

**Making Freedom Great Again:
Conspiracy Theories, Affective Nostalgia and Alignment, and The Right-Wing Base
Grammars of the #Freedomconvoy (*)**

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Abstract:

The so-called “freedom convoy,” which began in January 2021 in Ottawa, Canada, garnered international attention and sparked a flood of social media conversations. Far-right extremists and Twitter users sympathetic to this cause employed various strategies of “affective rhetoric”--the practice of instilling emotion in readers by appealing to their values and beliefs--in order to incite emotional reactions and influence public opinion. These extremists and sympathizers used these affective rhetorical techniques, such as fear mongering, demonizing, exaggeration, and polarization, to both maintain public engagement and increase public acceptance of their ideas, not only about the convoy, but about their larger ideals and aims as well. These larger extremist ideals include: the desire of a “golden age” of freedom; the concept of an “us” vs. a “them”; and the restoration of a “traditional” patriarchal white supremacy. The danger of this flooding of social media channels with such strategies and ideals can lead to increased public acceptance and reinforcement of the radicalized views of extremists, which can eventually lead to even more radical and dangerous ideas becoming acceptable in public conversation, particularly through conspiracies. As my research shows, online actors exploited a variety of conspiracy theories, including: The Great Reset; vaccines as weapons of mass genocide; medical martial law; and framing the Ukraine war as a hoax or a distraction. Thus, in the wake of the “freedom convoy,” movement, to get a sense of how these extremist conversations were framed, I analyzed tweets circulating with #IStandWithTruckers and #TruckersForFreedom2022. Using discourse analysis, I examine the affective rhetorical strategies of persuasion, ideals, and conspiracy theories that Twitter extremists and sympathizers employed to maximize political conflict and to shift the acceptability of extremist discourse in the public sphere.

Keywords: #FreedomConvoy; Twitter; Conspiracy Theory; Affect; Right-Wing Extremism

Introduction: Making Freedom Feel Great Again in Downtown Ottawa

In the wake of provincial and federal COVID-19 vaccine mandates and restrictions in Canada a series of protests began in early 2022, referring to themselves as the “freedom convoy.” Although the movement began as a challenge to mandatory vaccines for truckers crossing into the United States, it quickly evolved into a movement of total opposition to all COVID-19 mandates such as mandatory masks, lockdowns, etc. From January 22 onwards, numerous vehicles formed convoys and travelled across Canada before merging in Ottawa on January 29, 2022, holding a rally at Parliament Hill, where thousands of pedestrian protesters joined in. Many provincial capitals and border crossings with the US were also blocked off by various subsidiary protests.

Protesters stated that they would not cease their occupation of downtown Ottawa until all COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. Subsequently, on February 11, a state of emergency was declared by Ontario Premier Doug Ford, where new legal sanctions were authorized on the blockade of trade routes, highways, airports, ports, bridges, and railways. On February 14, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called for the implementation of the Emergencies Act for the first time since it was passed in 1988. Between February 17 and 20, protesters and organizers were arrested, parked vehicles were removed, and the blockades were dismantled from the Ottawa streets by a large-scale joint police operation. By February 21, approximately four weeks since it began, the majority of protestors had been cleared from Ottawa.

Beyond concerns these protests and lengthy occupations elicited in general, the freedom convoy movement (hereafter referred to as “FCM”) raises alarm bells concerning the involvement of far-right extremist groups, especially those who promote violence. Research conducted by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and others demonstrates that the FCM is supported at home and abroad by various right-wing extremist groups, including Proud Boys channels, the White Nationalist website Stormfront, and White Lives Matter. Equally worrisome, the Anti-Defamation League has identified that 1100 people who donated in support of the January 6, 2021, demonstration and insurrection at the US Capitol also donated to Canada’s FCM.ⁱ

In addition, the so-called “freedom convoy” has garnered international attention and sparked a flood of social media conversations. To get a sense of how these conversations were framed, I analyzed tweets circulated with the hashtags #IStandWithTruckers and #TruckersForFreedom2022 (and closely similar variants).

Using discourse analysis, I identified, examined, and analyzed the attendant conspiracy theories circulating in the FCM digital media landscape and the emotional responses to these theories in order to track how such affective conspiratorial discourses assist in the construction of an “affective public” (Papacharissi, 2015). By reading and assessing our data through affect theory (Ahmed, 2004), I argue that the conspiracy theories attached to and circulated within the FCM’s digital ecology function to exploit emotion and optimize far-right rhetorical content, particularly ideologies of: a much yearned for Golden Age, an “us” vs. “them” mentality, and patriarchal masculinity.

Theoretical Frameworks: Affect Alignments & Social Media Affordances

Research examining emotion on social media platforms has increased over the last few years, increasingly recognizing how affective strategies play an important role in determining how information circulates online and shapes public opinion (Bleiker & Hutchison, 2008; Boler & Davis, 2021; Crawford, 2000; Crilley, 2018; Crilley & Chatterje-Doody, 2020). Referring to the force and potential of embodied, felt, and sensed interactions (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010), the study of affect goes beyond *what emotions are* and allows us to understand *what emotions do* (Ahmed, 2004). Crucially, scholars of affect argue that we “feel our way” into political ideologies, religious orientations, and other identity formations (Papacharissi, 2015; Berlant, 2011; Sedgwick, 2003).

In this article, I am interested in how those who support or are sympathetic to the FCM “feel their way” toward the conspiracy theories and, ultimately, right-wing extremist rhetoric that such theories work to buttress and spread. Thus, I examine how emotional expression, rhetoric, and other affective content are leveraged and woven together with conspiracies by FCM sympathizers and far-right actors in the production of gendered and racialized content. In particular, I argue that conspiracy theories attached to the convoy movement, through fostering pernicious and virulent animosity toward “Others,” contribute to a deep sense of belonging and collectivity among convoy supporters. Indeed, as I demonstrate, such collective emotions play a significant role in shaping how FCM supporters and sympathizers perceive themselves and Others.

Ultimately, through the deployment of weaponized emotions via the (re)production and dissemination of tweets, videos, and other discursive and highly affecting tools, FCM sympathizers create a series of *affective alignments*. That is, through affectively charged and exceedingly demeaning gendered and racist discourses and imagery, users circulate and produce a form of *emotional collectivity* among themselves that supports, for example, an “us vs. them” mentality (Farokhi, 2022). As I will demonstrate, this affective accumulation of impacts—an avalanche of emotional bigotry if you will—is successfully persuasive precisely because of the deeply *affective* dimensions of the disinformation and discourse convoy-related and other extremist users deploy.

