

Contrapuntal histories of war resistance: Mapping US war resister migrations, questioning Canada as safe haven

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Key messages

- Two generations of US war resister migrants faced disparate outcomes in their search for protection in Canada.
- We offer a contrapuntal history of their migrations to Canada, the enforced patriotism, masculinity, and militarism that fueled their flight, and the social movements that supported them.
- While Canada has functioned as a safe haven historically, this role is always in flux and influenced by shifts in geopolitical relations.

This paper frames two generations of war resister migration from the United States to Canada and the social movements that supported them as contrapuntal histories, disparate yet woven together, and entangled across space and time. We argue that Canada has functioned at key historical moments as safe haven for war resisters from and others fleeing conflict led by the United States, but that this role was always provisional, historically contingent, and never guaranteed. It is therefore crucial to understand the social movements that arose to support the search for safe haven at different points in geopolitical relations and histories. We develop this argument with empirical research about people who migrated to Canada during wars led by the United States in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. In documenting both generations of resister migration, we move across scales to understand the highly embodied geopolitics of these journeys, which run parallel and diverge in key ways. Our analysis thus maps the shifting history of Canada as a safe haven for those seeking refuge from the violence of war and militarism in the United States.

Keywords: Canada-US border, migration, war resisters

Récits en contrepoint de résistance à la guerre: cartographier les migrations des résistants américains à la guerre et questionner le Canada comme espace refuge

Ce texte tisse la trame de deux générations de migrations de résistants à la guerre des États-Unis et du Canada et les mouvements sociaux qui les ont appuyées comme récits en contrepoint, disparates, mais étroitement reliés et enchevêtrés dans le temps et l'espace. Nous faisons valoir que le Canada a fonctionné à des moments clés de l'histoire comme espace refuge pour les résistants à la guerre et d'autres fuyant des conflits menés par

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les États-Unis, mais que ce rôle a toujours été provisoire, conditionnel et aucunement garanti. Il est donc essentiel de comprendre les mouvements sociaux qui sont apparus pour permettre la mise en place d'un espace refuge à différents moments de l'histoire et des relations géopolitiques. Nous développons notre thèse au moyen d'une recherche empirique sur les personnes qui ont migré au Canada durant les guerres menées par les États-Unis au Vietnam, en Iraq et en Afghanistan. En documentant les deux générations de migrations de résistants, nous nous déployons à différentes échelles afin de saisir les géopolitiques fortement incorporées de ces périodes qui sont parallèles et qui divergent de façons importantes. Notre analyse cartographie donc l'histoire changeante du Canada comme espace refuge pour ceux qui cherchent à se mettre à l'abri de la violence de la guerre et du militarisme aux États-Unis.

Mots clés : frontière Canada-États-Unis, migration, résistants à la guerre

Introduction: Canada as safe haven?

Canada has a long history of harboring those fleeing violence from the United States (US). During the Antebellum and Civil War periods, slaves traveling along the underground railroad crossed the border in search of safe haven. Members of the Lakota nation crossed into Canadian territory to evade additional violence and forced removal from their ancestral lands by the US Armed Forces at the end of Reconstruction. In the 20th century, conscientious objectors fled compulsory military conscription during World Wars I and II. Such histories of border crossing in search of “freedom” reinforce an enduring spatial imaginary of Canada as more “progressive,” more benevolent, a more “just” geography. This narrative still shapes contemporary geopolitics between neighbours. This spatial imaginary developed and persisted in spite of the reality that people were also fleeing slavery and other violent forms of racialized subjugation in Canada itself.

Disparate historical starting points fuel this mythology. In 1970 for example, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau remarked that, “Canada should be a refuge from militarism,” positioning the country as potential safe haven to US war resisters fleeing the military draft (Toronto Daily Star 1970, 1). As the newest wave of US war resister migration to Canada since the end of World War II, American soldiers (and potential soldiers) fleeing the US war in Vietnam arrived in Canada by the tens of thousands and received support from many civil society groups. Although Canadian military personnel participated in the US-led war, the war in Vietnam was less popular in Canadian society and the Trudeau government eventually issued a directives and altered policies allowing draft evaders and deserters to stay (see Hagan 2001, 34–65). Some 100,000 US citizens migrated to Canada during the Vietnam War. While an exact figure of how

many stayed remains unknown, they are estimated at roughly 50,000 (Hagan 2001).

More recently, in the wake of US President Donald Trump’s 2017 travel ban on several Muslim majority countries, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau invoked this imaginary with this tweet: “To those fleeing prosecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength. #WelcometoCanada.” (Trudeau 2017). Canada’s geopolitical framing as a multicultural nation-state willfully opening borders to those in need, we contend, obfuscates the realities of those detained by Canada and the governmental actions that uphold US militarism and border policies post-Cold War. In this context, the mythology, hewn from earlier generations, of Canada as safe haven is advanced by leaders and members of civil society alike.

Although the history of this migration to Canada is well-recorded (e.g., Kasinsky 1976; Haig-Brown 1996; Hagan 2001), a subsequent, lesser-known wave of war resisters arrived during conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan (2001–2021). Over 300 US military personnel moved to Canada since the early 2000s, the latest cohort of US war resisters. While the earlier cohort generally found safe haven in Canada (with exceptions), the younger generation did not (with few exceptions). And unlike their predecessors, this generation eventually faced rejection, deportation, and imprisonment upon their forced return home. To understand this most recent wave of resister migration, the larger research project, a portion of which is detailed in this paper, asked what kinds of “refuge” US war resisters sought, forged, and were granted—or denied—once in Canada. The findings show significant resonance across these two generations, including similar experiences, if different geopolitical landscapes and outcomes in the search for safe haven.

