"It's a tragedy when people start to go off on their own theories and not listen to scientific evidence" – Prime Minister Stephen Harper, 2014 (Westwood 2014).

“We have a crisis in Canada … in terms of the development of information and science to inform decision-making. What we have replaced that with is an ideological approach” – Nobel Prize-winning climate scientist Andrew Weaver (Linnitt 2013).

The recent depoliticization of knowledge enduring since the positivist turn has given rise to ‘evidence-based policy’ (EBP) so that policy making would be “optimal, legitimate and publicly accountable” (Frieberg & Carson 2010). However, EBP operates in a context of sustained political efforts to shape knowledge framing while retaining control over public data collection and dissemination (Pinto 2013). At the same time, the EBP literature often assumes policymakers’ access to information and elides public accessibility (Cartwright 2009; Lancaster 2014). How does the current macroeconomic context of fiscal consolidation (austerity) affect knowledge policy in Canada? While existing research has outlined various areas in which austerity has fashioned cuts, it has not connected it EBP, whose literature often assumes (abstractly) reasonable levels of data collection, processing, and interpretive capacities which are increasingly undercut by austerity. In this paper, I seek to excavate the politics of agnotology (the construction of ignorance) through an analysis of how the Canadian government has politically insulated itself and citizens from knowledge, undermining policymaking and public accountability in a time of austerity. I will focus on the numerous ways cuts (austerity) in public research intersects with the rise of the knowledge economy, driving a simultaneous retrenchment and commercialization of public knowledge in the state (via cuts to research staff, departments, and the census) and the university. At the same time, policy narratives regarding austerity are rendered more effective while policy-making is rendered ineffective.

Fiscal austerity makes cuts to publically funded knowledge collection, processing, production, and interpretive capacity. This puts renewed direct and indirect pressures to

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2 Austerity proponents claim that exorbitant public indebtedness is ruining the major economies and that neoliberal measures such as cutting spending (wages, prices, general spending while cutting taxes) to eliminate deficits and debts would result in economic growth (Levinson 2013, 93; Blyth 2013, 2).
marketize research and pursue quantifiable outcomes, undermining public knowledge and increasing information precarity. As a result, agnotology increases: policy making is weakened, the public is less informed, and policy narratives take precedence over policy evidence. This research looks at the ways austerity operates as a knowledge regime informing a public policy regime, creating the conditions for its existence by applying cuts to areas which could undermine its narratives. This paper is not explicitly about the politics of knowledge (e.g. framing), but of its increasingly institutionalized absence and subsequent effects on policy-making.

Evidence-Based Policy, Positivism, and the Conditions of Empiricism

At its most basic level, evidence-based policy (EBP) is the idea that professional practices should be based upon, or at least informed by, data that they do good rather than harm so as to render policy making “optimal, legitimate and publicly accountable” (Biesta 2010, 492; Frieberg & Carson 2010, 152; Howlett 2009). EBP has become globally influential since beginning in medicine as ‘evidence-based practice’ in the early 1990s: across advanced capitalist states, politicians are hailing EBP, from 2008 Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (seeking “a robust, evidence-based policy-making process”) to 1997 UK Prime Minister Tony Blair (“what matters is what works”) and as far back as Francis Bacon in the 17th century, whose idea of ‘New Atlantis’ would be based on “policy […] informed by knowledge, truth, reason, and facts” (Biesta 2010, 492; Frieberg & Carson 2010, 153). Evidence-based policy has many issues in understanding what constitutes evidence, how it can be applied, what ‘effective’ outcomes are, and how to discern relevance, among others (Biesta 2010, 491; Cartwright 2009, 127; Lancaster 2014, 948). This paper will not focus on the issues inherent in EBP; rather, the focus is on a necessary condition for its application: the existence of accessible and useable knowledge.