Importantly, in the digital ecosystem, incentive and persuasion strategies operate most effectively through affective and emotional appeals, and social media platforms such as Twitter offer an ideal venue through which emotional narratives can be produced and consumed (Farokhi, 2021; Papacharissi, 2016). For instance, in the case of the Egyptian Revolution in which thousands of Egyptians organized online and offline to protest the oppressive rule of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, Zizi Papacharissi (2016) suggests that hashtags functioned to connect people who held similar opinions. In this way, Twitter operates as a “networked public” that enables individuals to narrate their feelings of an event. This mediatized emotional exchange results in a “digital affect culture” (Döveling et al., 2018) which infiltrates the Internet, allowing users to express various affects based on shared norms, ideologies, discriminations, and the like (Benski & Fisher, 2014; Döveling, et al., 2018).

However, the expression of emotions facilitated by social media does not always result in the forging and fostering of collective solidarity toward social justice. Most often, power dynamics determine emotions and shape social and cultural norms. Thus, displaying emotions often results in the “othering” of certain groups, as Ahmed argues (2004). Mona Abdel-Fadil (2019), drawing on Ahmed’s work, argues that social media platforms are one of the main venues that allow individuals to effectively express an array of emotions and performative affects. In her analysis of a Facebook group that actively promotes the public visibility of Christianity for instance, Abdel-Fadil (2019) demonstrates how displays of emotion on online platforms can travel through an object—such as the Christian Cross—which can powerfully trigger certain feelings. Emblematic and emotionally charged symbols like the Cross become a “sticky object.” Such objects evoke particular and often polarizing feelings that effectively connect and mobilize people who aim to protect or wear such symbols, while at the same time disconnecting them from those who do not share the same passion for such an object (Abdel-Fadil, 2019).

In this paper, I argue that conspiracy theories associated with the convoy movement online are just such “sticky objects” which persuasively attract and polarize affective alignments. In order to assess this stickiness, it is necessary to understand and evaluate how conspiracy theories are weaponized by supporters of the FCM on Twitter to: a) sow confusion and prejudice; b) spread disinformation and fake news; and, c) ultimately reinforce affective processes that construct an “us vs. them” binary; increase the desire for a return to an imagined golden age, and enable the reclamation of patriarchal masculinity perceived to be under threat. The intensely emotionalized nature of these online discourses are keenly observed in FCM related hashtags.

Thus, this paper moves through two sections. First, I discuss the ironies and implications of four dominant conspiracies identified alongside our primary hashtags and the specific kinds of emotion that each conspiracy theory generates. Second, I provide an in-depth discussion of how these conspiracies help to influence the spread and persuasion of the rhetoric of far-right extremism (e.g., the desire for an imagined golden age, the “us” versus “them” binary, and the reinforcement of the idea of masculinity under threat). In doing so, I shed light on how these accumulated, affective flows construct a space of emotional and cultural belonging of convoy movement sympathizers and supports by way of transnational, extremist affective resonances, and alignments. The various emotional discourses produced and circulated online not only evoke affective alignment between the sympathizers of convoys but also constitute a core and affective dis-alignment with those who are perceived as Others and ultimately against the FCM.

Here it is worth noting how far right and other extremist users exploit the affordability of Twitter to tap into various media sources, texts, images, etc. in order to actively produce coherent narratives to ground the plausibility of their conspiracy theories. The overall design of Twitter acts as an echo chamber: a discursive space in which users are predominantly exposed to homogenous information and ideas that they do not contest (Fielitz & Marcks, 2019).

Given this capacity of Twitter, strong emotions come to easily take over logic, stimulating perceptions that are more likely to be prone to “fascist rationality” (Fielitz & Marcks, 2019) or better yet, fascist (ir)rationality. Also, given that the architecture of Twitter allows

messages to be circulated and shared rapidly, the exposure of such (ir)rational messaging increases exponentially. This constant exposure thus increases the popularity of a message which results in it becoming more believable, leading users not only to express their allegiance with such ideas by “liking” a given tweet, but also by actively sharing them (via retweeting). In combination, these architectural mechanisms of the platform vibrantly enhance the echo-chamber effect, resulting in ever wider circulation of such conspiracies.

In addition, the “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2006) of social media platforms enables non-professionals to successfully compete with professionals in the production of knowledge. For instance, Stef Aupers (2020), reflects how the Internet at large (and social media platforms in particular here), “cultivates a ‘cult of the amateur’ where the distinction between established (scientific) knowledge and alternative truth claims erodes” (473). Clearly, the inability of social media platforms users to be able to tell fact from fiction inside these emotionally charged echo chambers has disastrous implications for democratic principles, individual and public health, collective safety, trust in science, and any sense of mutual compassion nationally or globally.

Methodology

Data collected for this article come from Twitter and is part of a broader data collection effort of the examination of social media uses by right-wing extremist movements in Canada, the US, and India. I identified two primary hashtags that were frequently employed by supporters of FCM between February 6th to March 8th, 2022: #IStandWithTruckers and #TruckersForFreedom2022. To capture the data, I used a Twitter scraping tool known as TAGs² that allows for automatic compiling of data and storage of tweets on Google Drive. I then conducted a content analysis of the tweets to categorize the themes of the messages included. After manually thematizing the data, I used critical discourse analysis to evaluate how the discursive rhetoric of tweets is weaponized to invoke particular emotions targeted to intended audiences. In order to keep the data confidential, all tweets, retweets, and related online posts are not quoted verbatim. Also, whenever I used image, attention was paid in anonymizing the users.

SECTION 1: All Aboard the Conspiracy Convoy!

In what follows, I examine and explain four of the primary conspiracies associated with the FCM on Twitter. These include: “The Great Reset,” “Vaccine as a weapon of mass killing,” “Medical Martial Law,” and the “Ukraine war as a distraction.” Importantly, I track and evidence how each conspiracy produces and circulates particular types of intense affect, including hate and fear.

Conspiracy #1: The Great Reset (Must Not Be Permitted!):

One of the main conspiracies currently circulated on Twitter is “The Great Reset,” an initiative allegedly attributed to and launched by the World Economic Forum (WEF), the eminent non-governmental organization behind the annual Davos conference. The Great Reset supposedly aims to establish through governmental policies a radical and authoritarian restructuring of

international investment and government spending so as to revitalize the global economy, exploiting the disastrous economic ramifications due to the pandemic as an excuse (“What is the Great Reset,” 2021).

This conspiracy theory first emerged in June 2020, after the Davos platform announced plans to combat global inequality and promote environmental initiatives (What is the Great Reset,” 2021). The adherents of this conspiracy believe that there is a master plan, orchestrated by governments worldwide and members of the world’s elite, to “reset” the global economy through international banks, governmental programs and policies, and other environmental and social measures. They believe that the pandemic is being exploited as an opportunity to push forward this globalist plot through a variety of radical policies, such as forced vaccination and digital ID cards among others (Slobodian, 2020). Ultimately, proponents of this theory believe that the success of the Great Reset will enable large corporations, international institutions, the United Nations, and government officials, including Joe Biden and Justin Trudeau, to entrench and expand their global, authoritarian powers.