In this paper, we make the case that Canada functioned as safe haven for US war resisters at key historical moments, but that this role was always provisional, historically contingent, and never guaranteed. While both generations had many parallel experiences, they faced divergent outcomes in their respective searches for refuge. Conscription is often seen as the main difference between these cohorts, but there are other key facets distinguishing their journeys. Although outcomes differed across cohorts, parallels include consistently failed applications for conscientious objector status, the role of military recruiters, the decision to enter Canada, and the formation of social movements in large Canadian cities, anchored in Toronto. There also exists variety in histories and decisions to migrate, including racialized, classed, and gendered experiences of crossing, migration, and settlement. Among the many parallels, the majority of resisters moved to Toronto, assisted by a modern form of underground railroad, involving diverse, highly organized committees that distributed information and provided support. Reference to the underground railroad is not intended to conflate experiences of predominantly white resister migrations with those of African Americans fleeing slavery. There is no comparison between forced enslavement and compulsory conscription. Rather, we aim to highlight the geographically expansive and historically interconnected ways that activists—from abolitionists to anti-war activists—mobilized highly organized, largely secretive networks to safely move people across this border, and how these historical migrations and routes continue to influence resister migrations.

To develop this case, we analyzed archival material from the Jack Pocock and Mark Satin archives (housed at the University of Toronto). These archives focus on local organizing campaigns to support resisters in Toronto as well as transnational efforts to support resisters across Canada and the US. We also gathered over 50 oral histories by interviewing US war resisters spanning both cohorts residing on either side of the US-Canada border, as well as anti-war activists and organizers of the War Resister Support Campaign (WRSC), the latest social movement dedicated to helping war resisters to secure safe haven in Canada. Using both primary and secondary sources, we situate the earlier generation of resisters migrating during

war in Vietnam alongside the newer cohort who emigrated during the War on Terror in order to demonstrate how narratives persist. We show how this history still resonates and informs the North American imaginaries, influencing both the political and legal strategies of post-9/11 resisters seeking political asylum. From this intergenerational archive of primary and secondary sources, we map a contrapuntal relationship across two generations of resisters.

These recent waves of US war resister migration to Canada are historically, politically, and socially entangled. Focusing on the interconnected social movements that arose through and in support of resistance, as well as the lived experiences of resisters, supporters, and activists, we examine how the earlier resisters' histories of US-Canada border crossings influenced contemporary migration experiences for resisters to wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. To accomplish this, we first establish a contrapuntal framework for analyzing interconnections between the two generations and their journeys. We then discuss the historical contexts in which US soldiers become war resisters, particularly through experiences as young people struggling with militarism and social movements that supported the search for safe haven in Canada. Finally, we map local resistance in Toronto, and share oral histories, key findings, and conclusions.

Mapping contrapuntal histories of migration

Contemporary US war resister history is a contrapuntal tale. Building on Edward Said's (1993) practice of "contrapuntal reading," Derek Gregory (2009, 113) explains contrapuntal geographies as interrelated "networks through which people and events in different places around the world are connected in a complex, dynamic and uneven web that both maintains their specificity *and* mobilizes their interactions." Said's (1979) foundational scholarship on the "colonial present," for example, sought to evaluate the cultural development of Eastern and Western world populations, not as mutually exclusive historical entities—East and West—but rather as instructively inclusive geopolitical formations that emerged in tandem. For Said, the Occident's own origin is ultimately a story about the Orient; with the cultural stories of the East and the West intimately

shaping and shaped by the historical development of the other. Contrapuntal analyses thus foreground the historic, interconnected development of peoples and places, acknowledging the relational formation of disparate geographies as well as the lingering presence of past spaces and places in shaping contemporary socio-spatial relations.

Contrapuntal geographies of US war resistance map the intergenerational histories of trauma and struggle, and the resilience of resisters themselves. US war resisters respond to and live with the trauma of US militarism, imperialism, and border enforcement at an embodied level, scars which deeply inform subsequent generations in new tactics of survival and resistance. Resisters spanning two generations crossed the same border, sometimes in the same spots, using similar methods and means, but with vastly different outcomes. Reading these histories side-by-side thus reveals a longer, lived geopolitical history of US-Canada relations, addressing ongoing questions about Canada's role as potential safe haven for future arrivals. Through activist networks and social movement-building, war resisters addressed their collective trauma to form activist communities of care, building pathways for collective resistance, survival, and healing. Resisters who came during war in Vietnam mobilized intimate knowledge of the state and its use of compulsory conscription, coercion, and force to assist a newer generation to secure safe haven. A contrapuntal reading of US war resister migration thus offers a strategy for tracing the shared genealogies—and teleologies—of the contemporary US-Canada military alliance, a story that predates the War on Terror and engulfs the lives of more than one generation of resisters.

Examining intergenerational histories of US war resister migration to Canada during the US-led wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, we articulate a contrapuntal reading of geopolitical formations that show how one generation's experiences of resistance deeply inform the possibilities and limitations of subsequent generations. Here, the lived archive of US war resister migrations exposes historical continuities in North American militarism, immigration policy, and resister trauma. This contrapuntal history also reveals the lasting impact of geopolitical events on everyday communities that seek to resist, survive and heal from North American militarism.

Feminist political geographers have long critiqued critical geopolitics for overlooking the scale of the body (e.g., Hyndman 2004). Out of these critiques, conceptual ideas of intimate geopolitics (Smith 2020) and the global intimate (Pratt and Rosner 2006) arose. Pain and Staeheli (2014, 345) understand the intimate as “a set of spatial practices ... connecting the body and that which is distant,” a stretching of the intimate to a global scale. Oral histories enable a focus on the embodied experiences of resister migrations to map what Cindi Katz (2001) calls feminist counter-topographies: connections forged across local and global scales.

