# Problematizing Canadian exceptionalism: A study of right-populism, white nationalism and Conservative political parties

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## Abstract

The myth that Canada has resisted the "West's populist wave" persists despite evidence that demonstrates otherwise. This article traces how the assumption that Canada has avoided the rise of right-wing populism and white nationalism is tethered to the fiction that Canada has been a raceless society. After briefly reviewing the myth of racelessness and the history of right-populism in Canada, the article explores how the Reform Party of Canada conceptualized "the people" in racialized terms. This article examines how the Conservative Party of Canada's appeals to symbolic "diversity" and denial of systemic oppression have enabled more overt forms of racism. By examining the recent rise of hate crimes, this article makes the case that a direct link can be traced between the Conservative government's seemingly neutral discourses about the preservation of Canadian "heritage" and "common values" and the re-emergence of right-wing populism and the re-emboldening of white nationalism in Canada.

## Key words

Right-populism; racial governance; Conservative Party of Canada; Canada

## Resumen

El mito de que Canadá ha resistido la "ola populista de Occidente" perdura a pesar de que se puede demostrar lo contrario. Este artículo expone que la aceptación generalizada de que Canadá ha evitado el auge del populismo de derechas y del nacionalismo blanco está unida a la ficción de que Canadá ha sido una sociedad sin razas. Tras repasar brevemente el mito de la ausencia de razas y la historia del populismo de derechas en Canadá, el artículo explora cómo el Partido Reformista de Canadá conceptualizó "el pueblo" en términos racializados, y examina cómo las apelaciones del

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Partido Conservador de Canadá a la "diversidad" simbólica y su negación de cualquier opresión sistemática han permitido formas más abiertas de racismo. Al analizar el aumento reciente de crímenes de odio, el artículo argumenta que se puede hallar un nexo directo entre el discurso aparentemente neutral del gobierno conservador sobre la defensa del "patrimonio" y los "valores comunes" de Canadá y el resurgimiento del populismo de derechas y el reforzamiento del nacionalismo blanco en Canadá.

### Palabras clave

Populismo de derechas; gobierno racial; Partido Conservador de Canadá; Canadá

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## 1. Introduction

> As right-wing populism has roiled elections and upended politics across the West, there is one country where populists have largely failed to break through: Canada.
> (Taub 2017)

This article examines how the myth that Canada has resisted the "West's populist wave" persists despite evidence that demonstrates otherwise (Laycock 2005, Flanagan 2009b, Perry and Scrivens 2015, 2016). For example, in a June 2017 *New York Times* article, former human rights lawyer, Amanda Taub rehearsed the popular story that unlike in the United States and other parts of the globe, there is little worry about the rise of rightist, nationalist, racist, anti-immigrant, and neo-Nazi politics in Canada. Key to this story has been the role of Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) leaders such as former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper for their "shrewd calculation" in courting immigrants and for "cementing multiculturalism across all parties" (Taub 2017). This article challenges the myth that Canada has been inoculated from the spread of right-populism and white nationalism. It is precisely because of the virulence of these myths that a critical race analysis of the Canadian case is urgent. Examining the archive of Reform Party (1987–2000),[1] Canadian Alliance (2000–2003), and CPC (2003–) speeches, interviews, issue statements, and policy documents as well as the contributions of Conservative leaders such as Stephen Harper and Tom Flanagan allow for the exploration of an evolving racial governmentality in Canada. In order to analyze materials, I apply a critical race analysis of discourse and governance. This approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA), which considers the flexibility of racial governmentality, assists in analyzing processes of racialization in political text and talk. This approach allows for the examination of how political statements and debates reflect social relations and social and political power. The framework for governance used by critical race scholars allows for an exploration of the ways in which ideas about difference, hierarchy, value, and classification inform the political rationalities that underpin legal and political processes concerning racial difference (Hook 2001, Goldberg 2002).

This analysis of textual material involves paying critical attention to subtexts, contexts, and implicit knowledge in the communication of ideologies (van Dijk 2008). As Prior suggests, "documents should not merely be regarded as containers for words, images, information, instruction but (for) how they can influence episodes of social interaction and schemes of social organization" (Prior 2008, 822). CDA scholars have argued that "parliamentary debates should be studied as complex structures of social and political action and interaction" as they define and rationalize the system of racial inequality (van Dijk 2000, 103). Thus, political discourse analysis is the study of how power, ideologies, and public knowledge about issues such as immigration and integration are reproduced and legitimized "by the text and talk of dominant groups" (van Dijk 2008, 65). Due to their formal structure and public nature, political discourse, particularly in prepared speeches seldom appear overtly racist. Indeed, notions of tolerance and diversity may be extensively topicalized as ways to introduce more racist approaches. Disseminated through racially-coded language, such discourses have become the dominant mode for

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[1] Archived digitally in the Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections at the University of Calgary.

constructing and deploying racist ideologies (Goldberg 2002). As such, political discourses must be deconstructed to uncover "racial subtexts" (Li 2001). That is, in the Canadian context, critical race discourse analysis assists in understanding how latent racial resentments have circulated in racially encoded political discourse to manage public opinion and legitimate policy directions, which often have had the potential to manifest in explicit racial violence.

First, this article traces how the assumption that Canada has avoided the rise of right-wing populism and white nationalism is tethered to the fiction that Canada has been a raceless society. After briefly reviewing the myth of racelessness and the history of right-populism in Canada, the article explores how the Reform Party of Canada conceptualized "the people," "the elite," and "the other" in racialized terms. Then, by reviewing the Reform Party of Canada's right-populist rhetoric and policy positions on multiculturalism and immigration (1987–2000) and the rebranding of the Conservative Party of Canada (2003–present), this article shows how racial governance in democratic societies like Canada increasingly involved maneuvering racist agendas through symbolic discourses of diversity. It has thus become possible to present oneself or one's political party as *pro-immigrant* or *pro-diversity* while simultaneously committing to the annihilation of equity and social justice projects and programs. Finally, this article examines how the CPC's appeals to symbolic "diversity" and denial of systemic oppression have enabled more overt forms of racism. By examining the recent rise of hate crimes, this article makes the case that a direct link can be traced between the Conservative government's seemingly neutral discourses about the preservation of Canadian "heritage" and "common values" and the *re*-emergence of right-wing populism and the *re*-emboldening of white nationalism in Canada.

