Panic! In the suburbs: Investigating moral configurations of risk, neoliberal rationality, and middle-class anxiety in Maple Ridge B.C.

by

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine how the emergence of a homeless encampment in Maple Ridge, British Columbia in 2017 produced a reaction that I argue was the result of a moral panic. I seek to understand how a homeless encampment, as a hyper visible, centralized, and politically active hub for a marginalized community contributed to the sense of urgency around homelessness. I draw upon moral panic scholarship including theories around risk, neoliberal rationality, and the attending hybrid moral configurations produced by both to account for the hyper emotional reaction to homelessness in Maple Ridge. I situate this panic within the development of neoliberal disciplinary mechanisms that compel individuals to internalize ways of being that reimagine their relationship to the state and implore them to manage the conduct of others accordingly. Finally, I argue that this event was produced by a latent anxiety around economic precarity within middle class suburban communities.

Keywords: moral panic; homelessness; tent city; neoliberalism; risk; discourse

Dedication

I first want to express gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Dany Lacombe for her thoughtful insight and support throughout this process. I also want to thank the professors and instructors that have guided me through my journey in academia and encouraged me to recognize my own ability even when I was unable to do so myself.

Thank you to Paul for being unwavering in your love, loyalty, and belief in my ability to succeed. Your kindness is truly remarkable.

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Thank you, Dad. This quite literally would not have been possible without your contribution and even if you are unable to see what it has produced, I hope it is a proud addition to your legacy.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

On October 27th, 2017, against the backdrop of a crowded audience, three small business owners presented a case to Maple Ridge city council regarding what they argued was the extremely troubling impact of a nearby homeless camp. Yvan Charette, owner of the Haney Hotel spoke about lost revenue from regular customers resulting in reduced staff hours as a result of constant disturbances caused by camp residents. Mark Lancaster, owner of a local automotive shop, pleaded with city council to take seriously the threat posed to Maple Ridge "taxpayers" as he recounted instances where patrons, including "mothers and infants", experienced "highly graphic and violent death threats" by individuals he was certain were camp residents (Maple Ridge Council Meeting Video Recording, 2017). Finally, local business owner named Ahmed Yousef, who identified himself as a taxpayer, father and husband, concluded the presentation with a summation of the group's concerns:

> You have Saint Anne's Clinic that's struggling to keep its premises free of needles, excrement, and intimidating trespassers. On 224th, a wellness center barricades its massage therapists behind a locked interior gate. In a matter of weeks, they have filed 4 police reports. Langley Farm Market on 207th has had three break ins in two weeks. Sopranos Pizza: break and enter. Subway on Lougheed: armed robberies. 7-11 at Haney Bypass: robbed at gunpoint. Max Convenience Store: six armed robberies in the past 3 months. One of our local hotels was robbed at knife point […] Even your largest taxpayers are not exempt. Malls and major national retailers are forced to defend patrons with security guards and increased loss prevention staff. LordCo Parts, for example, a BC wide chain based here in Maple Ridge, deal with ongoing threats and issues. Clients in the Fuller-Watson building operate behind fencing with razor wire. Haney builders incurs a $70,000 annual tab for security. Vendor Canada's only Chevron station with a 24-hour security guard at a cost of over $50,000 per year to the owner. Thrifty Foods: losing thousands of dollars to shoplifting that they have had to reduce their opening hours. These stories are just the tip of the iceberg gleaned from myself, Mark, and the gentleman who spoke today talking to business owners. Add them to the complaints I'm sure you've heard. And this is before we talk about the impact to residential taxpayers. What we've been doing is not working. Not by any measure. While attempting to help the addicted homeless we've created a wild west environment that is as damaging to the homeless as it is to the community and businesses. Please. I beg. I implore of you: stand with the residents and businesses that have built this community and

end the daily torment of so many of us. I thank you for your time. (Maple Ridge Council Meeting Video Recording, October 24th, 2017)

Approximately one year after his presentation, Ahmed Yousef was elected to Maple Ridge city council after his participation in a collective of individuals called the "Burnett Street Neighbours" that successfully resisted a proposal by the British Columbia Provincial government to open a 85-unit supportive housing and shelter complex on Burnett street In Maple Ridge (Corbett, 2019; Melynchuk, 2018a). Yousef's campaign focused keenly on the issue of homelessness in Maple Ridge as he promised to be a city councillor "who will listen, champion for equal and consistent enforcement of laws, and offer real help, not warehouse the homeless." (Melynchuk, 2018a). Yousef's entry into municipal politics would occur during a period of intense divisiveness in Maple Ridge over the issue of homelessness. The debate gradually intensified after the appearance of two homeless encampments in Maple Ridge, first in 2015 and again in 2017. The second encampment, referred to as "Anita Place", represented a significant flashpoint. Created by individuals dealing with homelessness and anti-poverty activists as a protest against a lack of affordable housing and shelter space, Anita Place became one of the most notorious and contentious tent cities in British Columbia's history. A series of unsuccessful legal challenges were brought against the camp by Maple Ridge city council throughout 2017 and 2018. Local residents rallied against the camp as they argued it was responsible for a perceived increase in crime in the surrounding area. The backlash against Anita Place reached a climax in 2018 after the Provincial government proposed several supportive housing projects, referred to as "Temporary Modular Housing". The proposals were met by fierce opposition by residents who felt it would only further exacerbate the increase in crime caused by Anita Place residents. Construction was delayed after several demonstrations against the projects including one where a collection of residents was arrested blocking access to the project's construction site (Melynchuk, 2018b). As of 2019, two Temporary Modular Housing projects have been constructed and occupied by tenants, and Anita Place has been disbanded, however, reverberations of the outrage of many Maple Ridge residents continue to echo through the community.

At the time I began investigating the discourse that surrounded homelessness in Maple Ridge in late Spring of 2018, it became immediately apparent that I was witnessing a reaction more volatile than typical "NIMBYism". People invested in the

issue appeared to experience a type of catharsis through their expression of support or discontent for proposed measures to address homelessness. City council meetings were lit up by an endless parade of citizens energized by a cocktail of frustration, fear, and righteous indignation; they clamored to have an opportunity to use public question periods to express discontent with city officials whom they perceived to be singularly responsible for the deterioration of their community. Neighborhood coalitions organized to create petitions, hold public demonstrations, and block construction crews at site of social housing developments. These events satiated local media's ravenous appetite for controversy by providing an almost daily source of content as they reported on each unfolding detail of the ongoing confrontation between foot soldiers of their respective causes. Conversations between opposed parties on social media platforms were, and continue to be, at a rolling boil of rage, frustration, fatigue and exacerbation. Opponents squared off in these spaces to debate the origins of homelessness, the reasons for its particular iteration in British Columbia, and the most useful prescription for its eradication.

In this thesis, I examine how the emergence of the homeless encampment or "tent city" in Maple Ridge produced a particularly volatile reaction from the community. I argue that the backlash against Anita Place tent city and a social housing proposal designated for homeless people in Maple Ridge is the result of a moral panic. I seek to understand how a homeless encampment, as a hyper visible, centralized, and politically active hub for traditionally disenfranchised individuals, contributed to the sense of urgency that homelessness is a danger to local communities and a worsening social condition. I analyze the ways in which the discussion of homelessness has been dominated by neoliberal rationality that emphasizes risk adversity and personal responsibility. I draw upon moral panic scholarship as well as theories around risk, neoliberal rationality, and the attending hybrid moral configurations produced by both to understand why a community became particularly energized around this iteration of homelessness. I situate this panic within the broader development of neoliberal disciplinary mechanisms that compel individuals to internalize ways of being that reimagine their relationship to the state and implore them to manage the conduct of others in accordance with these norms. Finally, I argue that the moral panic in Maple Ridge is reflective of a deeper, latent anxiety around economic precarity within middle class suburban communities.

The backlash against Anita Place tent city and social housing proposals in Maple Ridge is situated within a decades long assault on the poor and working class in British Columbia. While homelessness and anti-homeless rhetoric are certainly not new phenomena in B.C., the seemingly sudden appearance of tent cities and their ability to generate attention in places like Maple Ridge has contributed to anxiety around entrenched poverty and its somewhat novel proximity to middle class suburban space. Given this is a relatively recent reconfiguration of suburban space, it is necessary to contextualize the concerns of suburbanites around homelessness within the progress of a neoliberal project in British Columbia and its attending impact on the socioeconomic landscape.

Maple Ridge, a suburban municipality within Metro Vancouver of approximately 82,000 citizens, is a predominately white, middle-aged, low to middle income community; nearly 76% of Maple Ridge residents identify as "European Canadian", the median age of the population is 41 years old, and the approximate total annual median income for an individual in 2015 was $37, 500 (Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population). According to the 2016 Census, the most common employment sectors for Maple Ridge residents are construction and retail trade (Statistics Canada, 2016 Census Population). Over the past several decades, middle income communities like Maple Ridge experiencing a reasonable degree of economic security from stable employment have been set on a downwardly mobile trajectory. As the bubble of the postwar economic boom in Western countries burst during a period of economic downturn in the early 1980s, governments responded with a series of successively more punitive austerity programs that targeted the poor and working class (McDonald, 2018). In British Columbia, McDonald describes the objectives of then Social Credit Provincial Government during this period:

> Viewing the "recession as an opportunity to slash the public service and curb the power of their unions," the government introduced twenty-six bills that aimed at "nothing short of totally redrawing the economic and social contours" of the province. The civil service would shrink 25 percent; government employees could be fired without cause. Human rights apparatuses created by the Barrett government and rent control mechanisms were eliminated. (2018:79)

Legislation was passed that took aim at gains made by the labour movement including indefinite public sector wage controls, amendments to Employment Standards that challenged various workers' rights, and abolishing the Employment Standards Board (Magnusson et. al, 1984). While the neoliberal philosophical influence on governance both locally and globally continued to intensify throughout the 1980's and 1990's, its impact would be most apparent in British Columbia after the 2001 election of the B.C. Liberal party into government (Cohen & Klein 2011; McBride & McNutt 2007). In their near sixteen-year tenure, the B.C. Liberals had a tremendously negative impact on protections for poor and working-class communities in B.C. – that included but was not limited to – continued changes to labour regulations, deep cuts to social assistance and basic social safety nets. The cuts occurred during a concurrent period of economic growth and an increase in both homelessness and overall economic precarity for low to middle class income brackets referred to as the "B.C. Paradox" (Cohen & Klein, 2011: 60).

Gaetz (2013) argues that the neoliberal influence on social policy during this time preceded a punitive turn in policy decisions around social assistance. For Cohen and Klein (2011), neoliberalism's greatest impact on the poorest communities was felt most keenly via the roll back of welfare assistance. While the "breadth of poverty in B.C. is mainly a low-wage story" they argue, "deep poverty is primarily a welfare story" (Cohen & Klein, 2011:70). Effectively, economic precarity became more widespread in British Columbia as a result of stagnant wages whereas deep poverty became further entrenched as a result of increasingly punitive stipulations attached to social welfare programs. This included the addition of exclusionary eligibility requirements for benefits, arbitrary wait times, and added criteria for maintaining assistance (Little and Marks, 2006). Welfare rates for a single individual in British Columbia were frozen at $610 per month for approximately ten years before being increased to $710 per month by the NDP government in 2017 (Zussman, 2017). As welfare rates remained stagnant amidst a rapidly accelerating cost of living, social assistance recipients tended to fall into "survival mode" whilst on benefits (Cohen & Klein 2011: 70). Those accessing welfare found themselves in a ceaseless pursuit of housing, food, clothing, and other basic needs that ultimately made upward mobility out of deep poverty virtually impossible.

In the chasm left by welfare state retrenchment in British Columbia, efforts to manage the most basic, immediate impact of poverty now occur through short term,

crisis-response style strategies. Gaetz (2007: 358) argues that the failure of neoliberal governance to address underlying systemic reasons for poverty result in people getting "locked in homelessness", both increasing the number of chronically homeless individuals *and* making existing homeless populations more 'visible'. As homelessness becomes more widespread, visible, and disruptive in previously unaffected communities like Maple Ridge, Gaetz argues a sense of urgency builds whereby people begin to pressure law makers to "do something about it" (2007: 358). State responses to ebbs and flows in anxiety over visible poverty, both the provincial and municipal levels, increasingly takes the form of emergency services in lieu of macro level systemic interventions. Strategies to quell community concern and improve the optics of homelessness in British Columbia increasingly materialize as emergency warming shelters in cold months, soup kitchens, food banks, and clothing donations. As evidenced in Maple Ridge and elsewhere, recently these programs have begun to bump up against resistance from communities to an increased proximity of facilities that serve populations entrenched in poverty. For example, a food bank in a municipality neighboring Maple Ridge struggled to find a facility to rent; as the food bank CEO noted "There isn't a great deal of vacancy in the City of Langley and even in the Township of Langley. Not everyone's keen to rent to a food bank." (Fatur, 2019).

Creation of social housing for the growing homeless population in Maple Ridge has been tremendously controversial. In 2017, the provincial government committed to spending 291 million dollars on the construction of 2,000 supportive housing units across British Columbia in an effort to address a worsening homelessness problem (BC Housing, 2018). Referred to as "Temporary Modular Housing" (TMH) these small, self-contained residential suites were designed to be quickly constructed on "underused" or vacant spaces across the province (BC Housing, 2018). While reception of proposed TMH projects has ranged from tolerant to welcoming in neighborhoods like Vancouver's Olympic Village and Strathcona, several proposals in less densely populated, suburban areas, such as Vancouver's Marpole neighborhood and the City of Richmond, were met with fierce opposition. Residents organized public demonstrations against TMH projects in their respective communities including blockades that delayed construction, rallies, interviews with media, and privately funded legal challenges (Corbett, 2018; Xiong, 2018). In Maple Ridge, the backlash against Anita Place reached a type of fever pitch in 2017 after two TMH project proposals were announced. The proposals would be the

second attempt in two years by the Provincial government to open supportive housing for homeless people in Maple Ridge. In early 2016, the Provincial government attempted to purchase and repurpose a vacant Quality Inn hotel as supportive housing units for homeless people (Larsen, 2016). The proposal was scrapped after an outcry from local residents that included a rally attended by over seven-hundred people opposing the project (Hager, 2016). Concerns cited were primarily related to the "low-barrier" model of the proposal that would not stipulate abstinence from drugs as a requirement for tenants and the proximity of the hotel to nearby schools and daycares (Hager, 2016).