We locate the geopolitical scale of contemporary border crossings in everyday spaces of resister migration histories and the relationally produced, embodied ways resisters found—or failed to find—security in Canada. The disparate experiences of border crossing by two cohorts locate living history in the composition of multiple, interlocking bodies of resisters, geographies, and place-stories, each unique in expression, but interdependent in producing contemporary US-Canada relations. Reading against dominant, transnational narratives of US-Canada relations, in our next two sections we outline collective histories and social movements that arose in support of war resistance during each historical moment. We then discuss key findings from oral histories conducted with members of both generations, drawing on embodied geopolitics. Building on this scholarship (e.g., Hyndman 2004; Sharp 2004; Smith 2020), we find “real geopolitik” embodied in recollections of migration histories and border crossings, where people live out the consequences of international relations. Reframing the US-Canada border through what Pratt and Rosner (2006) describe as “the global intimate” connects the daily lives and interpersonal relationships of US war resisters with events unfolding globally. This approach challenges epistemological privileging of states over people by disrupting nationalist historiographies that deny the porosity of national borders and the intimately lived *and* contested ways they are shaped by nonstate actors. Connecting US war resister migration histories, the global intimate enables clearer understandings of the everyday consequences of life under militarism, as well as the power of individuals—and social movements—to resist.

Organizing to support war resistance across North America during the US-led war in Vietnam

During the Vietnam war, resisters initially applied individually for military discharge by applying for the status of “Conscientious Objector” (CO). Conscientious objection is a legal alternative to combat service. Conscripted military-aged men could request “alternative service” by citing the violation of their religious and moral beliefs to kill against their will, if they could prove a connection with specific organized religions, such as Christian religious traditions with strong adherence to principles of non-violent pacifism (e.g., such as that of the Mennonites and Quakers). Adherence to gender norms, however, branded the actions of many COs as “cowardice,” particularly amidst social pressures to conform to cultural standards of masculinity, wherein a man's objection to war is viewed as “shirking” his duty to national service.

The history of conscientious objection is a contentious one in both North American and international military and social history. As Bibbings (2003) demonstrates, the development of the status of CO during WW I and its lasting association with failed masculinity prompted both social and military castigation, subjecting many young men to imprisonment. Military desertion remains a serious crime in both Canada and the US, punishable with imprisonment or even death during times of war (Clark 2012). It became common knowledge to service members filing for CO status that these belief-based applications were routinely denied by military boards, particularly in the Cold War years. As such, people pursued alternative modes of war resistance.

Social movements proved foundational to individual and collective forms of resistance during the revolutionary years of the Vietnam era. With growing discontent and public opposition to the Vietnam War, large numbers of draft-age men and others who also opposed war in Vietnam fled to Canada as an escape. The successful mobilization of large-scale public support for the elimination of mandatory conscription by anti-war activists and their allies in much larger, transnational, diverse movements, garnered political support for resisters during conflict in Vietnam. Although hostile social attitudes for COs existed during this conflict, political factors helped shield draft-aged men from

the same harsh backlash experienced by previous generations.

During the US war in Vietnam, student and anti-war activists united against the principle of mandatory conscription and its involuntary draft program. Since the mechanisms of the US war machine relied on obligatory service of military-aged men to populate its ranks, the compulsory draft clashed with contemporary North American liberal values of freedom of choice. Facing the moral dilemma of forcing young men to commit acts of violence against their will, anti-war activists on both sides of the border seized the opportunity to shift public criticism away from resisters and onto the war itself. As more North Americans began to question US justification of the conflict, a renewed cross-border campaign of “putting the war on trial” emerged, interrogating the very legality of mandatory conscription under international human rights law. The idea of putting the war on trial was in effect in organizing by Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and repeated in the newer campaign organized by Iraq Veterans Against War (Ruder and Smith 2008). In its concession to the anti-war movement, the US government suspended its military draft program in 1973. Presently, the US requires all men ages 18–25 to register with the Selective Service, but its military is now comprised of an “all-volunteer force” (AVF) (Bailey 2009). The moral imperative of conscientious objection thus unravels in the context of the latest war resister cohort, wherein it is presumed that those enlisting in the US armed forces have done so of their own free will, a point to which we will return (see Hipworth and Stewart 2016).

The ethos of the US-Vietnam resistance movement was informed largely by moral considerations against the war, with material support originating primarily from religious organizations. The Vietnam anti-war movement involved a cross-section of interfaith, labour, and youth movements, with an extensive operating network providing a range of services, from anti-military recruitment counselling to daily support for housing and food. A transnational network of agencies and counselling centres supporting resistance emerged across North America. This mostly youth-led movement supported construction and facilitation of highly organized political resistance that included the promotion of counter-cultural opinions, alternative flight strategies, and coordination of material

support in the everyday lives of resisters arriving in Canada.

The movement's well-organized opposition to military recruitment is meticulously detailed in its *Pre-Counsellor Curriculum* and program, which recruited and trained its own leaders in anti-draft counselling strategies to offer deferment infrastructures, methods and alternatives to potential war resisters (Midwest Committee for Draft Counseling, n.d.). Through detailed protocols and methodical training in counter-military recruitment, the movement trained leaders while equipping participants with tools to resist US militarism.

The resistance movement engaged in prolonged legal battles with strategic maneuvers to effectively buy time away from war for drafted men. For example, the campaign suggested the use of delay tactics such as attending college or seminary in order to push back induction dates or intentionally missing pre-screening medical exams. Legal arguments submitted to the courts also challenged more mundane matters such as jurisdictional issues. Notably draft counsellors and other advocates in the movement did not necessarily encourage resisters to emigrate to Canada as a first response, but rather examined resisters' specific circumstances to explore options to challenge conscription, first in the US, with migration to Canada several as a last resort.

