

FEATURED ESSAY: THE PRESENT IS HISTORY

# Settler Colonialism, Illiberal Memory, and German-Canadian Hate Networks in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries

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## Abstract

This article is part of the collaborative research project Populist Publics. Housed at Carleton University ([www.carleton.ca/populistpublics](http://www.carleton.ca/populistpublics)), it applies a data-driven analysis of online hate networks to trace how false framings of the historical past, what we call historical misinformation, circulates across platforms, shaping the politics of the center alongside the fringes. We cull large datasets from social media platforms and run them through a variety of different programs to help visualize how harmful speech and civilizational rhetoric about race, ethnicity, immigration, multiculturalism, gender equality, and LGBTQ+ rights are circulated by far-right groups across borders, noting specifically when and how they are taken up in the mainstream as legitimate discourse. Our interest is in how the distortion of the historical record is used to build alternative collective memories of the past so as to undermine minority rights and cultures in the present. We began with a basic question: To what extent is this actually new? As much as the atomized publics of our current day create ideal conditions for radical ideas to fester and circulate, it was obvious to us that we needed to look for linkages across time, drawing on interdisciplinary methods from the fields of history, media and communication, and data science to identify the tactics, strategies, and repertoires among such groups and individuals. By analyzing German-Canadian relations in particular, what follows is a first attempt to piece together some of these connections, with a focus on far-right hate groups—homegrown and imported—in the settler colonial project that is today's Canada.

**Keywords:** populism; transnational; illiberalism; settler colonialism; migration; networks; Germany; Canada

On December 7, 2022, German police raided more than 130 homes and made 25 arrests across 11 German states in connection with an alleged coup plot by adherents of the *Reichsbürger* (Citizens of the Reich) movement.<sup>1</sup> This was one of the largest counterterrorism investigations in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. Shortly after, the Public Prosecutor General at the Federal Court of Justice issued a press release outlining details of the group's planned activities. According to intelligence, the group had been planning their coup since

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<sup>1</sup> Christoph Schönberger and Sophie Schönberger, ed., *Die Reichsbürger: Verfassungsfeinde zwischen Staatsverweigerung und Verschwörungstheorie* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2019); Andreas Speit, ed., *Reichsbürger: Die unterschätzte Gefahr* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2017).

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November 2021.<sup>2</sup> Its armed wing would attack the German Parliament and overthrow the constitutional order. The group would then establish a state modeled on the German Reich of 1871 with an interim government led by Prince Heinrich XIII, the group's seventy-one-year-old leader. A former MP of the far-right *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany, AfD) was to become Justice Minister and so-called *Heimatschutzkompanien* (regiments to protect the Homeland) would consolidate the new system and eliminate remaining political opponents on the local level.<sup>3</sup>

As shocking as this news story was—and is—it is perhaps surprising to note that there has been a *Reichsbürger* real estate agent and alt-right German “colony” on the eastern Canadian island of Cape Breton since the early 2000s.<sup>4</sup> How should we understand the attraction of Canada to the *Reichsbürger*, one of several groups of émigré German far-right sympathizers over the years taken with the promises of this northern nation? While we are tempted to think of them as transplanted fascists and conspiracy thinkers radicalized by COVID—and some of them are—we are better served by considering them against the backdrop of a much longer history of transatlantic hate networks that gave succor to something we might call “illiberal drift,” which Helena Rosenblatt argues points to the tensions and inequalities within liberalism that can produce manifestations like these in established democracies.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as we'll see here, there is great compatibility between the settler colonial project and the illiberalism of the far-right. Recognizing some of these shared values nudges us to think more deeply about the relationship of liberal democracy to white supremacy, populism, and fascism.

Although it had surfaced as an idea in the nineteenth century, explaining Caesarism in the French case and the slide toward twentieth-century totalitarianism in Germany, there is a tendency to view illiberalism as a post-1945 concept and phenomenon, bound to authoritarian governments on the right. Of course, the term was in wide use by earlier generations of German historians who saw the nineteenth century as indelibly marked by examples of “liberalism in an illiberal society.” In the introduction to his essays on the political culture of modern Germany, Fritz Stern hoped that the German case might serve as “an object lesson in the failure of illiberalism.”<sup>6</sup> Decades later, the fall of communism brought the term back into use. In 1995, Daniel Bell, David Brown, Kanishka Jayasuriya, and David Martin Jones edited an influential volume on the authoritarianism of Asia Pacific democracies as a challenge to the optimism of Francis Fukuyama's end of history dictum. And in a similar vein, Ivan Kratsev and Fareed Zakaria took to the pages of *Foreign Affairs* in 2018 to explain how the crisis of democratization in the former Eastern bloc led to populist and authoritarian rule in Poland and Hungary.<sup>7</sup>

Increasingly, political scientists and political philosophers like Marlene Laruelle have started to see illiberalism as marking the space in the middle of a “continuum from democracy to non-democracy, describing a move from the former to the latter.” It is sometimes

<sup>2</sup> Press release, December 12, 2022, <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/aktuelle/Pressemitteilung-vom-07-12-2022.html?nn=478184>.

<sup>3</sup> Press release, December 12, 2022, <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/aktuelle/Pressemitteilung-vom-07-12-2022.html?nn=478184>.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Doerry, “Elche, Bären, Eva Herman: Rechtes Netzwerk lockt Gleichgesinnte nach Kanada.” *Der Spiegel Plus*, July 23, 2020, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/rechtes-netzwerk-lockt-gleichgesinnte-nach-kanada-elche-baeren-eva-herman-a-ad2c792a-f677-4c0f-a624-50f4aaa93e80>.

<sup>5</sup> Helena Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Fritz Stern, *The Failure of German Illiberalism: Essays on the Political Culture of Modern Germany* (New York: Knopf, 1972), 211–12. See also James Sheehan, *German Liberalism in 19th Century Germany* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Bell, *Towards Illiberal Democracy in Pacific Asia*, 1st ed., St Antony's Series (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Ivan Kratsev, “Eastern Europe's Illiberal Revolution: The Long Road to Democratic Decline,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/hungary/2018-04-16/eastern-europes-illiberal-revolution>; Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 1997, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/rise-illiberal-democracy>.

used to challenge the inevitability of liberalism itself as an ideology and ideal, identifying ideologies and practices from within and outside to decouple it from democracy.<sup>8</sup> Historians such as Tyler Stovall have gone in another direction still, drawing out liberalism's internal contradictions and citing the exclusivity of definitions like freedom and liberty as always already racialized and white.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, scholars of contemporary Canada have long noted the anti-democratic tensions within what historian Ian McKay has called the "liberal order framework." In a much-cited article from 2000, McKay points to the clumsy relationship of liberalism to democracy among the Fathers of Confederation to say nothing of the denial of rights to specific classes, races, and groups by policies that undercut individual and collective self-determination.<sup>10</sup> In the intervening years since McKay's landmark piece, this argument has only grown stronger in tone. In "reckoning with the realities of Canadian history," University of British Columbia historian Henry Yu argues that "the valorization and expansion of democracy" in this country "was inextricable from the dynamic changes in the politics of white supremacy." Whether in the form of abstract universalism or the protection of property, the liberal project in Canada was "predicated for most of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on the inclusion of new members in the body politic" while actively "depriving resources and opportunities for, others."<sup>11</sup> Not a few Canadian historians question how free, open, and democratic a settler colonial state can be if it promotes the active discrimination of a large portion of its population. And they are not alone.

Indigenous legal scholars have also detailed the circumscribed definitions of sovereignty at play in Canadian liberal democracy where whiteness has served as a territorializing force to dispossess First Nation, Inuit, and Métis people from their land. Indigenous groups have been systematically denied rights to language and culture which distanced them from collective traditions and identity—all through legal and constitutional means. Indigenous scholar Val Napoleon, writing together with Hadley Friedland, argues that Canadian liberal constitutionalism itself denies the precedents and power of Indigenous legal traditions.<sup>12</sup> In *Red Skin, White Masks*, Dene political scientist Glen Coulthaud claims the very concepts of freedom, popular sovereignty, consent, property, recognition, and equality are inextricable from the coercive practices and ideologies of settler colonialism, which uses myths around land use and occupancy, space, history, and heritage to justify European hegemony.<sup>13</sup> Settler colonialism reveals a political-economic system that mixes liberal and illiberal features, liberal in the sense that there is the architecture of universalism, individual rights, and corporate or group identity protections and illiberal in the way that these same rights are fundamentally inaccessible to all.<sup>14</sup> Viewed this way, we can see the appeal of Canada for far-right adherents as a place where foreign and homegrown ideas of race, nation, empire, and sovereignty came into contact, creating conditions that might be attractive to hate groups and mainstream society as well.<sup>15</sup> As we will show here, media, both analog and digital, helped move things along.

<sup>8</sup> Marlene Laruelle, "Illiberalism: A Conceptual Introduction," *East European Politics* 38, no. 2 (April 3, 2022): 303.

<sup>9</sup> Tyler Stovall, *White Freedom: The Racial History of an Idea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Ian McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 4 (December 2000): 616–51.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Yu, "Reckoning with the Realities of History: The Politics of White Supremacy and the Expansion of Settler Democracy in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in *Constant Struggle: Histories of Canadian Democratization*, ed. Julien Mauduit and Jennifer Tunnicliffe (Montreal: McGill-Queens Press, 2021), 390.