## 2. The myth of racelessness in Canada

The prevalent assumption that Canada has avoided the rise of right-wing populism is tethered to the fiction Canada has been a raceless society. Legal historians such as Constance Backhouse (1999) have documented how Canada's nationalist mythology – as having exceptionally avoided racist conflict that permeates other nations – has produced an "ideology of racelessness" (Backhouse 1999, 14). Backhouse has argued that because "Canadian history is rooted in racial distinctions, assumptions, laws and activities (…) to fail to scrutinize the records of our past to identify the deeply implanted tenets of racist ideology and practice is to acquiesce in the popular misapprehension that depicts our country as largely innocent of systemic racial exploitation" (Backhouse 1999, 7). Indeed, as a white settler colonial society, Canada's development has relied on racial hierarchy wherein laws and policies regulating the lives and livelihoods of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people have been designed to sustain "White Canada Forever" (Ward 1978). Histories about racial segregation in schools, slavery, and indentured labour, for instance, are "conveniently forgotten" in "self-congratulatory – and only partially true–national narratives of Canada as a 'haven' from slavery and racism" (Walker 2012, 4). Canadian critical race scholars have documented how the white settler colonial society construct has been made possible by attempts to erase or trivialize the existence of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized populations (Thobani 2007, Haque 2012). From the anti-Black race riots in Nova Scotia in the 1780s to the anti-Asian race riots in British Columbia in 1907, Canada's past and present have been

ensconced in white nationalist violence (Roy 1989, Walker 2012). Recently, in its re-opened investigation of white nationalist violence in Canada, even the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) traces right-wing extremism and violence to "the earliest days of colonization" (Boutilier 2018a).

The myth of racelessness that continues to define the country was crafted after the end of the Second World War when Canada, like other Allied powers, began to recognize the implications of legal exclusion (Price 2011). Specifically, the Allied nations feared losing the loyalties of racialized populations to the Soviet Union and to anti-colonial movements emerging in Africa and Asia (Price 2011). At this time, Canada, like other Western governments, introduced legal reforms "to eliminate discrimination on the basis of race" however, while it became unfashionable to be characterized as racist, "most acts of racial discrimination continued to go unaddressed" (Backhouse 1999, 7). De jure racial discrimination was replaced with new technologies of racial governance without necessarily abandoning racial hierarchies (Goldberg 2002, 210). In so-called raceless societies, racism is narrated as an antiquity and as characteristic of "unmodern" places elsewhere. Racism is imagined as an artefact of the past in the modern nation, which has, as it often must declare, atoned for its previous mistakes. By the mid-twentieth century, racism became isolated to the vulgar and irrational camp while citizens of the putatively raceless state continue to benefit from "reproducing racisms and distancing themselves from any implication in them" (Goldberg 2002, 99). In this context, the state enables its citizens to purge their "guilt and self-doubt" as "the less developed, the different" could be brought into civility through education and development that would instill values "rationally defined by white standards and norms, ways of knowing and being, thinking and doing" (Goldberg 2002, 206). Such a society is not raceless, however. Racism remains ensconced in political and legal institutions that shape the experiences of racialized populations (Backhouse 1999, James 2008). What is unique though, is that in such societies, all racial reference is rendered "unspeakable," especially naming systemic racism and calling for its end (Gill 2002). By denying and trivializing racism, racelessness comes to represent "state rationality regarding race" (Goldberg 2002, 203). In the name of neutrality, racelessness works to regulate heterogeneity and recentre whiteness, that is, the "norms of an Anglo-European moral tradition masquerading as modernizing universalism" (Goldberg 2002, 224). Thus, raceless states are racial states as they continue to rely on an abstract commitment to formal equality in order to regulate difference. The mobilization of such abstract liberal democratic values, embedded in common sense and institutionalized beliefs, have contributed to the reproduction of racial hierarchies. As such, raceless states obscure the racial violence on which its political, legal, and social order thrives.

As immigration policy opened up in the 1960s and as racialized groups in Canada struggled for protection against racism, a policy to manage the increasingly diverse population became necessary (Abu-Laban and Stasiulis 1992). In 1971, multiculturalism policy was designed to accommodate the *collective rights* of English and French Canadians as Canada's "two founding nations" and to symbolically recognize Canada's growing "other ethnic groups" (Haque 2012). While it is widely assumed that Canadian multiculturalism policy officially moved the nation away from an era of legal exclusion, it actually "promotes the myth that cultural freedom and equality of opportunity exist for everyone" (James 2008, 100). As James (2008) has argued, the definition of racism as

individual acts of discrimination obscures the systemic racism that persists. For instance, in his examination of the propagation of "codified" racist discourse in Canada, Li (2001) finds that while more blatant forms of racism might have been censured (although this more blatant variety has been recorded as on the rise) Canadian society continued to tolerate and at times promote a tacit version of racism, which is accepted and legitimated as *not* racist. The danger, of course, is that "the readiness of most people to reject the more extreme position of racism that makes the softer version so much more palatable and natural" (Li 2001, 90–91). Indeed, critical race scholars have examined how "the national subject remained empowered by displacing the patterns of discrimination and racial hatred onto the now disclaimed past or onto its own rejected, obstreperous, and stubborn minority in the present" (Thobani 2007, 154). That is to say, persistent racial violence was and continues to be framed as anomalous, isolated incidents unrepresentative of Canadian character, rather than as embedded in the social and political fabric of the nation.

This sort of symbolic multiculturalism stands in the way for the possibility of a more critical-radical multiculturalism that aims to dismantle racist structures to make way for a just society (Henry and Tator 1999). According to Thobani (2007), Canadian multiculturalism has become part of how the nation imagines itself, which allows it to manage racial difference "while claiming this difference to enhance its own cultural superiority" (Thobani 2007, 145). That is, multiculturalism discourse in Canada has been about the state management of heterogeneity wherein strategies and rationalities upholding racial hierarchies have merely been refashioned rather than reversed. For example, through various discourses on immigration and integration, the government can enforce an ideal homogeneity, which involves the exclusion of threats to an imagined national unity. In other words, racial violence is made rational as racist ideology persists under the guise of liberal democracy. That is, rather than disrupt the white settler construct, symbolic recognition and multiculturalism policy become part of a flexible racial governmentality that enables white settler societies to cast out those that risk destabilizing its dominance. As I have argued elsewhere, those whose political conduct potentially expose the contradictions of the white settler society, particularly Indigenous and Black populations, the racialized poor, and those profiled as terrorist threats to national security, are re-racialized as backward and their dispossession becomes attributed with their supposed *cultural* unfitness (Kwak 2019). Meanwhile, those deemed "proper" neoliberal subjects have been ascribed value for becoming law-abiding representations of *legitimate* cultural diversity. In this formulation, racialized immigrants are firmly cast as non-Canadian even as they integrate (Kwak 2019).

