supporters, as well as those that were evicted, continue the struggle, is in the legal arena. One of the more hopeful elements for a just future surrounds the human rights case filed by evicted tenants. This concluding chapter examines the human rights case within the context of radical tenant organizing, while revisiting some of the main themes explored in this dissertation.

Racial Discrimination in Housing and Human Rights

Timbercreek's efforts to replace predominantly racialized tenants with "premium" white renters, to engineer a population transfer and destroy an ethno-racial enclave, is a violation of international human rights law, according to a case currently before the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal brought by Heron Gate evictees (Yussuf et al. v.

Timbercreek 2019). In August and September 2019, 37 applicants from the 2018 demoviction zone filed applications with the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal against Timbercreek Asset Management Inc. (and its affiliated companies, listed as Mustang Equities Inc., TC Core GP, and TC Core LP) and the City of Ottawa. The Herongate Tenant Coalition and their legal team claims that Timbercreek's mass eviction and predatory redevelopment constitutes discrimination on racialized grounds that gave rise to difficulties finding adequate replacement housing, as well as the erosion of an ethnic community. The demovicted families in 2018 were dispersed throughout the city, many settling at the suburban margins where rents are more affordable than the inner- and inner-suburban core. Displacement has disrupted the social networks and cultural supports of this predominantly racialized, immigrant neighbourhood. In a novel and potentially precedent-setting move, a number of applicants, the vast majority of Somali origin, are seeking a right to return to the neighbourhood to units of similar size and rent, as well as \$50,000 each in damages. They are asking the tribunal "to determine whether a landlord has the right to displace a large group of residents of a low-income, family-oriented, racialized and immigrant community in order to create a predominantly affluent, adult-oriented, white and non-immigrant community in its stead" (Yussuf et al. v. Timbercreek 2019, 4). The case argues that the reengineering of the social and ethnic composition of Heron Gate from a low-income, migrant community to one that is primarily white and affluent violates the right to housing in international law (35).

At the center of the case made by evicted Heron Gate tenants is the targeted destruction of an ethno-racial community (Mensah and Tucker-Simmons 2021). As discussed in Chapter Six, large numbers of asylum seekers and immigrants sought refuge

in Heron Gate beginning in the early 1990s; in particular, hundreds of Somali families fleeing civil war made the community their home. Recent migrants were initially attracted by the large homes and affordable rents, but as the neighbourhood developed into a majority migrant community, newcomers from African, Arab, and South Asian countries “sought to live in Herongate in order to integrate [into] the increasingly tight knit migrant and ethnic community that was taking root. They sought to live in close proximity to those with whom they shared certain personal characteristics such as ethnicity, culture, language, place of origin, and religion” (Yussuf et al. v. Timbercreek 2019, 9). By the time of the 2016 Canadian census survey, as detailed in Chapter Six, Heron Gate was comprised of over 50 percent immigrants and 70 percent visible minorities; median employment income was under \$20,000 per year, 93 percent were renters, and 28 percent of households received some form of public assistance (Yussuf et al. v. Timbercreek 2019).

The destruction of Heron Gate as an ethno-racial enclave is the crux of the human rights case currently before the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal. Informed by a sociological and spatial understanding of the neighbourhood as an ethno-racial enclave, Heron Gate evictees asserted in their application that:

It is not merely the high concentration of people from specific ethnic groups, but the resulting emergence of cultural institutions, social relationships, and ethnic businesses that cater to the specific needs of the community or communities that distinguishes an ethnic enclave from a community that merely has a high concentration of residents from one or a small subset of ethnicities (Yussuf et al. v. Timbercreek 2019, 10).