<sup>12</sup> Val Napoleon and Hadley Friedland, "An Inside Job: Engaging with Indigenous Legal Traditions through Stories," *McGill Law Journal* 61, no. 4 (2016): 725–54.

<sup>13</sup> Glen Coulthaud, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Aaron John Spitzer, "The Settler-Rights Backlash: Understanding Liberal Challenges to Indigenous Self-Determination," *Territory, Politics, Governance*, April 28, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2022.2060301>.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

In what follows, we sketch out the emergence, migration, and circulation of far-right and right-leaning ideas in Canada with a focus on synergies in the 1920s and 1930s within the settler colonial state, and the role of newspapers and film in firming up fascist messaging. We then turn to an examination of the postwar revivification of fascist activism including the activism of Holocaust denier Ernst Zündel and his role as an early adopter of digital media. Finally, we return to the German far-right colony in Nova Scotia to plumb the role of social media itself in forging a place for white supremacist groups in contemporary Canada. Ultimately, we argue that a focus on cultural imaginaries, networks, and media provides compelling evidence of the transatlantic traffic in hate between these two countries, which might be opened up to further analysis in thinking about the place of illiberalism and specifically illiberal forms of memory in democratic settings.

### Illiberal Memory

The postwar era and especially the fall of communism gave rise to an international memory boom as nations wrestled with their own legacies of violence.<sup>16</sup> This process of introspection took on different forms from apologies for past crimes to truth and reconciliation commissions, war crimes trials, and the construction of national monuments and museums. In many Western nations, memory activism at both the state and societal level buttressed liberal notions of universalism and democratic pluralism, although not all citizens were able to lay claim to those ideals equally.<sup>17</sup> As Gavriel Rosenfeld has argued, democratic memory regimes were further challenged by another form of memory, an illiberal one, that served conservative political projects through an emphasis on pride and national unity, overlooking more sinister moments in a nation's past.<sup>18</sup> Yvonne Rosteck has suggested illiberal memory is particularly entrenched in countries that have done little to confront their own divisive historical legacies.<sup>19</sup> It gains expression in monolithic preoccupations with heritage, civilization, and national rootedness over and against fraught, contingent, and complex explorations of national and colonial history.

Illiberal memory centers on ideal types of good and bad citizens, heroes and scapegoats, who help form the boundaries of desired and disdained social, gender, and ethnic ideals. Like illiberalism, it is not just prevalent in countries that have taken the authoritarian turn. It has found a home in modern democracies as well and helps explain the appeal of certain countries to the far-right. In early-twentieth-century Canada, white supremacists such as Adrien Arcand helped till the ground for a new form of illiberal memory, drawing on principles from fascist Germany and Italy and mixing them with the homegrown antisemitism and anti-Indigeneity that were pervasive in the settler colonial state.<sup>20</sup> As historian Tyler A. Shipley highlighted in 2020, this was a strategy that resonated with political officials at the highest Canadian level, as when people like Prime Minister Mackenzie King started “flirting with Fascism” in 1937.<sup>21</sup> Arcand's disciple, post-1945 German immigrant Ernst Zündel, continued to nurture these social, cultural, and intellectual relationships, using gaps in the Canadian Criminal Code to fullest advantage in spreading hate propaganda and Holocaust denial. In the 1990s, the shift from analog to digital participatory media provided

<sup>16</sup> Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad, ed., *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Jenny Wüstenberg, *Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, “The Rise of illiberal Memory,” *Memory Studies*, February 15, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698020988771>.

<sup>19</sup> Yvonne Rosteck, *Wie Globalisierung und Mediatisierung die Demokratie verändern* (Zurich: vdf Hochschulverlag AG an der ETH Zürich, 2018), 83–84.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-François Nadeau, *The Canadian Führer: The Life of Adrien Arcand* (Toronto: Lorimer & Company, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Tyler A. Shipley, *Canada in the World: Settler Capitalism and the Colonial Imagination* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2020), 131.

new possibilities for the transfer, circulation, and consumption of civilizational rhetoric and heritage on a mass scale.<sup>22</sup> As we well know, online hate has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges of our time. And, as this article argues, we need to analyze this challenge as a transnational or even international phenomenon without neglecting historical context.

We cannot forget that Holocaust denial held pride of place in these illiberal hate networks. From his Toronto-based publishing house, Zündel made use of demonstrations, street violence, pamphlets, books, and lectures to broaden his base. Web 2.0 allowed populist and far-right adherents to build on this scaffolding and exploit these transatlantic pathways further. The networks Zündel established mirrored similar connections between the United States and Germany, as Michelle Lynn Kahn has addressed recently; indeed, he is an important node in illiberal memory transfer, using existing gaps in constitutional and legal frameworks to maximum advantage.<sup>23</sup>

Alongside the shift in media and the scale of outreach is a shift in content. Whereas in Zündel's era, the focus was almost exclusively on antisemitism, Holocaust denial, and (neo-) Nazism, in the digital field the spectrum of hate broadened, giving witness to transatlantic online communities like the *Wissensmanufaktur* with its image-heavy, Eurocentric digital footprint designed to attract adherents to Canada's maritime coast. By focusing in on a few examples from our growing corpus of digital datasets, we are able to see illiberal memory in action in a contemporary setting, taking shape, as digital memory scholar Andrew Hoskins argues "on the fly," through a mix of conspiracy theories, Holocaust denial, and settler colonial myths around the bounty and exclusivity of the natural landscape.<sup>24</sup>

### Imported from Germany?

The transatlantic exchange of ideas and ideologies between Germany and Canada had already started in the nineteenth century, as migrants fled in the wake of the failed revolutions of 1848–1849 (not only in German-speaking lands in central Europe) and again after the imposition of the German Anti-Socialist Laws in the 1880s. Such migrations remained suspicious—the fear of "imported anarchists" is only one example<sup>25</sup>—and even the second and third generations were not immune from criticism as German-Canadians had to prove their loyalty during both world wars.<sup>26</sup> The interwar period presented a new situation still: fascism and its German version of National Socialism emerged on the scene as a legitimate political alternative in North America, especially in the wake of the economic crisis after 1929 and fascism was supported by foreign Nazi organizations, including some members of the German legation.

Canada was fertile ground for this kind of thinking. Well into the 1920s Canada was still popularly regarded by Germans as a *terra nullius*, a land without Indigenous peoples.<sup>27</sup> Although a British ally in World War I, it retained its allure as a white settler colonial

<sup>22</sup> The historical literature is only just taking seriously social media and Holocaust/post-Holocaust memory. See Hannes Burkhardt, *Geschichte in den Social Media. Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust in Erinnerungskulturen auf Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest und Instagram* (Göttingen: V&R Academic, 2020); Jennifer Evans and Meghan Lundrigan, *Holocaust Memory in the Social Mediascape* (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming in 2023); Victoria Grace Walden, *Digital Holocaust Memory, Education, Research* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

<sup>23</sup> Michelle Lynn Kahn, "The American Influence on German Neo-Nazism: An Entangled History of Hate, 1970s–1990s," *Journal of Holocaust Research* 35 (2021): 2.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Hoskins, "Digital Network Memory," in *Digital Network Memory* (De Gruyter, 2009), 91, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110217384.1.91>.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Frank Jacob and Mario Keßler, ed., *Transatlantic Radicalism. Socialist and Anarchist Exchanges in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021).

<sup>26</sup> Gerhard P. Bassler, *Nation Builders and Enemy Aliens: Four Centuries of German Experience in Canada* (Altona: FriesenPress, 2021).

<sup>27</sup> Martina Seifert, *Die Bilderfalle. Kanada in der deutschsprachigen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur* (Augsburg: Wißner-Verlag, 2016).



**Figure 1.** Individuals displaying swastikas, days before the riots at the Christie Pits (*Toronto Daily Star*, August 8, 1933).

landscape well-suited to European adventurers.<sup>28</sup> These fictions and contradictions animated the transnational history linking these two countries. In times of crisis, illiberal ideas emanating out of Europe held traction and appeal for far-right-leaning emigrants. They mixed easily with homegrown racisms that held import of their own.<sup>29</sup>

When Hitler came to power in the spring of 1933, a fascination for fascism had further taken hold in Canada and manifested in the formation of several “Swastika clubs” in larger cities, such as Toronto. Such groups played a major role in the Christie Pits Riot in August 1933, when a mob “paraded a huge white sheet with a swastika” while attacking Jews in Toronto and shouting “Heil Hitler” (Figure 1).<sup>30</sup> This incident of organized racism received widespread media coverage at the time. But the original coverage was not limited to people of German descent.<sup>31</sup> Immigrant diasporas and their press played a pivotal role in spreading fascist ideas locally while antisemitism itself was widespread in public opinion in Canadian nativist and nationalist politics.<sup>32</sup> The fascination with the “new movements” in Europe was

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Wagner, *A History of Migration from Germany to Canada (1850–1939)* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 160–64.

<sup>29</sup> Arnd Bauerkämper, “Interwar Fascism in Europe and Beyond: Toward a Transnational Radical Right,” in *New Perspectives on the Transnational Right*, ed. Martin Durham and Margaret Power (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 39–66.