The politico-legal contours of the Vietnam War resister movement in Canada were largely shaped by shifting policies and legal structures on both sides of the border: the legalities of enforced patriotism vis-à-vis conscription of military-aged males in the US, the continually changing Canadian immigration laws, and challenges associated with resisters' border crossings and experiences of settlement in Canada. With increased regulation of draft dodgers in the US, and increasingly liberal Canadian immigration laws, this strand of the anti-war resistance movement offered guidance on resisters' border-crossings, with legal and settlement strategies designed to secure status in Canada. The movement frequently lobbied Ministers and other Canadian government actors to ensure that resisters not be entrapped or disadvantaged by legislative changes. In 1967, a points-based admission determination system was introduced in Canada. This approach was thought to be slightly more objective than the unregulated scheme that existed before, reducing some of the discretion of

individual border guards (Hagan 2001). Other changes in Canadian immigration policy, specifically relaxing the importance of military status on admissibility, resulted in an increase in the number of resisters entering Canada. In 1969, in a statement to the House of Commons, the Minister of Manpower and Immigration, Allan MacEachen, introduced a liberalizing policy, stating "membership in the armed service of another ... potential or actual, will not be a factor in determining the eligibility of persons applying for landed immigrant status in Canada" (Office of the Minister of Manpower and Immigration 1969). This position was fortified in 1971, when Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau stated that a person's military history, and whatever unresolved matters therein, should be sorted by the government of their home country and that the issue was not the business of the Canadian government. Another key moment came in 1973, when the government attempted to regularize the status of Americans already residing in Canada, offering 60 days grace to turn themselves over to authorities to be regularized.

Within this national landscape, the Toronto Anti-Draft Program (TADP) was the heart of anti-war resistance in Canada. Evolving from an earlier iteration of an anti-draft support group, the TADP took on a more defined structure as it commenced operations in 1967. Under its first director, resister Mark Satin, the TADP was staffed by Canadian and American volunteers, including notable Quaker pacifists Nancy and Jack Pocock. The TADP's work can be traced through historical correspondence, archived in Special Collections at the University of Toronto, between the Program and potential resister migrants, other agencies and groups, and legal counsel and government officials. The TADP advised persons planning to migrate to Canada and then worked to provide material assistance to resisters, post-emigration, by offering temporary lodging, loans, job-seeking assistance, and legal advice. Based in downtown Toronto, the TADP was the recipient of numerous calls and detailed letters from potential resisters in the US on a daily basis. In these communications, resisters sought advice about options and strategies for escape to Canada, legal instruction, and answers to questions about Canada's socio-economic conditions and potential for successful integration. The TADP also coordinated with satellite agencies to organize conferences and meetings to deliberate over changes to

cross-border policy, their impacts on resisters, and the resister movement's response to such changes.

The Jack Pocock and Mark Satin archives document the TADP's central role in publishing and distributing the popular *Manual for draft-age immigrants to Canada* (hereafter, "the *Manual*"). Edited by Satin and originally published in 1968 (Satin 1968), the *Manual* stands as a key tool of the resister movement, one that appears frequently in oral histories with resisters. The *Manual* was an essential and practical guide for potential and actual newcomers to Canada. Devoid of complicated language, each version detailed up-to-date Canadian immigration policies and procedures to entry and settlement. It also painted vivid images of Canadian socio-cultural and economic landscapes, providing

information on topics such as Canada's history, politics and culture, geography and climate, jobs, and housing. The *Manual* offered realistic examples of potential outcomes for resisters, reiterating that Canada was not for everyone, and underscoring the possibility of absolute disconnection from the US. Still, it rendered a welcoming picture of Canada.

The *Manual* remains a central part of the TADP's identity and resisters' migration histories. With six revised editions and an estimated 45,000 copies sold in both Canada and the US, the *Manual's* extensive distribution shows the geographical reach of the Vietnam anti-war movement and its social resistance program (as it operated in tandem with larger anti-war movements). In a recently revised introduction (Satin 2017), author of the new

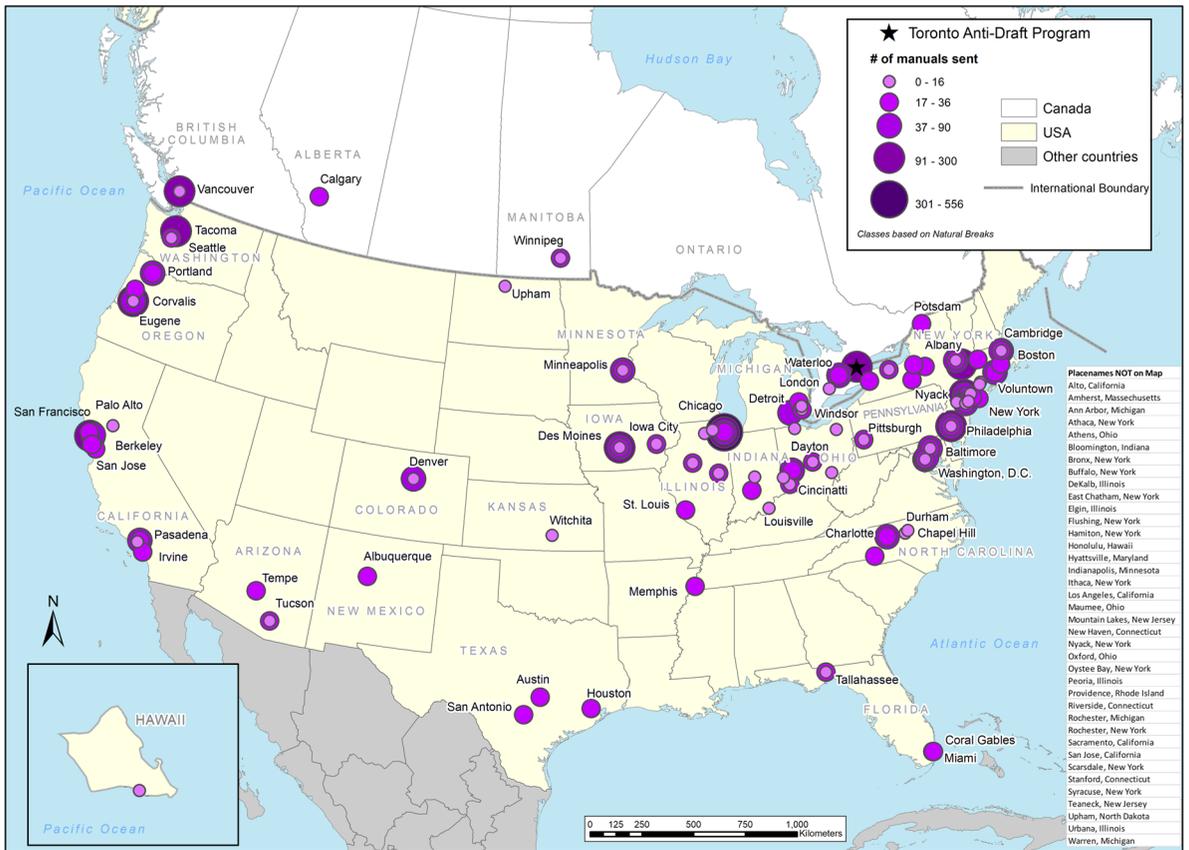


Figure 1
Distribution of the *Manual for draft-age immigrants to Canada* (Satin 1968).