Evidence-based policy’s assumptions, legibility, and pre-eminence are all tied to the ‘idealised linear rational model’ of scientific policy making borne out of the positivist turn in policy studies and public administration, a continuation of the modernist project of Enlightenment which sought to “change and improve the world through the application of reason” (Frieberg & Carson 2010, 153; Howlett 2009, 156). Rational-positivism was an epistemological and ontological shift in the social sciences in the mid-20th century, characterized by tenets of neutrality, objectivity, apolitical research, and quantitative methods which spread to policy studies and administration (Fischer 2003, 4; Hawkesworth 2006, 43). The “Ascendancy of Evidence” (according to Solesbury) represents a “retreat from ideology”, insofar as (particularly scientific) knowledge is read as rational and neutral, and therefore apolitical; but this elides the discursive, ideological, and ontological logics which become embedded and naturalized in processes and mechanisms defined as ‘rational’ (Frieberg & Carson 2010, 154; Hawkesworth 2006, 45). Although evidence was crucial to the technocratic orientation of policymaking which was directly influenced by rational-positivism, it would also be seemingly central to variations of New Public Management (NPM). With NPM, market logics are infused into the rational-

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3 Evidence can be defined as ‘the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid’; evidence contributes to the case for holding a particular belief as true, and is often considered in purely cognitive and scientific term (Biesta 2010, 494; Gambril 2010, 26).

4 NPM can be characterized as business style, results-oriented public sector management with a focus on quantifiable criteria for the allocation of public resources and measuring efficiencies of public service providers/suppliers (Pierre 1995, 56). NPM’s rise correlates with a shift from the technocratic public administration to a more instrumental and centralised paradigm in Canada (Fischer 2003, 5; Savoie 2010).
positivist framework of EBP, evident in government and university priorities in marketizing research (Pierre 1995, 55; Savoie 2010; Smeltzer & Hearn 2015, 352).

‘Active Agnotology’ and Silencing Knowledge

Another dimension of knowledge policy I will not cover directly is the ongoing censorship of government researchers, who are bound by a communications policy introduced by the Harper government under which a scientist must direct all inquiries to Ottawa regarding their published work (Semeniuk 2015). ‘Media relations specialists’ in the government have barred researchers from communicating with the public, media, and travelling for knowledge dissemination “even on ground breaking research” (CBC News 2015). For example, Ottawa banned the publication of research from Canada’s radiation detectors after the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, research that concluded that a two-degree Celsius increase in temperatures might be unavoidable, research on “unprecedented loss of ozone over the Arctic”, on the contamination of snowfall near the Alberta tar-sands with petroleum based pollutants, and more (Linnitt 2014). A 2013 report by the Professional Institute for the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC) found that 37% of federal researchers and scientists felt that within the last five years they were directly prevented from sharing their expertise with public or media; 25% said they were forced by government officials to modify their research for non-scientific reasons; 50% witnessed political interference in communication of scientific research (Linnitt 2014).

In addition to silencing scientists, the federal government also actively blocks information. From 2013-14, Ottawa redacted 79% of Access to Information requests (of 28,000) and censored 57% (74% for Environment Canada) (Corbeil 2015). In 2015, the government set a precedent by retroactively exempted all data for the ‘long gun registry’ from Access to Information and Privacy Acts, jeopardizing public research and accountability (Cheadle 2015).

A Knowledge Regime

"Apparently, if the public agrees to pay twice, corporations will invest in and grow Canada’s economy" – Eric Newstadt, 2014.

The knowledge economy was a macro-economic response to the destabilization of the Fordist accumulation regime, such that the onus for rapid growth was partially shifted toward the production of knowledge over physical commodities. The shift was perhaps cemented by the OECD’s 1996 ‘The Knowledge-Based Economy’ report, which defined knowledge economies as those "economies which are directly based on the production, distribution, and use of knowledge and information" (Bullen et al 2006, 53). ‘Innovation’5 became a new watch-word, and the OECD reports (1996, 2004) were followed by the European Commission (2003), the US (2003), the UK (2005), Australia (2004), and Canada (2002) (53). However, capital either became more or continued to be risk-averse, particularly in research & development (R&D) (Mazzucato 2013; Newson et al 2010, 62). Surveys of fifteen national innovation systems found striking similarities: all were based on leveraging ‘the knowledge economy’ and ‘innovation’, investing in R&D because private firms were hesitant, since “the costs are too great and returns uncertain”

5 Defined as “the commercial introduction of a new or significantly improved product or process to the market” by Oslo in a 1997 OECD report (Cozzarin 2006, 42).
(Cozzarin 2006, 42). In Canada, this has led to targeting government funding for research infrastructure, industry partnerships, and applied research, transfiguring universities into knowledge entrepreneurs which patent and license technologies as well as spin off commercial enterprises (Fisher & Atkinson-Grosjean 2002, 450; Newstadt 2014). As Mazzucato (2013) argues, “we are socializing the risks of investing, while privatizing the rewards […] who benefits from the state’s role in the development of technology?”