In 2018, the Province purchased a site on Royal Crescent Avenue in Maple Ridge designated as the location for a 55-unit TMH project (Flanagan, 2018). Shortly after the proposal was announced, opposed local residents began to rally against it. A neighborhood coalition organized a protest camp on the site of Royal Crescent and blocked construction crews from entering before being arrested by the RCMP (Melnychuk, 2018b). The second project, proposed for Burnett Street, was initially voted down by city council in 2018 (Hall, 2018). In 2019, against the stated position of city council and many Maple Ridge residents, the Provincial government unilaterally chose to approve the project and began construction (Melynchuk, 2019b). As of November 2019, both projects have been constructed and are fully operational.

<u>The Tent City</u>

Ongoing efforts by Maple Ridge residents to resist supportive housing proposals in their community occurred in tandem with an outcry against Anita Place tent city. While homeless communities are under near constant threat of displacement by various actors, the emergence of the 'tent city' seems to have sparked a new type of outrage and concern primarily in suburban communities across Canada (Stueck, 2019). The history of the North American homeless camp spans several decades. Herring (2014: 285) notes that pre-1970's, the appearance and disappearance of homeless encampments in North America were correlated with the "booms and busts of business cycles" whereby they were most visible during times of economic downturn. After the 1970's push for deinstitutionalization of individuals dealing with mental illness and the neoliberal inspired assault on the welfare state, the homeless camp became a more enduring fixture in the North American urban landscape (Herring, 2014). While tent cities lack the infrastructure to meet basic needs like access to water, sanitation, and warmth,

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they nonetheless act as a space of community and resistance for a typically alienated and vulnerable population that experiences homelessness. Loftus-Farren (2011) argues that in societies where access to safe, affordable housing is nearly impossible for some, tent cities offer critically important short-term housing options and opportunity for community building. In addition to more practical benefits experienced by residents, tent cities also act as sites of political resistance allowing often marginalized voices the opportunity to advocate for rights in a powerfully disruptive fashion.

As with much of North America, tent cities in British Columbia's Lower Mainland are increasingly common. One of the earliest protest camps in Vancouver's recent history was the 2002 "Woodsquat" located at the site of Downtown Vancouver's Woodward's department store. Woodsquat was part of a broader social movement that emerged in response to cuts to social safety nets by the B.C. Liberal government (Isitt, 2018). Since then, tent cities have appeared across the region, including "Namegans" tent city in Victoria (Bartlett, 2018), "Discontent City" in Nanaimo (Nanaimo News Staff, 2018) and, more recently, "Santurary" in Surrey (Ke, 2019) and Vancouver's Oppenheimer Park (Tanner, 2019). The emergence of tent cities as a protest strategy by homeless communities has been equally charted by a rise in anger and frustration from communities within which the camps appear. While backlash from "concerned residents" has flared in urban centres like Downtown Vancouver (Bula, 2019), a particularly volatile and sustained response has come from smaller, suburban communities where hyper visible, centralized homelessness is a relatively recent phenomenon. In Abbotsford, a municipality in the Fraser Valley, a tent city was formed in 2013 in response to a lack of shelter space (Baker & Okrusko, 2015). The reception by locals to the camp became somewhat notorious after making headlines when Abbotsford city workers dumped chicken manure on the tent city before evicting residents in 2014 (Baker & Okrusko, 2015).

While relatively short, Maple Ridge's history with tent cities has evolved into a prolonged battle over social policy. Maple Ridge's Anita Place tent city was created in May 2017 as a protest against the lack of affordable housing in the region (Stueck, 2019). It would be Maple Ridge's second tent city in two years after the first--located on Cliff Avenue behind a closed Salvation Army shelter--was demolished by city officials in 2015 (Melnychuk, 2015). After an outcry from local business owners and residents who claimed the first camp, inhabited by approximately sixty-five individuals, represented a

threat to "health and safety", a short-term "low-barrier" shelter was opened in a closed mattress retail store to house camp residents (Baker & Okrusko, 2015). In May 2017, it was announced this temporary shelter would be closed, leaving shelter residents with no immediate housing options (Johnston, 2017), leading to the formation of Anita Place tent city. Named as an homage to Anita Hauck, a resident and advocate for the Cliff Avenue camp who died in 2015 after getting stuck attempting to retrieve items from a clothing donation bin, Anita Place is also meant to sound like "I need a place" (Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows News, 2017). Supported by local anti-displacement activist organization the "Alliance Against Displacement" (AAD), Anita Place was created as an act of resistance and civil disobedience. According AAD organizer Ivan Drury, "Anita Place is a politically unifying force that makes homeless people activists, and binds anti-capitalist/anti-colonial activists to the immediate needs and consciousness of oppressed people" (Drury, 2018). Anna Cooper of the Pivot Legal Society describes Anita Place as "Canada's longest-standing, community-organized public encampment in living memory" (Cooper, 2018).

Since its inception, residents of Anita Place and their advocates have resisted efforts to disband the camp. Between 2017 and 2019, the City of Maple Ridge filed three applications with the B.C. Supreme Court to obtain orders that would allow city officials to either relocate camp residents or force compliance with regulations around fire and warming devices (Melynchuk, 2019a). The first application was dropped and the second was settled with an order that allowed camp residents to remain provided they were compliant with certain conditions (Stueck, 2019). The final application, filed in December 2018 under the authority of newly elected city council members and Mayor Mike Morden, claimed preconditions from the second application were not met and "fire risks" had reached a "critical level" putting campers and the public at "serious risk of injury or death." (Stueck, 2019). In early 2019, a court order was granted to the City of Maple Ridge that permitted the fire department and city workers to evacuate camp residents and "check fire safety" (Carrigg, 2019). After the arrests of several noncompliant camp residents including AAD activists, the camp was reopened with a series of provisions including a 24-hour on site security presence and requirements for "verification" prior to entry (Carrigg, 2019). These provisions effectively barred the majority of existing residents from accessing the camp. In September 2019, the city of Maple Ridge

announced the relocation of the remaining residents of Anita Place to modular housing and the start of work to turn the camp site into a public park. (Melnychuk, 2019d)

Rather than an act of pure survival, the contemporary tent city in North America has come to function as a site of resistance amplifying the often atomized and muffled political voice of homeless people. I would argue the appearance of these spaces in suburban communities acted as a flash point in the development of the current moral panic about homelessness underway in Maple Ridge and elsewhere. In small, uneven, disparate gatherings scattered across the region, homeless people have been rendered their most invisible and vulnerable to dispossession and marginalization. The tent city has materialized the existence of a more unified, politically active, centralized homeless population whose presence in suburban communities is sufficiently disruptive to demand attention and compel state action. Despite the considerable backlash that residents of these tent cities have faced over the past several years, they have been undeniably successful in creating a type of hyper urgency around the issue of homelessness that has not existed prior. The emergence of Maple Ridge's first homeless camp in 2015 represented a major shift in the ways that homeless communities advocated for themselves whilst highlighting a threadbare infrastructure available to address poverty. The tension between the political action of a marginalized, silenced population of homeless people and the fear and outrage of suburban families materialized into a moral panic.

Chapter 2.

Literature Review & Methods

The term moral panic was first popularized by Stanley Cohen in his investigation into dueling youth subcultures, the "mods and rockers", in 1960's Britain. Cohen analyzed media coverage of riots between the two groups and the exaggerated social reaction that ensued to develop the concept of moral panic and its function in society. He defines moral panics as when:

> A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes. (Cohen, 2002: 1)

According to Cohen (2002), moral panics are moments when persons, or conditions he called "folk devils" become symbolic targets onto which broader social anxiety is projected. Moral panics are, as Jock Young (2011: 250) describes, "a dramatic form of othering" that involves the scapegoating of folk devils as the cause of often unrelated, pre-existing social problems. Through "deviance amplification" the behaviour of folk devils is moralized in a manner that reinforces a moral code or boundary that is perceived to have been transgressed (Ungar, 2001: 277). Goode and Ben- Yehuda (1994) identify moral panics according to five core attributes: a heightened level of "concern"; "hostility" towards folk devils; "consensus" around the immediacy of their apparent threat; "disproportionality" of the reaction to the actual threat posed by folk devils; and "volatility" or a seemingly sudden eruption of concern (1994: 157; 158) . Disproportionality is an assumption inherent to the model of moral panic– it contends that the public concern over folk devils is not grounded in a "rational" calculation of risk but is a highly embellished, hyperbolic, "disproportionate" reaction (Hall et al., 1978).

Four key groups are responsible for the initiation and development of a moral panic: the mass media, moral entrepreneurs, the "control culture" (public and private agencies responsible for identifying and containing deviance), and the general public (Critcher, 2008: 1129). Through the process of "claims making", moral entrepreneurs both sound the alarm around a condition and contribute to the "net-widening" of an issue that broadens it from a general concern to a moral panic (Clapton et al., 2013: 804). Becker (1995: 169) defines moral entrepreneurs as society's "rule creators" and "rule enforcers" who leverage structural advantage or influence to shape moral discourse and ensure the continued functioning of particular social norms. Until relatively recently, traditionally moral entrepreneurs have been represented by politicians, religious leaders, and other politically conservative actors. Cohen was particularly interested in the process through which claims of moral entrepreneurs migrated via media amplification into the public consciousness. He argued that "understanding the role of the mass media in creating moral panics and folk devils" is necessary to unpack how deviance is socially constructed, and its function in enforcing moral boundaries (Cohen 2002: 11). While moral entrepreneurs generate exaggerated claims about folk devils, the germination of moral panics occur "through amplification of claims making in the media" (Hier, 2008: 176). The mass media circulate stereotypical portrayals of deviant acts and reinforce "rising spirals of alarm" around the group or act in question that generates a public sense that immediate action is necessary (Young, 2011: 250). According to the canonical definition, panics are "initiated from above" insofar as they are introduced by moral entrepreneurs who pioneer the reductive language that is used to the public to communicate the threat of folk devils to the wider public (Hier, 2008: 176).

The function of moral panic

Moral panics function to reaffirm moral boundaries that shift during moments of social change. Jock Young (2011) notes that the inflated concern around the mods and rockers phenomenon was a manifestation of unease around the threat to social norms represented by 1960s British youth culture. The mods and rockers were perceived as a rejection of the established social order and, as Cohen describes, the response to their behaviour was "as much to what they stood for as what they did" (2002: 224). According to Stuart Hall, panics function as opportunities for the state to capitalize on waves of public concern around crime as justification for an escalation of state violence towards certain populations that can ultimately secure hegemonic social relations under the "law-

and-order state" (1978: 322). Irrespective of the context within which they erupt, the origins of moral panics exist within the "tectonic plates of structural and normative change" that shift to release the energy apparent during moral panics (Young, 2011: 253).

Morality and moralization generate ideas. Moral panics, as products of both, are likewise productive. They do ideological work that "makes things happen" (Garland, 2008: 16). Panics are moments where a tremendous amount of energy is generated or what Garland refers to as "collective effervescence" (2008: 18). Panics are exciting, energetic moments for participants, spectators, media and stakeholders; they are conspicuously enjoyable in their spectacle. Panics also provide opportunities for people to feel connected to one another. Cohen's original theory includes many Durkheimian influences but none as clear as the assertion that panics are outcomes of a "boundary crisis" in society (Cohen, 2002: 219). Durkheim argues that morality generates consensus and unity; Cohen likewise asserts that panics allow participants to locate contours of an imagined community. Discursive formations deployed during panics allow communities to "fashion an enemy to mark the distinction between 'us' (the [allegedly] upstanding citizenship) and them (the wrongdoers)" (Monod, 2017: 44). Panics identify insiders and outsiders. The identification of those who do not belong or those who threaten the assumed order of things implicitly demarcates the qualities of those who do belong. Put differently, as claims makers assert the "otherness" of folk devils they simultaneously and unconsciously speak about themselves. This is an exclusionary practice that paradoxically engenders inclusion. While panics appear reactionary and volatile, they are also a process whereby a sense of community, belonging and togetherness for insiders is reaffirmed and redefined.

This dimension of moral panic analysis is particularly timely insofar as shared morality is increasingly tenuous within a society that operates according to what Durkheim describes as the "cult of the individual" (Marske, 1987: 1). Critcher (2003) argues that because of increasing social plurality, the development of a novel type of public sphere online, and the dissolution of class cohesion, debates around morality are more intense than ever before. Additionally, the undercurrent of uncertainty endemic to the "risk society" described by Beck (1992) produces a thirst for certainty via the identification of community. Bauman (2001) argues that modern life is characterized by a profound impulse to eliminate uncertainty and the unknowable (or the indefinable). He

conceptualizes the modern pursuit of community as underpinned by a desire to simplify, and reduce nuance and complexity of social relations to a point whereby a comfortable level of truth can be attained. Monod (2017: 69) likewise notes that a sense of belonging or community operates as a type of antidote to the "individuation" that "modernity initiates". Greer (2004: 113) argues that in a "climate of uncertainty", people appear to rally around issues that engender a sense of "unity and cohesion". The ability to locate a collective self, an "us", allows people to cling to a sense of belonging. Attempts to tap into shared values, like during moral panics, allow individuals to be plugged into a moral economy of decency, predictability, and familiarity that is buckling under a diverse socio-cultural landscape and cultural preoccupation with individual rights. While panics remain a primarily "boundary defining" process, as described by Cohen, the motivation behind them is situated within deep desires to establish familiarity in a society in the midst of a rapidly shifting social landscape.

<u>Evolution of moral panic theory</u>

Moral panic has been an immensely influential sociological concept widely applied by both academics and non-academics as a theoretical lens through which to view sudden eruptions of collective anxiety. As the field of moral panic research broadened, analysts have attempted to update Cohen's original formulation to sustain its relevance amidst shifting social structures. An aspect of the conventional panic model that has been subject to considerable debate relates to what some scholars describe as the "normative judgment" embedded within the concept of "disproportionality". Several scholars argue the "disproportionality model" of panic research is critically flawed given that there exists no single, objective measurement of "proportionality" within particular social reactions (Hier, 2002; Hunt 1999; Moore and Valverde 2000). Rohloff and Wright (2010) argue the core premise that panics necessarily represent "irrational" reactions ungrounded in a realistic calculation of risk tends to reflect the subjective judgement of researchers rather than a solid analytical criterion. Put differently, there has been a critique leveled against moral panic theory that a considerable degree of subjectivity is involved in assessing the degree to which a reaction is "out of proportion" to a threat.