To be sure, while more open immigration policies and official multiculturalism were installed under Liberal Pearson and Trudeau governments, the Liberal Party of Canada has not always been understood as the champion of minorities. Anti-Asian regulations such as the Chinese Head Tax (1885), the Continuous Journey regulation (1908), and Japanese Internment (WWII) were established by the MacDonald and Mackenzie King governments. Collaboration between Liberal and Conservative governments on restricting racialized immigration can be traced back to the King Liberals (1921–1930; 1930–1948), which expanded on the policy directions of the Borden and Meighen Conservatives (1911–1921), which augmented exclusionary practices of the Laurier Liberals (1896–1911). For example, while announcing the repeal of the Chinese

Immigration Act, Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie King reiterated his commitment to keep Canada a white man's country (Price 2011). The people of Canada, he stated, do not wish "as a result of mass immigration, to make a fundamental alteration in the character of [their] population. Large-scale immigration from the Orient would change the fundamental composition of the Canadian population" (Canada, *Hansard*, 1 May 1947, vol. 3, 2644–46). This is to say that racial governmentality in Canada has historically involved the cooperation of both Liberal and Conservatives parties. This continued to be the case with the Mulroney Progressive Conservatives (1984–1993), Chretien Liberals (1993–2003), Martin Liberals (2003–2006), and Harper Conservatives (2006–2015).

Scholars have also noted that despite important achievements such as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and the Multiculturalism Act (1988) and regardless of the political party in office, systemic discrimination persists. For instance, there remains a legitimate concern about access to justice given that most Canadians do not have the financial resources to mount such challenges. In addition, in 2006, the Harper Conservatives cancelled the Court Challenges Program (CCP) first established in 1994 to provide financial assistant for important court cases that advance language and equality rights guaranteed under Canada's Constitution (Troster 2006). This cut disproportionately affected the poor, disabled, women, Indigenous people, immigrants from their ability to access their constitutional rights.

Despite policies designed for genocide and forced assimilation, Indigenous people, Black Canadians and other racialized groups have continued to resist colonial and racial violence. Any democratic, egalitarian aspects of the country including multiculturalism policy, the opening up of immigration and citizenship laws, and reforms to labour laws could not have been achieved without this resistance, which was met with the chagrin and opposition of what Stephen Harper has referred to as "old-stock" Canadians (Ha 2015, Hopper 2015). For example, by referring to polls conducted in 1994, Abu-Laban and Gabriel (2002) have found that "more than half of all Canadians were of the opinion that there were too many immigrants in the country" (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002, 47). These might seem startling statistics for a country that prides itself on multicultural "tolerance" however, studies have shown that anti-immigrant sentiment is deeply ensconced in the nation's white anxieties (Mackey 1999). Li (2001) has found that such reactions are premised on the idea that "unlike European immigrants who came earlier, the recent third-world type of 'non-white' immigrants bring with them different values and behaviours that are incompatible with those in traditional Canada" (Li 2001, 84). Key to this position is that "racism is unacceptable to Canada, and Canadians remain tolerant and are *not* being racists when they voice their concerns over too much diversity" (Li 2001, 85 emphases added). Under the guise of non-racist cultural preservation, right-populists have targeted Indigenous and racialized populations in Canada while blaming what they perceive to be lax immigration policy and as causes of supposed national disunity (Mackey 1999). As I will discuss in the next sections, such imagined white disadvantage would work as the political glue that gave rise to the Reform Party of Canada in 1987, which revived anti-feminist, homophobic and anti-immigration hysteria (Tremblay and Pelletier 2000, Bird and Rowe 2013). Indeed, scholars that have extensively studied right-wing extremism in Canada such as Barbara Perry (2010) have advanced strong critiques of Canada's claim to substantive multiculturalism by pointing to the persistence and proliferation of hate crimes in the

country. As such, symbolic multiculturalism, which is emptied of its social justice possibilities, obfuscates the existence of inequities between dominant and subjugated groups.

## 3. Right-populism in Canada

Populism has more recently been associated with right-wing politics as fascist and authoritarian movements increasingly emerge throughout the globe. However, as Laclau (2018) has noted, populism covers various movements and tends to deny classification into the Left/Right dichotomy. By drawing from the work of populism scholars such as Germani (1978), Laclau (2018) clarifies that populism "defies any comprehensive definition" and includes contrasting components such as "the affirmation of the rights of the common people as against the privileged interest groups (…) but fused with some sort of authoritarianism often under charismatic leadership" (Germani 1978 cited in Laclau 2018, 4). Commenting on such "democratizing promises" and despotic perils of populism, De la Torre (2015) has observed the "emotional appeal" of populism's potential to "unite the people" and create solidarity among those who see themselves as "marginalized by the power of cultural, economic, and political elites" (De la Torre 2015, 2–3). That is, rather than present itself as divisive, as many recent examples have proven, populist rhetoric appeals emotionally to an imagined common people fighting virtuously against perceived external threats.

Laycock (2005) has traced how populism has been "central to the politics of both the Left and the Right in English Canada over the past century" (Laycock 2005, 172). On one hand, the social democratic populism of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) (1932–1961) was "more distinctly anti-capitalist and more inclined to see greater similarity than difference in the difficulties presented to farmers and urban labour by Canadian capitalism" (176). On the other hand, the Social Credit League which ruled in Alberta from 1935 to 1968 targeted "prospective welfare state programmes and centralising 'state socialism' as the people's real enemies" (Laycock 2005, 177). Up until the 1980s, the CCF's left-populism more greatly impacted the Canadian federal party system than Social Credit's right-populism. Indeed, the CCF and its successor, the New Democratic Party (1961), became a lasting "third party" option against the Liberal Party of Canada and the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada and "it was possible to be a socialist in Canadian public life without being widely seen as anti-Canadian" (Laycock 2005, 177). However, since its emergence in 1987, under the leadership of Preston Manning, the Reform Party of Canada challenged the NDP's third party status and has profoundly shifted the "modestly egalitarian politics that Canadians have broadly supported over the past forty years" (Laycock 2005, 184). Right-wing ideological shifts, which ushered in the Thatcher Tories in Britain (1979) and Reagan Republicans in the United States (1980) and disappointment with what was viewed as the Mulroney Progressive Conservatives' acquiescence to Liberal policies that undermined Canadian values, provided fertile ground for the rise of a party claiming to represent "ordinary Canadians".