Ethno-racial enclaves offer lower-income minority and recent immigrant households opportunities to access informal services and supports in their first language, as well as

businesses that specifically cater to their needs. These opportunities are significant, the application argues, “given the acute dearth of economic opportunities available to ethno-racial minorities in light of growing xenophobia and Islamophobia in Canada” (Yussuf et al. v. Timbercreek 2019, 12). Enclaves further provide “a level of defense or ‘cushion’ against racial discrimination emanating from mainstream society. That is, they act as a bulwark against discrimination in Canadian society, affording their members greater security both literally and in a socio-economic and cultural sense” (Yussuf et al. v. Timbercreek 2019, 12). The hostility directed toward racialized groups and immigrant communities in settler society is driven by an embedded culture of xenophobia informed by political and social logics of elimination. The insatiable quest for property and the improvement of property relations that continues to impel settler colonial attempts at domicidal elimination of Indigeneity, also informs the eliminatory logics and domicidal technologies targeting ethno-racial enclaves like Heron Gate.

The human rights application also targets the business model of Timbercreek as a financialized real estate investment firm. It situates the Heron Gate redevelopment within broader trends of the financialization of rental housing and what the application refers to as “hyper-gentrification” under a financialized investment model that specifically targets lower-income, racialized areas:

Timbercreek’s development plan for Herongate is consistent with a broader model of real estate development in Ontario that disproportionately affects people of colour, immigrants, people receiving public assistance, and families. This development model involves identifying real estate that is ‘undervalued’, displacing the existing ‘low quality’ occupants, renovating or building higher-end rental housing or condos, and then marketing them to ‘higher quality’ tenants. The replacement tenants are disproportionately white and non-immigrant, with smaller or no families, and not receiving public assistance (5).

Value and quality are two underlying principles driving gentrification in the financialization of rental housing in settler colonial societies. Undervalued properties inhabited by tenants determined to be of low quality (or undesirable) are targeted for elimination through the injection of value and replacement by high quality (or desirable) tenants. This eliminatory mechanism of settler colonial urbanization works to replace undesirable (typically racialized) populations with more desirable (typically white) populations, and is facilitated by processes of settler colonial urbanism and the reproduction of space. This dissertation has contributed sociological insight into how the racial and spatial logics of settler colonial urbanism contribute to processes of gentrification and displacement.

For its part, Timbercreek/Hazelview denies the allegations and asserts that the case has no public interest standing and has no reasonable prospect for success. According to the landlord-developer's response filed with the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal in September 2019, there exists no nexus between the redevelopment and the displacement of lower-income, racialized families: instead, the "decision to redevelop the property is in keeping with the cycle of evolution and rejuvenation that is common in communities across the Province and across Canada" (Timbercreek Asset Management 2019h, 30). More than mere rejuvenation, the evictees' application to the tribunal asserts that Timbercreek's redevelopment plan for Heron Gate violates international human rights law. Because Canada ratified international human rights law, it is binding on all levels of government (thus implicating the City of Ottawa). As a result, the applicants argue that "displacing existing residents, particularly those who are low-income and members of groups experiencing discrimination, for the purposes of redevelopment, is

only permitted if existing residents are fully consulted about development plans, and if those plans avoid permanent displacement of residents” (Yussuf et al. v. Timbercreek 2019, 5-6). Despite this, Timbercreek insists that the case is not one of housing discrimination, because the right to housing simply does not exist in Canada.

Timbercreek’s response to the tribunal claims that: “The right to housing has not been enshrined in domestic law” (Yussuf et al. v. Timbercreek 2019, 35). The strength and merit of this case brought by evicted Heron Gate residents could be the push that is required for housing to be legally recognized as a human right in Canada.

Coalition lawyers see the human rights case as potentially precedent-setting. Daniel Tucker-Simmons notes that the case is one of the most significant in the housing field that the country has seen in 20 years. The case, according to Tucker-Simmons, has “the potential to restrict the longstanding and discriminatory practice in the real estate development industry of targeting racialized communities for displacement and gentrification” (Herongate Tenant Coalition 2021b). Yavar Hameed, another lawyer representing displaced tenants, notes that “The deck is always stacked in favour of property owners. Canadian law typically privileges the interests of capital above people. However, even property developers must abide by human rights laws. That is the strength of the Heron Gate case, which identifies the displacement of racialized tenants as a form of discrimination” (Herongate Tenant Coalition 2021b). The legal arena is one of many terrains of struggle that residents have engaged against Timbercreek and the City of Ottawa, as one potential venue to seek remedy and housing justice against the domicidal practices of urban redevelopment and revitalization efforts.