The Great Reset began trending in November 2020 with around 80,000 tweets, most of which contained a video clip of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau addressing the United Nations via video conference in September 2020. In the clip, Trudeau states that the pandemic has provided the opportunity for a reset “to accelerate our pre-pandemic efforts to re-imagine economic systems that actually address global challenges like extreme poverty, inequality, and climate change.” Additionally, Trudeau uses the slogan “building back better,” which, according to the conspiracists, is far too similar to Biden’s campaign slogan “Build Back Better” to be an innocent symmetry. Thus, promoters of this conspiracy claim that this parallel provides clear evidence of not only of Trudeau’s and Biden’s mutual collusion toward The Great Reset in particular, but evidence of the conspiracy more generally (“The Great Reset,” 2020).

References to The Great Reset can easily be found amid the social media ecology of the freedom convoy movement. For instance, users warn that what they are experiencing in Canada is evidence that the “GREAT RESET Has INFILTRATED Cabinets Around The World,” especially via “Young Leaders Like Trudeau” (aka: “PM Black Face”), deploying rather overzealous hashtags-as-proclamations that “#CanadaHasFallen.” Users argue that The Great Reset is “not a conspiracy theory” but rather a “fact” and that it must “REJECT[ED].” To these users, COVID-19 has been weaponized to impose coercive measures and usher in radical political and social change in Canada, including forced vaccines, the stripping away of individual freedoms, and an increase in mass surveillance of national and global populations. Below are some telling examples of tweets which engage these ideas:

I agree! #TruckersForFreedom2022 🙌🇨🇦🇺🇸🇨🇦🇺🇸🇨🇦🇺🇸 We need to REJECT The Great Reset 🇺🇸 No Digital ID/Social Credit System. WEF does not favor Humanity.

GREAT RESET Has INFILTRATED Cabinets Around The World With Young Leaders Like Trudeau <https://t.co/tAHkgcwTQN>

how the World Economic Forum is infiltrating governments around the world. #BlackfaceHilter is part of the WEF so is every major world leader. It's not a conspiracy theory its fact.

What's crazy is how folks are unable to see what's right in front of their face
#greatreset #covid #covid19 #authoritarian #CanadaHasFallen
#TruckersForFreedom2022

The resignation of PM Black Face should not be taken as a victory for Canadians. The next in line is another WEF puppet intent on the Great Reset and the destruction of Canada. #Canadians #WEFpuppet #WEF

In addition, American right-wing media content creators such as Ben Shapiro and Glenn Beck (who have millions of followers) have supported the convoys, arguing that the Canadian government's actions to suppress the FCM is a clear example of The Great Reset (Scott, 2022).

Further, The Great Reset has been associated with "deep state" conspiracies. Adherents of this conspiracy believe that there are "entrenched powers within US government institutions that work on behalf of the Cabal. These are the men and women who ensure that the elites' Satanic desires are carried out and covered up" (QAnon, 2021). Thus, the FCM is understood as the ideal battleground in which to expose and defeat the deep state. As one user tweets:

The people of #Canada is tough and principled. They came up with the #TruckersForFreedom2022. Have faith they'll find the right way to proceed, sans violence. If they get their way up north, the deep state is screwed. If they keep them at bay with violence, we have guns. 🇨🇦🇺🇸

In combination, these rhetorical claims about global conspiracies are an indicator of a "collective delusion" produced by irrational paranoia, as they have no foundation in truth (Butter & Knight, 2020: 30). This form of rhetoric creates "an alternative social fantasy that placates its believers while empowering the liars (Jones, 2021: 33). Such comments foster not only prejudice against elites but also create an us vs. them binary between financial and governmental elites and the common populace. From the perspective of affect, such conspiracies powerfully contribute to the production, circulation, and intensification of anger and hate against elites, real and imagined, which helps to persuade people frustrated with governmental policies and/or economically struggling towards conspiracy communities to ease their emotions (Franks et al., 2013). This in turn creates and reinforces affective and social ties within such communities.

Further, these sorts of conspiracies are also effective in sowing confusion, doubt, and distrust of governmental, police, and other authorities and increasing the inclination of individuals to turn to populist alternatives (who are only too eager to exploit that distrust). In addition, such rhetoric inspires individuals to develop a dark and pessimistic view of humanity which casts the world into an apocalyptic battle between absolute good and absolute evil. This intensification of emotional polarization results in increasing general distrust and a willingness to exploit others for personal gain (Lantian et al., 2020).

Ultimately, these kinds of rhetoric are a useful tactic to appeal to and further persuade right-wing actors and sympathizers who are willing to believe in these conspiracies. The common endgame of these theories encourages the idea that only populist leaders are capable of “awakening” the populace and channeling righteous anger against elites into meaningful action. This particular dichotomy between the elites and the people affords populism with a moralistic approach to politics, thereby encouraging processes of Othering to become both normal and paramount in order to resist such imagined global, authoritarian regimes like The Great Resent (and the deep state).

Conspiracy #2: Vaccines as Weapons of Mass Genocide:

Since the beginning of the pandemic, one of the main and most viral conspiracies has suggested that vaccines have been purposefully designed to kill and eradicate humans, especially the white race. Unsurprisingly, this alleged mission to wipe out the human species is understood to be linked to The Great Reset (Conspiracy Chaos, 2021). Weaving in financial and technological elites, this theory claims that Bill Gates and other global aristocrats plan to solve overpopulation through a pharmaceutical genocide under the guise of vaccines (which is framed, notably, as #CrimesAgainstHumanity). This particular theory has reached far beyond Twitter.

For instance, a survey of 5,500 individuals in the US found that 23% of US citizens believe that COVID-19 “will be used maliciously to infect people with poison” (Boyle, 2020). Fear mongering related to this conspiracy has also been widely supported by people like Tucker Carlson, the Fox News anchor, who continues to sow doubt about the vaccine, claiming that thousands of US citizens have died from COVID-19 shots (Amore, 2021). The same narrative is evident throughout the convoy movement’s Twitter traffic. Users state that COVID-19 vaccines are part of a global experiment designed to kill and are part of a larger, secret plot for the mass extermination of humanity. For instance, one user claims that vaccines are ineffective, will likely kill you, and associates these comments with the “tyranny” of the Trudeau government: “Imagine being forced to take an experimental drug that doesn't even work and may kill you. #TrudeauTyranny #TruckersForFreedom2022 #TrudeauMustResign.” In addition, users add images to their tweets to reinforce their beliefs in this conspiracy. In collage-like fashion, for example, a user cobbles together strategically selected portions of newspapers (some of which do not include the news sources) to demonstrate their belief in the side effects of vaccines as well as to argue that vaccines cause health complications and death (see Figure 1.1).