According to Laycock (2005), the Reform Party (1987–2000) and later the Canadian Alliance (2000–2003) appealed to "less educated low-and middle-income English Canadians experiencing civic alienation and social powerlessness" including voters who would actually suffer from welfare cutting agendas (Laycock 2005, 190). These right-

populist parties in Canada have argued that "mainstream parties and state bureaucrats favour immigrants, native peoples (…) and special-privilege-seeking women's groups and gays, over 'ordinary working people' in the distribution of state resources" (Laycock 2005, 182). Reform's policy proposals reflected a "strong commitment to social or moral conservatism, calling for recriminalization of abortion, restoration of capital punishment, a return to traditional family structure and values" (Laycock 2005, 157). Moreover, new right intellectuals and media personalities such as Ted and Link Byfield, Michael Coren, David Frum, and Ezra Levant, media outlets such as the *Alberta Report* and *BC Report* magazines, and one of Canada's national dailies, the *National Post* have "offered political commentary that often amounted to little more than cheerleading for the Reform and Alliance parties" (Laycock 2005, 183). Together, these forces argued against bureaucracy and taxation regimes that, in their view, pander to "special interests". Reform advocated for policies that would dramatically minimize the welfare state including the "replacement of many social service programmes by private charity work, 'workfare' as an alternative to welfare, elimination of state support for multicultural and other advocacy groups, and elimination of pay equity programmes" (Laycock 2005, 180). Similar to right populist parties elsewhere (Moffitt 2015, Zuquete 2015), Reform activists blamed the woes of the common people on "high taxes and state intervention in the entrepreneurial private economy" (Laycock 2005, 187). Their view of social justice was a neoliberal one, wherein equality of opportunity and individual freedom, rather than equality of outcome as achieved through affirmative action policies, are prioritized. Reform activists and leaders refused to understand that their supporters are also "special interests" and that Reform's conception of social justice would maintain an inequitable, socially unjust society. According to Laycock (2005):

> From its inception, the Reform Party was closely associated with big-business-sponsored right wing organisations such as the Fraser Institute, the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation, and the National Citizens' Coalition. In the Reform perspective, lobbyists, think-tanks and business organisations advocating new-right policy solutions were not just more legitimate public actors than the special interests; their opposition to special interest 'interventionist' agendas made them allies of 'the people'. (Laycock 2005, 187)

That is, as a populist party founded the belief that virtue lies with the "common people" undifferentiated by class, sex, or race, the Reform Party claimed that the precondition for true democracy is a special-interest-free zone, and thus propagated a colorblind approach. However, critical race scholars have found that it is through ideals of racelessness (evasions of racial reference) that racial hierarchy is normalized and reproduced (Goldberg 2002). As Laycock (2005) observed, all the interest groups that Reform aimed to exclude were "'equality seekers', while the groups they wished to politically enable were against state intervention, in favour of social programme reduction, and opposed to a meaningfully inclusive and diverse public sphere" (Laycock 2005, 191). Moralistic concerns about the deterioration of "traditional family structures, gender roles, and Christian values (…) had an authoritarian, anti-pluralistic tone" (Laycock 2005, 188). Put differently, this version of democracy amounts to the delegitimization of equity seeking voices by moving questions about racism, sexism, and homophobia from the public to private domain, and the maintenance of a socially and politically unjust society.

### 3.1. Race, racism, and the Reform Party of Canada

Preston Manning and the Reform Party rejected the recognition of groups as having any systemic disadvantage that could or should be addressed. Indigenous claims to sovereignty, multiculturalism policies, feminisms, labour unions, and anti-racism efforts all came under attack as corrosive to an otherwise cohesive and common national identity (Mackey 1999, Laycock 2005). Through a classically populist rhetoric, Manning insisted that "special interests" stood in the way of "the common sense of the common people" or "one big family" (Laycock 2005, 162). By examining the role and impact of right-wing populist figures such as Pauline Hanson on mainstream politics in the Australian context (a white settler colonial society, not unlike Canada), Moffitt (2015) provides a key observation that can apply to the Canadian context. Moffitt (2015) finds that right-populist leaders' conception of "the common people" in these societies has two central features: (1) they are Anglo-Saxon and (2) they view themselves as increasingly powerless due to the control of the liberal "elite". Key to this perceived victimization is the belief that "the people" are being attacked from both above and below. Moffitt (2015) summarizes this dichotomization of "the people" versus their nemeses:

> *From above*, 'the people' are seen to be attacked by 'the elite' who spur on (…) the compensation of minorities, which are construed as threatening the economic livelihood of groups such as small business owners, manual laborers, and farmers. *From below*, it is argued that 'mainstream' Anglo Australians are culturally under threat by immigration and multiculturalism. (Moffitt 2015, 300–301 emphases added)

Similarly, in the Canadian context, the Reform Party and its supporters imagined themselves as struggling against the tyranny of the ruling political apparatus including not only politicians and policymakers in Ottawa and intellectuals and media, deemed academic snobs, that would deign to critique Reform's exclusionary proposals but also systemically disadvantaged populations. In this quest, Reform reproduced a "politics of resentment" by drawing especially on anxieties around Indigenous claims to sovereignty and land. Obscuring ongoing colonial violence and dispossession, Manning, Flanagan, and other Reform activists have persistently attacked Indigenous people as "'special interests' demanding 'special rights' and 'race-based benefits' to the detriment of the white majority" (Flanagan 2000, Laycock 2005, 185). For example, in 1995, the Reform party created "a report on Native policy without consulting any of Canada's 607 band councils" (Laycock 2002, 144). In another example, in 1999 parliamentary debates on Bill C-9 An Act to give effect to the Nisga'a Final Agreement, Manning excoriated Indigenous rights, including title, as "socialist" (Manning, in Canada, *Hansard*, 26 October 1999, vol. 136, nº 11, 661–671).

Despite their insistence on a race-blind approach, the archive of Reform Party speeches and issue statements indicate that racism is also coded in party literature. On multiculturalism, Reform declared that it would repeal the Multiculturalism Act as well as cease funding and programs for "ethnic and racial organizations" (Manning 1992). Rather, the centrality of a European national culture and Canadian values were emphasized (Reform Party of Canada 1991, Harper 1991, Flanagan 1992). Clearly outlined in Reform's *Blue Book* (1991), *Green Book: Issues and Answers* (1991–1992) and *Blue Sheet* (1996–97) was a strong opposition against "'hyphenated Canadianism pursued by

the Government of Canada' (…), 'funding of the multiculturalism program' (…) and endorsement of 'the principle that individuals or groups are free to preserve their cultural heritage using their own resources'" (Laycock 2002, 86). Clearly, the Reform Party, and its later incarnations in the Canadian Alliance and the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC), believe that "the political right can accommodate inclusion only so long as the market remains the arbiter of social choice" (Laycock 2002, 79).

Similarly, Reform's immigration policy was designed to be "non-racist, non-discriminatory" and based on Canada's economic needs while emphasizing the need to crack down on "false refugees" supposedly set on abusing Canada's lenient immigration system (Reform Party of Canada 1991). Moreover, the 1996–1997 *Blue Sheet* promoted the "integration of immigrants into the mainstream of Canadian life" (Laycock 2002, 86). Like their disdain for hyphenated-Canadianism, Reform argued that immigrants must discard their ethnic identities. The obvious racial subtext here is that full integration into "Canadian culture" is the only way that racialized immigrants can be accepted into the nation. Thus, while Reform's discourse on multiculturalism and immigration might appear neutral at first sight, they reproduced white nationalist ideals and attracted racist supporters. Like right-populist parties elsewhere, the Reform Party "quickly became a vehicle for anti-immigrant sentiment among insecure 'average people'" (Laycock 2002, 130). Citing the 1993 Canadian Election Study (CES), Laycock (2002) found that Reform voters "registered the highest level of resistance" against admitting more immigrants to Canada among major party voters (Laycock 2002, 20). Social inequities arising from such policy positions that continue to privilege middle-to-upper class white men have been legitimized, as they supposedly reflect the natural superiority and inferiority of groups (Laycock 2002, 88).