<sup>30</sup> Danny Rosenberg, “Athletics in the Ward and Beyond: Neighborhoods, Jews, and Sports in Toronto 1900–1939,” in *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meaning of Urban Sport Cultures*, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox et al. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 148. See also Cyril Levitt and William Shaffir, *The Riot at Christie Pits* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

<sup>31</sup> Alexander Freund, *Beyond the Nation? Immigrant Local Lives’ in Transnational Cultures* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Filippo Salvatore, *Fascism and the Italians of Montreal: An Oral History, 1922–1945* (Toronto: Guernica, 1998); Alan Davis, *Antisemitism in Canada: History and Interpretation* (Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2006); Ira Robinson, *A History of Antisemitism in Canada: History and Interpretation* (Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2015); Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933–1948* (Toronto:

not necessarily universal. Canadian journalist Matthew Halton described in some detail in the *Toronto Daily Star* in 1933 the scope of antisemitic laws in Germany. He returned to Germany in 1936, where he reported critically on the Olympic Games and the gross manipulations of German propaganda.<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately, Halton's was not the only stance on Nazism in Canada. There were several different networks and individuals that helped spread Nazi propaganda throughout the country, in addition to diplomats and other state officials. The five German consulates provided "the movement with support in the form of funds and propaganda materials."<sup>34</sup> These connections between Canada and Germany relied heavily on strategies of "cultural diplomacy," when the German state, still isolated in the aftermath of the Treaty of Versailles, tried to reestablish exchanges of students and research alongside economic ties.<sup>35</sup> With the rise of the Nazis in Germany in 1933, this strategy became even more aggressive as the foreign organization of the German Nazi Party (NSDAP) reached out directly to German passport holders in Canada (*Reichsdeutsche*). In 1934, the German Bund Canada (BDC) was founded in Waterloo, Ontario, and the people of German descent (*Volksdeutsche*) started their own organization, together with a newspaper.<sup>36</sup> The prevailing image of Canada changed in the German perspective as well, at precisely the same time.

As we saw earlier, from a "German" point of view, Canada earned the perception of being a "land without people," in contrast to Hans Grimm's notion of the German "people without space," a reference to Germany's lost colonies after World War I. This narrative was related to the idea of a German *Lebensraum im Osten* (German living space in the European East), a settler colonial ideal exploited by the Nazis in justifying the Holocaust.<sup>37</sup> Another German view of Canada began to change in the 1920s. As a member of the German Reichstag put it in 1927, Canada was in danger of shifting from a country based on the cultural autonomy of immigrant communities to one of assimilation and "forced denationalization."<sup>38</sup> The *völkisch* ideology of the Nazis seized on this criticism of cultural assimilation. It supplanted the longer-standing romantic view of Canada in both image and ideology, rooted in late-nineteenth-century central European travel writing and imagination in novels, for example, from German writers such as Karl May. While the German (and after 1938 Austrian) Alps were described as "beautiful," the Rocky Mountains in Canada appeared to German writers now as "cold and (as) hard as their name."<sup>39</sup> The country's socioeconomic and political system, based around a British-style liberal government and American-styled consumer capitalism, was also summarily rejected.

This shift in perception impacted German immigration to Canada more generally and was an argument for the *Heim ins Reich* (return to the German homeland) campaign, focused on the many *Volksdeutsche* in the country. The most important organization to promote this

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University of Toronto Press, 2012); Angelo Principe, *The Darkest Side of the Fascist Years: The Italian-Canadian Press, 1920-1942* (Toronto: Guernica, 2009); Ruth L. Klein, ed., *Nazi Germany, Canadian Responses. Confronting Antisemitism in the Shadow of War* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012). Pathbreaking in this perspective was Martin Robin, *Shades of Right: Nativist and Fascist Politics in Canada, 1920-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

<sup>33</sup> See the quotations in the Vancouver Holocaust Education Center online teaching material at [https://vhcc.org/1936\\_olympics/the\\_nazi\\_state\\_document.pdf](https://vhcc.org/1936_olympics/the_nazi_state_document.pdf), February 14, 2023.

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Wagner, "Nazi Party Membership in Canada: A Profile," *Social History* 14, no. 27 (1981): 237.

<sup>35</sup> See, most recently for the United States, Elizabeth Piller, *Selling Weimar: German Public Diplomacy and the United States, 1918-1933* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2021); Luise von Flotow and Reingard M. Nischik, ed., *Translating Canada* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Wagner, "Nazi Party Membership in Canada"; Jonathan Wagner, "The Deutscher Bund Canada, 1934-39," *Canadian Historical Review* 58, no. 2 (1977): 176-200.

<sup>37</sup> Ruth Schilling, *Postcolonial Germany. Memories of Empire in a Decolonized Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Frank Bajohr and Rachel O'Sullivan, "Holocaust, Kolonialismus und NS-Imperialismus. Forschung im Schatten einer polemischen Debatte," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 70, no. 1 (2022): 191-202.

<sup>38</sup> Wagner, *A History of Migration from Germany to Canada (1850-1939)*, 176.

<sup>39</sup> Wagner, *A History of Migration from Germany to Canada (1850-1939)*, 178.

idea was, globally as in many other countries of the time, the *Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland*. It provided publications and periodicals to local public libraries in Canada with the hope of reaching a German or “German-rooted” audience.<sup>40</sup> Such activities were meant to destabilize Western societies, still recognized as enemies from World War I. In some cases, this propaganda succeeded in spurring return migration. But especially after 1939, these activities fomented suspicion and led to the scrutinization of German-bound people to Canada, though not initially to mass internment. This, however, would soon change once war was declared, resulting also in the little known policy of interning Jewish refugees, some of whom had fled Hitler’s racial laws.<sup>41</sup> But there is another transnational aspect worth mentioning here, which Bàrbara Molas has pointed out most recently in her paper on the 1935 foundation of the Classocracy League of Canada:<sup>42</sup> Although a small organization, the Classocracy League unified Ukrainian ultraconservative thought and Italian ideas of elitism with fascist corporatism. Aligned by an illiberal vision of Canadian identity based around European and Christian supremacism, the main and mostly Montreal-based protagonists were transnationally linked to organizations such as the Francoist Friends of National Spain and the Christian National Social Party.<sup>43</sup>

While German-Canadian and other diasporic groups were mobilizing along illiberal lines, French Canadian journalist Adrien Arcand starting pushing in the same direction. In February 1934, Arcand formed the Parti National Social Chrétien (National Social Christian Party), later known as Canadian National Socialist Unity Party (since July 1938 called the National Unity Party, or NUP), and drew crowds of more than 100,000 people to his rallies in Montreal. The fierce antisemite had contact with the German Nazi Party via the United States already in 1932; corresponded with the leader of the British Union of Fascists, Oswald Mosley; had relations with Virginio Gayda, an Italian newspaper editor and “unofficial spokesperson for the Mussolini regime”; and proudly declared himself the “Canadian Führer.” An ardent Anglophile despite his Francophone heritage, he advocated for a romanticized fascist Canadian state within a staunchly conservative British Empire. Arcand organized an international exchange of fascist pamphlets and newspapers. The organ of Arcand’s NUP, *Le Fasciste Canadien*, promoted the publications of fascist groups from countries in Europe and beyond. Arcand also gave space in his 1933 founded weekly newspaper *Le Patriote* to translated articles from German antisemitic journals such as *Der Stürmer*.<sup>44</sup>

As mentioned previously, these transnational networks resonated with homegrown anti-semitism and an openness to National Socialism, at least in the early days. Prime Minister King visited Germany in the summer 1937 and even had an audience with Adolf Hitler. Following the tone set by British appeasement policy, King did not oppose the German strategy to gain “living space” in the European East. Before he met with Hitler, he was even received by Hermann Göring, who thanked him warmly for a gift to the Berlin Zoo: a Canadian buffalo, whose extinction was—of all animals in Canada—an outgrowth of the violent settler colonial project in North America.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Wagner, *A History of Migration from Germany to Canada (1850-1939)*, 203–10.

<sup>41</sup> Christine Whitehouse, “You’ll Get Used to It”: *The Internment of Jewish Refugees in Canada, 1940-43* (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2017); Andrea Strutz, “Interned as ‘Enemy Aliens’: Jewish Refugees from Austria, Germany and Italy in Canada,” in *Refugees from Nazi-Occupied Europe in British Overseas Territories*, Brill, Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies series, vol. 20, 46–67, ed. Swen Steinberg and Anthony Grenville, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004399532\\_004](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004399532_004).

<sup>42</sup> Bàrbara Molas, “The Classocracy League of Canada: A Fascist Form of Canadian Multiculturalism?,” *Fascism* (2022): 1–28.

<sup>43</sup> Molas, “The Classocracy League of Canada,” 18–23.

<sup>44</sup> Nadeau, *The Canadian Führer*, 113–14, 160, 169–70; Robin, *Shades of Right*, 266; “Adrien Arcand, Canadian Fascist Leader Dies,” *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, August 3, 1967, <https://www.jta.org/archive/adrien-arcane-canadian-fascist-leader-dies-was-interned-during-war>.

<sup>45</sup> Shipley, *Canada in the World*, 158.