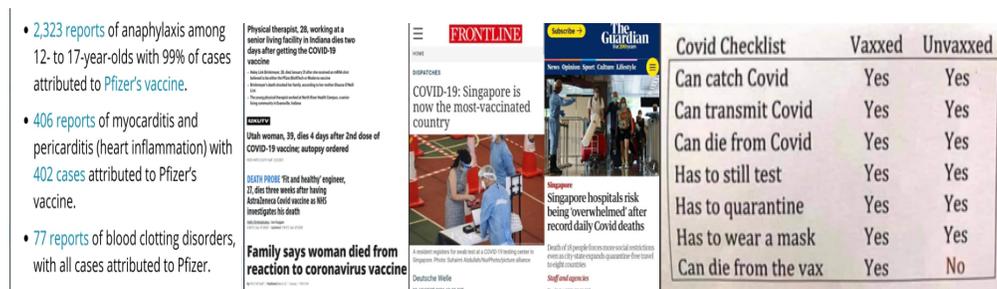


Figure 1.1: “Facts” and “Statistics” about COVID-19

While some users believe that the side effects of vaccines are a tactic used by the government to increase “the leading causes of death” such as “heart disease, cancer, strokes, and Alzheimer’s and it KILLS people with diabetes” (see Figure 1.1), others simply believe that vaccine efficacy is “at best debatable” and criticize the effectiveness of any policy or program to slow the spread of infection. For instance:

Lockdowns don’t work. Masks don’t work. Vaccines are at best debatable.

Importantly, these unscientific, necropolitically-inflected conspiracies result in increasing mistrust of governments as is evident in the post below:

@JustinTrudeau Canadians were forced coerced threatened cajoled into getting these vaccines and we do not trust government now!!! We are divided and you need to step down as leader of the country! #DoneWithCovid #CrimesAgainstHumanity #IStandWithTruckers <https://t.co/3nSyEGFv9t>

Troublingly, researchers have found that exposure to such anti-vaccine conspiracy theories increases vaccine hesitancy and negative attitudes towards biomedical approaches, resulting in distrust of medicine which in return pushes them to seek advice from non-professionals (Jolley et al., 2020). Suspicion of and belief in the perceived dangers of vaccinations also results in making “people feel powerless, disillusioned and mistrustful” (Jolley et al., 2020: 237).

As can be seen in the tweets above, such rhetoric readily invokes anger in right-wing sympathizers who feel that the government's policies are unfair and unjust. This, in turn, results in increasing mistrust toward medical, scientific, and governmental institutions as a whole. The rhetoric of mass killing and increased death rates due to vaccination also invokes fear by persuading far-right adherents and convoy sympathizers to believe that mandatory vaccines are threatening their existence. Ultimately, such conspiracy theories persuade people to be dubious of science and suspicious about the pharmaceutical industry, thereby impacting the rationality of individuals in the long term in making important health decisions, increasing hesitancy towards vaccines, and negatively impacting community health.

On a large scale, this can lead to “collective paranoia,” thereby creating an aggressive attitude toward authorities who advocate mandatory vaccination initiatives. Again, in conjunction with The Great Reset, anti-vaccine conspiracies and paranoia concerning their intentional lethality further persuade individuals to be drawn toward and embrace populist figures. By combining the polarization of elites vs. the wider populace with life-or-death consequences, such figures appear as saviours and can easily exploit messianic and otherwise liberating rhetoric for the sake of garnering political support. The use of “freedom” in the FCM’s online rhetoric is no accident.

Conspiracy #3: Medical Martial Law in the Year #COVID1984

Another conspiracy theory unfolding on Twitter claims that the Canadian federal government is an evil entity engaged in a secret plot to force “medical martial law.” The

adherents of this conspiracy theory believe that the aim of vaccines is not to protect the health of the general public but rather to impose and maintain tyrannical, authoritarian rule.

This conspiracy was started by Chuck Baldwin, an American right-wing politician, radio host, and founder-former pastor of Crossroad Baptist Church. He warns his followers that governments exploited COVID-19 as a tactic to enforce “medical martial law” in order to strip citizens of their rights. According to Baldwin, such “laws” are “unadulterated, unabashed government tyranny” (Extremists and Conspiracy Theorists, 2020). This conspiracy theory was readily promoted by other conspiracy theorists such as Tom Corbett, claiming that “what we are seeing right now...is the flicking of the switch and the turning on of the apparatus for medical martial law” (as cited in Extremists and Conspiracy Theorists, 2020).

The conspiracy of medical martial law clearly resonated with supporters and sympathizers of the FCM. In particular to Canada, related Twitter users have connected Canadian public health measures to this theory, arguing that the government, through the operationalizing of the Emergency Act by the Trudeau government, has all but formally declared martial law. Some examples of tweets echoing such messages include:

Trudeau's actions against Freedom Convoy equate to martial law & Creating martyrs of the truckers!

This guy just initiated martial law. This can't be real.

#ChrystiaFreeland and #Trudeau being on the #WorldEconomicForum board with #phizer CEO #AlbertBourla should be enough of a red flag for #Canadians to know the #insurrection from the inside, not the #TruckersForFreedom2022 #MartialLaw by the #Nazi @cafreeland and @JustinTrudeau

Keep crushing people until they revolt.... And then come down hard with fascist dictatorial powers and martial law..... Rise of the modern Nazis... #ZaidHamid #CanadaHasFallen #TruckersForFreedom2022 #GreatReset #TrudeauFailedCanada <https://t.co/q6TjyoY7s2>

As is clear from these tweets, the idea of a mandatory vaccine policy is understood to be a nefarious government plot to exert authoritarian, “fascist,” and “Nazi”-like control over the population and infringe on people’s liberties, their very “freedom.” These Twitter users understand the enforcement of the Emergency Act as evidence that medical martial law “can’t be real” but is already happening. To these users, the pandemic was nothing more than a smokescreen for an authoritarian plot to monitor the actions of citizens and remove their freedoms (if not, as discussed in the previous conspiracy, designed to kill them outright). Importantly, with reference to the “#GreatReset” and “#WorldEconomicForum,” these users deliberately link the conspiracy of medical martial law to The Great Reset and its deep state, elite-driven machinations.