Sexist, homophobic, and anti-immigrant outbursts from Reform leaders, candidates, and party-friendly media became so frequent that it became impossible to dismiss these as isolated incidents (Flanagan 1992). For example, the *BC Report* and *Alberta Report* repeatedly published stories claiming that Asian immigrants "would overrun the Western provinces" (Laycock 2002, 90). In October 1993, Preston Manning was publicly confronted at a speaking event at York University about Reform member John Beck who had made racist remarks calling on "Anglo-Saxons" to get involved with the problem of "evil immigrants" as reported by the *Globe and Mail* (Flanagan 2009b, 152). In another instance in February 1992, which one former Reform party advisor describes as "the most damaging publicity event", the *Toronto Sun* reported that four members of the neo-Nazi Heritage Front, including leader Wolfgang Droege, had joined the Reform Party. The members were expelled but "the headlines still reinforced the impression that the Reform Party was a magnet for extremists and would not clean house until forced to do so by exposure in the media" (Flanagan 2009b, 92). As such, Reform leaders identified public impression management as one of Reform's major weaknesses and thus it became a vital part in the Conservative rebranding or racial realignment strategies. To be sure, the problem, according to Reform leadership, was not that the party was attracting white nationalists because of its racism but that it was receiving negative publicity for it.

Despite these scandals, by 1997, Reform won Official Opposition standing in Canadian Parliament and became the new dominant right-wing party in the House by displacing the federal Progressive Conservatives and became the influential third party by

displacing the NDP. Reform worked tirelessly to reverse efforts established by previous governments by "pushing the post-1993 federal Liberal government in budget-cutting, tax-reducing directions that would have seemed unthinkable one decade before" (Laycock 2005, 179). Reform gained further legitimacy with the rise of Conservative party premiers at the provincial level. In Alberta, Ralph Klein (1993–2004) and in Ontario, Michael Harris (1995–2003) famously emphasized a "common-sense revolution" and "have governed with an emphasis on tax-cutting, social programme slashing, union-bashing, and the reduction of employment equity programmes for women and visible minorities" (Laycock 2005, 192). Still, citing the 2000 Canadian Election Study, Laycock (2005) observes how "for a large majority of Conservative voters, Reform seemed too 'extreme' on social issues, too intolerant towards Aboriginal people, visible minorities, and women" (Laycock 2005, 179). For these and other reasons, Manning campaigned to transform the Reform Party of Canada (1987–2000) into the Canadian Alliance (2000–2003). However, in the same year, Manning lost the new party's leadership race to Stockwell Day.

In 2003, Stephen Harper, formerly an Alberta Reform MP (1993–1997), won the Canadian Alliance leadership race against Day. In these days, there were many failed attempts to merge to two federal parties of the Right as a way to "maximize its vote-harvesting capacity" (Laycock 2005, 193). Then, in 2003, when Peter MacKay won the federal Progressive Conservative (PC) leadership race – ousting Joe Clark who had firmly rejected proposals to merge Reform and the PC party – the two parties finally merged to become the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC). In 2004, Harper won the leadership race for the new party and took aim at reforming the national party system (Laycock 2005, 181). However, even while the CPC attempted to abandon "many earlier Reform Party enthusiasms for a message of conventional new-right economic orthodoxy" for the sake of "vote harvesting" for the 2004 federal election, "many of its activists refuse to sideline their vocal social conservatism" (Laycock 2005, 194). After losing this election yet again to the Liberal Party, Stephen Harper decidedly "froze the undisciplined social conservatives out of his shadow Cabinet" (*ibid.*). Determined to unite the Canadian right and defeat the Liberals, Harper recognized the importance of, yet *liability* posed by, the CPC's social conservative allies.

## 4. Covert and overt racism in the rebranding of the Conservative Party of Canada

The Conservative Party of Canada's new leader, Stephen Harper, and Tom Flanagan, the Reform Party's former Director of Policy, Strategy and Communications,[2] recognized the importance of long-term movement building and strategic planning. Rather than having to continuously manage racist outbursts, the Conservative Party of Canada had to *appear* less racist than Reform while preserving whiteness as the normative core. If a Canadian Conservative Party hoped for any chance to implement their policies, it would need to rebrand itself to win elections and survive defeats. For Flanagan (2009a), the objective was clear: "If you control the government, you choose judges, appoint the senior civil service, fund or de-fund advocacy groups, and do many

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[2] Harper's campaign manager for the 2002 Canadian Alliance leadership race and the 2004 and 2006 elections.

other things that gradually influence the climate of opinion" (Flanagan 2009a, 274). On the rationale behind "moderate" CPC campaigning, Flanagan observed that "[w]e can't win if we veer too far to the right of the median vote" (Flanagan 2009a, 278). What former Reform leaders realized was that Canada's reputation for being a multicultural "country of immigrants" could be wielded towards profitable political and economic ends. A Conservative definition of multiculturalism could be achieved through the total neoliberalization of multicultural discourse. Once associated with the possibility of social justice, notions of multiculturalism and diversity have been *further* commodified to promote bootstrap individualism and capitalist competition. Immigration and multiculturalism policies would no longer emphasize social justice but rather focus on what Abu-Laban and Gabriel (2002) have called "selling diversity". In a context where everything is oriented to the market, any social disparity is attributed to individual incapacities rather than to structural inequity.

Sensitive to the emergence of a shifting discourse on race in Canada, Della Kirkham (1998), has provided an analysis of Reform Party's "discourse on race, ethnicity and equality," which can be extended to the CPC's discourses as well. For instance, leading up to winning a minority government in 2006, Harper often emphasized the party's embrace of diversity and multiculturalism while "promoting common values across Canada" (Harper, quoted in Canadian Issues 2005). In one breath, Harper claimed to embrace multiculturalism but emphasizes that "common values" are paramount. Kirkham (1998) observed the use of "code words" in Reform's articulation of immigration policy and, like other critical race scholars, found that abstract liberal language such as "equality" and "common values" as mobilized by the Party were not neutral but rather have been integral to sustaining unequal social hierarchies. Indeed, identifying problematic social conservative elements of Reform as barriers to electoral success does not mean that the Conservatives suddenly abandoned such ideologies. The problematic factions of Reform needed to be isolated in order to recast the image of the Conservative party in a way that made them palatable to a wider net of Canadians during elections. The very ideologies and policy orientations that originally garnered social conservatives would then be implemented once elections were won (Kwak 2018, 2019).