Such fascist ideas and antisemitic policies did not go unchallenged. Newspapers and journals from several Canadian political parties aligned with the workers' movement, influenced by immigration, and the global antifascism of Italian immigrants started to mount an opposition.<sup>46</sup> Artists like poet and novelist A. M. Stephen responded with a 1934 pamphlet he titled *Hitlerism in Canada*, and the founding manifesto of the Canadian League Against War broached similar topics.<sup>47</sup> Jewish communities and organizations like the Canadian Jewish Council and the Jewish Immigration Aid Society advocated against antisemitism and for more acceptance of refugees first from Germany and later from all over Europe; similar to the United States, Canadian immigration restrictions remained antisemitic and racially biased throughout the 1930s and early 1940s.<sup>48</sup> Familiar with everyday racism in their own lives, Jewish Canadian organizations were quick to push for a boycott of German goods following the Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses.<sup>49</sup> German officials were criticized vociferously during the Olympic Summer and Winter Games in 1936 when Canadian communist and other newspapers blamed the material pouring out of the German diplomatic missions in Canada as pure propaganda.<sup>50</sup>

We do not know much about the influence of regional media outlets on public debates on the national level. But regional case studies like Lauren Wheeler's work on the *Winnipeg Free Press* indicate there was criticism of antisemitic policies and attitudes both inside and outside Canada. In the spring of 1943, this newspaper even advocated for a general (and unusual) pro-refugee position.<sup>51</sup> As forward thinking as these actions were, structural racism on the ground continued to shape how the fascist racial mission unfolded in Canada. While Winnipeg has a history as a haven for left-leaning social justice causes and groups, Indigenous people who worked the city's saw mills tended to eschew the labor unions, the heart of the activist left, seeing them as colonial institutions.<sup>52</sup> Winnipeg was also home to the second major far-right organization, the Canadian Union of Fascists (CUF), which was busy publishing its own newspaper, *The Thunderbolt*.<sup>53</sup> Antisemitism was a mobilizing force in Canada on both sides of the political spectrum.

Public opinion changed more generally in Canada over the course of the 1930s, especially with reports about the Kristallnacht pogroms in November 1938 in Germany and Austria, which led to the termination of student exchanges at Canadian universities until the 1950s.<sup>54</sup> With the outbreak of World War II, obvious Nazi organizations such as the BDC and Canadian parties such as the CUF disappeared overnight; the Canadian government

<sup>46</sup> Kasper Braskén, Nigel Copsey, and David J. Featherstone, ed., *Anti-fascism in A Global Perspective: Transnational Networks, Exile Communities, And Radical Internationalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021).

<sup>47</sup> Gregorys Betts, *Avant-Garde Canadian Literature: The Early Manifestations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 127. For the aspect of transnational pacifism from the 1920s on, see Swen Steinberg, "All Quiet? Remarque in Kanada," in *Weltweit—Worldwide—Remarque. Beiträge zur aktuellen internationalen Rezeption von Erich Maria Remarque*, ed. Alice Cadeddu, Claudia Junk, Thomas F. Schneider (Göttingen; Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2020), 35–54.

<sup>48</sup> Lauren Wheeler, "Winnipeg 1943: Non-Jewish Response to the Refugee Problem," (MA thesis, Carleton University, March 2006).

<sup>49</sup> Richard Menkis and Harold Troper, *More than Just Games: Canada and the 1936 Olympics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 55. See also Patrick Farges, "Transnational *Yekkishkeit* from a Canadian Perspective," in *Refugees from Nazi-Occupied Europe in British Overseas Territories*, Brill, Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies series, vol. 20, 21–45, ed. Swen Steinberg and Anthony Grenville, <https://brill.com/edcoll-book/title/54869>.

<sup>50</sup> *Refugees from Nazi-Occupied Europe in British Overseas Territories*, i, 37, 50, 174.

<sup>51</sup> Wheeler, *Winnipeg 1943*, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Lynne Fernandez and Jim Silver, *Indigenous People, Wage Labour and Trade Unions: The Historical Experience in Canada* (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2017), 8.

<sup>53</sup> Hugues Théorêt, *The Blue Shirts: Adrien Arcand and Fascist Anti-Semitism in Canada* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2017), 153.

<sup>54</sup> Research results by Swen Steinberg, based on the localization of activities of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) at Queen's University between the 1920s and the 1960s, Queen's University Archives, Kingston and Ontario.

declared Arcand's NUP illegal in June 1940.<sup>55</sup> While Canadians of German descent were not subject to internment like the more than 20,000 Japanese Canadians—a distinction based on a much older white and European settler colonial racism—they nevertheless remained at the center of the Canadian debate about a possible fifth column of Nazi supporters.<sup>56</sup> This theme was even taken up in feature films such as *49th Parallel* (Great Britain, 1941) about a group of Nazi spies that arrived via submarine in Nova Scotia and passed through the country, before stopping in a German Mennonite village in the province of Manitoba (Figure 2). It was, to a certain extent, the German propaganda and *Heim ins Reich* campaign that triggered the suspicions and questioned loyalties pictured in this movie. Such proof of loyalty became more and more important after Canada entered World War II in September 1939. Already in 1940, Canadian authorities interned political activists such as communists and union functionaries. Among them was Adrien Arcand, who had been interned with 850 Canadian fascists.<sup>57</sup>

The postwar era, with Canadian soldiers returning from the front, was shaped by the reestablishment of contacts between Canada and Germany. This included new labor migration made up of displaced persons and people “in transit” because of the war.<sup>58</sup> They were also accompanied by collaborators and war criminals.<sup>59</sup> The relationship between people involved in Holocaust-related crimes and postwar immigration to Canada, and how this has shaped the politics of memory, is still an ongoing debate.<sup>60</sup> A further complication is the fact that some of the remnants of the homegrown pre-1930s fascist networks did not entirely disappear after 1945. John Ross Taylor, former secretary of the Canadian Union of Fascists, died as late as 1994. He was an associate of Ernst Zündel who came to Canada in the late 1950s to avoid conscription into the *Bundeswehr*.<sup>61</sup> After 1945, Adrien Arcand became Zündel's main mentor and a fellow Holocaust denier.<sup>62</sup> Although fringe groups like these

<sup>55</sup> Report of the Canadian Mounted Police for the Year ended March 31, 1941 (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1941), 15; Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf: Fascist Movements in Canada in the 1930s* (Montreal: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1978).

<sup>56</sup> Greg Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America* (Vancouver: Columbia University Press, 2009); Ann Gomer Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 2000); Ursula Lehmkuhl and Elisabeth Tutschek, *150 Years of Canada: Grappling with Diversity since 1867* (Münster: Waxmann, 2020); Peter C. Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Towards Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

<sup>57</sup> Patricia E. Roy, “Internment in Canada,” *Canadian Encyclopedia*, June 11, 2020, February 14, 2023, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/internment>.

<sup>58</sup> Julie F. Gilmour, “‘The Kind of People Canada Wants’: Canada and the Displaced Persons, 1943–1953” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2009), [https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/29949/1/Gilmour\\_Julie\\_Frances\\_200906\\_PhD\\_thesis.pdf](https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/29949/1/Gilmour_Julie_Frances_200906_PhD_thesis.pdf), February 24, 2023; Franklin Bialystock, *Delayed Impact: The Holocaust and the Canadian Jewish Community* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); Adara Goldberg, *Holocaust Survivors in Canada: Exclusion, Inclusion, Transformation, 1947–55* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015); Janine Stingel, *Social Discredit: Anti-Semitism, Social Credit and the Jewish Response* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); Wolfgang Klooff, *Wor(l)ds of Trauma: Canadian and German Perspectives* (Munster and New York: Waxmann, 2017).

<sup>59</sup> David Matas and Susan Charendoff, *Justice Delayed: Nazi War Criminals in Canada* (Toronto: Summerhill Press, 1987); Harold Martin Troper and Morton Weinfeld, *Old Wounds: Jews, Ukrainians, and the Hunt for Nazi War Criminals in Canada* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); David Matas, *Nazi War Criminals in Canada: Five Years After* (Institute for International Affairs, 1992); Alti Rodal, *Nazi War Criminals in Canada: The Historical and Policy Setting from the 1940s to the Present: Prepared for the Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals* (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1986).

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Canadian Jewish and Polish Groups Join Forces to Demand Removal of SS Monument at Ontario Cemetery, *Algemeiner*, July 31, 2020, <https://www.algemeiner.com/2020/07/31/canadian-jewish-and-polish-groups-join-forces-to-demand-removal-of-ss-monument-at-ontario-cemetery/>; Graffiti on monument commemorating Nazi SS division being investigated as a hate crime by police, *Ottawa Citizen*, July 17, 2020, <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/graffiti-on-monument-commemorating-nazi-ss-division-being-investigated-as-a-hate-crime-by-police>.

<sup>61</sup> Jason Tingler, “Holocaust Denial and Holocaust Memory: The Case of Ernst Zündel,” *Genocide Studies International* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 210–29, esp. 210.

<sup>62</sup> Nadeau, *The Canadian Führer*, 139; Théorêt, *The Blue Shirts*.



**Figure 2.** German-rooted Mennonites in Manitoba speak out against the propaganda of German spies they had welcomed to their community (screenshot from *49th Parallel*, 1941).

may seem quaint and inconsequential—Arcand purportedly received funding from Conservative Prime Minister R. B. Bennett as late as 1930 to smear the liberal candidate for Prime Minister—they were buttressed by public opinion that helped spread support for nativist and nationalist sentiment already firmly rooted in Canada.<sup>63</sup> As much as Zündel represents a bridge to these earlier ideas and networks, he also represents an important transformation in the construction of illiberal memory, accelerating in the process the shape, form, content, and transmission of Holocaust denial.