Similarly, some challenge Cohen's premise that moral panics typically represent attempts to reaffirm typically conservative social values. Cohen (2011) himself was critical of the tendency to construct moral panics as necessarily "bad" or regressively conservative social movements characterized by a desire to impede progress or social

justice; he stressed the necessity of a delineation between "good" and "bad" panics and how the immediacy and energy that drive panics can be harnessed towards positive, progressive social change. Several social movements that erupt suddenly to address an issue occur in a manner that is characteristically "panic"-like, for example, climate change activism (Cohen, 2011). Carlson (2015) additionally asserts that, where the goal or outcome of a panic is an advancement of social justice or an interruption of oppression, it can be considered positive. Hier (2017: 871) argues panics are "normatively ambivalent operations of power" that are neither rooted necessarily in an oppressive impulse to maintain the status quo or from progressive values of compassion and care. Consequently, scholars have argued for a rethinking of panics as apolitical phenomena where neither end of the political spectrum is immune to the passionate, energized and often volatile reaction that occurs during a moral panic (Hier, 2017: 870).

Another limitation of the conventional moral panic model is the "temporal" component that framed them through what Rohloff and Wright (2010: 406) describe as a "present centered" lens. With some exceptions (notably Hall et al.'s analysis of mugging), moral panic research has rarely accounted for the progression of social dynamics over history that contribute to their development. Additionally, Ungar (2001: 278) notes that moral panic research is almost exclusively done "in retrospect" with regards to "successful panics" that appear suddenly, conclude, and result in legislative changes. Ungar (2001: 280) stresses the need for increased investigations of "waves of public concern" that fail to meet the criteria of moral panic but that nonetheless represent significant markers of social anxiety that could potentially materialize into moral panics. Likewise, Rohloff and Wright (2010) argue that few investigations account for the reasons why panics inevitably subside. Moral panic research traditionally has failed to adequately account for causes behind the development and cessation of panics given its temporally limited focus.

Finally, recent shifts in the nature of mass media, access to information, and claims making processes have necessitated a rethinking of conventional perspectives on mass media and claims amplification. The foundational analyses of Cohen (2002) and Hall et al. (1978) were predicated on the influence of a dominant, centralized media structure on popular discourse that facilitated the ability of a moral authority to "engineer social consensus and control" (Ungar, 2001: 276). McRobbie and Thorton (1995) argue this framework constructs society and social reactions as predictable and consensual.

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Panics are assumed to be expressions of a monolithic moral order and moments where an uncritically adopted social order is reorganized and affirmed by moral gatekeepers (McRobbie & Thorton, 1995). While folk devils remain a core feature of moral panics, their role has evolved considerably; some scholars argue that contemporary folk devils appear less marginalized than their historical counterparts – with some modern exceptions like terrorists or pedophiles, for example. Through media expansion and fragmentation, folk devils have access to a multitude of platforms and mediums through which they can contest and subvert stereotypical portrayals (McRobbie & Thorton, 1995). The somewhat novel ability of any individual, including folk devils, to produce counter narratives against the claims of moral entrepreneurs was largely impossible within a centralized media landscape (McRobbie & Thorton, 1995). Hier (2019: 384) argues the most significant impact of evolving forms of technology on moral panics is how they are "witnessed". Stories, arguments, testimonials, or other forms of evidence that support or contest dominant media narratives can be circulated widely and consequently, contemporary moral panics are no longer witnessed by "cohesive audiences" (Hier, 2019: 386). Processes central to the creation of panics have become increasingly "unpredictable and fractious" as they represent instances where a diverse group of voices engage in a type of confrontation between subjective assertions of the moral order (Ungar, 2001: 277). Consensual and uncontested panics have become as scarce and outdated as some of their associated media platforms. McRobbie and Thorton (1995: 571) stress the need for a paradigm shift from "conventional points of social control" to an understanding of panics as a series of "endless debate(s) about who 'we' are and what 'our' national culture is". Put differently, in lieu of a view of panics as monolithic or "top down" (Ungar, 2001) many advocate for an analytical shift that reflects how panics no longer operate on a type of linear trajectory whereby a uniform public uncritically adopts and acts upon moral imperatives disseminated by authorities.

<u>Panics as Regulation</u>

In response to critiques of the original theory, moral panic scholars have attempted to update, sharpen, and tighten the focus of moral panic research. Specifically, debates around the "disproportionality" model continue in moral panic literature. Some advocate for a rethinking of moral panics as instances of ongoing moral regulation processes rather than eruptions of irrational concern. Hier (2008) argues that moral panics are not exaggerated, inflated reactions to imagined threats but rather

routine extensions of social life manifesting through constellations of risk and responsibility. He argues primarily that panics represent "short term manifestations of long-term moral regulation processes" (2011: 524). Panics are understood to be neither ahistorical nor limited eruptions of irrationality. Instead, panics are situated on a continuum of an endlessly unfolding process of negotiations around moral boundaries that continue to operate (albeit in less dramatic ways) after panics subside. Panics then should be approached as instances where the moral boundary is threatened and renegotiated in a way that is "routine rather than extraordinary" (Rohloff and Wright, 2010: 410). Despite some consensus around the "moral panics as moral regulation" model proposed by Hier, Jock Young (2009) alternatively suggests that, because moral panics are moments where pre-existing anxiety is projected onto a scapegoat, disproportionality refers to a reaction towards the scapegoat, not the underlying cause:

> The response to the event is somewhat proportional to the anxiety, otherwise it would simply not be a fully-fledged moral panic. What is disproportionate is the reaction to its immediate manifestation. It is proportional to the anxiety, not to the actual event. (14)

Put differently, it is the reaction to folk devils that is disproportionate during a panic, Young argues, not the reaction to the underlying anxiety that is being displaced onto them. Falkof (2018) contends that contemporary research has become overly preoccupied with developing a universally applicable model of moral panic. Though the canonical works of Cohen (2002) and Hall et al. (1978) provide rich analysis of individual panics and their associated features, much contemporary scholarship forgoes this style in favor of using case studies as a vehicle to develop the theoretical model to a point of universality (Falkof, 2018). Falkof (2018) stresses the need to understand moral panic as a "framework" rather than a model as it allows for more useful investigations into collective experiences of heightened anxiety. Accordingly, this project does not engage with this ongoing debate by explicitly asserting the degree to which the reaction in Maple Ridge is "disproportionate". As will become apparent, there was an often exaggerated and inflated tone to the claims of many residents however my analysis attends more to the ideological underpinnings of the moralized discourse around homelessness than to what Thompson (2001: viii) describes as the "secondary features" of moral panics like disproportionately. My hope is that this will facilitate a deeper engagement with the various styles of discourse deployed by Maple Ridge residents during this event as means to better understand the particular social structures that produced them.

<u>Risk and morality</u>

        Moral panic research has also evolved to reflect shifts in sites of social anxiety within the context of what Beck refers to as the "risk society". Beck (1992) argues that a latent outcome of modernization is a type of free-floating, generalized social anxiety around potential harms associated with forces of capitalist production. In the 1980's, a type of novel social consciousness began to develop around potentially catastrophic outcomes of a variety of industrial practices; people became acutely aware of the largely incalculable and unknowable potential risks posed by, for example, nuclear chemicals or widespread destruction of the natural environment (Ungar, 2001). Beck (1992) referred to this new consciousness organized around anxiety as indicative of a "new modernity" which he described as the "risk society". The risk society is one that sees risk everywhere and organizes around the careful calculation and ongoing negotiation with risk and harm (Beck, 1992). Ungar (2001) argues that contemporary society is confronted by risks that are incomparable to previous generations. Though anxiety provoking historical risks, like for example those associated with the possibility of nuclear war, had clear causes and solutions, today's risks have become "incalculable and unpredictable", impossibly complex, and "not detectable by our senses" (Ungar 2001: 273). Despite an "increased reflexivity" manifested through a sharp increase in efforts to understand, manage, and mitigate risk, their associated potential consequences remain mysterious (Ungar, 2001: 273). The "new modernity" that characterizes life within the risk society means that we navigate life confronted by a set of existential risks not experienced by prior generations. Unsurprisingly, Ungar (2001) argues the particular type of anxiety that manifests from an acute awareness of these risks is unique. Prudence and harm avoidance become a "constitutive component of social organization" rather than sporadic and occasional and risk becomes an "everyday ritual" or "blind faith" (Miller, 2006: 306). While, as Miller (2006:303) notes, the risk society has "come to terms with the unintended consequences of late modernity", the resulting social anxiety has a profound impact on micro and macro levels of social life. Individuals shape their behaviour in accordance with values of prudence and rational calculation of risk. Institutions, rules, norms and conventions increasingly become organized around concepts of safety and security. Collectively, society becomes preoccupied with strategies that anesthetize the dull pain produced by an awareness of ever-present, looming catastrophic threats. We become increasingly focused on "actionable" threats or

those that seem to indicate concrete causes and solutions, like for example, crime (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997: 206).

Though risk indicates potential harms, it also presupposes an availability of solutions, the possibility for action or, "risk prevention". As Hier (2003: 14) notes "risk represents a discursive technique which implies faith in the controllability of social phenomenon". Risk provides the language, knowledge, and "illusion" that elusive notions of control and predictability, so desperately desired by the risk society's collective social consciousness, can be harnessed through conscious, prudent self-conduct (Hier, 2003: 14). There is an inherently hopeful dimension for disciples of risk-based problems insofar as they offer opportunities for achievement and liberation via the minimization of harm (Hier, 2008). To be constantly "at risk" is to be empowered with the strategies and capacity to take control of the likelihood of potential harms through "responsible action" (Hier, 2008: 183). Risk-based problems offer us the means to manage the existential angst that has come to frame our lives.

Given the evolution of social anxiety within the risk society, a growing body of scholarly literature suggests that an increased frequency in instances of moral panic has begun to characterize contemporary social life. Hier (2003: 5) argues that the rationality of risk avoidance and moralized discourses have collided to produce a moralization of risk adversity which provides "fertile ground for moral panics". He asserts that the apparent proliferation of moral panics in the West act as a type of heightened manifestation of the profound, existential uncertainty that is characteristic of the risk society (Hier, 2003: 5). Likewise, Miller (2006: 307) argues that moral panics have become "eruptions" of anxiety within risk societies. The boundaries that once separated morality and risk avoidance have begun to blur. Risk now *is* morality. The doctrine for what constitutes a morally upright individual or the ideal moral character is predicated on a commitment to personal responsibility and careful calculation of risk and harm avoidance. Risk represents a type of modern religion within the risk society, or as Mary Douglas (1992: 26) notes, "risk provides the secular terms for rewriting scripture (that is, of what constitutes sin)". Risk discourse has become enshrined in contemporary society to the degree to which it mimics the once absolute moral code offered by religious dogma. Montelius and Nygren (2014: 436) argue that health, for example, has become a type of social performance "infused with ideological meanings". Consequently, the immoral character under modernity is one who willfully ignores information and

consciously chooses to remain "at risk" despite being equipped with the knowledge to correct themselves. Consequently, Hier (2008: 179) argues, panics are more about pathologizing than demonizing the proverbial folk devil. Moral panics, then, act as volatile expressions of this modern moralized configuration that compels individuals to organize their conduct around principles of risk-adversity, harm-reduction, and personal responsibility.

<u>Neoliberalism and the moralization of risk</u>

The integration of risk society theory into moral panic research provides insight into the evolution of social anxiety in late modernity. Several scholars have noted, in addition to risk analysis, moral panic research necessitates a consideration for the relationship between morality, risk, and the religion of personal responsibility cultivated under neoliberal governance. Dillon (2018: 10) defines neoliberalism as an "economic project [that] claims to expand the individual liberty of a rational, self-interested actor through the governance of a free market", one that aims to "[remake] the nexus of state, market, and citizenship." Neoliberalism – as a political, social, and ideological pursuit – accomplishes the reimagining of the relationship between the state, citizen and market by emphasizing the unfettered movement of capital above all other goals.

Neoliberalism, as a mode of governance, emphasizes rational self-conduct and personal responsibility (Hier, 2008). The neoliberal citizenry is implored to internalize a sense of duty for self-preservation and accordingly, safety and security become necessary outcomes of personal choice. This particular form of responsibilization is referred to as "prudentialism": "The active citizen thus is to add to his or her obligations the need to adopt a calculative prudent personal relation to fate now conceived in terms of calculable dangers and avertable risks" (Rose, 1996: 158). Hunt (1999) observes that under neoliberalism, ideas about right and wrong flow through proxies of risk harm and responsibility. Contra the "rational choice approach", risk avoidance is not a practice grounded in an objective calculation of harm or an ostensibly value-free appraisal of potential risks but instead an outcome of "values and institutions" (Montelius and Nygren, 2014: 432). The neoliberal subject has integrated into their lives, not only an awareness and ongoing negotiation with risk and harm reduction but a personalized sense of responsibility for their own relationship to those dimensions. This is significant as it maps the distinct contours of contemporary processes of moralization that fix moral

discourse within the realm of the rational, aware, and personally responsible individual. Risk impacts the form moralization has taken under late modernity but also how the state functions to shape the behaviour of citizenry according to its objectives.

<u>Related moral panic studies</u>

The scope of moral panic studies is tremendously broad as there are countless examples of highly volatile efforts by societies or communities to reaffirm moral boundaries. Panics around illicit drug use are a particularly popular focus of moral panics and have been "remarkably consistent" for decades (Cohen, 2002: xiv). Accordingly, discourse around drug legalization and criminalization is one of the primary spaces within which moral entrepreneurs operate in contemporary society (Becker 1995; Vuolo et al., 2017). With some exceptions, specific investigations into moral panics that materialize around social housing or issues around housing in general appear extremely limited. Robinson (2010) analyzed a moral panic fueled by resentment British communities felt towards new immigrants who were seen to be unfairly advantaged in the allocation of social housing. Kirkpatrick and Gallagher (2013: 35) investigated a moral panic that erupted around "degentrification" in an affluent California suburb where locals contested an influx of low-income residents into the neighborhood after the 2008 financial crash that dramatically impacted property values. In separate investigations, Dadusc and Dee (2016) and Pruijt (2013) explore Dutch anti-squatting legislation and discourse surrounding squatting through the lens of a moral panic. Otherwise, there appears to be minimal understanding of how civil disobedience and resistance by homeless populations to austerity measures, displacement, and criminalization under neoliberalism is understood and responded to during moral panics. This thesis will add to existing research by considering the ways in which the emergence of tent cities in Canada has produced a particular style of moral discourse around homelessness and housing.