SOURCE: Map created by cartographer Trina King based on archival data from the Toronto Anti-Draft Program showing the distribution of the *Manual* across North America.

introduction James Laxer notes major shifts in the immigration policy contexts across both the US and Canada, but acknowledges the continued struggles of refugees and the contemporary search for sanctuary.

Figure 1 maps the *Manual's* extensive distribution across the US and Canada. These data points, collected from distribution logs in the archives, demonstrate the campaign's scope and momentum, but also the widespread precarity of resisters, who viewed Canada hopefully as potential safe haven.

The Vietnam War resister movement in Canada crafted an enduring political blueprint and network-based infrastructure for more contemporary waves of resistance. It also inspired other movements, such as the US-based sanctuary movements to protect non-citizens with precarious status at risk of deportation (Ridgley 2011). By adapting this history and its political landscape into the contemporary Iraq and Afghanistan war resister movement, resisters and their allies across North America would learn from and adapt key politico-legal strategies from the earlier resister movement in Canada.

Contemporary resistance to military service in Iraq and Afghanistan

Nearly 40 years after tens of thousands of Vietnam War resisters, deserters, and draft dodgers entered Canada in search of safe haven from mandatory military conscription, a new cohort of resisters made their way north. In spring of 2004, the WRSC held its first public rally and fundraiser in Toronto, Ontario. Headquartered in Toronto, the WRSC emerged that year as a grass-roots response to news of US military personnel crossing into Canada in search of refuge from what many viewed as unjust wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. After the arrival of Iraq and Afghanistan war veteran Jeremy Hinzman, the first documented War on Terror resister in Canada, approximately 300 additional US service members crossed into Canada in search of safe haven between 2004 and 2010 (Hipworth and Stewart 2016).

Judy Pocock, daughter of Vietnam-era peace activists Nancy and Jack Pocock, spoke at an opening event of the WRSC in 2004. She raised the history of Vietnam-era resisters and their general success in finding safe haven in Canada.

This success factored significantly into the transnational geographical imagination of many North Americans who understand Canada as welcoming people fleeing war in Vietnam, whether from the US or from south Vietnam. Pocock called upon Canadians to commit to welcoming this new generation of people fleeing war in Iraq, including nationals from Iraq and the US.

Northern-bound migration mythologies of “the great white North” have been prevalent in shared US-Canada history from the Antebellum period onward. From 2017 to 2020, over 50,000 people (Government of Canada 2020)—many with precarious immigration status in the US—entered Canada on foot to evade the Trump administration's xenophobic enforcement strategies of arrest, detention, and deportation. Desperate attempts by families fleeing persecution under Trump are reinforced by popular discourses available to US citizens whenever the results of a presidential election do not suit their politics du jour; namely, that life in Canada will be better. This romanticized, mythical historiography of Canada as benevolent is transnationally produced and consumed on both sides of the border. Without the moral equivalency of forced conscription, however, this latest cohort of resisters found themselves in an unfavourable political climate, with even some Vietnam-era resisters questioning the validity of their asylum claims.

The success of the earlier anti-war movement effectively ended the US military draft. As a result, military enlistments in the post-Vietnam era are viewed as “voluntary,” irrespective of the potential recruit's class, citizenship status, or social identity. Citing the “bogus” nature of War on Terror resister asylum claims, the Canadian government legally justified their deportations—under both conservative and liberal leadership—by enforcing anti-CO immigration policies that support US militarism, directly or indirectly. Eventually, only 15 war resisters were granted permanent residency in Canada; most resisters selectively returned to the US in order to avoid legal persecution, with nine forcibly deported by the Canadian government, an action that condemned several service men, and, in at least one instance, a pregnant woman, to jail time in US military prison.

The role of Canada's military proves equally important in the diverging political climate and outcomes of the two resister cohorts and their

respective fates in Canada. Although an estimated 12,000 Canadians served as private citizens alongside US troops during the conflict in Vietnam, the Canadian military abstained from the conflict, sending only peacekeeping troops near the war's end (Corday 2015). In 2001, Canada joined the US combat mission in Afghanistan, but refrained from publicly supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom until 2014 when the operational mission shifted to defeating the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Rand Corporation, n.d.). Although these abstentions did not result in military neutrality, they continue to foster an inaccurate depiction of Canada as both a historical and moral antithesis to the “war-mongering,” an image of the US widely touted by members of the international community and North American political left. Still, the history of resistance to the Vietnam War and mass opposition to war in Iraq amongst Canadians propelled the Iraq and Afghanistan War resistance movement, according to Toronto-based activist and Campaign coordinator Michelle Robidoux (Interview, June 2017).¹ The remobilization of popular anti-imperialist narratives, and its accompanying Canadian legacy of letting resisters stay—with “Let them stay” a frequent slogan of the Campaign—initially aided the WRSC in championing the rights of enlisted soldiers to desert on the grounds of international war crimes (Hipworth and Stewart 2016). Several chapters of the WRSC developed across Canada to support resisters deserting with their families for allegedly witnessing, or being forced to commit, crimes against humanity (Hipworth and Stewart 2016). Figure 2 maps the network of support chapters that were part of the WRSC.