However, engaging in legal proceedings within a justice system that upholds a settler colonial legal framework that was built upon and emphasizes the sanctity of property rights can be fraught, to say the least, and this dissertation has contributed to conversations about the viability of social movement engagement within the legal realm. The relational struggle over Heron Gate that has ended up in various legal proceedings provides insight into how tenant justice and urban social movements may benefit from a tactical and strategic engagement with the settler colonial justice system. As discussed in Chapter Eight regarding the defamation cases filed by the Herongate Tenant Coalition against Timbercreek, engaging ruling actors on this terrain—a plain in which financial and corporate elites tend to smugly dominate—enables social movement actors the opportunity to request and demand the production of internal records of their opponent that may help in the case. This dissertation has demonstrated that the Herongate Tenant Coalition’s tactical engagement in the legal realm—in addition to supplementing with other research strategies such as freedom of information requests—is an exercise in knowledge production, a research strategy that enables tenant movements to better understand their adversaries in struggles for housing justice.

In the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal case, the formal request for production of records included redevelopment policy documents and business plans, meeting minutes and correspondence pertaining to evictions, demolition, and redevelopment, financial records, and records related to surveillance and private investigation reports regarding the monitoring of residents’ activities. Likewise, records were also requested from the City of Ottawa that included similar items such as meetings and correspondence addressing evictions, demolition, and redevelopment, documents in relation to the City of Ottawa’s

authorization and involvement in the dissolution of the community, as well as any preventative measures sought. Tenancy-specific records were also requested, including all relevant property standards and bylaw records in relation to inspections, maintenance, repair, and corrective action. Accessing the internal records of the landlord-developer in this case has also proven beneficial by exposing landlord tactics, connections, strategies, and mistruths.

In addition to the production of records, the legal cases initiated by Heron Gate tenants and the Herongate Tenant Coalition provide further insight into ruling institutions and social relations surrounding property, real estate, and municipal governance, as demonstrated in this dissertation. By engaging on this terrain of struggle we are able to learn and produce knowledge about our opponents, how they think and approach tenant organizing and resistance. We have learned that landlord-developers will go to great lengths to protect their brand, that brand integrity is more important to them than any associated legal costs. Efforts undertaken by tenants in this struggle have resulted, if I may speculate, in the rebranding and repositioning of Timbercreek as Hazelview. Landlord-developers are susceptible to public shaming, and using social media helps level the playing field against a powerful actor. The cases also demonstrate that, while potentially problematic, the legal terrain outside of landlord-tenant tribunals can be a viable option from which to engage in struggle against ruling institutions such as landlords, developers, and city officials. It is widely recognized amongst housing activists that landlord-tenant tribunals favour landlords; tenant justice is rarely served in such venues. This is why elevating legal struggle beyond landlord-tenant tribunals can potentially be a fruitful option, if a variety of favourable conditions exist (such as good,

sympathetic lawyers, access to funding/fundraising, and the time, patience, and energy to engage in the process). Finally, if the human rights case is successful, Heron Gate tenants will have set a national precedent with potential international implications that could provide protections from predatory real estate investment targeting entire buildings and neighbourhoods for gentrification. At the same time, while no protection exists against demolition-driven eviction in Ontario landlord-tenant law, a favourable ruling from the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal could serve to push for legislative changes in the province and beyond that would protect tenants against demoviction and provide a right of return.