### Media Hybridity, Holocaust Denial, and Hate in the Postwar Era

Despite the continuation of fascist networks and sympathies, the postwar era in Canada was also marked by a rise in Holocaust consciousness and the popularization of Holocaust memory in the public sphere. In keeping with Holocaust memory activism in other countries, the first monument dedicated to Holocaust victims in Toronto was unveiled in 1962. The growing prominence of Holocaust memory was further reflected in universities and schools, with the incorporation of Holocaust awareness material in the classroom alongside invitations to Holocaust survivors to discuss the topic with students.<sup>64</sup> In that same decade, the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) began to organize several national public events to

<sup>63</sup> Nadeau, *The Canadian Führer*, 86.

<sup>64</sup> Similarly today, the provincial government of Ontario has recently announced to expand its educational initiatives and investments to combat rising antisemitism and Islamophobia, and to provide new support and programs to students and educators in schools. This underscores the dire need to continue to build the critical consciousness necessary to combat these and other forms of hate, racialization, and discrimination. See “Ontario Announces Plan to Combat Antisemitism in Schools,” Ontario Newsroom, January 27, 2022, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1001493/ontario-announces-plan-to-combat-antisemitism-in-schools>, and “Ontario Expands Plan to Combat Islamophobia in Schools,” Ontario Newsroom, February 9, 2022, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1001576/ontario-expands-plan-to-combat-islamophobia-in-schools>. See also Tingler, “Holocaust Denial and Holocaust Memory,” 213.

commemorate the Shoah and push back against the revivification of fascism in a new form. Other groups acted locally to pressure the Canadian government to deport Nazi war criminals. There was a great need for such actions. Research suggests that approximately 3,000 Nazi criminals had, in fact, made their way to Canada.<sup>65</sup>

As we have seen, antisemitism was not simply a product of immigration; it was part and parcel of the everyday life experiences of many Jewish Canadians before, during, and after the war. Barring Jews from joining social clubs, restricting access to housing, education, the labor market, and discrimination at summer resorts were continued practices well after 1945.<sup>66</sup> Alongside structural racism, Steven Baum and Anita Bromberg found evidence of more insidious forms of “Antisemitism—Canadian Style,” in which a person’s “Jewishness remains culturally invisible or it is sanitized and shaped to fit Christian expectations. Or it is simply not mentioned at all.”<sup>67</sup> Antisemitic discrimination was alive in the postsecondary education sector as well. Until the reforms of the 1960s in McGill’s and the University of Toronto’s medical schools, Jewish students could not exceed 10 percent of the graduating class.<sup>68</sup> The rise of new rights movements (labor, women’s, Indigenous, gay and lesbian, regional) challenged the liberal order framework Ian McKay described as Canada’s ongoing political project, which endeavored to reinvent itself after 1945. Holocaust consciousness played a pivotal role.

The Canadian Jewish Congress mobilized to combat a rise in anti-Jewish and anti-African-Canadian hate in the early 1960s. To this end, it lobbied the Liberal government of Lester B. Pearson to incorporate aspects of the 1948 Genocide Convention into the Canadian Criminal Code, specifically around the promotion of genocidal acts, hate, and the recognition of minority rights. Owing to a “lack of human rights culture within the Department of External Affairs,” Canada had originally opposed the inclusion of cultural genocide in Article 2 of the convention because it might encapsulate many of its own policies against First Nation, Inuit, and Métis people at home.<sup>69</sup> When in 1965 Justice Minister Guy Favreau brought into being the Cohen Commission to tackle the problem of hate propaganda directly, the commission opted for an even narrower definition of genocide than in the Genocide Convention, circumventing any mention of forcible transfer of children as this came dangerously close to the policy of compulsory education in Indian Residential Schools, which continued to operate in Canada until 1996. Yet even this was not enough for lawmakers who debated whether genocide was even possible in a place like Canada. As Senator Arthur W. Roebuck remarked in 1966, “Canadians ... are a kindly and tolerant people ... We have good will for all mankind, irrespective of colour, race, or ethnic origin.”<sup>70</sup> Senator George H. White was more indignant when he argued that proposed anti-hate legislation “was an insult to every individual Canadian. Are the citizens of Canada being put on a par with the Germany of Hitler and his gang of storm troopers and SS guards, and on a par with the people of certain other countries from which there are reports from time to time of acts of genocide?”<sup>71</sup> Despite a growing sense of urgency around Holocaust memory and

<sup>65</sup> Tingler, “Holocaust Denial and Holocaust Memory,” 214.

<sup>66</sup> Steven K. Baum and Anita Bromberg, “Antisemitism—Canadian Style,” in *Antisemitism in North America*, ed. Steven K. Baum, Neil J. Kressel, Florette Cohen, Steven Leonard Jacobs, Jewish Identities in a Changing World series, vol. 26 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 180, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004307148\\_009](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004307148_009).

<sup>67</sup> Baum and Bromberg, “Antisemitism—Canadian Style,” 175.

<sup>68</sup> Parallels to this antisemitic discrimination can be found in the low admission rates of Black students at the University of Toronto’s medical school as well as anti-Black racism faced by these students online and offline today. See Maggie Parkhill, “U of T Valedictorian Hopes to Inspire Future Black Doctors,” *CTV NEWS*, June 12, 2020, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/u-of-t-valedictorian-hopes-to-inspire-future-black-doctors-1.4964953>; see also Baum and Bromberg, “Antisemitism—Canadian Style,” 181.

<sup>69</sup> William Schabas, “Canada and the Adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” *McGill Law Journal* 43, no. 3 (1998): 403–42.

<sup>70</sup> Senate of Canada 1967, 1109.

<sup>71</sup> Senate of Canada, 1969, 1611.

preoccupation with definitions of genocide brought about in part by the rise in Holocaust consciousness, settler colonial attitudes and structures continued to mitigate anti-hate protections.<sup>72</sup> Liberal constitutionalism sat easily alongside illiberal memory and ideals.

While Holocaust memorialization slowly gained traction, it was countered by alliances of Holocaust deniers and neofascists, who spread illiberal memories of Nazi policy to bolster the circulation of antisemitic conspiracy theories, general racism, and disinformation with the express purpose of dehumanizing victims of the Shoah. Drawing on homegrown antisemitism, the basis for postwar neo-Nazism in Canada was already set by people like Adrien Arcand. Similarly, the Canadian National Socialist Party, commonly known as the Canadian Nazi Party (1965–1978), founded and led by William John Beattie, acquired status within the new neo-Nazi ecosystem.<sup>73</sup> In the news article “My 16 Months as a Nazi” (1966), private investigator John Garrity, employed by the Canadian Jewish Congress to infiltrate the Canadian Nazi Party, documented the strong ties between US and Canadian activists including the flow of propaganda material from the United States into Canada, underscoring transnational ties that continued to exist throughout the twentieth century until today.<sup>74</sup>

Another important site of memory negotiation was the German-Canadian community itself. Recent research on the *Kanada Kurier*, a German-language periodical dating back to 1889, reveals how the newspaper’s comments or letters-to-the-editor section (*Leserbrieft*) countenanced antisemitism and outright Holocaust denial. These sentiments were frequently embedded in comments about World War II and German victimization more generally, showcasing the prevalence of antisemitic sentiment, topoi, and stereotypes within German-Canadian identity discourses.<sup>75</sup>

Central to the acceleration of antisemitism and Holocaust denial was Ernst Zündel (1939–2017). A German immigrant who entered the Canadian neo-Nazi scene in the 1960s, Zündel became a ruthless promoter of Holocaust denial and neo-Nazi ideology. In fact, he was one of the most notorious Holocaust deniers with strong transatlantic ties to the German neo-Nazi movement and beyond.

Having met Adrien Arcand in the late 1960s, Zündel came away with a new and extremist understanding of his own German ethnicity, one that he had to “protect” against, in his view, the growing “anti-German propaganda” in Canadian society. Zündel found the Holocaust to be the “hoax of the century.” In 1978, in response to the popular American miniseries *Holocaust*, lauded for the way it helped bolster Holocaust consciousness, Zündel founded “The Concerned Parents of German Descent.” This assembly of Toronto-based ethnic Germans protested at several Ontario TV and print media stations to prevent the miniseries from airing in Canada, confirming Zündel’s identification with a hateful and extreme antisemitic understanding of German ethnicity.<sup>76</sup>

Zündel took every possible opportunity to spread his hatred and antisemitism globally. In an essay that Zündel directed at the “Islamic World,” published in 1980, he envisioned Holocaust deniers and Islamic leaders might join forces in the fight against common enemies.<sup>77</sup> This publication and the denial prototype “Did Six Million Really Die?” (Zündel authored the foreword and postscript), amounted to false news charges as they point to the existence of a contemporary conspiracy by Freemasons, Jews, and bankers to persuade

<sup>72</sup> Ruth Amir, “Cultural Genocide: It Did Happen Here,” *Aboriginal Policy Studies* 7, no. 1 (2018): 111–12.