This newer resistance movement was comprised of a cross-section of politically left, anti-war activists, including steelworkers, student activists, and members of interfaith communities; it also included war resisters from the earlier generation. One of the most compelling aspects of the War on Terror resister movement was its reactivation of Vietnam-era war resisters and activists, on behalf

of this latest cohort, many of whom experienced similar psychological trauma as a result of military service and political opposition. The recent political movement's “Let them stay” campaign (War Resister Support Campaign, n.d.), for example, proved particularly successful in fostering public support for Iraq War resisters in Canada by focusing on what many viewed as an “illegal occupation.” Mobilizing anti-colonial discourses previously found in the earlier generation's support of the Vietcong government, the political left's moral opposition to the war in Iraq reanimated shared anti-colonial discourses from conflict in Vietnam. The Campaign's moral *tour de force* was thus rooted in similar geosophies that produced Canada as an antidote to US militarism and its related psychological violence—past and present. Such Vietnam-era metaphors backfired, however, as the political maneuver split many progressives inside the WRSC movement over the unanswered question of Afghanistan—a war the Canadian military contributed troops to, upholding, to some, principles of the “just war” doctrine.

Despite the WRSC's success in coalescing a robust, intersectional grassroots movement, and a majority of Canadian public support for resisters in Canada, anti-CO immigration policies remained both a political and legal hindrance to the movement, as a result of the AVF. Vietnam-era legacies functioned as an Achilles heel to the WRSC's legal strategy, which failed to destigmatize “voluntary” enlistment in legal proceedings concerning War on Terror resister asylum claims. As evidenced in statements by Conservative Party Immigration Minister, Jason Kenney: “[T]hese resisters are deserters ‘who volunteer to serve in the armed forces of a *democratic* country and simply change their mind to desert,’ as opposed to the Vietnam draft dodgers, who never chose to be involved with the military...” (Kauffman 2015, emphasis added). The characterization of the US as a “democracy” by Kenney and the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper presumed citizens' right to protest the government without fear of retaliation. Such democracy-as-exceptional logic not only discredits the legitimacy of US citizens actually *needing* Canadian state protection, it also denies US war resisters refugee status on the basis of humanitarian and compassionate consideration. As a spokesperson for what was

¹This research was conducted with approval of Wilfrid Laurier University's Research Ethics Board. Some participants chose to be named, while others opted to remain anonymous through the use of pseudonyms. A subset of participants participated, all named, in a feature-length documentary film called “Safe Haven” completed in 2020. Usage of first and last name signals the real name. Our usage of first names only signals a pseudonym.



Figure 2
Chapters of the War Resister Support Campaign.

SOURCE: Map created by cartographer Trina King based on data provided by the War Resister Support Campaign.

then called the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada stated: “Military deserters from the United States are not genuine refugees under the internationally-accepted meaning of the term. ... These unfounded claims clog up our system for genuine refugees who are actually fleeing persecution” (Kauffman 2015).

Similar anti-CO sentiment is further evidenced in the Harper government's institutionalization of Operational Bulletin 202 (July 2010), a directive requiring Immigration Officers to “flag” potential deserters on the basis that desertion is a punishable offense in Canadian society, marking them as criminals and therefore inadmissible to the country

(Hipworth and Stewart 2016). The Bulletin has remained in effect under the Liberal party government led by Justin Trudeau.

The case for conscientious objection in the War on Terror resister movement was arduous, placing the onus to prove persecution on resisters and their supporters. According to the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, a conscientious objector is an individual who claims “the right to refuse” military service on the basis of “freedom of thought, conscience, or religion” (United Nations 1948). As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ *Handbook and guidelines on procedures and criteria for determining refugee status* explains:

Not every conviction, genuine though it may be, will constitute a sufficient reason for claiming refugee status after desertion or draft-evasion. It is not enough for a person to be in disagreement with his government regarding the political justification for a particular military action. Where, however, the type of military action, with which an individual does not wish to be associated, is *condemned by the international community* as contrary to basic rules of human conduct, punishment for desertion or draft-evasion could, in the light of all other requirements of the definition, in itself be regarded as persecution. (UNHCR 2019, 38–39; italics our own)

Fifteen years after the WRSC began its fight against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the legacy of resistance to the war in Vietnam continued to shape a new generation's quest for justice, a call that largely went unanswered. And, despite the robust international opposition to the war in Iraq, the legacy of the post-Vietnam era AVF limited the Canadian state's willingness to see this latest cohort of resisters as victims of US state violence.

Embodied parallels, divergent outcomes

Contemporary war resisters arriving in Canada found a politico-legal landscape altered from that of their Vietnam-era predecessors. The border had been more porous for the earlier generation (Nguyen 2016), even if passage remained at the discretion of border guards (Hagan 2001). This newer generation confronted a new set of policies. Whereas the earlier generation applied to become permanent residents (“landed immigrants”) using the points system implemented in 1967, this new generation applied for refugee status. By the 1990s, asylum seekers were being criminalized in North America and globally (Loyd and Mountz 2018). US military personnel seeking state protection were not exempt from discourses that labeled them “bogus refugees.” While based in the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees, refugee status determination is also politicized. For example, *refugee* resettlement and status determination were long tied to cold-war divisions and conferred largely on those fleeing communist governments, including mass resettlement of

Indochinese refugees during the Vietnam War (Ngo 2016). For US military personnel, the absence of the draft and the concept of “voluntary service” fueled narratives that excluded War on Terror resisters from consideration as people in need of safe haven in the form of state protection. Additionally, US exceptionalism and assumptions that place the US as a model democracy that “rescues” those fleeing violence (Nguyen 2016), meant that US citizens were unlikely to receive Canada's protection from alleged persecution at the hands of the US government. Nevertheless, among our participants, intergenerational wounds ran deep as two generations of war resisters grapple with the trauma of enforced patriotism, militarism, and failed masculinity prescribed by a society that equates military service with manhood.