Revisiting Domicide, Urban Liveability, and Community

Wellbeing

This dissertation has made an original contribution to literature addressing the financialization of rental housing and impacts on landlord-tenant relations. This research has provided a comprehensive profile of a financialized real estate investment firm, and how it has deployed different tactics in the built environment that contribute to gentrification, as well as in response to tenant resistance. More specifically, this dissertation has contributed to understanding the inter-related gentrifying processes of strategic neglect, demoviction, and intensification, as they have played out in Heron Gate. This research has further shed light on the municipal role in facilitating gentrification, mass displacement, and the destruction of an ethno-racial enclave. At the same time, this dissertation has contributed to literature on social movement studies, more specifically in the realm of tenant organizing and housing justice. Engaging political activist

ethnography as a research method has enriched this understanding of tenant organizing against eviction and the ruling actors and institutions that work to advance property relations by reconfiguring land and real estate according to its highest and best use. In the case of Heron Gate, urban redevelopment and the perfecting of property has necessitated displacing some of the city's most marginalized residents, including dozens of large Black and Brown immigrant and refugee families. Racialized property relations are at the core of settler colonial urbanism, and this dissertation has also contributed to critical scholarly conversations about how social space is produced and reproduced in settler societies.

This dissertation has examined and analyzed the social relations underpinning the financialization of rental housing and urban redevelopment in Canada, and associated impacts of gentrification, displacement, and resistance. The revitalization of the Heron Gate neighbourhood carries with it dramatic implications, but also provides valuable insights on domicide, the discourse of liveability, and social relations of rule and resistance in the settler colonial city. This dissertation has made an original contribution to literature on urban liveability by critically examining discourses surrounding urban governance, redevelopment, and improvement—including revitalization, intensification, and efforts to create liveable homes within North America's most liveable mid-sized city. A notable scholarly contribution of this dissertation is interpreting liveability discourses within a sociological understanding of domicide as both repressive and productive.

Domicide is a poignant framework from which to analyze the discourse of liveability and its application to Heron Gate. Domicide, as a productive and repressive socio-spatial process, manifests under a discursive banner of liveability, where liveability

for some coexists and depends upon domicide for others. Domicide is both repressive in that it destroys one group of peoples' homes or communities and renders those people disposable and dispersible, and at the same time productive by replacing these homes and communities with those of more privileged groups, under auspices of improving quality of life and wellbeing. Attempts undertaken by the landlord-developer and city officials/planners for making Heron Gate liveable for some involve efforts to unmake the homes of existing residents whose dwellings and lives have been rendered unliveable. The already precarious lives of lower-income, racialized, and immigrant populations are rendered disposable and replaceable so that other more desirable populations—typically representative of the white settler majority—can live and flourish. As we saw at Heron Gate, the improvement of property for settler use is facilitated through the application of a particular entrepreneurial framework of community wellbeing.

The remaking of Heron Gate has been made possible in part through the discursive and ideological applications of liveability as imagined in the City of Ottawa's New Official Plan and the Conference Board of Canada's Community Wellbeing Framework. The New Official Plan mobilizes liveability alongside intensification with the aim of "injecting new life" into targeted urban areas (City of Ottawa 2021d). The Community Wellbeing Framework mobilizes liveability alongside a business imperative to improve property relations, reproduce urban space, and shape productive settler subjectivities. The invocation of liveability within these particular frameworks of governance has both racial and spatial implications. The application of the Community Wellbeing Framework to Heron Gate renders the pre-demoviction, racialized working-class neighbourhood as a space and place devoid of liveability. Designing for liveability

in Heron Gate involves reimagining place and reproducing space that is liveable, through processes of home unmaking. Producing liveability through designing for community wellbeing also serves the dual functional purpose of modifying (or removing) undesirable behaviours and simultaneously generating productive life. These processes provide insight on how settler colonial urbanism works to reproduce urban spaces and ideal subjects.