<u>Significance of topic & research questions</u>

Using moral panic as a theoretical framework through which to investigate the discourses emerging out of Maple Ridge around homelessness is a worthwhile area of study as debates around housing both reflect and shape interventions in housing policy and legislation. Cohen (2011) argues that the primary outcome of a moral panic is the

re-establishment of a moral order through repressive legal measures. Panics generate new ideas and crystalize new moral boundaries; these boundaries often manifest as new mechanisms of social control in the form of legislation that shape the trajectories of future panics. More specifically however, discursive events like moral panics that materialize around housing have an enduring impact on the manner in which practical decisions around housing intersect with moral imperatives. Specifically, discourse around social housing produced through moral panics can be used to either resist or reinforce stigma and repression of already marginalized populations. For example, Dadusc & Dee (2015) explore how discourse that emerged out of a moral panic around squatting was used to enforce increasingly repressive and punitive measures towards homeless people. Haworth and Manzi (1999: 155) argue that the study of wider discourses on housing can help to illuminate the "recursive and dynamic process" that exists between language and policy implementation. The ways in which housing proposals or categories of residents are constructed discursively can work as a type of self-fulfilling prophecy with regards to policy implementation. In Maple Ridge, discourse that stresses the danger of homeless populations was previously successfully in thwarting social housing proposals thus further limiting the already scarce supply of safe housing options for those experiencing housing precarity. From this perspective, language functions to carve out new narratives that can be employed in subsequent housing debates. Consequently, Haworth and Manzi (1999) stress the need to take seriously the mitigating impact moralized discourse has on housing management and policy. The narratives and strategies deployed by interested actors in Maple Ridge that attempt to construct homelessness as a moral issue are likely to have meaningful and enduring impact on the way policy makers and communities respond to and conceptualize homelessness. This thesis attempts to answer the questions: what is the ideological work being done by these communities in their action against social housing proposals and homeless encampments? What is the role of online spaces in shaping claims making processes? And how does working cooperatively to exclude certain populations help these communities understand themselves as a collective, moral entity?

<u>Methodological Considerations</u>

This thesis draws upon qualitative methods such as participant observation, and various online ethnographic methods including "netography". Netography refers to the

study of internet culture through an immersion in online communities and social media spaces (Kozinets, 1998). Monod (2017: 7) argues that instances of moral panic are understood as "discursive events" insofar as they can be deconstructed through an analysis by the "way they are talked about". Accordingly, my primary focus has been to understand the ways in which individuals constructed this issue discursively to analyze how particular themes, tropes, and ideas circulated and the role of counter narratives in shaping them. Unlike most moral panic research done "in retrospect" (Monod, 2017) or long after the event has concluded, this thesis attempts to explore an actively unfolding panic. Accordingly, my analysis of available documentation has been intentionally broad in an effort to circumscribe this panic as it unfolded during the time of my research. The constantly evolving nature of this event has meant that my pursuit of relevant documentation has been similarly fluid and I have attempted to pay equal attention to both online and offline spaces where conversations about homelessness in Maple Ridge occurred.

Monod (2017: 9) suggests that moral panic research should "cast the net wide" vis a vis data in order to sufficiently account for the multiplicity of voices and ideas that contribute to the way each panic manifests. I identified primary sites, both on and offline, where the issue of homelessness and/or social housing in Maple Ridge was discussed. In order to attend to the ways in which public discourse functioned online, I identified key online spaces such as comment sections in local news media sites, Facebook groups, YouTube, and Twitter posts. Hier (2019: 386) stresses the significance of online platforms in altering how claims are made and circulated in panics. He notes that claims typically flowed from "structurally advantaged activists" which, in the age of social media, has now broadened to include bloggers, trolls, or virtually anyone with access to social media (Hier, 2019: 386). Accordingly, I have treated online conversation threads as core processes where significant claims originated. I searched social media platforms for local neighborhood groups and other relevant pages, where homelessness was an ongoing topic of discussion. This included Facebook groups like "Action Maple Ridge", "Protecting Maple Ridge (Public Page)", "Maple Ridge Politics", and the "Pivot Legal Society" and the Alliance Against Displacement Twitter profile.

Online data collection was supplemented with several hours of observation at community events pertaining to housing and homelessness. Throughout 2018 and 2019, I attended various events pertaining to the issue of homelessness and recorded extensive field notes; events included multiple Maple Ridge city council meetings, local

rallies, demonstrations, a Temporary Modular Housing project opening, and other relevant gatherings where the issue of homelessness was discussed. My interaction with residents at these events was extremely limited, I did not attempt to engage residents in any meaningful discussions and I was otherwise a silent observer. Given the breadth of documentation available online and in material spaces, conducting interviews or interacting with individuals in person or online was unnecessary. In addition to field notes collected during field observations, I analyzed media reports, videos, and their comment sections pertaining to developments in the state of Anita Place tent city, Temporary Modular Housing, harm reduction, homelessness and/or drug use in Maple Ridge to identify rhetoric, tactics, or strategies employed by commenters responding to those reports. This included reports by Global News, CTV News, Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows News, and CBC News. Conversations and other relevant data were coded by emergent themes such as "common sense," "risk," and the idea that something could be "enabling" of immoral behaviour.

Limitations

The major limitations of this project relate to scope and timing. As a result of the maximum allotted length of this thesis, I have chosen to limit my scope to an analysis of only discourses that are critical of homeless people and social housing proposals. Throughout this panic, there has been a sustained production of counter narratives and discourses aimed at challenging stigma and stereotypes about homeless people. Local advocacy and activist organizations have played an important role in supporting homeless people in Maple Ridge to advocate for themselves. These represent significant claims that have undoubtedly played a role in the trajectory of this panic; however, limited space has meant I am unable to account for this impact in this project. Likewise, my analysis is not exhaustive; it pertains only to the dominant critical claims that have been most widely circulated in mass media and online platforms. Data collection occurred during a period where this panic was still actively unfolding: between summer 2018 and spring 2019, and consequently, it was not been possible to conduct an exhaustive and comprehensive account of documents available that relate to the topic. I have attempted to account as adequately as possible for the relevant spaces where this issue has been discussed. Since I have not had the advantage of analyzing

documentation retrospectively, I have been unable to account for the legacy this panic will leave on social housing policy and homelessness.

Additionally, I have not included a substantive analysis of the role of traditional media in amplifying and circulating claims. Given the maximum allotted length of this project, my analysis pertains primarily to the role of moral entrepreneurs and claims makers. More research is needed to understand how traditional local media sources contributed to the ways claims were acted upon by policy makers. Likewise, more research is needed to understand the interplay between evolving social media landscapes and traditional media reporting and the feedback loop between them. Finally, in accordance with ethical guidelines around online research, I have not explored commentary posted on private social media groups. There were several prominent, but private, social media groups where networking took place among residents and more research is needed to understand if and how the claims circulated within the groups differed from those in the public spaces.

Chapter 3.

Negative Discourse

In their analysis of a moral panic that developed in response to squatting in England and Wales, Dadusc & Dee (2015: 111) identify several distinct "meta-discourses" or dominant styles of claims making that influenced the public conversation around the practice of squatting. Similarly, the moral panic in Maple Ridge was shaped by certain key discourses around homelessness. Unpacking the role of claims makers in moral panics is crucial to accounting for how such events unfold and the subsequent legacy left in their wake. Best (1990: 24) describes claims making as a "rhetorical activity" where the primary objective is to claim "ownership" over a particular issue as a means to define the parameters of the debate. Claims makers strive to characterize the problem in question, generate urgency around the need for solutions, and to centre their ideal prescription for resolution (Best, 1990). Though, as previously mentioned, there was a sustained production of discourse that advocated for increased social housing for homeless people and actively supported residents of Anita Place, this section will focus exclusively on what I have chosen to describe as 'negative' discourse around homelessness. Negative discourses were those that constructed Anita Place residents as dangerous and disruptive, that advocated for direct state intervention to initiate the camp's removal, and resisted 'low barrier' social housing projects in Maple Ridge. Whether they advocated for criminalization, institutionalization, or compulsory drug treatment, these residents were singularly concerned with initiating state action that would eliminate the visibility of homelessness in Maple Ridge. Residents who engaged in negative discourse tended to be the most outspoken and visible claims makers in this panic. Irrespective of the degree to which they represented the 'majority' of Maple Ridge residents, their claims were hyper visible in mainstream media and on social media platforms. Negative discourse was advanced by a wide-ranging group of individuals including parents, politicians, local residents, journalists and small business owners. They represented some of the key moral entrepreneurs of this panic and those responsible for asserting moral claims about poverty, homelessness, and drug addiction.

Negative discourse was informed by a conservative political ethos. This was reflected in the ways that debates about the particular details of homelessness in Maple

Ridge wandered into more macro level critiques of a perceived intensification of progressive, leftist ideological influence on Canadian politics. For example, in a 2018 article about Anita Place tent city entitled "Residents have had enough of catering to squatters" legislative reporter and columnist Tom Fletcher writes:

> All parts of the province struggle with our new generation of wasted street people, mostly feral males left to raise themselves in a culture that worships sex, violence, drugs and rock and roll. And the Left Coast is Canada's natural gathering place for the drifters and thieves who will do anything but work to support their bad habits. That's why highway routes into our soft-climate, soft-politics urban regions are where the "tent cities" tend to spring up. (Fletcher, Oct, 2018)

The comment section from this article posted to the *Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows News* website was flush with admirers praising Fletcher's perspective apparently lacking in mainstream media coverage. As one commenter noted: "another great article Mr. Fletcher and it was spot on. Thank you for telling the truth" (Geff te Boekhorst, 2018). While Fletcher's analysis of contemporary culture's alleged obsession with "sex" and "rock and roll" is so antiquated and out of touch it reads like satire, he expresses a foundational premise around which the critique of homelessness in Maple Ridge is based: that homelessness – and most social problems – are an inevitable outcome of ineffective social welfare policies. For many residents, the welfare state had failed in its aim to assist otherwise hardworking individuals through times of economic uncertainty and had become a system that facilitated the abdication of responsibility by unscrupulous segments of the population.

Negative discourse in Maple Ridge also reflected shifts in contemporary conservative political ideology that increasingly incorporate anti-intellectualism and conspiratorial views of government, academia, and scientific expertise as biased or untrustworthy. For example, claims of homeless groups "pouring in" or being "bussed in" by other cities or provinces into Maple Ridge as part of some massive conspiracy to offload parasitic, addicted populations onto an overly permissive social safety system seem ripped almost verbatim from comments made by attendees at Donald Trump campaign rallies in 2016 about undocumented immigrants. For example, this exchange between a Maple Ridge resident and then Mayor Nicole Reid were common:

> Resident: Okay so once you move, let's say you do move the Anita's Place residents to the modular housing. What's to stop a lot more people with the same

drug and alcohol issues to continue to move into that same area and plus pour into Maple Ridge as they currently are? With drug and alcohol issue ma'am?

Mayor Reid: The drug and alcohol issues are across the entire region. Throughout Metro Vancouver, all over the Fraser Valley

Resident: I am aware of that but it appears that there seems to be, uh, a disproportionate number of those people with those issues being resettled into Maple Ridge.

Mayor Reid: That's not true according to the data

Resident: Well we're seeing it ma'am (Maple Ridge Council Meeting Video Recording, May 23rd, 2018)

This exchange reveals some influence of existing xenophobic rhetoric around immigration used to scapegoat racialized populations on how residents understood and described the local homeless population. It also demonstrates how negative discourse weaponized existing suspicion around the validity of scientific data and the motivations of social scientists as a means to both legitimize claims and stress the need for immediacy through constructing homelessness as a rapidly deteriorating social problem. There was widespread rejection of data by negative residents deployed by social service organizations or government officials to challenge exaggerated or incendiary claims about homelessness. For example, many outright denied the legitimacy of crime statistics when they were used to demonstrate that the incidence of crime in Maple Ridge appeared to have decreased over several years. During an October 2017 city council meeting, the Ridge Meadows RCMP Superintendent Jennifer Hyland explained to attendees that crime rates in Maple Ridge were at a two-year low, despite the adamant assertions of local residents that the local Downtown area had become "lawless" and a "wild west environment" as a result of the "addicted homeless" population (Maple Ridge Council Meeting Video Recording, October 24th, 2017). The eruption of laughter and jeering from the public that ensued was sufficiently disruptive to motivate Mayor Nicole Reid to threaten to clear council chambers (Maple Ridge Council Meeting Video Recording, October 24th, 2017). For these residents, crime statistics were a meaningless fabrication that functioned solely to allow people in power to dismiss their lived experience. Conspiracy theories, distortion of empirical data, or the naked fabrication of data would be a common discursive strategy employed by negative residents to engender consensus amongst their followers. Irrespective of the strategies employed, residents' stake in the outcome of this debate appeared to extend beyond

concerns around a local issue. For those at the centre, the victor of this particular battle had the potential to tip the scales for either side to gain traction in the larger, far more significant cultural war at hand.

Despite a shared objective to close Anita Place tent city and thwart social housing proposals they perceived to be dangerously lax, residents who engaged in negative discourse were a heterogenous group who employed different strategies to advance their objectives. In the following chapters, I explore three 'sub-genres' of claims making styles within the dominant negative discourse: what I refer to as 'Online Ridgilantes', 'Taxpayers', and 'Concerned Residents'. My investigation of these genres is not intended to represent an exhaustive account of negative discourses; there were several additional perspectives that garnered significantly less attention from local media and online. Likewise, these genres are not intended to function as categorizations of individual actors; they instead attempt to describe the features of dominant *styles* of discourse as they appeared on local media reports, social media, and in social gatherings. Many prominent figures in the community employed different discursive styles and strategies depending upon the context within which they spoke. In some cases, individuals may have oscillated between different genres or used several simultaneously. My aim in the following section is to demonstrate how negative discourse contained a spectrum of related but divergent ideologies used for advancing claims and generating momentum. As will become apparent, some strains of negative discourse often relied on appeals to emotions as a means to engender support while others drew on arguments that stressed the necessity of limited government and welfare state retrenchment.