The logic of this conspiracy is further evidenced and understood by users who post tweets with the hashtag #Covid1984. This is, of course, an obvious reference to George Orwell’s

dystopian novel *1984* which tells “a story of a society where lies and misinformation are used by the government to control the population” (Stewart, 2021). Just as Orwell warned about the tendencies of governments to move toward absolute, authoritarian power, users perceive COVID-19 as an ideal cover for such authoritarian inclinations. That is, to gain, hold, and abuse their power, and to surveil and ultimately control the populace. Some examples of #COVID1984 include:

Pay attention #COVID1984 #DoNotComply #HOLDtheLINE
 #CanadaHasFallen
 #TrudeauNationalDisgrace

UN PLANES SPOTTED NORTH BAY!! <https://t.co/EIQ0jDsIXT> via
 @YouTube
 #COVID1984 #NoVaccineMandates #DoNotComply #HOLDtheLINE
 #TrudeauNationalDisgrace

Read along emotional lies, this conspiracy relies upon and advocates irrational fear and suspicion, which eventually pushes sympathizers of this theory to believe in a strong need for noncompliance towards governmental health measures (and government authority more generally). This trope of conspiracy theory also arises from a form of mass delusion grounded on the imagined premise that everything we experience as individuals is part of the larger struggle of humankind’s timeline of destiny. Entwined with polarizing notions of good and evil (like that of The Great Reset), such conspiracies permit individuals to understand that their individual struggles are not only caused by such evil forces (e.g., government authoritarianism) but thus are then legitimately quite beyond their own individual control (and thus the need for populist action and noncompliance).

As scholars have noted, individuals susceptible to these types of theories are often already looking for and “creating patterns—even if these patterns are just illusory” (Imhoff & Lamberty, 2020: 198). to identify, explain, and otherwise justify their personal struggles, fears, and frustrations. As a consequence, these types of conspiracies result in both undermining perceptions of democratic, political efficacy and reinforcing the feeling that the status quo cannot be changed (and thus should be overthrown). Ultimately, this can lead to making people feel increasingly powerless and fearful. These feelings, in turn, can increase individuals’ vulnerability to conspiracy theories (Imhoff & Bruder, 2014; Imhoff & Lamberty, 2018), especially those which further help identify the (illusory) patterns with which they can make sense of their current fears and struggles. Unfortunately, this often results in a downward trend or what we might call a vicious spiral. Those who feel powerless tend to look for narratives which affirm their feelings, which in turn further biases their interpretations of the world (Imhoff & Lamberty, 2020).

Conspiracy #4: “Nobody cares about Ukraine!”: War as a Weapon of Mask Distraction

The final conspiracy theory I examined is also the most recent. This theory makes the claim that the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine is a nothing more than a tactic to “distract” and deflect attention away from the FCM and its aims. As mentioned in *The Guardian*, one participant of the FCM, Ryan Wright, told reporters that he believed the invasion was a

distraction intended to take attention away from what he and his fellow truckers are doing. Wright said the invasion is “a big fat smokescreen to keep everyone distracted on what is really going on in the world” (Olmos, 2022). Here are some examples of tweets that underscore this conspiracy narrative:

They don't care about anyone's health, They only care about their own agenda. #TruckersForFreedom2022 was Uniting the 🌐. Go look all the Convoys started from 1 🇨🇦. They can't have Unity, so they start a War to distract & kill more innocent people.. All this to keep their power

Biden administration just wagging the dog because they are terrified about a truckers convoy headed to Washington. They are trying everything to distract attention from it. Won't work. Nobody cares about Ukraine!#TruckersForFreedom2022

Woke Up! Wednesday - Weapons of Mask Distraction
#TruckersForFreedom2022
Trudeau ploughing the Woke vote as he try's to distract the public from his brutal excess with #TruckersForFreedom2022 Playing race card for agit prop on Left Wing TV

The rhetoric of these tweets demonstrates how users believe that the state is using war (if not the outright waging of war) to distract and deter them from the real war being waged on Canadians by the federal government to “keep their power.” These Twitter users view the invasion of Ukraine as a hoax invented to deceive people and distract the populace “so we don’t pay attention and see what they are doing” (as one user stated). Nevertheless, users argue that such tactics “will not work” and that they are here as brave truth-tellers, the true patriots who not only pursue the truth but also expose the official lies.

Once again, this form of conspiratorial rhetoric contributes to the production of a culture of suspicion, or a “hermeneutic of suspicion” (Butter & Knight, 2020: 4). This type of paranoid suspicion refers to “a desire to reveal the underlying causal factors hidden beneath the deceptive surface appearance” (Butter & Knight, 2020: 4). Tragically, by seeking to uncover the “truth” of the federal government’s multiple authoritarian plots to variously control (or even kill) the populace, those sympathetic to or in firm belief of this particular conspiracy theory become, at minimum, horrifyingly ignorant about current wars and other important global events, or, at worst, sickeningly unconcerned for the victims of such tragedies occurring in the Ukraine and elsewhere.

SECTION 2: The Base Grammar Lessons of Right-Wing Extremism

Having described in detail how these four conspiracies manifest as dependable or “factual,” narratively understandable, and knowledge-claiming frameworks which evoke particular emotions among freedom convoy sympathizers on Twitter, in what follows, I analyze and explain how these conspiracies are made to (re)produce and reinforce three foundational or “base grammars” of right-wing extremism. As Stuart Hall (1990) argued, a “base grammar of race”

underpins the ways in which racialized groups are represented in mainstream media. Taking up this frame in the context of the FCM, I ask: what are the base grammars of whiteness and right-wing extremism emerging from the social media ecology of this movement? While posts associated with #IStandWithTruckers and #TruckersForFreedom2022 (and other close variations) claim to be fighting for their freedom against state control, this claim relies on a series of extremist base grammars that become evident through and alongside the conspiracies discussed above. Three of these base grammars I attend to here include: the myth of a “Golden Age” of freedom, the logics of an “us” vs. “them” mentality, and the restoration of patriarchal masculinity that is currently perceived to be under threat.

Base Grammar #1: Desiring the Golden Age of Freedom

The mythology of a Golden Age of freedom is a common theme in the discourse of users I analyzed. This myth represents a desire to return to a time when: the nation was “pure” (meaning racially); there was less state intervention; and anyone (i.e., men) could do what they wanted as long as they could defend themselves (Murphy, 2009). For instance, among right-wing extremists in North America, Islamophobes desire a return to a Christian nation; racists crave a return to a white nation; and Incels wish for a patriarchal society in which men had unimpeded sexual access to women. In India, on the other hand, right-wing Hindus yearn to restore the mythology of a Vedic Golden Age, a time from the glorified past before the Mughal empire and before the British Raj (Leidig, 2020).

A common motif related to this trope includes the valorization of perceived (male) heroism. Unsurprisingly and particular to the Twitter ecosystem of the FCM, (again, mostly male) convoy participants are hailed as true patriots, heroes who fight to keep their home “free.” Despite the fact that they have been “oppressed,” users wrote, they will “rise again and again Like the Phoenix from the ashes UNTIL THE LAMBS HAVE BECOME LIONS and the rule of Darkness is no more.” These heroes, users assert, are fighting to save “Canada from the clutches of #TrudeauTyranny . . . in the attempted destruction of our beloved country.” Here are the tweets in full:

And when they seek to oppress you
And when they try to destroy you,
Rise and rise again and again
Like the Phoenix from the ashes
UNTIL THE LAMBS HAVE BECOME LIONS
and the rule of Darkness is no more

And forever in the hearts of Canadians
their signatures will be etched.
They'll be remembered either as heroes
who saved Canada from the clutches of
#TrudeauTyranny or Criminal Collaborators
in the attempted destruction of our
beloved country.