This was the case for John (a pseudonym), 72, who grew up in a small mid-western town. He found his town's homogeneity and conformity oppressive, and felt that he never fit in: “You're coming from macho, conservative America: baseball and apple pie. You gotta go out there and get a good job. You had to go to church on Sunday” (Interview, August 2017). Like many in his cohort, John had deferrals from the draft while he completed his university education, but was forced to enlist as soon as he graduated. Like many others, he felt tricked by a recruiter who promised him skills and officer training that would keep him out of combat. John's 14 months in training affirmed his opposition to war in Vietnam and cemented his will to not go. He characterized this time as extremely stressful and likened being in the military to being in prison: “I knew they were going to box me up and crate me off to Vietnam. I could see it coming”.

John tried hard from within the army to avoid going, but learned he was ineligible for CO status as a Catholic. One day he visited a veterans' hospital and met a veteran who had returned from Vietnam and shared his experiences. John identified this as the moment when he knew he would never go. He came across a copy of the *Manual for draft-age immigrants to Canada* (Satin 1968), carried it with him everywhere, called it his “bible” and hid it in the glove compartment of his old car, which was parked on base during training. He spoke with a professor who gave him the names of two lawyers, who gave him the name of a 3rd lawyer who put

him in touch with a group based in Vancouver, British Columbia, who advised him on traveling to Canada.

When John was scheduled to fly to Vietnam in July of 1971, this was his sign to leave. He left with his partner in a Volkswagen, packing the belongings they could fit “like Russian dolls”: “We had candles, records, all our clothes and a few books. I had a very short army hair cut still.” They threw a wedding dress over everything and said they’d just been married. The border guard wished them a good holiday, and they drove directly to the committee in Vancouver. John broke down in tears of relief that still come as he relives that time, describing the moment when an immigration officer months later put his hand on his back, at the completion of his interview for landed immigrant status, and said, “Welcome to Canada.”

Toward the end of his oral history, John described how “this” follows him, but as he has moved farther away from the border, from Vancouver, to Victoria, and eventually the interior, it has gotten better, but he still has nightmares and remembers the experience like it was yesterday. John lives with acute anxiety and struggles to make decisions. He explained the weight of this history and how it turns in his mind like a tape, like a monkey on his back. He explained that he needs to breathe and calm down.

While some Vietnam-era resisters found notoriety in Canadian society for their accomplishments as community organizers, professors, judges, and radio personalities, others have lived out quiet, anxious lives as they contended with guilt, fear, and shame. Some hid their histories in the interest of fitting into the fabric of Canadian society, integrating into local communities and becoming Canadian citizens. Several participants mentioned rarely discussing this history outside of the interview.

About half of the US citizens who emigrated to Canada during the Vietnam War were women (Hagan 2001). The oral histories of women who moved to Canada as war resisters revealed different subjectivities and experiences. Many of these women came because they were partnered with men who had been conscripted; all but two couples interviewed for this research had subsequently separated after immigrating to Canada. Some women identified primarily as partners, but more of them identified as activists and resisters in

their own right. Leah Main, for example, explained the legal risks she took as a draft counselor, which resulted in the issuing of a warrant for her arrest and the decision to move to Canada with her partner. Although her marriage ended within two months of her arrival in Montreal, she continued her activism and, eventually, her career as an elected official, strongly identifying as a septuagenarian as a war resister: “Because I was legally vulnerable, I consider myself a war resister in my own right” (Interview, August 2017).

We gathered oral histories from other women like Leah who divorced the partners with whom they arrived in Canada, and went on to settle and stay. They raised children, crafted livelihood and careers, cultivated communities, and lived out lives as activists. While these women lived diverse, disparate lives, none we met identified as “housewives,” or “stay-at-home moms.” This in itself is noteworthy for women of this generation.

Most who emigrated to Canada opposed US intervention in Vietnam; they understood themselves as privileged citizens of Canada and also as victims of US militarism and war. They positioned themselves as different from, but in solidarity with, Vietnamese civilians, Black Americans, and the students who were victims of state violence at Kent State and elsewhere. This was not necessarily the case for the later generation. The War on Terror cohort was much smaller by comparison to the previous generation, and its members were comprised of a different social class. Unlike their predecessors, few resisters of war in Iraq and Afghanistan had completed secondary education, and most enlisted in the military voluntarily to secure a livelihood, health insurance, access to higher education, or immigration status.

Most resisters in the more recent cohort enlisted, served, and emigrated to Canada after tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. They came to understand the true violence of war only after enlistment and service. Their experiences led to an unwillingness to participate and a change in conscience, particularly in light of the information that emerged on the reasons that the US entered these wars, especially in Iraq. They were deemed deserters by US authorities, with rates of desertion rising steadily since 2006 (Associated Press 2007). Many suffered debilitating post-traumatic stress disorder from service in the military, active duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, and experiences of desertion.

The shifting perception of Iraq and Afghanistan war resisters proved crucial to their reception in Canada, while also signaling changes to US-Canada relations and post-9/11 border enforcement. Rather than accept the recent cohort of war resisters as a group—which eventually happened for the first cohort under the leadership of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, a hero to many of that generation—the Canadian government considered the War on Terror resisters, and fought against their cases, as *individuals*. All were denied refugee status, although some received legal status with permission to stay granted on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. Those who were deported were handed over to US authorities, with some among them spending time in military prisons.

Individual histories of US war resistance demonstrate the embodied ways in which contemporary US-Canada relations are lived out. Jeremy Hinzman spent three years in the US army. His two applications for CO status were denied. After a tour in Afghanistan, he became the first resister to make a refugee claim in Canada in 2004 (Hipworth and Stewart 2016). When the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) rejected his claim, Jeremy pursued appeals and status on “humanitarian and compassionate grounds.” While ordered to leave in 2008, Jeremy appealed and won the right to stay in 2009. In contrast, another resister and refugee claimant, veteran and conscientious objector Joshua Key, was granted support on appeal by ruling of the Federal Court that the IRB reconsider his refugee claim on the basis of the requirement that he systematically violated Geneva Conventions during service in Iraq (War Resister Support Campaign, n.d.).