Chapter 4.

Online Ridgilantes

Negative discourse around homelessness in Maple Ridge contained an undercurrent of hate speech and extremist rhetoric that advanced an explicitly violent, vitriolic, and dehumanizing perspective of homeless people. Unsurprisingly, given the active role of social media in this panic, this rhetoric appeared primarily online through the contribution of individuals who participated in a discourse I have chosen to classify as "Online Ridgilantes". This name is a reference the term "rigilante" that became locally synonymous with negative residents throughout 2017 and 2018. The term "ridgilante" was jokingly coined by Maple Ridge resident Jesse Stretch as a play on the term 'vigilante' used by locals to describe residents who participated in protests against Anita Place tent city and various social housing proposals (Corbett, 2017). While 'Ridgilante' now (often pejoratively) refers to local residents critical of supportive housing proposals and tent cities, I use the term to reference a particular style of claims making undertaken online by individuals who wove a thread of menacing rhetoric that ran through this panic. Online Ridgilantes were individuals who used language that was overtly offensive, that constructed homeless people as less-than-human, and often included explicit threats of violence towards both homeless communities and government officials perceived to be 'soft' on the issue. Though not exclusively online, the contribution and influence of Online Rigilantes was most apparent in online spaces like comments sections and social media. Their rhetorical style reflects a longstanding tradition of aggressive behaviour online; often described as "keyboard warriors", individuals who are confrontational and hostile online have had a significant impact on internet culture since its proliferation (Sibai, 2015: 104).

One of the more notorious spaces Online Ridgilantes interacted was a Facebook page called Protecting Maple Ridge (PMR). PMR is a private Facebook group administered by local residents highly critical of state responses to homelessness and who stress the need for punitive measures such as criminalization, institutionalization, and compulsory addiction treatment programs as the only viable solutions to a perceived degradation of their community by a dangerous, drug addicted homeless population. The page and its administrators have been a notorious fixture in Maple Ridge for advancing

overt threats of violence against homeless communities with a particular fixation on Anita Place residents. While the main PMR page is private, screenshots of discussion threads between members were regularly leaked on other public pages run by locals aiming to expose the page and its followers. For example, a Facebook page (confusingly also named "Protecting Maple Ridge") describes its stated purpose as aiming to help others "see the disgusting, pathetic and stupid things posted in the various Maple Ridge Facebook groups" (Protecting Maple Ridge, 2016a). One leaked screenshot reveals a private PMR group member pondering the likelihood of an assault conviction for "beating the living crap" out of a homeless person given the supposed lack of credibility of someone with an addiction (quoted in Protecting Maple Ridge, 2016b). Another, shows 2018 mayoral candidate and private PMR administrator Mike Hayner suggesting that the city should employ homeless people for the creation of a website called "hobo wars" dedicated to "videos of crackheads getting shot with paintballs" (quoted in Protecting Maple Ridge, 2018). Other, more implicitly violent posts, include a 2016 "admin approved" post that cryptically invites PMR group members to participate in a bulk purchase of "electric stun gun[s]" (quoted in Protecting Maple Ridge, 2016c).

While PMR was a centralized hub for Online Ridgilantes, they were a notable presence in most online conversations around Maple Ridge and homelessness. The principal contribution of Online Ridgilante discourse was a persistent, unwavering construction of homeless people with addictions as vermin or less than human needing to be cleansed from society. This included descriptions of homeless people with addictions as "monkeys", "crackheads", "soulless", "junkies". In one online thread, a commenter noted "I have more compassion for animals then addicts" (Anita Swain, 2018). These descriptions often dovetailed into threats of violence towards homeless communities, activists, and government officials perceived to be overly permissive. There were frequent references to violent vigilantism like "taking things into their own hands", or that it was "time to get rid of these degenerates" (Ed Birch, 2018). In response to a comment that suggested Anita Place residents be "evicted" and the site subsequently "bulldozed", one commenter replied "why evict? Just bulldoze. When that D9 Cat starts up, they'll move quick enough" (Tom Gowdyk, 2018). References to fire as a necessary method to cleanse the dirt represented by Anita Place were also common: for example, in a comment section from an article on Anita Place a commenter asked

"flamethrower anyone?" (David Crymble, 2018) while another posted a GIF from the television show *Game of Thrones* with the caption "Burn them all!" (Matt Adams, 2018).

While I am reluctant to speculate the degree to which these threats were connected to actual acts of physical violence, the tone of online discussions was often mirrored by language and behaviour offline. In 2018, a video uploaded to social media showed a lit firecracker being thrown from a moving vehicle at a homeless person in Mission (a neighboring municipality to Maple Ridge) with the caption "make 'em dance" (Feinberg, 2018). In a 2018 interview on local radio, a Maple Ridge resident whose home bordered Anita Place noted that paintballs were regularly shot at camp residents from a nearby apartment complex (Cassandra Cave, 2018). In 2017, amidst tremendous scrutiny from negative residents, then Mayor Nicole Reid, perceived by negative residents to be overly permissive with regards to Anita Place, was forced to avoid public appearances at the advice of the local RCMP who cited credible threats to her safety (Daya, 2017). In a 2018 interview with a local newspaper, Reid described the impact of relentless harassment she experienced online:

> I have been absolutely assaulted online. I should never be in a situation where, as an elected official, I can't communicate with my public because there's people out there who have no ability to regulate themselves online and say absolutely deplorable things about me and anybody who supports me. I have had people who have supported me that have been threatened. I mean, it's absolutely outrageous. (cited in Melynychuk, 2018c)

Given the volume and scope of their incendiary rhetoric, pushback by other negative residents towards Online Ridgilantes was glaringly absent. Throughout the duration of my investigation into online spaces, I rarely encountered attempts by other negative residents to distance themselves or their movement from the rhetoric of Online Ridgilantes. There was significant resistance towards Online Ridgilante discourse by individuals supportive of Anita Place residents who advocated for the implementation of supportive housing for homeless. Amongst negative residents, however, violent language appeared to be an acceptable contribution to their discussions provided they were rooted in a critical perspective of Maple Ridge's homeless population. It is important to note that my access to private social media groups like PMR was limited, therefore I cannot make a definitive claim to the scope of resistance to Online Ridgilantes within those spaces. Nonetheless, there was a distinct lack of critique leveled against Online Ridgilantes by other negative residents on publicly accessible platforms.

The ease with which they navigated online conversations unchallenged by fellow negative residents is significant insofar as it indicates both a rapidly shifting landscape of moral entrepreneurship in the age of social media and an evolving ideological relationship between anti-homelessness and far-right hate movements.

A significant aspect of Online Ridgilante discourse in Maple Ridge is that it demonstrates the evolving role of social media in contemporary moral panics as a democratic information source. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter facilitate communication between likeminded parties and expedites and streamlines the potential for grassroots organization. Social media gives voice to the voiceless and is what Tucker et al. (2017: 49) calls a "liberation technology". It simultaneously sharpens and broadens the ability for people to participate in democracy and effect change even in the absence of "traditional or formal" organizing strategies (Tucker et al., 2017: 49). Accordingly, the landscape of claims making processes in moral panics has begun to shift considerably in the era of social media. Hier (2019) notes that a significant impact of social media on moral panics has occurred through the process of moral entrepreneurship. Traditionally, moral entrepreneurs have been individuals who, through activism, social connections, or lobbying, were able to exert influence over mass media narratives that ultimately shaped public opinion. Recently, social media has begun to transform moral entrepreneurship by creating a space beyond the boundaries of mass media where unusual claims making styles can be amplified to either reinforce, resist or invent new perspectives on moral regulation and social control (Hier, 2019: 386). As cynicism towards mainstream media narratives as biased or untrustworthy intensifies (Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2019), individuals with perspectives once relegated to the fringes of political discourse are suddenly able to tap into likeminded enclaves otherwise unavailable to them. I would argue the discourse around homelessness in Maple Ridge often functioned as such an enclave. It was fertile ground for individuals seeking opportunities to participate in violent, dehumanizing dialogue online around drug addiction, homelessness, and those who are perceived to have abused the welfare state. Online Ridgilantes maintained an unapologetic posture of hatred and indignation towards individuals dealing with homelessness and/or addiction that pushed against boundaries of "civil" discourse. The normalization of debasing communities deemed less-than-human within Maple Ridge created a climate that allowed a particular brand of vitriol to be considered unremarkable by many because, at a minimum, it validated the

frustration of many negative residents. In the absence of social media, it is unlikely that Online Ridgilantes are able to amplify their perspectives to a similar degree within a centralized media landscape. This demonstrates how social media has facilitated the inclusion of fringe claims making styles otherwise excluded from mainstream media to carve out space within contemporary moral panics and play a significant role in shaping narratives.

Another implication of Online Ridgilante discourse is that movements like the one in Maple Ridge can be amenable and hospitable to a style of right-wing extremism that flourishes online. Recently, a notorious Canadian far-right hate group made attempts to participate in a local suburban backlash movement against homelessness and tent cities. In 2018, the hate group "Soldiers of Odin" were a notable presence in several demonstrations denouncing Nanaimo's "Discontent City" homeless encampment (Little, 2018). Soldiers of Odin announced plans to march alongside local "concerned residents" to protest the camp (Pescod, 2018). Shortly thereafter, a Facebook post from the Soldiers of Odin Vancouver Island chapter stated that as a result of "child sex trafficking in the camp", members of the group would "facilitate the removal of Discontent City" (Chek News, 2018). There is currently no evidence to suggest that far-right hate groups like Soldiers of Odin have attempted to connect with neighborhood coalitions in Maple Ridge in a similar capacity. Likewise, there is no indication that Online Ridgilantes themselves represent members of an organized hate group. The broader lack of resistance against Online Ridgilante discourse, however, signals the existence of a conduit for far-right hate groups to communicate their ideology via anti-tent city or anti-homelessness movements like in Nanaimo. Put differently, the significance of Online Ridgilante discourse in Maple Ridge is related more to the response (or lack thereof) from other negative residents than to the presence of the discourse itself.

While the grievances of negative residents in Maple Ridge (and elsewhere) do not immediately appear relevant to the imperatives of far-right hate groups, Online Ridgilante discourse provides evidence of connective tissue necessary for such a linkage to be formed. Recently, scholars have begun to recognize that the impact of the internet on hate groups extends beyond access to a wider network of potentials recruits. Klein (2012) argues that the internet has allowed the modern extremist hate group to adopt a new strategic method for gaining new followers and legitimizing themselves through what he calls "information laundering". Information laundering refers to the

participation of hate groups or proponents of hate speech in "ubiquitous internet currencies" of news, social media, and other content creation in a manner that surreptitiously includes extremist rhetoric (2012: 429). Klein argues that the unique landscape of the internet has provided the latitude for racist hate movements to "transform, conceal, and seamlessly merge their agendas into the popular domains of online culture" (2012: 429). Through the freedom afforded by the internet, hate groups have become particularly skilled at participating in debates around cultural issues online in a manner that does not immediately expose their underlying goal of advancing racism (2012: 441).

As evidenced in Nanaimo, groups like Soldiers of Odin may find it fruitful to participate in "information laundering" through debates around homelessness as a way of luring people into a deeper curiosity around their ethos. People with skepticism around mainstream media narratives are searching for a lens through which to understand the issue of homelessness. The inclusion of Online Ridgilante discourse in the broader grievances around Anita Place and social housing proposals demonstrates a longing of some for an understanding homelessness articulated through the blunt force of hate speech. While far-right extremism typically targets a racialized Other such as the non-white immigrant or the poor person of colour, the scapegoating of homeless populations in Maple Ridge (and elsewhere) often functioned in a similar capacity. Perry & Scrivens (2018) note that far-right movements tend to be "spatial" insofar as they rely on affirmations of belonging and the right to claim space. Such affirmations rely on the construction of an 'Other' as a fundamental threat to racialized boundaries intended to separate "us" from "them" (Perry & Scrivens, 2018, 172). Much like the xenophobic and racist language targeted towards undocumented immigrants, the ultimate goal of scapegoating homeless people as dangerous, lecherous, and threatening has been to subvert their right to claim space in Maple Ridge. In this way, the process of othering homeless people in Maple Ridge had similarities to the othering that occurs through racism or assertions of white supremacy. Though in this case, white supremacy did not manifest exclusively in opposition to people who are explicitly racialized, the strategies, ideologies, and assertions of dominance inherent to white supremacy were deployed in a similar capacity. Online Ridgilantism touched upon a constellation of latent, existing hatred held by many individuals that expressed itself through their participation in this

debate: hatred of those perceived to be culpable in their own hardships, hatred of left-wing politics, of the state, of altruism, and the 'Other'.

Chapter 5.

Taxpayers

The second noteworthy genre of discourse comes from individuals I refer to as "Taxpayers". Broadly, Taxpayers refer to those who engaged in discourse around homelessness influenced by a neoliberal, preoccupation with limited government, low taxation, and welfare state retrenchment. The apparent goal of Taxpayers was to initiate the removal of Anita Place residents and to advocate for the creation of abstinence-based addiction recovery services in Maple Ridge. Taxpayers stressed the necessity of these prescriptions by constructing homelessness in Maple Ridge as a threat to both individual safety and to the optimal functioning of the local economy. I refer to proponents of this discourse as 'Taxpayers' as both an acknowledgement of how they identified themselves (as "taxpayers") and of the ways in which they relied on the specter of the 'taxpayer' as a means to embed particular critiques of government spending within the debate around homelessness.