Such narratives implicitly evoke affective nostalgia of the Golden Age. While the discourse of the Golden Age itself directly evokes the love of an imagined place that belongs to the past and invites individuals to think about the past with love, it also generates a profound anger or hate of the present and the ones who are perceived to be contaminating the present moment, tarnishing the past, and ruining the possibility of a glorious future. Troublingly, such narratives of a golden past all too easily work to both reinforce white patriotism and to minimize or erase the real

history of colonialism, slavery, and racism experienced by indigenous, Black, and other peoples of colour that are inextricable from the history of violent nation building in the Americas.

In addition, a rhetoric of victimization underpins the above narratives. The FCM sympathizers on Twitter collectively claim victim status in response to perceived oppression committed by the villains (e.g., Liberal government and racialized Others) against those who participated in convoy protests and occupations. Deploying words such as “oppressed” and “lambs” demonstrate the ways in which the supporters of the convoys see themselves as the injured party in their narratives. In addition, hashtags related and appended to posts concerning the FCM become a central space in which users construct and claim a status of “collective victimhood” (Noor et al., 2017) around their perceived grievances of an unjust government and society.

Claims of such collective victimhood both enable and endorse the constriction of ingroup identity and function to produce a perceived sense of moral righteousness (Vollhardt, 2020).ⁱⁱ The status of victimhood also not only shifts blame off of convoy protestors and occupiers, but also generates social support and sympathies for extremism within the movement itself. In other words, narratives of victimhood by supporters of the FCM make any of their wrongdoing invisible and discourage or disallow expressions of collective remorse while continuing to position governmental agents and racialized Others as oppressive (Vollhardt, 2020). Also, by portraying themselves as victims, FCM actors and their sympathizers, the majority of whom are white, are able to re-establish the social hierarchy in which white subjects have dominant status.

Given the racial tonality of this process of victimhood imbedded in golden age affective nostalgia, it is important to consider how reverse racism and white victimhood work in tandem. First, by claiming reverse racism, groups of racialized whites are able to claim racial discrimination, and to construct a shared sense of fate and collective white race-consciousness (Brooks et al., 2017). Second, the narrative of white victimhood permits whites to deny and avoid any responsibility for the racial privilege they possess, ply, and enjoy, consciously or unconsciously. Equally, and because they perceive themselves as the rightful inheritors of the Golden Age, they feel legitimate in their demands for restitution, access to resources, and the space to have their demands heard (DiAngelo, 2018).

In addition, the narrative of white victimhood activated alongside Golden Age grammar can foster and sustain a moral panic towards those who are perceived as Others (i.e., the non-deserving inheritors of the past). According to Mike King, moral panics, “have historically been a core part of the reproduction of white supremacist ideas, practices and structures in the US” (King, 2015: 86). Given the fact that moral panics are easily generated and circulated online, they also easily function to harbour, spread, and reinforce the white supremacist ideologies they are wed to. In the case of the FCM, claims of the status of (white) victimhood on Twitter function to build a digital white space to harbour and launder white supremacist ideologies and grants the “opportunity for hate movements—niche communities themselves—to tap into those intersecting online interests of politics, current events, opinions, and most of all, information” (Klein, 2012: 243).

Base Grammar #2: “Us” (Whites) vs. “Them” (Racialized Others)

Another base grammar of right-wing extremist movements closely related to the racist rhetoric above is the invocation of “us vs. them.” This process of racial Othering occurs through both physical and cultural processes. Physical otherness is based on the perceived differences of skin colour, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc., while cultural othering occurs based on (perceived or real) cultural differences. According to Zygmunt Bauman (1993), the notion of otherness lies at the heart of social identities and collective belonging. Further, the construction of identities around binary and polarized oppositions functions as an important signifier of difference to create a sense of belonging between those who are perceived to share similar attributes and values (in-groups) but also establish power relations in which certain groups are seen as superior and others as inferior. In other words, the concept of otherness provides “a fundamental category of human thought” which assists in the production of stereotypes and re-establishes a hierarchy of superiority of the “us” over and in distinction from the inferiority of the othered “them” (de Beauvoir, 1949)

Importantly, mass and digital media, legal, political, cultural, and social institutions have the power to influence regimes of representation, reinforcing certain types of superiority and inferiority through the representation of what is “normal” and what is not. As Stuart Hall argues, visual representations of otherness, whether racial, ethnic, sexual or class-based have become essential to understanding the nature of “us” vs. “them.” Similarly, bell hooks (2015) argues that the ways in which magazines, movies, and books represent Black people functions to re-inscribe white supremacy and maintain hegemonic systems of thought and domination. Accordingly, the discourse of the FCM reveals its own rhetoric and systems of representation, intersected by race and gender.

The collective notion of “us” against “them” is evident in comments posted by supporters of the FCM. Statements such as “taking the country back” and “save our country” contest the pro-immigrant and multicultural policies of Trudeau and epitomize the attainment of “our” freedom and saving “our” country (users seem quite clear who belongs to this independent possessive pronoun). Not only do such posts clearly demarcate who belongs to the “our” and “us” of the convoy movement, but they provide clear representations of who does not. Here is an exemplary post in this vein:

This is a peaceful protest. Unless you want terrorists like #Antifa #BLM burning your businesses down, looting, breaking car windows, burning the cars, beating innocent people up and burning your federal buildings and churches. Which would you have? #EarPlugs #FreedomConvoy2022

Posted by a so-called “freedom fighter,” this tweet aims to represent minority protesters like Black Lives Matter as dangerous and threatening (evoking fear and hatred towards them) while depicting the convoy as “peaceful.” It is also interesting the ways in which this post speaks to an imagined “you” (through the independent possessive pronoun “your”): clearly, this Twitter user imagines a receptive and sympathetic audience who could become part of the “our” or “us” against the racialized, violent “them.”

Emotionally, the narrative of “us” vs “them” readily evokes fear and hatred towards those who are perceived as Others. For example, one user refers to Jagmeet Singh, the leader of the New Democratic Party, as a “little lad dog whore” [sic; lap dog is clearly meant here] who “comes running” to support Trudeau’s Emergency Act in an attempt to garner more votes (see Figure 1.2). In one short Twitter phrase, Singh is reduced to a diminutive, servile, animalistic, and sexually perverted lackey of Trudeau and the Liberals. While Singh’s race is not explicitly mentioned, the “dog whistle,” if you will, of this post cannot be ignored: as a visibly brown, bearded Sikh man who wears a turban, it is only too easy to invoke the long history of racist rhetoric which equates non-whites as non-human and sexually other. This mobilization of varying degrees of fear, and hatred aimed at Singh reflects Sara Ahmed’s discussion of the affective economies of white Aryans. According to Ahmed (2004: 118), the alignment between the subject and nation

is affected by the representation of both the rights of the subject and the grounds of the nation as already under threat. It is *the emotional reading of hate that works to bind the imagined white subject and nation together*. (emphasis in original)

In the context of the freedom convoy movement, the emotionally charged phrases embedded in such narratives not only serve to ignite an array of emotions ranging from hate to fear, but also function to create “collective affect” (Skoggard & Waterston, 2015)—in this case collective anger, fear, and hate—in which users connect to each other based on their shared (negative) feelings against Others.