While preserving the traditional Anglo-Saxon base of the party, Reform leaders believed they also needed to undo the Liberal stronghold over *minority groups* to win elections. For instance, when former-Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party Sheila Copps compared Manning to well-known American bigot, David Duke and challenged Reform's "racist agenda", Flanagan has said that the *obvious* response would have been to refer the media to the few racialized members of Reform (Flanagan 2009b, 94). The same party that had "consistently opposed government policies intended to increase the participation of women or ethnic minorities" (Laycock 2002, 78) also made efforts "to recruit members of ethnic minorities as candidates in the 1997 and 2000 elections" (Laycock 2002, 145). As I have examined elsewhere, the Reform Party relied on racialized people that vocally opposed multiculturalism policy to authenticate its position (Kwak 2019). For instance, four racialized Reform members of parliament (MP) elected in 1997, were described as having "given Reform an important new weapon in the struggle for nationwide acceptance" (Cosh 1997 cited in Kwak 2019, 1717). Flanagan advised, "[i]f Reform is ever to win over youth and ethnics, it needs individual candidates to sell its message (…). It's

great that Rahim is present now for the purpose of mobilizing new constituencies, and he shouldn't be afraid to let himself be used as an emblem. He's young and he's non-white; he can play two different roles; and, yes, absolutely, he should do it" (cited in Kwak 2019, 1718). Racialized politicians were called upon by Reform to "inoculate the party" from "the viruses of extremism and racism which can be fatal to a new party" (Manning 1992).

Similarly, while Harper Conservatives denied that the party engages in demographic accounting while simultaneously providing a racial and gender inventory of caucus membership: "Our party does not conduct demographic profiling, as some other political parties do. To the best of my knowledge, among our caucus, we have the following numbers that correspond to these identified groups: 19 women, 7 immigrants, 10 visible minorities, and 1 Aboriginal person" (Harper, quoted in Canadian Issues 2005). Harper often repeated the script that the CPC includes voters and candidates from immigrant and minority communities and thus, cannot be accused of intolerance. The task, as Conservative strategists saw it, was not to appeal to these voters by promising them new benefits, it was to insist that "new Canadians" *are* new Conservatives by mobilizing racially essentialist tropes. Indeed, Asian Conservative MPs' participation in immigrations debates has not minimized discourses of immigrant illegality. Nor has their participation necessarily demonstrated heightened race-based consciousness in parliamentary debates. Rather, the contributions of Asian Conservative MPs become the very justification for the further restrictions on immigration legislation (Kwak 2018). This challenges the assumption that the Conservative party's courtship of "ethnic groups" has been key to Canada's resistance of right-wing populism (Taub 2017). Instead, it has become a barrier to realizing actual social transformation.

The CPC leadership also strategically re-articulated Reform's explicitly malignant positions into more palatable ones to unseat the Liberal government in 2006. In many ways, Harper Conservatives' decade-long reign in government (2006–2015) can be attributed, in large part, to the mainstreaming of right-populist discourse in Canada, which has had wide-reaching consequences. Indeed, the Reform Party's political discourse and policy directions crept into the mainstream of Canadian political discourse. According to Laycock (2002), "just as the Liberal party co-opted NDP policies in the 1960s and 1970s, so it has "co-opted (…) versions of Reform's policies regarding social-program cutbacks, deficit reduction, and taxation since 1995" (Laycock 2002, 151). Public policy debate directly affecting racialized populations not limited to multiculturalism, citizenship, immigration, and Indigenous affairs became imagined as raceless. According to neoliberal logic, to recognize race or any other category of difference would be to recognize "special interests". However, as Goldberg (2002) has noted, the deracialization of racial reference works to "naturally carry forward those racial privileges historically reproduced" (Goldberg 2002, 235). That is, the CPC's remodeling demanded an appeal to racial anxieties without drawing upon explicit racial reference. Instead, in dramatic moves that would change the way public debate is conducted, categories such as immigration, refugees, crime, and welfare were mobilized to evoke race implicitly. Far from neutral, the abstract liberal language mobilized was integral to sustaining inequitable social hierarchies. Put differently, while the party name has changed, that most of the key players of the new CPC were former Reform MPs meant that policy directions would be steered by these players (Flanagan 2009a). Indeed,

Flanagan (2009a) has documented the CPC's ability to broaden the Conservative appeal without abandoning Reform's core policies and principles.

Under the Harper Conservative government (2006–2015), discourses of integration and national security were mobilized to justify amendments to immigration and citizenship legislation. Bill C-31 Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act (2012), Bill C-43 Faster Removal of Foreign Criminals Act (2013), and Bill C-10 an Act to enact the Justice for Victims of Terrorism (2013) are just a few bills that are now law. Anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, and particularly, Islamophobic views have been mobilized in parliamentary debates that led to the successful passage of legislation that scholars, civil society, and human rights organizations across Canada and around the world have called unconstitutional and excessively punitive (Kwak 2019, 1721). Scholars have noted the intensification of Islamophobia in political debates that target Islam as the antithesis of modern secular democratic principles. Razack (2008), in particular, has examined how widespread anti-Muslim racism in the Western world since September 11, 2001 has mobilized the trope of civilized white people that must save imperiled Muslim women from dangerous Muslim men. This was perhaps most apparent in the Conservatives' Bill S-7 Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act (2015) proposed by former-Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Chris Alexander and former-Minister for the Status of Women Kellie Leitch and their related "barbaric cultural practices tip line" (Maloney 2015, Milewski 2015). In the same year, when a federal judge ruled that the niqab ban during citizenship ceremonies was unlawful, former Prime Minister Stephen Harper told the press that this was "not how we do things here" (Quan 2015). During the 2017 federal Conservative leadership race, Leitch continued to insist that Islam is incompatible with Canadian values when she proposed screening all immigrants and refugees for "anti-Canadian values" through a survey of their views on rule of law, gender equality, sexual orientation, and religion (Tunney 2016).

Over the past decade, several bills have been proposed to address the perceived Muslim threat to Quebec's national identity and secular values. For instance, in 2010, Bill 94 was introduced to ban Muslim women from wearing "face coverings", specifically, the niqab, when requesting government services (Razack 2018, Mahrouse 2018). Calling for similar regulations, in 2017, Bill 62 An Act to Foster Adherence to State Religious Neutrality and, in Particular to Provide a Framework for Requests for Accommodations on Religious Grounds in Certain Bodies was passed in Quebec (Mahrouse 2018, 476). Especially since September 11, 2001, researchers have documented increased violence and harassment directed at Muslim communities. Through political rhetoric, Muslims have been targeted as threats, such as Harper's description of Islamicism as "the greatest threat to the West" (CBC News 2011). Through media depictions, Muslims have been associated with terror (Mahrouse 2018). In this context, wherein political leaders and news media reinforce the perception that any Muslim is questionable, people with prejudices are granted legitimacy in expressing anti-Muslim attitudes, which has increasingly turned into violent action (Perry 2015).