Taxpayers were influential and organized moral entrepreneurs. Throughout 2017 and 2018, they organized formal presentations to Maple Ridge city council, created petitions, and held public demonstrations denouncing proposals for social housing. Key premises of Taxpayer discourse also proved to be an effective campaign platform for candidates in the 2018 municipal election. Several proponents of Taxpayer discourse were elected as Maple Ridge city councillors; this included, for example, local small business owner Ahmed Yousef, who participated in a coalition of negative residents called the 'Burnett Street Neighbours' that organized demonstrations against the Temporary Modular Housing proposal (Corbett, 2018; Corbett, 2019). Elected in a landslide victory alongside Yousef, current Mayor Mike Morden campaigned on promises that included the swift removal of Anita Place, the implementation of a drug rehabilitation facility, and the creation of dedicated social housing for seniors, veterans and the "true homeless" in Maple Ridge (Chamber of Commerce Serving Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, 2018). In 2019, Mayor Morden uploaded a video to his personal YouTube channel claiming that homeless people in Maple Ridge were "raping and pillaging all of our community and businesses" (Morden, 2019). Despite the occasional use of inflammatory language, Taxpayers like Mr. Morden typically predicated their arguments

on an allegedly sober assessment of the cost of homelessness to the local taxpayer. Taxpayers often underscored their arguments with an ostensibly altruistic aim of redirecting social welfare to "truly" needful populations such as seniors, veterans, low-income families, or individuals perceived to be less culpable in their own hardships than the local homeless population.

Taxpayer discourse in Maple Ridge is reflective of a style of political rhetoric commonly invoked within discussions around government spending. Willmott (2017) explores the ways in which individuals come to identify as taxpayers and how the imagined figure of the taxpayer has become discursively useful in political debates. He argues individuals are fashioned into "taxpayer subjects" through "taxpayer governmentality" which refers to the practices through which they learn to govern their own conduct and the conduct of others in accordance with liberal critiques of the state (2017: 255). Willmott conceptualizes the interest groups, think tanks and other networks of people who deploy the specter of the taxpayer as "a performative network" that operates out of the "intellectual nuclei of liberalism" (2019: 135). The contexts in which the taxpayer is deployed discursively is worthy of investigation as it can help illuminate the ways in which liberal beliefs about limited government are enacted and reproduced (Willmott, 2017: 257). Put differently, analysis of the spaces in which taxpayer subjectivity is exercised can help demonstrate how the political philosophy of liberalism fosters a citizen subject concerned with limited government and political conduct governed by market reason.

In addition to advancing liberal critiques of the state, taxpayer discourse can function as a strategy to neutralize the political agency of certain groups. Willmott (2017: 256) observes that the taxpayer is often constructed as "aggrieved and perpetually wronged" by (among others) social assistance recipients deemed undeserving of financial support. In this way, invocation of the taxpayer often functions to materialize the existence of a counterpoint or adversary: the "non-taxpayer" (Williamson 2018, Willmott, 2017). Given that tax contributions are involuntary and compulsory, the marking of certain individuals as taxpayers (and others as non-taxpayers) is a rhetorical strategy that identifies the opinions, claims, and positions of certain individuals as authoritative and legitimate. As Willmott notes, the taxpayer is one "whose judgement should be heeded and whose opinions cannot be discarded" (2017, 256). The abstract nature in which the taxpayer is constructed discursively often serves to define parameters of

exclusion rather than of inclusion and of those who are entitled to speak and those who are not. The taxpayer subject is one with the political power to act while the non-taxpayer is to be acted upon. Accordingly, an emergent theme of Taxpayer discourse in Maple Ridge was an emphasis on this dynamic between the taxpayer and non-taxpayer. Taxpayers constructed themselves as obliged to participate in an inherently antagonistic, one-sided relationship with the non-taxpayer; one where both parties are perpetually pitted against one another in a struggle for scarce resources generated entirely by the taxpayer:

> Because they're homeless, they expect to get everything handed to them with no rules to follow or accountability. Then, they have a sense of disdain for the hard-working tax-payers who support them. (Evelyn Wilson, 2018)

Taxpayers felt slighted by the notion that homeless people, as allegedly perpetual non-taxpayers, would advocate for subsided housing in addition to already existing social assistance support. Taxpayers in Maple Ridge focused on residents of Anita Place as the ultimate personification of non-taxpayers and wasteful government spending:

> Anita Place has an estimated population of 90. Welfare pays $375 per person per month for rent. That is an astounding $33,750.00 per month. (Amy Lynn Levere, 2018)

Such speculative cost analyses of Anita Place residents in terms of social assistance benefits were common; Taxpayers often asserted that benefits provided Anita Place residents with an abundance of resources:

> The homeless addicts at tent city get a monthly welfare cheque for basic needs food, shampoo, towels instead of spending it all on drugs go buy your own shampoo and towels. $1500 bucks that's a lot of towels (Cathy Charron, 2018)

While this rant is not tremendously different than typical neoliberal antagonism towards the welfare state, in Maple Ridge, it was channeled towards local individuals perceived to be 'non-taxpayers' in specific ways. Taxpayers cited an alleged increase in petty crime like theft or public drug use as evidence of how the local homeless population was a drain on resources. Taxpayers felt that, while residents of Anita Place introduced a sinister element of lawlessness to their community, local law enforcement appeared unwilling to obstruct instances of criminal behavior. Taxpayers were frustrated and confused that, while they believed instances of petty crime had reached near epidemic levels in their community, there was minimal intervention by local law enforcement. Often

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interpreted as evidence of a special or parallel set of rules being applied to residents of Anita Place, many concluded that such 'non-taxpayers' were allowed to skirt the rules and responsibilities imposed on others:

> Definitely time to get rid of these people. Unfortunately, they have more rights than us tax paying citizens which I do not understand. (Brant Andrews, 2018)

Taxpayers conceived of themselves as exploited, swindled, and punished within an obtuse social system that demanded they adhere to basic social norms often ignored by the non-taxpayer:

> Just who the hell do they think they are?!!? They are NOT above the law, although they do get away with thefts, ignoring bylaws, etc. much more so than the taxpaying citizens of MR. (Charlene Mallory, 2018)

The sentiment that non-taxpayers were afforded an unfair latitude to avoid certain consequences contributed to the sense that tax contributions provided virtually no residual benefit to the taxpayers. The primary beneficiaries of taxes were increasingly represented by some of the "least deserving" individuals possible who appeared to be rewarded for a flagrant disregard for basic social norms. The construction of the taxpayer as the victim of an inherently unfair social system often revealed an underlying agitation around real experiences of economic hardship which served as evidence that 'hard work' had come to hold minimal value in society:

> "It's at the point of being ignorant and insulting to hard working people actually struggling to make ends meet without all the handouts these POS are getting. I mean seriously, they steal from us and basically get a pat on the back and a "Here you go" for it. It's nauseatingly backwards." (Jen Buckby, 2018)

For Taxpayers in Maple Ridge, the sole beneficiaries of social assistance programs were profoundly undeserving. While the nineteenth century concept of the "underserving poor" has demonstrated "remarkable resilience" as a method of moral regulation over the poor for several centuries (Tihelková, 2015), MacKenzie and Louth (2020) argue that neoliberal governance has evolved its parameters. Traditionally, the notion of the "deserving and undeserving poor" was a metric through which to delineate between individuals either worthy or unworthy of support from charitable organizations. As early as the late-seventeenth century, churchwardens or other authorities defined widows, orphaned children, the elderly, or people with physical illness as "deserving" while able-bodied people, or pregnant women were typically considered 'undeserving' (Schen,

2000). This basic rubric of poverty as an outcome of an individual moral failing persists, however, the contemporary reimaging of poverty and "deservingness" under neoliberalism is now intertwined with the significance of personal responsibility and risk avoidance. The notion of deservingness for the poor is increasingly articulated through two pillars: one that emphasizes an individuals' ability to mitigate personal risk (financial wellbeing, health, employment, or otherwise) and the other that one does so with minimal, if any, support from the state (MacKenzie and Louth, 2020). The key difference from the traditional definition is the ways in which the poor, like all neoliberal citizens, are understood as enabled through doctrines of health and self-improvement to avoid risk through prudent decision making. The influence of neoliberalism on how the poor are constructed discursively entangles the imperative to become an empowered, entrepreneurial citizen concerned with self-improvement via risk minimization. While these imperatives are inculcated into all neoliberal citizens, here it serves to expand the parameters of how "deservingness" is identified in individuals whilst also providing the ideological grounds for policy decisions around poverty and the poor (MacKenzie and Louth, 2020). The modern reimagining of the "underserving poor" influences social policy to focus less on punishment and increasingly on strategies that remold the poor into independent individuals able to mitigate personal risks be they financial or health related.

In Maple Ridge, the emphasis on risk avoidance in the contemporary reimagining of the "undeserving poor" showed up in particular through stigmatizing narratives around drug use and addiction. Cohen (2002: xiv) notes that the "wrong drugs used by the wrong people in the wrong places" has been a favorite subject of moral panics for decades. In Maple Ridge, however, stigma around drug use was deployed to deny the legitimacy of claims for social assistance and hardships experienced by drug users. For Taxpayers, those who were homeless and used drugs exemplified the modern underserving poor. Taxpayers affirmed their theoretical support of social assistance programs but were opposed to the current iteration that allegedly misdirected resources:

> People want to see the homeless housed. What they don't want is, specifically the homeless addicts, tossing their dirty needles and stealing. (Diane Marie, 2018)

Taxpayers cited public drug use, theft, discarded syringes, and the generally unpleasant demeanor of the "homeless drug addict" as key grievances. The inherently undeserving,

morally bankrupt nature of this figure was emphasized through contrast with populations experiencing financial precarity argued to be more legitimate:

> If they were going to build something, why not for the true vulnerable, vets and seniors that have worked all their lives and are struggling to pay rent and buy food! (Online Commenter 1, 2018)

Senior citizens and veterans were held up as exemplars of the modern deserving poor: these were communities of individuals who had legitimately struggled and, more importantly, provided tangible benefits to society:

> Take care of our seniors who have paid taxes their whole life. Take care of Veterans who have suffered real trauma. Let all the drug users disappear for all I care. (Online commenter 2, 2018)

Seniors and veterans were pitted against the local homeless population as competition for dwindling resources; they were also constructed as particularly vulnerable to the misdeeds of the unscrupulous homeless drug user. For example, the following commenter reflects a common sentiment that resources ought to be redirected to protect the "right citizens:"

> A fund raiser for all the seniors that are house bound due to all the drug addicts on their streets. Or for more security for their apartments so they are not vandalized. You are backing the wrong citizens (AJ Magoo, 2018)

Likewise, Taxpayers contrasted homeless people who used drugs against their own struggle or the struggle of loved ones, as individuals who, though experiencing economic precarity and deserving of assistance, nonetheless labored dutifully and stoically, without such requests:

> My daughter and her husband are both hard working individuals with a baby on the way and are having a hard time finding a decent affordable place to move to and these 'persons' demand housing? Concept, put down the pipe, get you're [sic] a** clean and sober and work on fixing yourself and stop expecting everyone else to do it for you. […] I support anyone that wants to get their shit together but not the ones that feel that society and the world owes them everything. (Joanne Ruppel Walker, 2018)

Acknowledgements of financial precarity functioned as both an indictment and as an affirmation of personal will and grit as sufficient tools in overcoming hardship:

> I want lots of things since I broke my back 10 years ago but I am now on disability but I guess I am lucky because my money goes to my mortgage and

other bills instead of on drugs. I guess it's all about priorities. If I could not afford my house here in Maple Ridge then we would move to another city where it is cheaper. I don't expect the market to change because my situation changed, I take it upon myself to change location to where I can afford it. (Sabrina Pires, 2018)

Taxpayers often expressed a sense of 'being on their own' with regards to an ongoing struggle in maintaining access to basic necessities like housing. Despite an emphasis on personal will in overcoming structural barriers like unaffordable housing and low wages, Taxpayers' attempts to centre the experiences of the "deserving poor" indicate an acute awareness of a dwindling social infrastructure available for those experiencing financial precarity. While Taxpayers fault the misdirection of resources to the "wrong people," they nonetheless express a cognizance of the inability of a threadbare social safety net to provide care for individuals during periods of vulnerability, including old age, where self-sufficiency becomes increasingly challenging.

Given the significance of homelessness and supportive housing proposals to the debate in Maple Ridge, definitions of the "undeserving poor" were also articulated via the notion of the "truly homeless". The expression of the "truly homeless" or "true homeless" – presumably referring to the authenticity of claims from people who lacked housing – was circulated widely by proponents of Taxpayer discourse including Mayor Mike Morden during his 2018 Mayoral campaign (Chamber of Commerce Serving Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, 2018). Many asserted that Anita Place residents were not "truly homeless"; as one online commenter noted: "some are truly homeless people, but most are lazy thugs and thieves that don't even belong here." (Carol Hogg, 2018). Some used this term as a reference to the presence of local anti-displacement activists, such as the Alliance Against Displacement at Anita Place (Boothby, 2019), Taxpayers, however, often used the term "truly homeless" to exclude anyone who claimed to lack housing while also using drugs. In a 2018 opinion piece published in *Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows News* entitled "Empathy has led to enablement", author Mike Shields laments criticism he received after suggesting that access to social housing should be contingent on compliance with addiction treatment rather than "mixing the truly homeless down on their luck single-mother families with individuals having currently outstanding warrants for drug distribution or violence" (Shields, 2018). For Taxpayers, substantial differences separated the "truly homeless" from those who they believed made conscious choices to forgo housing in support of continued drug use:

I don't see the issue of explosive drug use being addressed. I am not in favour of public policy that enables people to take themselves out of the economy, then supplies them with housing, food, health care all at public expense. If drug use is now a disease, why are we allowing it to spread? The financial cost is enormous. I wonder if you spend your housing money on drugs, are you really homeless? (Norman12, 2018)

Taxpayers rejected the idea that homelessness could be defined purely by lack of access to housing. Drug use was a conscious abdication of responsibility and evidence of a willful disregard for one's own wellbeing and, accordingly, drug users without housing were not "truly homeless". Instead, these were the modern "drug addicted homeless" or the "homeless drug addicts": a new and cunning cohort of individuals dedicated to exploiting an overburdened social support system. This new generation was unscrupulous and calculated:

Only referring to the homeless addicts, addicts are pros at manipulation. I was speaking with a homeless addict last week. He thinks differently but he still lives on the streets. He said lots of the addicts are laughing at the people that keep giving and giving, with-out any expectations for respect or accountability. They consider them suckers! (Diane Marie, 2018)

Homeless people who used drugs were argued to be both risk to their own safety whilst simultaneously siphoning off scarce resources otherwise allotted to the "truly homeless":

I make a choice to not stick needles in my arm but rather make the choice to go to work and support my family and pay my taxes. Those who are mentally challenged have my sympathy and should be in Riverview. The rest have made the choice to do drugs and suck up the money that should go to the truly homeless, I work hard to stay warm, have food and a home, these druggies want all that I work hard for free and then want me to pay for the drugs via a safe injection site. (Marc Porter, 2018)

According to this narrative, a new culture of homelessness has emerged. Historically, the "truly homeless" person was represented by a classic, "down-on-their-luck" figure, who through unavoidable circumstances, found themselves in a dire, but temporary predicament. Poverty occurred through no conceivable fault of their own. These were veterans, low wage workers, single parents, or people without familial wealth. They were likely once taxpayers, and could become taxpayers again. They were relatable. They encountered challenges experienced by anyone lacking substantive wealth to endure periods of scarcity. But gradually, society's "truly homeless" have been overlooked and overshadowed the modern, drug addicted homeless person. This sinister iteration, created by a woefully naïve and ill-advised social safety system, is a departure from

genuine appeals for assistance from deserving individuals. The modern homeless person is now represented by individuals who make the conscious choice to forgo housing, healthcare, food, and whatever else in a pursuit to construct their situation as dire as possible as to avail themselves of the variety of social programs in place to address the "truly" needful populations. This figure is entitled, dangerous, calculated, ceaselessly in search of gratification of their basest urges, and, above all, an absolute threat to the fabric of society. These are the "homeless by choice", and their lack of scruples or presumably any degree of morality allows them to feast like parasites at the rotting remnants of the welfare state.