<sup>73</sup> John Garrity, “My 16 Months as a Nazi,” *MacLean’s*, October 1, 1966, <https://archive.macleans.ca/article/1966/10/1/my-16-months-as-a-nazi>.

<sup>74</sup> Garrity, “My 16 Months as a Nazi.”

<sup>75</sup> Nicolas Groulx, *Zwischen deutschem und kanadischem Identitätsdiskurs im Kanada Kurier 1981. Zur Vergangenheitsbewältigung in einer Diasporazeitung* (master’s thesis, University of Montreal, 2015), [https://papyrus.bib.umontreal.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1866/12556/Groulx\\_Nicolas\\_2015\\_memoire.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y](https://papyrus.bib.umontreal.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1866/12556/Groulx_Nicolas_2015_memoire.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y).

<sup>76</sup> Tingler, “Holocaust Denial and Holocaust Memory,” 215.

<sup>77</sup> Ernst Zündel, *The West, War, and Islam*, <http://aaargh.vho.org/fran/livres5/zunwestwarislam.pdf>.

the world that the Nazi regime had killed 6 million Jews during World War II.<sup>78</sup> Zündel intensified his efforts to promote neo-Nazi material, which included radio and TV shows, as well as the production of pamphlets, essays, audiotapes, videotapes, and books (including his book entitled *The Hitler We Loved and Why*), seeking to undermine and counter the historical truth of the Holocaust.<sup>79</sup> In order to distribute his material transnationally, Zündel established his own publishing house, Samisdat Publishers,<sup>80</sup> and shipped his propaganda to forty-five countries including Germany,<sup>81</sup> where his media outlets and content were picked up by German neo-Nazi groups and movements.<sup>82</sup> During a crackdown in 1981, the West German government seized a large amount of illegal denial literature and Nazi memorabilia; Zündel was one of the largest suppliers. Ever in search of fame, he found the added popularity a welcome side effect.<sup>83</sup>

Zündel knew how to stage himself and his project strategically: he gained popularity, both in Canada and Germany, especially during his false news trials in an Ontario court.<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, he was not charged under the more specific hate speech provisions, defined in sections 318 and 319 of the Canadian Criminal Code (which were used in other hate speech cases as well), but under section 181, in relation to false statements.<sup>85</sup> In 1985, he was convicted of “knowingly publishing false news” in connection with his Holocaust denial materials and sentenced to fifteen months in jail.<sup>86</sup> Although this conviction was later overturned due to procedural errors, he was retried and again convicted in Canada in 1988. In 1992, however, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the law against publishing false news was unconstitutional and too vague.<sup>87</sup> Although the resolution of the case was by no means a rejection of the principle of criminalizing hate speech, Zündel was celebrated for his victory for “free speech” among his peers, and he resumed his activities.<sup>88</sup>

In the mid-1990s, he was summoned as a witness during the trial of the German neo-Nazi Bela Ewald Althans, who was a leading figure in the German neo-Nazi movement. Althans, protégée of Zündel, became an important node in Zündel’s network in Germany.<sup>89</sup> Other

<sup>78</sup> Leonidas E. Hill, “The Trial of Ernst Zündel: Revisionism and the Law in Canada,” *Museum of Tolerance*, <https://www.museumoftolerance.com/education/archives-and-reference-library/online-resources/simon-wiesenthal-center-annual-volume-6/annual-6-chapter-7.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Kenneth Lasson, “Holocaust Denial in North America,” in *Antisemitism in North America*, 306.

<sup>80</sup> The choosing of “Samisdat” for his publishing house is worth further research because this term also carried notions of anti-Soviet sentiment that intersected with antisemitism.

<sup>81</sup> Tingler, “Holocaust Denial and Holocaust Memory,” 216.

<sup>82</sup> Another recent dynamic within the German-Canadian corridor of far-right extremism is the PEGIDA movement. Founded on Islamophobia and anti-immigration sentiment, the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident (PEGIDA) movement was founded by far-right extremist networks in Germany. Since 2018, PEGIDA has established several offshoots across Canada, which warrants further research. While their rhetoric is less extreme, their mobilizing themes draw upon societal racist stereotypes of Muslims and nonwhite immigrants as recent surveys unveiled. See Jade Hutchinson and David Yuzva Clement, “Right-wing Extremist Threat Landscape in Canada: Avenues for Coalescence and Transnationalisation,” in *A Research Agenda for Far-Right Violence and Extremism*, ed. Rohan Gunaratna and Katalin Pethő-Kiss (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023).

<sup>83</sup> Ernst Zündel, “Gift to the World,” *CBC/The Fifth Estate*, 1993, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sN92noK1E6w>.

<sup>84</sup> Alan Mendelsohn, “Canadian Trail Spotlights Holocaust-as-Hoax Hatred,” *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, April 14, 1985, <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-1985-04-14-8501140496-story.html>.

<sup>85</sup> Sheryl N. Hamilton and Sandra Robinson, *Law’s Expression: Communication, Law and Media in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: LexisNexis, 2019), 136.

<sup>86</sup> Frederick M. Schweitzer, “Antisemitism and Law,” in *Antisemitism in North America*, 285, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004307148\\_013](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004307148_013).

<sup>87</sup> *R. v. Zundel*, Supreme Court of Canada, August 27, 1992, <https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/904/index.do>; “Ernst Zundel,” SPLC, SPLC Southern Poverty Law Centre, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/ernst-zundel>.

<sup>88</sup> Hamilton and Robinson, *Law’s Expression*, 136.

<sup>89</sup> David Bathrick, “Anti-Neonazism as Cinematic Practice: Bonengel’s Beruf Neonazi,” *New German Critique* 67 (1996): 133–46, <https://doi.org/10.2307/827782>; Barbara Bollwahn, “Althans beklagt Falschdarstellung. Neonazi verzögert Urteil durch aberwitzige Beweisanträge.” *taz*, August 23, 1995, <https://taz.de/11495707/>.

nodes in this transnational network included figures such as the aforementioned William John Beattie, but also the far-right activist Paul Fromm,<sup>90</sup> who served as a public school teacher with the Peel Region Board of Education in Ontario, from which he was suspended.<sup>91</sup> With the advent of the internet, Zündel saw a new avenue to distribute his propaganda and to continue to form alliances globally, entering a hybrid period in which he continued usage of analog media while experimenting with digital forms.

His newest addition to the canon of hate, the internet page “Zundelsite” not only featured his own work but also promoted other well-known Holocaust deniers such as David Irving. This medium was hosted in California and managed by his third wife, Ingrid Rimland. In 1996, in another legal attempt to prosecute Zündel, the Canadian Human Rights Commission responsible for enforcing Canada’s Human Rights Act ruled that the Zundelsite “was ‘malevolent in its depiction of Jews,’”<sup>92</sup> exposing a minority to hatred, contempt, and danger, underscoring that hate does double damage, to the individual as well as the community targeted. The tribunal found in 2002 that Zündel violated subsection 13(1) of the Canadian Human Rights Act (CHA) by communicating hate messages on the internet and noted that “these messages create an environment in which it is likely that Jews will be exposed to extreme emotions of detestation and vilification.”<sup>93</sup> Confirming that freedom of expression is fundamental to a free and democratic society, the tribunal’s decision underscored that limits on expression are also reasonable and justified.<sup>94</sup> Consequently, the tribunal ordered the removal of the internet page, which could not be enforced because the site was hosted in the United States.<sup>95</sup> By 2002, Zündel had already fled to the United States in order to securely continue his activities benefiting from the First Amendment because it grants almost absolute power to print and publish whatever one wishes and, therefore, protects hate agitators from persecution.<sup>96</sup> In this sense, the Zündel case is illuminating as a window into some of the issues that surface today around how to tackle online hate speech as it circulates across borders and jurisdictions.<sup>97</sup> Online hate has moved out of the shadows of the internet, and numerous groups and individuals have created a more visible profile both on social media platforms and on unregulated fringe messaging boards alike, with the latter offering havens for a “no-limits” approach to content.<sup>98</sup>

In 2003, Zündel was arrested in the United States for immigration violations and deported back to Canada. In March 2005, he was deported from Canada to Germany, where he was promptly arrested. The Mannheim Regional Court sentenced him to the maximum penalty of five years in prison for *Volksverhetzung* (demagoguery). According to the court’s conviction, Zündel had continued to repeatedly deny the Holocaust on the internet and in other media outlets.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Enzo Di Matteo, “The Two Faces of Paul Fromm.” Now 20, December 14, 2000, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060616175503/http://nowtoronto.com/issues/2000-12-14/newsspread.html>.

<sup>91</sup> “Paul Fromm,” SPLC, SPLC Southern Poverty Law Centre, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/paul-fromm>.

<sup>92</sup> Schweitzer, “Antisemitism and Law,” 286.

<sup>93</sup> Schweitzer, “Antisemitism and Law,” 286. Through Bill C-304, subsection 13 of the CHA, which was enacted in 1977 in order to deal with recorded hate messages (*hate lines*), was repealed and the repeal of hate speech provisions of the CHA passed into law and came into effect in 2014. See Hamilton and Robinson, *Law’s Expression*, 139; Citron *et al. v. Zündel*—Summary of Canadian Human Rights Tribunal Decision, Toronto City Clerk, <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2002/agendas/council/cc020416/adm4rpt/cl044.pdf>.

<sup>94</sup> Hamilton and Robinson, *Law’s Expression*, 287.