In an interview with the *Toronto Star*, Bernie Farber who leads the Canadian Anti-Hate Network emphasized how the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) dismissed the threat of the far right when the hate group Heritage Front was active in the 1980s and 1990s (Boutilier 2018b). Following this

trend, the *Toronto Star* reported that in 2016, CSIS abandoned an ongoing investigation into Canada's far-right insisting that it "no longer constituted a national security threat" (Boutilier 2018b). However, warning that white nationalist beliefs often do turn into action, Barbara Perry and Ryan Scrivens told the *Toronto Star* that "between 1980 and 2015, there have been more than one-hundred and twenty incidents involving right-wing extremist groups in Canada. The 'incidents' range from drug offences to attempted assassinations, firebombings and attacks. That's compared to seven Jihadist-inspired incidents over the same period" (Boutilier 2018b). Despite this, Scrivens and Perry (2017), have found that most counter right-wing movement efforts have been directed at radical Islamic groups and there is a disturbing tendency for Canadian officials to trivialize the threat of white nationalism and right-wing extremism.

It is troubling that CSIS only recently re-opened its investigation into far-right extremism in Canada when anti-Muslim violence has been endemic for decades. For instance, on 29 January 2017, a twenty-seven-year-old white university student with "anti-immigrant", "pro-Trump", and "anti-feminist" ideologies named Alexandre Bissonette entered a mosque in a suburb of Québec City and opened fire, killing six people and injuring many others (Mahrouse 2018, 471–473). Police interrogation of Bissonnette revealed that he espoused far-right beliefs that conflated immigrants and refugees with terrorism. By analyzing court documents from his sentencing hearing, Mahrouse (2018) found that Bissonette's social media activities plainly revealed his extensive consumption of far-right material and that he had "studied previous mass murders including Marc Lepine, who killed fourteen women in Montreal in 1989, and Dylann Roof, the white supremacist who committed the Charleston church mass shooting in 2015, killing nine black people who were in bible study" (Mahrouse 2018, 478).

Mahrouse (2018) has examined how this show of explicit anti-Muslim racist violence was "minimized and denied". For instance, terrorism charges were not laid against Bissonette even though both Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Quebec premiere "explicitly condemned his actions as a terrorist attack" (Mahrouse 2018, 479). Mahrouse (2018) notes how this outcome was "consistent with the widespread reluctance to attribute racially motivated violence to white men" (Mahrouse 2018, 481). Citing Inderpal Grewal's (2017) work on the figure of "the shooter", Mahrouse (2018) finds that "where the perpetrator is white and Christian, he is not referred to as a killer, murderer, or criminal (and I would add, terrorist), and this in turn marks them and their crimes as exceptional" (Mahrouse 2018, 481). What allowed Bissonette to escape terrorism charges is the view that systemic racism plays no role in shaping individual racism. However, it is systemic racism that has motivated the rise of anti-Muslim hate crimes in Quebec *since* the mass murders in 2017. As documented by Mahrouse (2018), "the mosque where the massacre took place continues to be the target of hateful messages, including a package containing a copy of the Qur'an, its cover slashed where the name of Allah was written in Arabic. The package also held a photo of a pigsty with the message that Muslims could bury their dead there. In addition, a car belonging to the mosque's president was set on fire in his driveway" (Mahrouse 2018, 492). It is thus the systemic, sometimes covert, racist ideologies, politics and rhetoric that shape more overt incidents of racism that one must challenge.

In 2018, soon after defecting from the Conservative Party of Canada, Maxime Bernier founded the far-right populist People's Party of Canada. In classically populist rhetoric, Bernier claimed that his party speaks for "all Canadians" rather than "special interest groups". While Bernier has stated that "xenophobia has no place in his political venture" (Boutilier 2018b), his party vowed to end "extreme multiculturalism". As though it were lifting from Reform policy documents, the People's Party of Canada emphasized the "cultural integration of immigrants", the "distinct values of a contemporary Western civilization" (The People's Party of Canada 2019a), "limiting immigration" by focusing on economic immigration in ways that would not be detrimental to "Canadian workers", and insisting that all immigrants would be screened for values that accord with Canadian norms (The People's Party of Canada 2019b). While the People's Party failed to gain any success in the 2019 federal election, their ideas about immigration did resonate, for some, even racialized, Canadians (Mosleh and Green 2019). While perhaps perceiving Bernier's tactics as unpalatable, the People's Party's position on multiculturalism and immigration did not depart greatly from Conservative supporters' positions. Citing a 2018 EKOS survey, Valpy and Graves (2018) found that the Conservatives' position on immigration gave them a lead against the Trudeau Liberals ahead of the October 2019 federal election, showing that "65 per cent of Conservative supporters reported "too many immigrants are coming into Canada from non-European, non-white countries, and too many of them are visible minorities". Some researchers have attributed such racial resentment to economic recession by calling it "part of our cognitive wiring as human beings" and that the move towards "ordered populism" is a sort of regressive "survival mechanism" (Valpy and Graves 2018). This is despite evidence that has shown that "most immigrants get pushed to the bottom of the economic pile when they arrive" and that "opposition to immigration is found to be highest in places where the least number of migrants settle" (Valpy and Graves 2018). These statistics reveal how white Canadians have historically tended to dismiss the fact that their economic precariousness might be connected to an unsustainable capitalist order that thrives on disparity and instead turn towards racial resentment (Ward 1978).

Scholars, news media, and intelligence services have recognized that waves of populism in the United States and Europe have also emboldened right-wing extremists in Canada. Representatives from police services and the armed forces have also gone on record to confirm the threat of right-wing extremism in Canada. For instance, Barbara Perry has observed that between 2015 and 2018, there has been "a 20 to 25 per cent jump in the number of right-wing extremist groups active in Canada" (quoted in Boutilier 2018b). Statistics Canada has also reported that "the number of police-reported hate crimes in 2017 was 47% higher than in 2016, marking the fourth consecutive annual increase and that in 2017, 43% of all police-reported hate crime was motivated by hate of race and ethnicity (Statistics Canada 2018). The upward trend in right-wing extremism prompted news media outlets to probe the rise of hate crimes. In 2018, the *Toronto Star* released a three-part series examining the rise of white nationalist and right-wing extremist groups in Canada. By tracking their online and offline activities in recent years, researchers and some news media outlets have also noticed the building of alliances between far-right groups including La Meute, Soldiers of Odin, the III%, Storm Alliance, and the Proud Boys (Boutilier 2018b). As reported in the *Toronto Star*, Moonshot CVE, a U.K.-based counter-extremism research group, tracked a total of 5,214 far-right web searches in

Canada over a two-week period. The results revealed that "search terms included David Duke, the former leader of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States; popular neo-Nazi phrases and code words" and "other white supremacist imagery" (Boutilier 2018a). These research findings reveal how the spread of far-right extremist ideologies has indeed reached Canada.