Figure 1.2: “Jagmeet Singh, “the little la[p] dog whore” of the Liberals

Emotionally speaking and important to this base grammar in particular, its potential for affective persuasion and alignment is not one-way or only negative. While the rhetoric of us. vs them certainly evokes fear and hatred towards those who are perceived as Others (e.g., BLM, Jagmeet

Sing, etc.), it also powerfully produces and advocates for a deep feeling of “love” among those who are perceived as “us.” Here are some examples of such tweets:

I am now reduced to tears. Thank-you Patriots. You may be vilified by elitist politicians, but real Canadians know better!

God bless Canada, the truckers and God bless America! We're joining...
#FreedomConvoy2022

#TruckersForFreedom2022 -So proud of our Canadian brothers and sisters ...
much love from miles away! LET'S DO THIS CONTINENT WIDE!

The Patriot networks between nations has grown a lot ...over our desire to be free from forced experimental vaccines and especially between the Patriots in The US and Canada I feel a brotherly love toward you magnificent people

This intensely positive, mutually caring, and, indeed, loving emotions on display between the FCM and their sympathizers are an example of *affective alignment*. That is, these emotional responses work effectively to produce a shared, connective, and collective pathos between sympathizers of and protestors and occupiers at the various freedom convoy protests. These posts demonstrate, as Ahmed asserts, how the affective alignments of white nationalists are driven by a love for “their” country, a white collective fantasy of national identity, and no doubt, their cleaving to their rightful inheritance certified by their belief a racially pure, less authoritarian golden past.

This love, however, is also propelled by white extremists’ *hate* for Others who would threaten and destroy their imagined (white) nation. Thus, white far-right extremist affective alignments function to also police and reinforce the boundaries between whites and Others. In other words, these affective networks produce powerful feelings of love for the nation, believed to be frighteningly endangered because of the Liberal government and what they stand for (e.g., both racial minorities and, paradoxically, financial, Big Tech and Big Pharma, and governmental elites). These emotive networks foster “mediatized emotional bonds and collective imaginations” (Sumiala, 2013: 119) that align users into what Zizi Papacharissi (2016) has termed affective publics: “networked publics that are mobilized and connected, identified and potentially disconnected through expressions of sentiment” (Papacharissi, 2016: 311).

Sympathetic Twitter users help to forge such an affective public online by creating a unique discursive space wherein users are guided to come into affective alignment with one another. In these affective alignments, the “social sharing of emotion” (Rim et al., 1992) function not only to foster a national alignment between and among the real Canadians (as one of the users wrote), but also between Canadians and (assumedly white) US citizens as is evident in the mutual support offered across the border in the tweets quoted throughout this paper. Equally, this alignment contributes to intense affective dis-alignment with those who are seen as non-Canadian (e.g., BLM, Jagmeet Singh, etc.). In other words, Through the rhetorical and discursive exploitation of Twitter, users are able to manifest a sense of belonging between and among sympathizers through emotional bonding, coming to love themselves, one another, and their

nations through the trafficking and application of negative and distancing affective accumulations piled upon racial Others.

Base Grammar #3: Restoring Traditional and Patriarchal Masculinity

The final base grammar of the FCM I attend to stems from a desire to reclaim traditional forms of patriarchal masculinity that are perceived to be under threat (and easily understood as associated with the conspiracy of a golden, “heroic” past). Michael Kimmel (2007: 207) argues that the “restoration of masculinity [and] retrieval of masculine entitlement” is an essential element that draws men to far-right groups. The convoy movement exhorts masculinity and toughness as key to re-securing the state and resisting the perception of authoritarian control (e.g., “#DoNotComply #HOLDtheLINE”). Supporters, sympathizers, and convoy protestors, along with far-right extremists exploiting the occasion of the convoy, deploy references to hegemonic masculinity to legitimize hierarchical gender relations between men and women, femininity and masculinity, and pure and corrupt masculinities (i.e., racialized, minority, and queer masculinities) (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

For instance, Twitter users applaud the convoy for demonstrating tough, masculine ideals, labeling such actors as patriots who repudiate the “feminine” liberal government (and, as we have seen, those who act as “whores” for Trudeau). Being “tough” provides a scaffolding base grammar for refashioning the convoy’s “freedom fighters” as masculine archetypes, promoting narrowing definitions of national identity while positioning the liberal government as weak, effeminate, and not “man enough.” Calling on Trudeau to “come out from his hole” and “show some muscle” (See Figure 1.3) exemplifies how “freedom fighters” cast themselves as “real” men while depicting the leader of the liberal party as a “little bitch” who ran away like a “chicken.” (See Figure 1.4).



Figure 1.3: Trudeau “showing some muscle . . . Only proves his weakness.”



Figure 1.4: “Real” men “freedom fighters” vs. the “little bitch” Justin Trudeau

Evidently, the image of the trucker-as-warrior here is associated with particular, traditional (some might even say toxic) traits of masculinity such as “decisiveness,” “aggression,” “muscular strength,” and a willingness to engage in battle, to “fight” for Canada and “freedom.” This is in stark contrast to representations of the Liberal government, which is associated with traditional, patriarchal conceptions of feminine characteristics such as “weakness,” “vacillation,” “softness,” and “feminine” (see Figure 1.5). These traditional and dichotomous notions of gender lie at the heart of the FCM discourse and are notably similar to common gendered discourse among right-wing extremists. Like adherents of the allied “Men’s Rights Movement,” sympathizers of the FCM insist that feminism functions to emasculate and undermine men. In reference to the heroic, masculine actions of the freedom convoy protests and occupations, one user wrote:

Real men do exist. Feminism has not killed them all. The truckers are fighting for freedom and they can’t do it alone #IStandWithTruckers

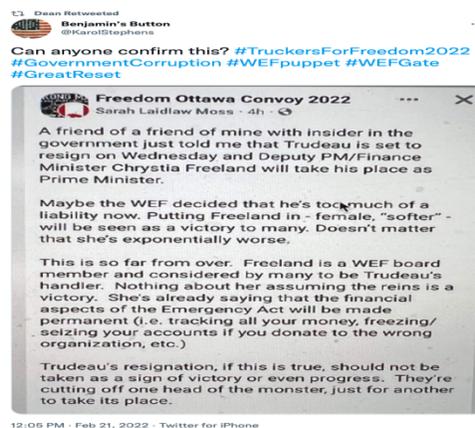


Figure 1.5: Trudeau rumoured to be “set to resign” and replaced with the new “monster” Freedland

The tweet and image above present women in general and feminism in particular as inherently incompatible with the vision of the FCM. In the image, Cynthia Freeland, currently the deputy prime minister and minister of finance (the first woman to ever hold the portfolio in Canada), is considered, if put in charge should Trudeau resign (he did not) to be a supposedly “softer” version of one monster replacing another. Because, to these Twitter users, both Trudeau and Freeland traffic in effeminacy, neither can be respected or trusted. So, while on one hand Freeland is portrayed as softer, on the other hand, she is disparaged as likely to be “exponentially worse,” wholly monstrous, and even the real power behind the Liberal party (e.g., “Trudeau’s handler”).