<sup>95</sup> Citron *et al. v. Zündel*, Toronto City Clerk; “Ernst Zundel,” SPLC.

<sup>96</sup> Schweitzer, “Antisemitism and Law,” 286; Lasson, *Holocaust Denial in North America*, 326.

<sup>97</sup> Alexander Brown, *Hate Speech Law: A Philosophical Examination* (New York: Routledge, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315714899>; Heidi J. S. Twarek, “Fighting Hate with Speech Law: Media and German Visions of Democracy,” *Journal of Holocaust Research* 35, no. 2 (April 3, 2021): 106–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25785648.2021.1899510>; Stefanie Ullmann and Marcus Tomalin, “Quarantining Online Hate Speech: Technical and Ethical Perspectives,” *Ethics and Information Technology* 22, no. 1 (March 1, 2020): 69–80, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-019-09516-z>.

<sup>98</sup> Hamilton and Robinson, *Law’s Expression*, 144.

<sup>99</sup> “Holocaust-Leugner Ernst Zündel gestorben,” *Deutsche Welle*, August 7, 2017. <https://p.dw.com/p/2hqKP>.

Holocaust denial and revisionism uses pseudoscientific veneer to mask its basis in hate, dehumanization, and disinformation. With books, videos, conferences, and in the hybrid mediascape of the early internet, it surfaced in the form of historical expertise. Holocaust deniers claimed to be scientists and experts in historical research. The most prominent examples include Ernst Zündel, David Irving, contributors to the California-based Institute for Historical Review, or the American Fred Leuchter, the self-styled engineer who claimed that science shows genocide did not take place in the German extermination camps. Professional historians have spent years taking on these claims in public fora including lectures, publications, and in high-profile court cases. Despite this, revisionism—what historian Richard J. Evans called “telling lies about Hitler”—established itself as an auxiliary ideology in the service of far-right extremist imaginaries with the expressed purpose of intervening in the writing of history to “correct” the historical register through falsification.<sup>100</sup> Deniers such as Zündel or Irving adopted the language of scholarly authority. And, while organized efforts to falsify the historical record in this most obvious fashion have been dealt with somewhat effectively through hate speech laws, immigration law, human rights tribunals, and high-profile court cases, the appeal of populist and neofascist thinking, especially around the falsification of the historical truth, has not receded in today’s world. Alongside these longer-standing hybrid media networks, new digital media affordances have changed the landscape of hate and mis- and disinformation once again, providing new nodes in these existing transatlantic populist and far-right networks where the relativization of German crimes manifests in everyday acts and speech.

The history of hate speech legislation reveals the pervasiveness of homegrown antisemitism and settler colonial structures and mindsets that circumscribed minority rights and protections. Holocaust consciousness propelled social justice mobilizations around anti-Jewish and anti-Black racism, raising awareness about genocide as a way to combat hate. While liberal protections of freedom of speech and personality rubbed up against Canada’s evolving human rights framework, delaying hate speech legislation for twenty years from the late 1960s to the 1980s, illiberal memories of Canadian righteousness and toleration ensured these same protections would fail to transform policies aimed at Indigenous death and dispossession. As we’ll see in this next section, transatlantic hate networks linking European right of access to the land with the romance of physical escapism continued to animate the next generation of far-right conspiracy theorists, who found an ideological home in Canada.

### “Nova Scotia Nazis”: Far-Right Mobility and Colonial Imaginary in Practice

Zündel’s vision for the transnational communication of far-right ideas through newer and larger digital networks has become an inescapable feature of our twenty-first century.<sup>101</sup> As the example of the alt-right German “colony” in eastern Canada indicates, actors have capitalized on hybrid cycles of communication between sites in the digital and physical worlds.<sup>102</sup> Nova Scotia’s “public past” as Ian McKay named it, exalting whiteness, nature, empty spaces, and land for the asking—long promoted by the province’s tourist board—served as an added lure to this far-flung part of the maritime east coast.<sup>103</sup> In July 2020, an investigative article in the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* (later declared to be one of the magazine’s most read of the year) revealed that “hundreds” of German citizens

<sup>100</sup> Richard J. Evans, *Lying about Hitler: History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

<sup>101</sup> Maik Fielitz and Nick Thurston, ed., *Post-Digital Cultures of the Far Right: Online Actions and Offline Consequences in Europe and the US* (transcript publishing, 2019); Patricia Anne Simpson and Helga Druxes, ed., *Digital Media Strategies of the Far Right in Europe and the United States* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).

<sup>102</sup> John Postill, “Populism and Social Media: A Global Perspective,” *Media, Culture & Society* 40, no. 5 (July 2018): 754–65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443718772186>.

<sup>103</sup> Ian McKay, *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010).



associated with the far right, among them former *Tagesschau* news presenter Eva Herman, were purchasing real estate in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.<sup>104</sup> According to German media coverage, Herman and her partner Andreas Popp were attracting potential German migrants to their “colony of the like-minded” through annual, conspiracy-theory-laden seminars and the resale of large land packages.<sup>105</sup> A former associate of Popp, real estate salesman Frank Eckhardt was also reported to be targeting similar potential German “Neusiedler” or “new settlers” in a separate scheme, offering property to those seeking the “freedom” and “self-determination” of rural Nova Scotia.<sup>106</sup> Using both written records and personal testimonies, *Spiegel* writer Martin Doerry reveals that Popp, Herman, and Eckhardt have married ideological networking, colonial imagination, and for-profit business in successful schemes to transplant far-right-leaning German citizens to Atlantic Canada.

Somewhat evocative of Zündel, Popp has released collections of far-right conspiracy theories through his own publishing company, while Eckhardt has reportedly used his real estate dealings to share Holocaust denial material with potential clients—ranging from quoting German neo-Nazi Gerard Menuhin to mailing computer disks of falsified reports and Nazi propaganda.<sup>107</sup> Beyond these parallels, however, their activities are recognizably informed by the far right and alt-right of the present. Herman, whom Doerry describes as a potential “stool pigeon” (“*Lockvogel*”) for members of the AfD party (*Alternative für Deutschland*), operates a channel on Telegram, which serves as a popular social media platform for the alt-right on both sides of the Atlantic. Hermann and Popp cohost videos on their *Wissensmanufaktur* website, where they discuss self-defined “crises” such as the Great Replacement or the Great Reset, both known far-right conspiracy theories accelerated by the internet. Eckhardt, who participates in more analog methods of knowledge sharing such as mail, still evokes popular online far-right “traditionalist” language on his real estate website, promising his clients a “healthy, self-sufficient” lifestyle and access to abundant natural resources away from authoritarian governments (Figure 3).<sup>108</sup>

More generally, and echoing back to earlier-twentieth-century phenomena outlined at the beginning of this article, the systems and networks created by these far-right personalities hinge on a colonial imaginary in which Canada, specifically Cape Breton, serves as a potential homeland for ideological refugees from a collapsing Europe. Beyond signaling their appreciation for natural splendor and land ownership, Popp and Herman regularly integrate Canada’s inherent coloniality to reinforce their visions for utopian community building. In a 2012 video promoting his “refuge” in Cape Breton (and hosted by *Querdenker* Michael Friedrich Vogt), Popp describes how his audience of “free-thinkers” is stimulated by the energy of a country that “still has Indians” (Figure 4).<sup>109</sup> Rather than relying entirely on depictions of “empty” land for the taking, Popp and Herman resort to a romanticized colonial imaginary that treats Indigenous people as anthropological curiosities, admirably out of step in a modernizing age. *Querdenker*—a strange coalition of German esoterics, leftist anti-vaxxers and far-right extremists—have emerged on the scene in recent

<sup>104</sup> Doerry, “Elche, Bären, Eva Herman.”

<sup>105</sup> For discussion of international land sales in Cape Breton, see Joan Baxter, “Developers Are Selling Off Cape Breton, One Subdivision after the Other, to German-speaking Non-residents. What—If Anything—Is Wrong with That?,” *Halifax Examiner*, <https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/featured/developers-are-selling-off-cape-breton-one-subdivision-after-the-other-to-german-speaking-non-residents-what-if-anything-is-wrong-with-that/>.

<sup>106</sup> F. E. Property Sales, Ltd., Canada, has since been charged with extortion and firearms-related charges; see <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/german-immigrants-afraid-after-cape-breton-man-charged-1.6319215>.

<sup>107</sup> Tom Ayers, “German Couple Buys Land in Cape Breton, Gets Nazi Material Too,” *CBC News*, July 31, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/german-couple-buys-land-in-cape-breton-gets-nazi-material-too-1.5667512>.

<sup>108</sup> Doerry, “Elche, Bären, Eva Herman.”

<sup>109</sup> See “Canada Reise mit Andreas Popp,” YouTube. The comment comes at the 50:30 time mark. It was filmed in 2012 and uploaded in 2016.



Figure 3. Screenshot of Frank Eckhardt's real estate website at <https://fe-propertiesales.de/en/>.