Applying the Community Wellbeing Framework of liveability puts the landlord-developer between a rock and a hard place, according to the Herongate Tenant Coalition. Members of the Coalition spoke to the Community Wellbeing Framework at a November 2021 event organized in an attempt to galvanize community opposition to the social framework and as part of efforts to relaunch a legal fundraising campaign to support costs associated with the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal case. First, although the Community Wellbeing Framework was released in July 2018, it was not applied at the time to the existing neighbourhood parcel subjected to mass eviction and demolition. Nor was it applied to the remainder of the neighbourhood (Mast and Hawley 2021). Applying the Community Wellbeing Framework's metrics to evaluate the health of communities—in terms of measuring the social, cultural, and affordability components—would likely result in a high grade, revealing that the neighbourhood would be considered highly liveable for its residents. Revealing that the existing neighbourhood is liveable would work against purported justifications for demolition and redevelopment. A high score according to the Community Wellbeing Framework would undermine landlord-developer claims that the existing neighbourhood is “no longer viable”, exposing what the Coalition has emphasized from the beginning that viability is synonymous with profitability. On

the other hand, giving Heron Gate a failing grade despite high levels of socio-cultural supports and affordability would reveal the inherent (and potentially racialized) flaws in the design, and would further shed light on the *raison d'être* of the framework to enhance profitability and productivity through community design and redevelopment.

The research presented in this dissertation has examined the Heron Gate neighbourhood of Ottawa South as a highly contested space grappling over two competing visions of the neighbourhood. On the one hand, the Herongate Tenant Coalition is struggling to maintain the working-class integrity of the neighbourhood as a lower-income, family-oriented, largely racialized and immigrant community. On the other hand, Timbercreek's corporate capture of the community has initiated a process of accelerated financialized gentrification where demoviction has been employed as a blunt instrument perpetrating mass displacement, to create a zone of affluent consumption for a predominantly higher-income, adult-oriented, white, and non-immigrant community. Timbercreek's efforts to demobilize the Herongate Tenant Coalition further demonstrate the implications of finance-driven gentrification and the suppression of tenant organizing. Contested spaces such as Heron Gate represent strategic battlegrounds emanating from struggles in the socio-spatial restructuring of the city under settler colonial urbanism and the financialization of rental housing. The ongoing battle between Timbercreek and the Herongate Tenant Coalition is a localized but crucial flashpoint in contestations surrounding affordable housing and urban space in Canada.

Housing Crises and Radical Approaches to Tenant Justice

A cursory glance into the world of housing procurement and policy, from micro urban to macro regional scales, is sure to consistently generate an underlying and ubiquitous theme: crisis. Housing has come to be defined by the crises that embody the institution of shelter. There simultaneously exists a housing shortage crisis, an affordability crisis, and an evictions crisis. The steady rise of rates of evictions around the globe has been described as “the silent social tsunami of our times” (Soederberg 2018). Rental housing insecurity affects millions of urban households, and interdisciplinary research has attended to accelerated processes of gentrification-induced displacement and the urgent need to decommodify and defend housing (Desmond 2016; Madden and Marcuse 2016; Soederberg 2021). The lucrative political economy of evictions and rental housing insecurity is driven by housing financialization, privatization, and a broader neoliberal assault on housing policy (Brickell, Arrigoitia, and Vasudevan 2017; Sassen 2014; Watt 2018). At the same time, displacement is driven by general trends of gentrification and removal of affordable housing options, where once affordable dwellings are either transformed or torn down and former lower-income tenants are replaced by incoming tenants that can afford higher rents. These trends disproportionately impact marginalized populations along race, gender, and class dynamics. In countries such as Canada, as well as other western countries—and in particular settler colonial societies—these simultaneous and complementary crises of evictions and affordability are prevalent; yet media and policy discourse in Canada is predominantly focused around home ownership and the incessant drive to realize the settler colonial dream of owning property. Therein

lies the root of these crises, which prompts further thought on the invocation of this terminology in the first place.