As a collective network who felt attuned to this troubling new phenomenon, Taxpayers viewed the debate around social housing and Anita Place as a novel opportunity to delineate between classic and contemporary portrayals of homelessness. By emphasizing drug use as the mechanism through which homelessness can be defined as voluntary, Taxpayers are able to acknowledge considerable evidence of housing unaffordability in British Columbia whilst maintaining the notion that poverty is an outcome of personal, moral failing. The efforts of Taxpayers to draw a stark division between the "truly homeless" and the "homeless by choice" demonstrate the internalization of neoliberal rationality that attempts to shape individuals, at all levels, into rational, self-interested actors with the tools, knowledge and capacity to make carefully calculated moves that either improve or degrade their position in the economic sphere.

Taxpayers and Sick Talk

The emphasis on drug use in Taxpayer discourse resulted in a particular fixation with drug rehabilitation models. Taxpayers have consistently refuted social housing proposals by calling for compulsory, abstinence-based drug rehabilitation programs as the sole viable solution to homelessness. Paradoxically, while the deployment of the "taxpayer" in political debates is informed by liberal critiques of state expenditure, the focus on drug use and addiction manifested in arguments that stressed the need for sophisticated (and expensive), medically-focused care facilities to be implemented in Maple Ridge. As previously mentioned, mayoral candidate Mike Morden campaigned throughout 2018 on promises that he would resist plans to implement any "low-barrier" social housing model for Maple Ridge. In 2019, newly elected Mayor Morden and his council opposed a Temporary Modular Housing project in Maple Ridge in favour of a

"high-barrier" model that required abstinence from drugs. In an interview with local media, Morden commented:

> The purpose of this is to launch what [Maple Ridge City] council's envisioned. We're not talking about low-barrier housing here. We're talking about treatment. And we're talking about detox facilities and we're talking about transitional housing in an abstinence-based environment, (cited in Melnychuk, 2019c)

Like Morden, many were adamant that social housing in Maple Ridge must be contingent on sobriety in order to effectively address homelessness. As previously mentioned, critics like Morden and other concerned resident groups deployed this narrative to resist and delay numerous "low-barrier" housing proposals in Maple Ridge for several years (Hager, 2016). These efforts would echo wider calls by Taxpayers for the creation of a "one stop shop" style facility that would oblige participation in detox, in-patient drug rehabilitation, mental health support, life skills and vocational training in a single location:

> Have a multi-level facility that teaches them life skills and job training after detox, away from temptation. They need 24/7 professional help that would be cost effective when used in one large facility. An occasional drop-in by professionals at these supportive housing units will never accomplish anything and full time in each would be far too ex-pensive. (Marilyn Nygard, 2018)

Some advocated for a modernized refurbishment of the institutional mental health facility, Riverview, as a space that could accommodate a holistic care model.

> I fail to see why any municipal tax dollars are spent to provide land for low barrier shelters that the community doesn't want more of. We pay provincial taxes -- let the Province step up to the plate on this and live up to its responsibility to house people on the 144 acres of land which it already owns (WE, the people already own!!!) at Riverview before they come to Maple Ridge begging to be able to deteriorate our community even further and asking us to pay for the 'privilege'. (Online commenter 3, 2018)

Similar suggestions were typically predicated on the stipulation that they be "removed from society" and that residents would be required to progress through a series of milestones prior to their reintroduction into 'society':

> A purchase by the government of large properties/farms. Add housing, a kitchen, appropriate healthcare staffing along with teachers in life skill areas. This would be a working farm/cottage industry, resident-aided, viable business. Those deemed too un-well to reside and work would be transferred to an appropriate facility where their needs could be better met. Those that are capable of treatment and work in this model would grow food, care for animals, cook, clean,

learn a trade and be required to be part of a connected team environment. After a set timeframe and when certain requirements have been met, then an integration back into public community would be required […] A support group and a job would be mandatory when moving into housing within a community. (Online Commenter 4, 2018)

Taxpayers cited both safety concerns around leniency towards drug use and the limited scope of projects like Temporary Modular Housing in providing long term support to communities with multiple, persistent challenges. Taxpayers' critiques of "emergency" housing measures like TMH are effective insofar as they highlight the limited, short sighted, and largely inadequate nature of the project's ability to address outcomes of systemic poverty represented by homelessness. Provisional, crisis-style responses like TMH are a profoundly insufficient measure to eliminate the social conditions that produce homelessness on the scale that exists throughout British Columbia in areas like Maple Ridge. Such limited responses to a worsening, widespread condition make apparent the lack of functioning infrastructure available to address social problems via government policy. I would argue, however, the goal of this dimension of Taxpayer discourse is not to advocate for improved facilities or more long-term strategies to address abject poverty in British Columbia.

Taxpayers' calls for holistic care models, though ostensibly motivated by the desire to meaningfully address homelessness, nonetheless demonstrate an underlying preoccupation with implementing interventions that are cost-effective, self-sustaining, and minimal burden to the 'taxpayer'. Often underscoring these proposals is an imperative to cut costs by grooming perpetual dependents of the state into lifelong, self-sustaining citizens. Taxpayers' fundamental grievance with TMH relates more to philosophy than to program logistics. Taxpayers advocate for an abandonment from the type of "care" represented by the TMH design – one perceived to be overly permissive, lack a paternalistic emphasis on reshaping behaviour, and most importantly, one that fails to transform the "non-taxpayer" into a fully functioning, upright "taxpayer". The care model advocated for by Taxpayers is swift, repressive, and authoritarian. It demands submission. It is born out of a discourse akin to what Gowan (2010: 52) describes as "sick-talk": the moralized discourse around homelessness that pathologizes dispossession as an outcome of psychological disturbance (such as addiction) rather than of a moral failing or what she refers to as "sin-talk". Gowan argues that consequently, such "authoritarian medicalization" functions similarly to "sin-talk" insofar

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as it demands the submission of homeless populations, not to religious doctrine but instead to one of health and recovery (2010: 56). Though seemingly more benevolent than sin talk as it stresses "care" in lieu of naked domination, sick talk nonetheless exerts control over dispossessed populations as those who fail to comply face punitive tactics (Gowan, 2010: 56). Maple Ridge's brand of "sick talk" manifested through a critique of housing proposals that did not require abstinence from substance use.

Invocation of the taxpayer in political debates implicitly critiques government spending and the welfare state and stresses the necessity of limited government that functions in support of the unfettered movement of capital. I would argue Taxpayers' calls for all-encompassing, holistic care centres are a cynical attempt to cultivate the illusion of empathy for marginalized populations. The primary goal of these suggestions has been, and continues to be, submission – to immediate rules of institutional settings but also psychic submission to a doctrine of health and recovery. Under such a care model, those deemed in need of care are stripped of basic liberties accessible only through compliance with an arbitrary set of conditions: abstinence from substance use, removal from community, and adherence to program guidelines. Additionally, this approach facilitates the implementation of repressive measures even prior to the opening of institutional facilities. Given the influence of neoliberalism on the welfare state, the implementation of a facility that provides "wrap-around" services would likely take several years, if not decades, to get the green light. Holistic, wrap-around services are scarce under the skeletal remains of the welfare state in British Columbia. Taxpayers deploy this narrative as it would allow for the enforcement of violent and punitive measures to remove the existing population during the period that this expensive, cumbersome, and ultimately unlikely project is planned. The goal of Taxpayers has been, and continues to be, to employ punitive measures that force submission from local populations they have deemed to be unworthy of support, not to advocate for better facilities.

Taxpayer discourse is situated at the nexus between morality and the market that is generated through neoliberal rationality. It was amplified by a diverse coalition that included individual citizens and representatives in local governance. Taxpayers drew upon arguments that were fiscally oriented, practically concerned with budgets, expenditures, and reckless government spending as a means to embed liberal critiques of the state within a debate around homeless people and social housing. Taxpayers

demonstrated both an imperative to fortify discourse around poverty as an outcome of a personal moral failing and to advocate for social policy towards the poor that is repressive and authoritarian based in dogma around health, risk avoidance, and personal responsibility

Chapter 6.

Concerned Residents

The panic in Maple Ridge is highly emotional –as panics often are– it involves anger, frustration, and fear. Accordingly, a dominant style of discourse in Maple Ridge was characterized by a singular focus on appeals to emotion and emotional narratives. I refer to proponents of this discourse as "Concerned Residents" as a reference of how they were typically identified in media coverage (Global News, 2018). Media amplification of Concerned Residents' claims was reflective of a more traditional relationship between moral entrepreneurs and media in moral panics; interviews and sound bites from Concerned Residents featured prominently in coverage of homelessness in Maple Ridge throughout 2018 and early 2019. Typically, advanced by parents of young children, daycare owners, and adult children of elderly parents, concerned residents stressed the threat of the local homeless population to the sanctity of Maple Ridge as a safe, "family oriented", suburban space.

Concerned Residents were active contributors to online discourse. As previously discussed, the landscape of communication and connection facilitated by social media was a significant factor in the trajectory of this panic. In addition to platforming fringe ideology otherwise overlooked in mainstream media, social media also created a mechanism for anecdotes, videos, and images of individuals allegedly linked to the local homeless community to be circulated widely. Often, locals would take to social media with harrowing personal anecdotes of being threatened with violence, harassed, or experiencing generally unsettling encounters. Videos or images of individuals using drugs publicly, stealing, being attended to by paramedics, or leaving refuse in public spaces would become quasi-viral within neighborhood Facebook groups in a way that generated significant engagement amongst residents. Such posts would be cited as evidence for the necessity of a swift and decisive intervention in the disruption caused by the local homeless community. The response online to such posts was akin to what Johnen, Jungblut, and Ziegele's (2017) describe as "online firestorms" (3141) albeit on a more limited scale. Online firestorms refer to periods of targeted moral outrage online towards an event, a brand, or individual and are characterized by widespread engagement, "indignant tonality" and a "negative opinion climate" (2017: 3140).

Pseudo viral posts detailing individuals behaving in dangerous, unpredictable, or uncontrollable ways became (and continues to be) a common trope of community Facebook groups in Maple Ridge. Concerned Residents, in particular, would cite first or second hand encounters as evidence for the ever-present, immediate threat posed by Anita Place residents. Anecdotes, particularly those involving children or elders, functioned powerfully in Maple Ridge as a way of generating outrage online:

> I'm exhausted, my kid's bike was stolen, I almost had to get physical with a homeless guy trying to break into my tent trailer. Last week a person biking up from tent city almost ran into me because she was riding on the wrong side of the road and let loose with a steady stream of filth at me. (Ryan Burden, 2018)

Children were the most common feature of these posts. Concerned Residents strategically deployed notions of childhood innocence and, to a lesser extent, the vulnerability of the elderly as means to maximize a sense of worsening risk in their community. For example, the loss of children's bicycles to theft was a pervasive theme of online anecdotes. While Concerned Residents and others critical of the local homeless population reported experiences of theft on a regular basis, the loss of children's bicycles was associated with an added symbolic significance:

> For the most part of people whom I've dealt with that "live" there, they steal and "do what they need to do" to live. They've stolen my 9-year old's bike. Threatened my husband. (Carri Fraser Ash, 2018)

Stories about seniors tended to focus on loss of property or access to space--for example, having property stolen, being mugged, or losing the ability to safely leave their residence:

> It is a cesspool of drugs and thieves! My mother was mugged on her scooter! My friend's child lost his bike that was specially equipped with a prosthetic arm!? Wonder where THAT ended up!? (Kimmie Prokopenko, 2018)

Anecdotes about theft or otherwise unsettling interactions were significant for the anti-tent city and anti-TMH movement in Maple Ridge, however, stories of individuals coming perilously close to danger at the hands of local homeless people generated a distinct type of fervor online:

> Some weird guy from tent city tried to claim my 19-month-old son was his. My partner had him in his arms about to put him in the car and this guy starts going off "that's my f***** kid, you're abducting him, give me my kid he's not yours" then

proceeded to threaten my partner and said "I'll shoot you in the back of the head" (Kayla Hutchinson, 2018)

Posts that similarly reported a type of aimless, senseless, violent antagonism by Anita Place residents towards innocent families would elicit a cascade of responses on neighborhood social media groups of individuals speculating about alternative outcomes where disaster occurred. For example, in response to the above post, the following comments were typical:

> A person has to wonder what he would have done to a baby had he actually been able to wrench it away from its parent. Gives me shudders down my back to even think about that AND the fact that he may actually have a gun. (Pat Carlson, 2018)

> I too am pregnant and always out with my son alone! This terrifies me to be out and about in my own town that I've lived my entire life! It's heartbreaking and sickens me the thought of experiencing anything like this! (Christina McLure, 2018)

Inherent to Concerned Residents' anecdotes was a sense of ambient chaos and unpredictability, where the most basic functions of daily life become impossible under the tyrannical reign of Anita Place residents. Occasionally, posts that initiated significant engagement online would appear in local media coverage. Sean Hier (2019: 385) notes that typically online firestorms have minimal impact outside of the online echo chambers in which they originate, however, they are occasionally identified as newsworthy by mainstream media in what is referred to as "digital spillover". For example, in 2018, a Maple Ridge local was interviewed on *The Lynda Steele Show* radio show after a Facebook post detailing her experiences living next to Anita Place was shared widely in neighborhood groups:

> Lynda Steele: And you're a mom, you've got kids. How does this impact your children?