Such rhetoric considers women to be hideous creatures masked under a guise of feminine “softness” that cannot be trusted. In addition, the possibility of Trudeau’s resignation putting a woman in charge of the nation is not perceived as a sign of victory but instead as cause for increased alarm and suspicion. Such rhetoric evidences the misogynistic and patriarchal beliefs of members of the FCM. Related to these ideologies is the attendant vilification of feminism as that which seeks to “kill” men, stoking animosity and hatred against feminists. Despite this vilification of feminism, ironically, a certain strand of feminist rhetoric, such as “my body, my choice,” is exploited to challenge mandatory vaccines.

Conclusion

As I have demonstrated, on the surface, the FCM claims to be centrally concerned about the propensity for authoritarian conduct of the Canadian federal government in the current circumstance of COVID-19 vaccines and related restrictions. However, as I have shown in great detail, the four conspiratorial rhetorics linked to the FCM are rife throughout and have deeply penetrated into the social media discourse and ecology of this movement. This rhetoric begins through an understanding of how the “us” of the FCM have become victims of elites, the state, and racialized others, which, in turn, generates a profound lack of trust, especially in governmental institutions. In tandem, the rhetoric of victimhood and lack of trust elaborate a sense of powerlessness against elites, the state, and racial, far left, or related others. When woven together in and through these four conspiracies as these rhetorics are, victimhood, distrust, and powerlessness manifest as an important generator of paranoid fear. Ultimately, this fearful paranoia effectively encourages a movement from fear to frustration, frustration to anger, and anger to hate, propelling a shift towards the embrace of and a desire for populist or fascist resistance to the status quo (e.g., #HOLDtheLINE).

Thus, the circulation of conspiratorial rhetoric within the FCM Twitter ecology functions not only to exploit emotion, but also to optimize the base grammars of far-right rhetorical content, particularly ideologies of a golden age, an “us” versus “them” mentality, and patriarchal masculinity. FCM supporters and sympathisers leverage and weave together these conspiracies throughout FCM’s Twitter discourse, further generating, spreading, and intensifying negative affect (e.g., hate and fear), which underwrite the base grammars of extremism. Paradoxically, along with negative emotions such as hate and fear, the FCM Twitter ecology also generates love and affection between those who share belief in these conspiratorial rhetorics and the base grammars of extremism.

Ultimately as I have shown, the punctuation of conspiratorial thinking in the base grammars of extremism through digital media provides a space in which extremist actors are globally able to connect and support each other (e.g., US Twitter users supporting Canadian FCM actors), and in which forces of populism, fascism, and everyday racism and misogyny become further encouraged to emerge, grow, and spread. In other words, these conspiracies enable sympathizers of the FCM to establish a sense of transnational “affective alignment,” forging community across borders, nations, and continents.

Any discourse trafficking in the rhetoric of liberation or freedom, as Michel Foucault (1988) might say, should make us very suspicious. Here, through the enfolding of The Great Reset conspiracy with The Golden Age grammar, the FCM imagines the (re)making of freedom great again, again and again and again and again and again. Importantly, the FCM bases its argument on the attainment of freedom by positioning themselves as those most vulnerable in the current moment. It is clear that, to the FCM, white people and white men in particular are this highly vulnerable and victimized population that, although evidently possessing and employing their right to a voice—a very loud and unrelenting voice—they paradoxically maintain the fact of their vulnerability, victimization, and eminent threat of being silenced.

Thus, the suspicion of the security of one's freedom as articulated through highly complex layers of conspiratorial thinking invite us to bring a more critical light to this discourse of freedom. Our rational suspicion is most sorely required when the purchase of our “freedom” (i.e., for a supremacist, patriarchal few) must necessarily be bought via an irrational “hermeneutics of suspicion.” With frightening clarity, the “fight” for “freedom” against the federal government’s vaccine mandates is nothing more than an opportunity for the past, present, and future grievances of those most eager and historically likely to benefit from ideologies of purity, racism, and patriarchy. Driven by paranoia, perceived powerlessness, and supremacist patriarchy, this ideological steam roller continues to plough onward, paving the way for the convoy of white supremacy to barrel along unfettered.

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Footnotes:

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- ⁱ For example, the enormous economic impacts to the US and Canada is currently estimated in the billions of dollars, the failure of police forces to quell, manage, or otherwise expediently end the Ottawa occupation and border crossing protests and the friendliness with which some police engaged with protestors—and even funded them (Thompson 2022), the toll the protest took on local businesses and residents (Gaviola, 2022), and the likelihood that the overwhelming whiteness of the convoys contributed to their sustained length that would not have been afforded to an occupation by Black Lives Matter or Idle No More protestors etc.
- ⁱⁱ It must be noted that people of color are not often afforded the status of victimhood. Their status of victimhood is either delegitimized outright and/or used as a tool to brand people of color as always already oppressed, which results in further mistreatment of people of color (Vollhardt, 2020).

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About the Author

Dr. Zeinab Farokhi earned her PhD in Women and Gender Studies and Diaspora and Transnational Studies at the University of Toronto. She is currently a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow at Concordia University (2022-24) and an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto Mississauga. Her dissertation, "Digital Islamophobia: A Comparison of Right-Wing Extremist Groups in Canada, the United States, and India," investigated and tracked the gendered, affective, and transnational digital strategies, rhetoric, and affinities of anti-Muslim extremist actors on Twitter via qualitative discourse analysis. Building on her dissertation, Dr. Farokhi's postdoctoral research will conduct a mix-methods comparison of Hindu nationalist and white supremacist discourses on Youtube in order to further assess the affective and affinitive alignments among extremist groups and their exploitation of audio-visual affordances. Dr. Farokhi's work emphasizes feminist approaches to extremism, digital media, and transnational and diaspora studies and highlights the urgent need to better understand how national and transnational extremist rhetoric manifests, spreads, and persuades across digital ecologies.

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