While Jeremy and Joshua were allowed to stay, most in this cohort were not. Robin Long left his family and the Mormon Church behind in Boise, Idaho as a minor and traveled across the US before settling into minimum wage work far from home in the US south. During this time, he was approached by a military recruiter who offered him specialized skills building tanks and a US\$12,000 signing bonus, an attractive offer to an adolescent working for minimum wage who scored high on his assessment exams. During his two years of service, Robin trained for combat in Iraq. Because of his self-described “Arab looks,” he was often assigned to play Iraqi soldiers and civilians in field exercises, and, as a result, he grew increasingly at odds with

US military values and practices. He kept these thoughts to himself, but suffered as a result, from addiction, anxiety, and depression. After attempting suicide a first time, he was placed on a heavy regimen of anti-anxiety and anti-depression medications. After a second suicide attempt, he was reported by a military priest in whom he confided. As punishment, he was given rapid deployment orders to Iraq where he would be sent into the aftermath of battles in Fallujah.

On the day he was scheduled to board his flight, Robin went into hiding and eventually made his way to Canada, accompanying friends traveling to a wedding. When his friends returned home, Robin stayed and traveled across Canada with a group making a documentary film about recycling. Several months into his time in Canada, he heard a story on *CBC* radio in which one of five US war resisters with refugee claims in Canada was interviewed. Like others we interviewed from the previous generation, he was stunned to learn that there were others like him. He eventually joined the WRSC, filed for refugee status, and found a job and a partner with whom he had a son in Canada. Robin's claim and appeal were denied, and he was the first resister deported and handed over to US authorities in 2008. After being sentenced to 15 months as a prisoner of conscience in Colorado, he spent one year and four days in military prison in San Diego. After being released, he made his way north, living in California, Oregon, Washington, and Colorado. For years, he longed to return to Canada, but was banned from re-entry for ten years after deportation, separating him from his Canadian-born child.

Like Robin, Linjamin Mull enlisted after spending several difficult months unhoused and unemployed in New York City after graduating university. For Linjamin, service offered a potential path to economic stability and access to higher education. Once enlisted, he trained to repair tanks with the hope of maintaining a distance from ground combat in Iraq. As the need for troops in Iraq grew, he found himself training to do housing raids and foot patrols. Linjamin grew fearful of active duty. Like Robin, he deserted before deployment, seeking refuge in Canada. Life in Toronto introduced him to what he characterized as a more accepting multicultural experience and perspectives on race and racism that differed from those he had experienced as a Black man growing up in

the US south. Linjamin describes his voluntary return to the US after his application for refugee status in Canada was declined as a period of serious culture shock from which he has never recovered. Like Robin, he misses Canada, a country that failed to provide legal protection, but where he forged community and found a sense of belonging nonetheless.

Most among this latest cohort never experienced the welcome that John received from the immigration officer a generation ago. Instead, nine people were deported between 2008 and 2012. Still others, like Linjamin, returned voluntarily once their claims were rejected. Kimberly Rivera was the first woman deported. She was arrested crossing into New York State and sentenced to ten months in military prison. She was returned to prison to finish her sentence after giving birth to her third child. Rodney Watson spent five years in refuge in a church in Vancouver under threat of deportation until becoming one of fifteen Iraq war resisters granted permanent residence on humanitarian grounds after the Liberal party came back into power.

While these two generations of resisters encountered distinct political landscapes, their migration histories show parallels in routine denials of CO status, geographies of border crossings, and early experiences in Canada where new arrivals knew very little about Canadian society, but found themselves supported by well-organized social movements. Although several Iraq war resisters interviewed cited the earlier generation as inspiration and a direct source of material support, most did not find “safe haven” like their predecessors. At the same time that these stories hinge upon one another, they have different outcomes, resulting in their interwoven, yet divergent nature, which emerges even in these brief mappings of their counter-topography.

Conclusions

This paper mapped a contrapuntal history of US war resister migration across two generations, finding that there is much to learn that remains relevant to those in search of safe haven today. Histories of US war resister migration are important because Canada still holds potential to serve

as a safe haven for those fleeing militarism, war, and violence. Yet governmental responses to migrations vary drastically over time. As participant Leah Main said, “Canada is a safer haven than America is, but it's not the same kind of safe haven that it was in the 1960s” (Interview, August 2017).

These findings are timely because two important things have happened since the WRSC ended its 15-year campaign for safe haven for US war resisters. After the Trump administration entered office in 2017, there was a surge in asylum seekers crossing into Canada on foot. Their geographical evasion of the Safe Third Country Agreement's (STCA) denial of claims at ports of entry meant that people were forced to cross over more rugged and isolated terrain. Over 50,000 crossings in 2017 (Government of Canada 2020) renewed debates about and court challenges to the STCA, including Canada's Federal Court 2020 ruling that the Agreement was unconstitutional (Rehaag and Aiken 2020), and a subsequent 2021 decision by the Federal Court of Appeal to overturn that ruling (CCR 2021). At the same time, COVID-19 brought about a global pandemic that resulted in the rapid, historically unprecedented closure of borders around the globe. This closure included the Canada-US border, a highly integrated border suddenly shut down to all but crossings deemed “essential.” Asylum seekers across North America were aggressively turned back and deported by the Trump administration, resulting in a build-up of asylum seekers in Mexico and Central America (Blue et al. 2021).

We are now living another articulation in this contrapuntal cycle, with the politicization of asylum along the Canada-US border. The question of whether and what kind of safe haven Canada will be, and for whom, remains open, haunted by earlier histories of inclusion and exclusion.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to everyone who participated in and supported this research, including war resisters and activists, the War Resister Support Campaign, and archivists at the University of Toronto's Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. We also thank Ileana Díaz and Matthew Fey for helpful research assistance along the way. All mistakes are our own. This research was funded by Insight and Connection grants from Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

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