Figure 4. Excerpt from “Refugium Cape Breton Island—Michael Vogt zu Gast bei Andreas Popp,” 2012.

years to protest government overreach, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Canada’s settler colonial past and present hold a distorted resonance for them. On Herman’s own website, a 2021 post about the Canadian Red Dress Project, which raises awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, uses the history of colonialism as a cautionary tale for Europe, where she implies that assaults against European white women by (what is implied to be) nonwhite immigrants will soon require Germany to have its own Red Dress installations.<sup>110</sup> Self-insertion into a narrative of Indigeneity thus serves to not only

<sup>110</sup> Eva Herman, “Die roten Kleider,” *Willkommen bei eva.herman*, <https://www.eva-herman.net/die-roten-kleider/>.



**Figure 5.** Examples of mainstream media headlines normalizing Canada as “wild” or available space, including Doerry’s own inciting article.<sup>118</sup>

legitimize their claims to land ownership in Canada, but also provides support to their larger racist, anti-immigration views.<sup>111</sup>

Doerry’s findings on these attempted “colonies” were shared widely by German and Canadian media outlets (Figure 5). CBC Nova Scotia reacted with their own investigation into Eckhardt, including interviewing the German couple that received Nazi materials.<sup>112</sup> After reporting on the *Spiegel* findings, the *Halifax Examiner* was contacted by Popp and Herman, who denied any connections to Eckhardt and his Holocaust denial.<sup>113</sup> Notably, although Canadian media outlets and politicians made their disapproval of these ideologies clear, aspects of Popp, Herman, and Eckhardt’s vision resonated with Canadian attitudes toward (European) settlement: in an opinion piece published by *Saltwire*, author Bob

<sup>111</sup> Using Indigenous symbols and ceremonies to legitimize actions with ties to the far right was also observed at the Freedom Convoy in Ottawa, February 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/first-nations-protocols-ceremony-ottawa-rallies-protests-1.6344168>.

<sup>112</sup> Ayers, “German Couple Buys Land in Cape Breton, Gets Nazi Material Too.”

<sup>113</sup> “Nazi Sympathizer Network Buying Up Cape Breton Properties with ‘Colony’ in Mind: German Report,” *National Post*, July 24, 2020, <https://nationalpost.com/news/nazi-sympathizer-network-buying-up-cape-breton-properties-with-colony-in-mind-german-report>; Joan Baxter, “Report: Right-wing German Extremists Are Buying Up Land in Cape Breton,” *Halifax Examiner*, July 23, 2020, <https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/featured/report-german-nazis-are-buying-up-land-in-cape-breton/>.

Martel insists that the “German immigrants [he] know[s] are chasing the Cape Breton dream, not some Nazi nightmare.”<sup>114</sup> Claiming that he himself has no contact with far-right-leaning Germans in Cape Breton, Martel’s commentary nonetheless reinforces a colonial narrative of belonging taken on by the far-right “colony”—resting on the rightful desire for a “simple, rural lifestyle,” as well as the imagined colonial world of Karl May’s western novel, *The Treasure of Silver Lake*, which Martel argues German migrants may be seeking to emulate.<sup>115</sup> Patricia Anne Simpson identifies this framework of references in her 2016 article on Germany’s new online-based far-right personalities, in which she argues (in reference to Popp) that “the identification with First Nations ... invokes the German love of author Karl May, but also the mythos of the ‘vanishing race’ and alignment with warrior cultures.”<sup>116</sup> Self-identification with popular cultural narratives are therein not confined to specific national contexts, but have the capacity to inform the self-legitimization, entitlement, and even public acceptance of far-right actors moving and operating transnationally. And indeed, there are countless examples of mainstream media headlines normalizing Canada as “wild” or available space.<sup>117</sup>

Although the Nova Scotia “Nazi colony” remains a developing media story (see, for example, the *Halifax Examiner*’s three-part follow-up coverage from November 2021),<sup>119</sup> the activities of Popp, Herman, and Eckhardt offer a significant window into both logistical and imagined foundations for the transatlantic operation of the contemporary far right. Popp and Herman, in particular, have created hybrid schemes for sharing and manifesting their far-right worldview, in which their self-credentialized digital presence and critical media content encourages followers’ physical visits, seminars, and land purchases in Canada. In both the digital and physical components of these recruitment schemes, Popp and Herman are shown to emphasize colonial narratives of self-sufficiency alongside coopting Indigenous spirituality and culture into their notions of ideological Canadian belonging. While this movement of the German far right to Canada exists on a significant historical continuum, as shown in this study, Herman and Popp’s imagining of Canada as a space for European colonial refuge is reinforced by cultural norms and popular narratives on both sides of the Atlantic. Alongside Karl May novels and other depictions of North America as an untamed “Wild West” perpetuated in Europe, the illiberal memory of the Canadian far right crafts its own understandings of “legitimate” residency and land use based on the Eurocentric tradition of Canadian immigration campaigns (Figure 6). Social media accounts share historical content that depicts and romanticizes white settlement and self-sustenance, and identifies these white descendants of European settlers as the only “true” modern curators of a distinct Canadian identity. This resonates with both the Canada imagined by Popp, Herman, and Eckhardt (a place for unquestioned European land ownership, escapism, and world building) and Canadian narratives such as the “Cape Breton dream.” The circulation of ideas across the Atlantic among these far-right adherents and the ways in which they can enable far-right mobility (both physically and digitally) thus warrant further examination in the specific contexts of the transatlantic sphere.

<sup>114</sup> Bob Martel, “German Immigrants I Know Are Chasing Cape Breton Dream, Not Some Nazi Nightmare,” *Saltwire*, July 30, 2020, <https://www.saltwire.com/nova-scotia/opinion/bob-martel-german-immigrants-i-know-are-chasing-cape-breton-dream-not-some-nazi-nightmare-479645/>.

<sup>115</sup> Martel, “German Immigrants I Know Are Chasing Cape Breton Dream, Not Some Nazi Nightmare.”

<sup>116</sup> Patricia Anne Simpson, “Mobilizing Meanings: Translocal Identities of the Far Right Web,” *German Politics and Society* 34, no. 4 (2016): 34–53.

<sup>117</sup> Doerry, “Elche, Bären, Eva Herman”; Martel, “German Immigrants I Know Are Chasing Cape Breton Dream, Not Some Nazi Nightmare.”

<sup>119</sup> Joan Baxter, “Marketing Cape Breton as a ‘Refuge’ for ‘Clear Thinkers,’” *Halifax Examiner*, November 19, 2021, <https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/investigation/marketing-cape-breton-as-a-refuge-for-clear-thinkers/>.



**Figure 6.** Examples of historical campaign posters promoting European immigration to Canada, reposted on far-right nationalist Canadian Instagram accounts.<sup>120</sup>

## Conclusion

We have argued that by exploring historic German-Canadian networks and entanglements, we discover transatlantic intersections long before the advent of the internet that help us understand the power, appeal, and resonance of far-right ideas in established democracies. Illiberal memory formations play an essential role in their effort to disseminate and normalize racist ideas within political, educational, social, media, and everyday spaces across the Atlantic. Already in the late 1920s and early 1930s, a variety of different players, including German officials and local groups such as Swastika clubs, connected and adhered to fascist ideas of exclusion and hate in order to promote antisemitism and call for anti-democratic societal change. Print media including newspapers, pamphlets, and books played a pivotal role in disseminating illiberal ideologies. The Second World War interrupted these connections, but only for a short time: transatlantic fascist networks and ideas remained vital after 1945 and were revitalized or even reinvented by individuals like Ernst Zündel. Homegrown racism gave them room to grow.

Far-right movements, as witnessed by the rise of right-wing parties today, aim to legitimize racist settler colonial narratives in order to create illiberal forms of memory and identity rooted in hate, violence, fear-mongering, and falsification of the historical register, as seen with the cases of Zündel and Herman. Their hybrid use of media, both analog and digital, is tailored to specific audiences and promotes polarized inside-outside thinking. Collective enemies are created, drawing on a broad spectrum of hateful ideologies and projections (antisemitism, anti-gender and transphobia, anti-Indigeneity, homophobia and Islamophobia, anti-government and anti-immigrant sentiment, and hate toward homeless persons, persons of color, feminists, as well as mainstream media and democratic institutions). The traffic in hate, including the focus on normalizing shifting attitudes, intentions, and behavioral expressions, does not obey national boundaries.

As a consequence, we cannot underestimate the temporal and spatial adaptability of the transatlantic far-right worldview and its strategies. Current examples like the Cape Breton-

<sup>120</sup> See Instagram posts at [https://www.instagram.com/p/CbS0fGxpd\\_t/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CbS0fGxpd_t/); <https://www.instagram.com/p/CEiKSVzgiLH/>; and <https://www.instagram.com/p/CXfeeSFrGga/>.

based German far-right communities draw on specific nationally or regionally perpetuated narratives (such as Canada as “untouched land,” Karl-May-esque North American romanticism, and histories of National Socialist colonialism and Lebensraum) while also speaking to ideas that resonate with the broader Canadian far-right movement, which constructs Canada as a white colonial space. These illiberal notions resonate easily with Canadian structures that already support the settler “Canadian dream” while reverberating with global audiences aspiring for “refuge” from cancel culture and corrupt Western governments. This offers a transnational toehold to far-right mobility and schemes of belonging whether financial, ideological, or otherwise. Although many of these ideas are rooted in similarly misleading historical narratives that perpetuate white supremacy and hate, they are not imposed from outside the social contract of liberal democracy; they reside within it. The question for us now becomes what do with the knowledge that liberal democratic norms and systems might also produce illiberal outcomes?

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