Radical approaches to social, political, economic, and environmental justice provoke deeper reflection into the meaning and root causes of various crises. While there is broad recognition of various crises within the housing field, there is a lack of deep understanding of what this actually means and what can be done about it (Madden and Marcuse 2016). This is evident when various levels of government (like the City of Ottawa or the Government of Canada) declare a housing emergency and largely ignore the root causes of such an emergency. Instead, the housing crisis is viewed as a technical problem that can be solved with typically market-oriented measures that may include policy modifications related to zoning and land use, mechanisms to increase home ownership, and various technological innovations. Madden and Marcuse (2016) instead want us to view housing in terms of a political-economic problem where the housing system is shaped by wider social conflict between different groups and classes. The key node of conflict shaping housing systems today is “a conflict between housing as lived, social space and housing as an instrument for profitmaking—a conflict between housing as *home* and as *real estate*” (Madden and Marcuse 2016, 4). Within this conflict the housing crisis materializes; there is a push and pull between social forces and relations of rule and resistance where ruling property relations continue to precipitate a crisis through the perpetual drive to profit off peoples’ homes and community living space. Within the ruling relations of property and land ownership, homes are susceptible to domicile.

Housing justice activists and tenant organizers that are engaged in struggle to defend their homes and communities see through the veneer of crisis popularized in

media and government discourse. A more radical approach questions the idea of crisis as it implies a departure from a norm; in the case of housing, a crisis implies that universal access to adequate and affordable housing is normal, and that we are only living in a temporary departure from a well-functioning standard (Madden and Marcuse 2016, 9). However, inadequate and unaffordable housing is a long-standing norm for lower-income and marginalized populations:

Housing crisis is a predictable, consistent outcome of a basic characteristic of capitalist spatial development: housing is not produced and distributed for the purposes of dwelling for all; it is produced and distributed as a commodity to enrich the few. Housing crisis is not a result of the system breaking down but of the system working as it intended (Madden and Marcuse 2016, 10).

This critical perspective on housing is part of a broader radical interpretation that is shared by and informs tenant organizing and social movement struggles for housing justice.

Over the course of carrying out this research I participated in numerous events (the majority held online during the pandemic) that featured tenant organizers and housing activists from multiple cities that shared their perspectives, approaches, and best practices in the face of gentrification and eviction. In the majority of these cases, organizers and activists were not engaged at the municipal level to try and negotiate policy tweaks that would allow for the creation of more affordable units. Instead, they were focused on building tenant power through non-hierarchical community-based organizing, on forming tenant committees and other groups and associations that engage in a diversity of actions and tactics in support of and in defence of tenants. The social relations of resistance enacted by these affiliations and affinities focused on issues relevant to their particular situational and territorial circumstances. However, a number of

commonalities emerge in tenant struggles against gentrification and displacement, including taking measures to halt evictions and defend existing affordable units, to fight back against rent increases (AGIs), and to compel landlords to maintain adequate living conditions by making timely and necessary repairs.

Within these movements and localized struggles, tenant organizers and activists generate their own theories and methods of social struggle. Knowledge production is an integral aspect emanating from the epistemological work and everyday activities that organizers and activists engage in the development of strategies to achieve largely localized victories. Within these organizer and activist circles there is an acute understanding of how the housing system functions and the forces that shape it. According to one person at a virtual event where activists were discussing and organizing against the acquisition of a community space by a financialized real estate firm in Winnipeg, “housing, precarity and homelessness is not a necessary evil of modern society, but is in fact a manufactured crisis that is the direct result of settler colonialist dispossession and the drive of capitalism to expropriate and commodify the necessities of life” (West Broadway Tenants Committee 2021). At the same event a tenant organizer explained their interpretation of the dimensions of housing crisis in relation to financialization and the broader Canadian economy:

The financialization of rental housing in Canada is currently propping up the Canadian economy. The crisis that we are facing in this situation is not a crisis of a lack of housing or even a lack of affordable housing. This really, really hits to the core of the Canadian economy itself... The only thing that is going to change this situation is when working class people are organized with each other and able to put forward a resistance that can change both the dynamics with landlords, but also the dynamics that are within our economic system itself... it is about building power and building strength in our neighborhoods and within working class communities to leverage the resistance against things that are happening in our

workplaces, with our government, with our landlords... (West Broadway Tenants Committee 2021).