Policy Narratives, Agnotology, and the Conditions of Ignorance

“As a result [of cuts], discussion of multibillion-dollar policies … can now be pursued in ignorance” Michael Wolfson, 2015.

Policy making and public accountability are contingent on what actors know and what they believe, intertextually shaping one another. With agnotology, knowledge is increasingly removed from the equation, allowing belief (i.e. Policy Narratives) to occupy a more prominent role. This paper utilizes Narrative Policy Analysis (NPA) to highlight how ideas and narratives shape broad social discourses as well as policy conceptualization, choices, and implementation (e.g. framing welfarism as immoral dependence may be more likely to result in welfare-to-work programs instead of demand side labour market policy) (Pinto 2013, 96). Policy narratives are not necessarily rooted in evidence or rational approaches to understandings; rather, they are often rhetorical tools that take the shape of metaphors and causal stories in which events and ideas are presented to convey meaning and often rationalize or legitimize a course of action (96).

The neologism agnotology was coined by science historian Robert Proctor and linguist Iain Boal to describe the study of the conditions that promote and sustain ignorance (Bedford & Cook 2013, 2020). Some interpret agnotology not as the mere absence of knowledge (Gambrill 2010, 27), but as a force which often blocks it (Code 2014, 154). Agnotology may arise from a basic lack of knowledge, selective choice, or from an intentional attempt to deceive (Pinto 2015, 300). In any kind of evidence based practice, whether medical, public policy, or voting, knowledge is paramount (Gambrill 2010, 26). In the context of this paper, I am less concerned with motive (deliberate production of ignorance: ‘active agnotology’) as I am with effect (systemic production of ignorance: ‘passive agnotology’), and so, I take the simple definition of agnotology as an absence of knowledge but as a socially constructed absence (Pinto 2015, 295). Knowledge policy in Canada is not a ‘natural vacuum,’ it is the result of political, cultural, institutional, and economic frameworks which – although they may not have intended to – create the conditions for ignorance through the retrenchment and marketization of knowledge (295; Bedford & Cook 2013, 2020; Pinto 2015, 295).

The trajectory of the knowledge economy in Canada and elsewhere undermines ‘policy analytical capacity’ of government to respond to issues (Howlett 2009). Although it is not the focus of this paper to address whether or not people mobilize, in what ways, and to what effects, we can contribute to this debate in several ways: 1) the ‘means of production’ to collect, code, analyze, and generate knowledge in the public sphere are being increasingly regulated to private and marketable outcomes, such that less attention and resources are diverted to research that is either not directly marketable or critical of the paradigm; 2) Agnotology, as will be elaborated shortly, is a consequence of the information precarity of privatized and marketable research; 3) the role of austerity, in further hollowing out there state, makes it more difficult to fund research
and academic fields not supported by industry and to fund public research apparatuses. In this way, whether or not critical pedagogy or public policy ‘work’ is less important than whether it has the necessary inputs: whether there is publically available and reliable research on subjects of concern to the public, not just to industry (e.g. on inequality) and whether the public and policy designers have the interpretive capacity to respond.

**Fiscal Austerity and Economies of Knowledge**

"Important statistical information has become so unreliable that the government would be better off making policy decisions based on no information at all" – Munir Sheikh (Freeman 2015).

**Census**

In late June 2010 the government stated that it would eliminate the mandatory long-form 2011 census (first administered in 1971) and replace it with a voluntary6 ‘National Household Survey’ (NHS) sent to one in three Canadian households (Thompson 2010, 377; Abu-Laban 2014, 215; Black 2015). The change was made by an Order in Council without debate, consultations, or a bill (Black 2015). The interest in the census may be due to the fact that although the collection and processing of data may be partisan free, the conclusions and policy consequences may not be (Thompson 2010, 378). Brian Mulroney’s Progressive Conservative Government in the late 1980s first canceled the mid-decade census of 1986 to ‘save money,’ but reversed course (380). Later, Statistics Canada was criticized as an edifice of ‘big government’ by Conservatives and Liberals alike, and like other federal departments, had its budget cut during Canada’s austerity in the 1990s (380).