Scholars have also examined how newly emboldened alt-right groups are increasingly "weaponizing free speech and using it as a rhetorical prop in campaigns of ideological intimidation" (Zine 2018). Zine (2018) notes how institutions including Canadian universities have capitulated to the "normalization of bigotry" by providing public platforms for alt-right personalities. To name just a few recent examples, Faith Goldy, with ties to Neo-Nazi groups, was scheduled to speak at Wilfrid Laurier University on the eve of the International day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Similarly, while speaking at the University of Waterloo, American Ann Coulter stated that the "U.S. should invade Muslim countries and kill all the leaders" (as quoted in Zine 2018). The many followers of alt-right ideologues have aggressively attempted to "silence, harass, and intimidate those who hold opposing views" (Zine 2018). For these reasons, it is vital to "differentiate between legitimate dissent that may include unpopular or controversial views and speech acts that incite hatred" (*ibid*.). Relatedly, calling out right-populist divisive politics has meant being classified as part of Canada's cultural elite. By this twisted logic, the victims of systemic racism become cast as villains while those that have profited from structural inequities become the protagonist of the national story. For instance, it has meant that even Indigenous land defenders and their allies standing against ongoing colonial dispossession "need to check their privilege" (Turnbull 2020).

Right-populists have mobilized in an effort to reassert narrow definitions of Canadian national identity and have tailored their message to strike a chord in the larger public, and build on existing insecurities such as immigration as a perceived threat to white identity. Aptly described as "button-down terror", Perry finds that hate movements have co-opted civil rights language and have weaponized freedom of expression in order to appear legitimate. Through discursive sanitation, right-populism has gained legitimacy since the 1980s in contemporary politics. This more coded and obfuscated strategy will likely continue to be necessary for the movement's survival but it is clear that this more insidious approach has helped to make explicit hate and violence more acceptable.

## 5. Conclusion

This article has challenged the myth that Canada has avoided populism and right-wing extremism. A critical race approach to the study of governmentality allows us to trace a bold through line between the Harper Conservatives era (2006–2015) and the intensification of right-wing extremist violence in Canada in what has been called "the age of disruption" (Harper 2018). White supremacist movements have gained strength and legitimacy over the last several decades by moving from the fringes to the mainstream of Canadian politics, culture, and society. What sets the contemporary movement apart from historical movements is that it subsists on its ability to hide in plain sight (Perry 2000). Right-populist terror's capacity to escape the label and thus, the regulation precisely signifies white privilege. Right-populism has been legitimized as part of a putative struggle for "national unity" and "Canadian values" and its targets are

instead cast as problems to be eradicated. Through discourses of denial and trivialization, the myth of Canadian racelessness continues to prevent Canadians from recognizing racial violence and reinforces their belief in their innocence with respect to racism (Razack 1999). With this article, I urge readers to understand the racial subtext of calls for the preservation of "Canadian heritage" and "Canadian values" as calls to violence against those who have already been imperiled by white nationalism. Somehow, it is still widely assumed that Canada's right-populist white nationalism has failed to find a home within traditional federal political parties. Without recognizing the direct linkage between seemingly benign political rhetoric and the documented rise of white nationalist violence, without comprehending how the spectacular violence is made possible because of routinized speech about "too much diversity," "too many immigrants", "threat against Canadian identity", "threat to rule of law" that criminalizes and re-victimizes the targets of white nationalism, this violence will continue apace.

In a special issue of *Le Travail* (2014), Canadian historians commented on the impact of the new right on the politics of history in Canada. Specifically, scholars explored how the Harper government's rewriting of the country's record was integral to its project of "destroying key public and social institutions, eroding the country's scientific and intellectual infrastructure, pushing for a less fair, more unequal Canada" (Noel 2014, 212). These scholars have insisted that we look at the context of Harper's broader agenda in reshaping Canada's national history and identity. Indeed, what was achieved by emphasizing right-populist values as Canadian values? The nation's historical record – marked with controversy and resistance against colonialism, sexism, and poverty – proved threatening to the Harper administration's neoliberal, militarist, and assimilationist social vision and political agenda. The solution was propaganda to support those Conservative values and push forth a policy agenda that was "very closely tied to the needs of big business" (Finkel 2014, 199). The result became the erasure and denial of histories of colonialism and the criminalization of dissent against state-sanctioned racial violence. Sanitized versions of Canadian history have been mobilized to de-fund empirical research that has documented systemic oppression. The Harper Conservatives also hung their hats on official apologies as attempted inoculation against charges of racism (Kwak 2018). However, claims to have "addressed wrongs like Indian Residential Schools and the Chinese Head Tax to help Canadians move forward together"[3] prove meaningless as demonstrated by the Conservatives' denial of a national crisis of murdered and missing Indigenous women, systemic police violence targeting Black Canadians, and immigration law reforms that have intensified the criminalization refugees. And lest we forget, in 2009, one year after apologizing for Residential schools,[4] Harper declared that Canada has no history of colonialism.[5] The government instead focused its attention on highlighting the nation's "royalist and military origins". For instance, Harper insisted that by mentioning Remembrance Day, the Conservative

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[3] Stephen Harper's remarks to celebrate the fifth anniversary of his government, "Canada is, and always has been, our country" (quoted in Wherry 2011).

[4] The Indian Act (1876) allowed the federal government to establish Residential Schools to strip Indigenous people of their identity. Integral to the colonial project of elimination, approximately 150,000 Indigenous (First Nation, Métis, Inuit) children were taken from their families and communities and made wards of the state.

[5] Stephen Harper's remarks at a press conference in Pittsburg at the announcement that Canada would host the 2010 G20 meeting (in Finkel 2014, 197).

version of the citizenship guide imparts "a deeper understanding of Canada's history, symbols, and values" (Kealey 2014). Indeed, scholars have warned that the re-writing of history under Harper Conservatives involved a calculated attempt to propagate hostility and made the nation even more dangerous for historically marginalized communities.

The current political moment, in particular, demands the investigation of what is achieved by declarations of racelessness. For instance, once a society has been declared raceless or past racism, it becomes possible to reinvigorate racial anxieties. An analysis of the Reform Party of Canada's emergence in 1987 and its impact on mainstream political life in Canada challenges the widely-held assumption that Canada has been somehow inoculated from the rise of far-right populist movements observed elsewhere. Given the historical context of racial governance in Canada and thus, by understanding that Canada has been deeply shaped by racist ideologies and politics, it is unsurprising that more recent examples signify, not a new emergence but rather, a re-emboldening of right-populist white nationalism.

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