> Cassandra Cave: Um, well I don't take them out of my house that's for sure around here (*laughing*).

> LS: And you've got people smoking *crack* on your front lawn?!

> CC: Yeah. There was a trailer parked out front of my home back into my driveway. I actually missed my son's doctor appointment because the trailer was blocking my driveway and, if you talk to the police, and from experience, you never want to confront them just because you never know what you're going to

get. And I actually saw them doing drugs out front of my home. (Cassandra Cave, 2018a)

In addition to anxiety and anger around theft and risk of physical violence, Concerned Residents often cited the possibility of children being injured by discarded needles in public spaces like parks as an argument against the implementation of low barrier social housing. As with Taxpayers, the 'low-barrier' design of the TMH was a particular concern for Concerned residents. For example, during the public question portion of a 2018 city council meeting, a local resident expressed this concern over the proposed TMH project:

> I want you to discuss the number of children to be pricked by a needle that would be enough to decide the shelter is a failure (*her voice becomes shaky and she begins to cry*). Would it be too great a price if 2 children from Golden Ear's were pricked during their lunch hour? (*said through tears*). Or 2 from Thomas Haney? I want you to discuss where you will draw the line? I have 80-year-old friends who have to walk past the shelter to do their shopping; I want you to discuss how many have to be beaten and robbed before you decide the shelter is the wrong location. (Maple Ridge City Council Meeting Video Recording, May 23rd 2018)

As evidenced in this quote, the low barrier supportive housing model represented a genuinely terrifying vision for Concerned Residents. The potential for children to be injured by discarded needles or seniors being victimized became realistic, imminent and the final step in the perversion of their community by harm reduction initiatives. This discourse tracks with recent coverage by local media; stories about discarded needles in public spaces near harm reduction focused services have become a particular fixation of local reporters. For example, in 2017, a story about a child coming into contact with a needle at a daycare near Maple Ridge made local headlines (Brown & Little, 2017). In 2019, a local media source shared a video uploaded to social media by a woman claiming her child stepped on a discarded needle titled "Child allegedly steps on uncapped needle found near B.C. water park" (Balzer, 2019). Though there is a lack of aggregated, wider analyses of the degree to which individuals – of any age – are being injured by discarded needles, there is ongoing local media coverage about the issue of needles being found in public spaces across British Columbia (Granger, 2019, Blats, 2019, Hayes, 2019, DeRosa, 2019).

As Concerned Residents spoke out against the TMH proposal or advocated for the removal of Anita Place, they would often face criticism of stigmatizing an already vulnerable population. In these instances, narratives of imminent danger or tales of peril served to mobilize the immutable innocence of children or the elderly as a rebuttal. For example, the following is an excerpt from a comment thread discussing stigmatizing narratives around homelessness in Maple Ridge:

> I do have kids. We used to live in the sunrise apartments. Until one of my neighbors (a drug addict, who was scheduled to be removed by the bailiff later that morning at 10am.) unfortunately he passed out while freebasing in his bedroom and knocked over his acetylene torch. As a result, burning down 1/3 of the building and leaving 63 units (mostly families) homeless at 6am on a Saturday in mid-March. We watched our family-oriented building change overnight when a (what would be well known to police) drug house opened across the street." (Beth Korman, 2018)

Likewise, after her post and subsequent media appearance elicited considerable attention from critics on Facebook, Cassandra Cave defended her position by citing the ongoing disruption she experienced from Anita Place residents:

> When you miss your child's DR appointment because the camper was parked in front of the driveway so they could smoke crack (but you can't ask them to move because they will scream and threaten you). When you're tormented while you try to bring your garbage and recycling bins inside the house in the morning. When your child is woken up all night because they scream bloody murder at each other or are using power tools. After all this, you tell me you wouldn't be upset and scared for your family's safety. (Cassandra Cave, 2018b)

References to children and risk were a discursive strategy that allowed Concerned Residents to disengage with the criticism that they lacked empathy towards the less fortunate. It allowed them to avoid accounting for the humanity of homeless people in Maple Ridge. For example, in a 2018 *Global News* report of reactions to the TMH proposal, a resident identified as a "mom" is depicted alongside a stroller with a toddler as she explains:

> I don't think that it's necessarily about a roof over their heads and clothing. A lot of them are looking for drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and unless someone's going to supply them with that as well, they're going to be looking to steal from people in this neighborhood. (Global News, 2018)

As guardians of childhood innocence, Concerned Residents were effectively absolved of the burden of compassion or empathy for individuals they perceived as threatening. Invocation of childhood innocence or the vulnerability of the elderly had a totalizing

effect; it allowed Concerned Residents to mitigate competing moral imperatives by evacuating the complexity that surrounded the vulnerability of homeless people. The symbolic significance of children, in particular, was that of immutable innocence; the imperative to protect it was indisputable. Consequently, the risk of children being defiled– through loss of property like bicycles or through more direct physical harm – could be tangentially mentioned in relation to social housing or Anita Place and the argument against either could be implicitly understood. Whereas Taxpayers emphasized the "deservingness" of seniors as lifelong taxpayers, Concerned Residents juxtaposed the danger of unpredictable, drug using individuals against the frailty of seniors. Children acted as avatars for innocence and seniors for frailty. Whereas Taxpayers attempted to soften their economic view with calls for services for "truly" needful populations, Concerned Residents used the undisputable innocence and purity of children to normalize dehumanizing discourse around homeless people. Both Taxpayers and Concerned Residents maintained an awareness of a moral imperative to show kindness to "less fortunate" so both used their own strategies to navigate complicated dueling moral imperatives.

The role of imagined or exaggerated risks to children are significant to the history of moral panics. Cohen (2002) notes that children's function in moral panics evolves continuously including where childhood deviance or delinquency becomes the focus of the panic itself. In Maple Ridge, notions of childhood innocence acted as a rhetorical cudgel that effectively and efficiently communicated risk. Zelizer (1994: 22) argues that the emphasis on innocence represents a discursive shift in the way children are constructed in the West. The "sacralization of the child" refers to the process through which children are viewed less in relation to their economic value as sources of cheap labour but increasingly through the prism of emotion. As childhood labour becomes increasingly scarce within the economic sphere, children in industrialized societies have, as a consequence, become "sacred" insofar as they are "invested with religious and sentimental meanings" (Meyer, 2007, 96). In other words, sacralization has meant that the contemporary child's value is weighted *entirely* in emotion representing a departure from an era where children were treated partially as sites of economic value generated through cheap labour (Meyer, 2007 96). The modern preoccupation with eliminating risks for children, Zelzier (1994) argues, arises out of this reimagining of the value and role of children. Moeller (2002) argues that media often uses images of children or

tropes of childhood innocence to circumvent complex issues within stories that involve competing moral imperatives. She notes that "children have become *the* moral referent" (Moeller, 2002, 38) that can be used to flatten complicated moral landscapes. Consequently, references to children or appeals to emotion via the symbolism of children become a powerful rhetorical device. As Moeller (2002: 39) notes "invoking children lends fervor to an argument for (or against) a public policy position and overlays a moral construct on the debate".

Concerned Residents' claims of childhood innocence defiled by the morally bankrupt drug addict has a tremendously broad symbolic purchase. Images of children poked by needles or ripped from the arms of their parents, seemingly reinforced by local media reports, are powerfully evocative. They help to generate an urgency for action. They help people to feel validated in their anxiety around changes to the social world. People fear the moral fabric of their community is disintegrating. People are frustrated that systems appear to be failing within the very areas they were designed to operate. They have encounters with individuals behaving in unpredictable and erratic ways that seem to support these fears and support the discourse they participate in online. The groundswell of energy behind the panic is emotional and consequently, the claims, the strategies, and momentum behind the movement are generated by a reliance on stories that play with emotions. For Concerned Residents, harm reduction initiatives were the natural end phase of the transition Maple Ridge was experiencing from a sleepy suburban family haven to a depraved, crime ridden landscape of urban decay rooted in addiction. The deterioration was occurring rapidly and it was occurring at the hands of a minority group.

Chapter 7.

Conclusion

The origins of moral panics exist within social upheaval. Triggered by social unrest, they are manifestations of a collective yearning to reaffirm moral boundaries. Moral panics identify for the community a scapegoat, one that acts as a lightning rod to absorb the anxiety produced in moments of uncertainty and whose elimination makes possible a belief in a return to familiarity. In Maple Ridge, the emergence of Anita Place tent city became a site upon which residents could channel a constellation of fear, resentment, and hostility towards homeless people. The resiliency of Anita Place in the face of multiple legal challenges and the subsequent proposal to subsidize housing for its residents represented a troubling shift in the status quo. For many Maple Ridge residents, somewhat abruptly, the suburban sprawl of their calm, homogeneous, family-oriented community was appropriated by a frightening cohort of nefarious characters. It was a cohort of homeless people who for many seemed to be lecherous, entitled, and antagonistic to their values. They were represented by lawyers, community figures, and activists. They employed civil disobedience as a keenly effective measure to solicit the media's ravenous hunger for an energized and contentious issue around which to build a narrative. Residents experienced the material realities of living in close proximity to individuals who lack access to basic needs like shelter, warmth, and privacy. Anecdotes about these experiences were taken up by moral entrepreneurs and circulated in fantastical and exaggerated ways that generated a sense of urgency and contributed to a crisis narrative-- one that was rapidly spinning out of control with debris flying off and hitting innocent bystanders. Online discussion threads were populated by an army of ground troops mobilized under an intoxicating brew of neoliberal common sense, hate speech, and conservative political dogma in the guerilla warfare of social media debates.

This thesis adds to the existing moral panic research literature by investigating how the emergence of a tent city in suburban space produced a moralized discourse around homelessness and housing. In addition to counter narratives and more fringe ideologies not explored in this thesis, the conversation around homelessness in Maple Ridge was dominated by three distinct, but related discursive styles. Residents in Maple Ridge invoked these styles as a means to characterize the problem driving

homelessness, generate urgency around the need for solutions, and centre their preferred prescription. The online conversation around homelessness often included a discourse that traded in pervasive internet currencies of hate speech, violent language and extreme right-wing ethos dedicated to dehumanizing the other. Some residents employed a discourse informed by a neoliberal preoccupation with limited government, low taxation, and welfare state retrenchment, a discourse that invoked the spectre of the taxpayer as a means to embed a liberal critique of government spending within the discussion of homelessness. Other residents devised a rhetorical cudgel out of images of children or childhood innocence as a means to seamlessly traverse the complicated moral landscape of campaigning against housing for homeless people.

While the most immediate and unifying objective of these somewhat disparate discursive styles was to expedite removal of Anita Place and advocate for the implementation of more repressive measures to contain entrenched poverty in Maple Ridge, I would argue that the roots of hostility and hatred channeled towards homeless people in Maple Ridge exist elsewhere. The legacy of Canada's neoliberal project is a threadbare social safety net; one where experiences of deep poverty are more abject, and where stagnant wages make working-class populations increasingly vulnerable to poverty. Demographic data around the average annual income and most common employment sectors of Maple Ridge residents locate a large proportion of the community within this downwardly mobile socioeconomic position of the working class in Canada. Likewise, as residents expressed frustration or concern around the local homeless population, they expressed, often obliquely, an awareness of this precarity. For example, local small business owners pleading with city council to remove a nearby tent city highlighted diminishing revenue amidst increasing operational costs. Residents conceptualized themselves as victims of social assistance recipients dedicated to appropriating what little wealth they were able to accumulate. They lamented on how the experience of 'hard work', financial struggle, and the internalization of values of stoicism have seemingly ceased to provide any tangible value in their lives. They proclaimed that supportive housing was unfair and a drain on scare resources for more deserving populations like seniors, veterans, or poor working families thereby stressing the sense of ever dwindling social resources available to those who need them. While many residents faulted individual moral failings and ineffective government for these experiences, they nonetheless revealed a degree of recognition of the deteriorating

social infrastructure available for those experiencing financial precarity. They were aware on some level that a dry rot that had set into a once opaque barricade that separated the poor from the middle class and their proximity to poverty was getting closer than ever. In other words, Maple Ridge residents recognized that the decentralization of visible, entrenched homelessness from urban space into their front yard –often literally – might have indicated that their position in the social hierarchy had degraded to one more akin to the homeless than to that of the upper class.

The grassroots energy that emerged in Maple Ridge is likely a product of broader anxiety around the increasing precarity of their position in the socioeconomic stratum. This manifested in an intense panic over a somewhat novel proximity to deeply entrenched poverty personified by the ultimate economic other— the homeless person. The perceived invasion of a population traditionally relegated to densely populated urban spaces into smaller suburban spaces could represent a profound threat to middle class communities like Maple Ridge. It could make clear that adherence to doctrines of productivity, self-reliance, stoicism, and prudence provide little protection from the fetters of capitalism. As the frontier of economic precarity advances forward and consumes communities once protected from daily encounters with entrenched poverty it leaves in its wake a trail of festering social wounds. And once this frontier advances beyond these communities, their members fear the future that awaits. Who will protect their children in public spaces? What will become of their elderly parents when they are unable to earn an income? What happens when one becomes an economic other? Implicitly, individuals fear that there remains little meaningful infrastructure to protect them once they have been left behind. No one is coming to save them. The fear in Maple Ridge around homelessness is, at its core, a socio-economic one. People fear not solely that the existence of such populations in their midst will siphon off scarce resources allocated to their community, but rather that a way of life is slipping through their grasp.

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