Within tenant-based organizations that embrace more radical theories and approaches to housing justice, there is an overarching emphasis on tenant power and building working-class solidarity. Webber and Doherty (2021) refer to this as “territorial organizing” which is scalar organizing that is targeted toward and situated within the neighborhood-level. “Territory for us sets the parameters within which working class people are engaged with and integrated into organizing in their class interest” (240). Parkdale Organize, the organizational locale in which Webber and Doherty are involved, is not dedicated to operating within a particular sector, whether it be tenant, labour, migrant, or anti-poverty. Instead, they “aim to intervene within the myriad of struggles facing working class people within a particular territory. We aim to build the power of working class people, as a class, within that territory” (241). The effectiveness of grassroots groups like Parkdale Organize is their organization across sectors and bridging various struggles. Their work has inspired other radical-oriented movements and mobilizations of tenants against corporate and financial landlords (August and Webber 2019), including the Herongate Tenant Coalition and the Hamilton Tenants Solidarity Network. Inspired by rent strikes organized by Parkdale Organize, the Hamilton Tenants Solidarity Network organized a rent strike in 2018 against Ottawa-based InterRent REIT (Power and Risager 2019; Risager 2021).

A politics and praxis of refusal also inspired the Herongate Tenant Coalition, whose initial push to mobilize was to attempt to halt evictions and displacement from the neighbourhood. The Coalition used a diversity of tactics including media work, public

shaming, and research. The Herongate Tenant Coalition from the beginning rigorously researched its opponent and deployed strategies and tactics adopted from the organizing and theorizing work of other direct action-oriented tenant struggles. While I was initially hesitant about the role of academia contributing to the struggle in Heron Gate, I realize now that academic (and journalistic) research skills have meaningfully contributed to resistance efforts there. Collective research efforts surrounding the struggle have enabled a better understanding of the neighbourhood's ownership structure; of the landlord-developer, their investment strategies and tactics deployed against tenant opponents; of the neighbourhood itself, in particular the parcel that was demolished in 2018 and the residents who lived there—this research forming the basis of the human rights case; and of the role that municipal governance plays in the realm of maintenance and property standards, urban planning, and relationships with developers. While research has been an integral part of the struggle at Heron Gate, it should not overshadow the work on the ground—of door-knocking, mobilizing, and lobby meetings—of grassroots organizing. It is this mundane, thankless work that should be recognized above all, in building people power as part of collectivist struggles that are necessary when tenants are faced with the asymmetry of ruling relations that combines legal, state, and police power at the service of property and landowners. This does not mean that this type of work always results in great victories. Robyn Kelley (2002) writes: “Too often our standards for evaluating social movements pivot around whether or not they ‘succeeded’ in realizing their visions rather than on their merits or power of the visions themselves” (quoted in Choudry and Kapoor 2010). However, sometimes grassroots tenant organizing work can lead to small victories, some of which have been teased out in this dissertation.

Tenant organizers in Heron Gate—and elsewhere, especially during the COVID-19 evictions blitz in Ontario (Crosby 2021c)—have increasingly thrust the violence of evictions back into the public sphere by mobilizing to halt displacement and bring media attention to the social costs associated with enforcing evictions. As housing precarity continues to accelerate in Canadian cities, urban social movements that mobilize tenants and the broader working class are critical to curbing the tide of displacement stemming from the hyper-commodification of housing. Key to these efforts will be the centering of rent as a political issue (Stein 2019). Relying on neoliberal land-use policies like inclusionary zoning at the municipal level, and federal strategies that continue to emphasize homeownership and market solutions to affordable housing, will not amount to the radical shift in property relations required to move the needle toward anything that resembles housing and tenant justice. What is necessary to push for social and housing justice is a strong, organized, and radical tenant movement, where “tenant movements are uniquely capable of grounding the abstraction of ‘housing’ in the lived reality of home” (Stein 2019, 182). “A radical reimagining of a just, equitable future” (Hussein and Hawley 2021) is required to transform the social relations that produce the city, and the property relations that reproduce settler colonial urbanism.

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