Former Chief Statistician Munir Sheikh, who resigned over the switch, argued that the voluntary census cannot produce the accurate and reliable data needed “for the development of good public policy, necessary programs and services, and trustworthy research” (Thompson 2010, 378). Because it is centralized and leverages the federal government’s relatively higher capacity, all the Canadian provinces rely heavily on Statistics Canada’s collection of raw data, and the long-form census had detailed data about employment, education, income, language, and even household purchases (Thompson 2010, 381; Scharper 2015). When Sheikh ran Statistics Canada, they would not publish data if the response level was below 75%, but with the NHS, the agency had to reduce that threshold to 50% so as to not discount two-thirds of census neighbourhoods (over 1,000 communities’ responses were withheld) (Freeman 2015; Black 2015). The last mandatory long-form census was held in 2006 and had a response rate of 93.5%, while the 2011 NHS had a response rate of 68.6% and cost $22mn more (the 2016 census is set to replicate the 2011) (Scharper 2015).

All manner of individuals and organizations (488 against and 11 for, as of 2014) have criticized the change, with the private sector (e.g. the Canadian Chamber of Commerce) and other actors raising concerns over the adequacy of the data not collected as part of the NHS (Thompson 2010, 378; datalibre 2014). Liberal Member of Parliament (MP) Ted Hsu submitted Bill C-626 as a private member’s bill to restore the long-form census; it was defeated by the Conservative majority on February 4th, 2015 (Open Parliament 2015).

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6 So as to ‘protect people’s privacy’ given ‘complaints’ regarding the long form census (the privacy commissioner’s office revealed fifty complaints over the past 20 years) (Thompson 2010, 377).
Federal Departments & Agencies

Despite years of austerity in Canada, the government spent $750mn in ads since 2006, potentially $12bn a year (for 2015) in ‘income-splitting’ tax reforms, and $410mn in ‘tax free savings accounts’ in 2014 alone (an increase of 84.1% since 2009, and when matured could cost $15.5bn a year federally and $9bn a year provincially) (Raj 2015; Macdonald 2014; Goodman 2015). All of this has occurred while making cuts to Library and Archives Canada (the institution charged with keeping actual records of Canada’s past), the end of the long form census, and dramatic cuts to Statistics Canada (which collects, codes, and analyzes data about Canada’s population and its social, economic, linguistic, and cultural trends) (Abu-Laban 2014, 216).

What follows is a brief list of cuts and closures (157 as of 2014) (CBC News 2014): in 2012, the National Council on Welfare was closed, along with its findings (Noel 2014, 211); in 2013-14 there was a 20% reduction in funding ($66.9mn) to the Department of Labour’s ‘learning and labour market information’ activities (Tencer 2014); cuts to the Parliamentary Budget Office and Environment Canada (700 positions), the closure of the Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy (NTREE), the Experimental Lakes Area ($3mn); global climate research centres and stations7; ten science-based departments and agencies will have lost $2.6bn and 7,500 jobs by 2017 (Lum 2015); the elimination of the National Science Advisor (PressProgress 2015; Linnitt 2013; CAUT 2015, 4); massive closures of libraries (including consolidation and loss of collections from Health Canada) (Westwood 2014).

There have been $33.9mn in cuts to Statistics Canada by 2014-15 (with another $142.6mn by 2017; a total cut of 34% since 2010), following other cuts which saw it ultimately remove all four of its key longitudinal surveys initiated in the 1990s8, reduced 34 programs, stopped other surveys mid-way, and cut 31.4% of its staff (2,300), particularly in science and technology (PSAC 2014; Woods 2013; Stabile & Bednar 2013; Globe and Mail 2014; Kirby 2014). Further, in the mid-1980s, Statistics Canada began charging user fees and implementing ‘cost recovery’ strategies for previously free statistical information, which prevents browsing data and accessing special tabulations exorbitantly expensive (Metcalfe 2010, 493).

As Alain Noel (2014) has said, we are witnessing “the gradual removal of the recent past” (212). These cuts result in agnotology by undermining the ability to analyze socio-economic and natural phenomena, along with all their intersections and complexities (216).

The University

Public research in Canadian universities has undergone rapid and intense transformations since increasingly integrating themselves into the knowledge economy (Dzisah 2010, 261; Fisher & Atkinson-Grosjean 2002, 452). To capitalize on the knowledge economy, the Canadian

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7 Such as the Polar Environment Atmosphere Research Laboratory (PEARL), which provided ground-breaking research on climate change. Environmental researchers in the government and in universities have often produced research that questions the government’s policy agenda (Linnitt 2013).

8 1) National Population health Survey; 2) National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth; 3) Workplace and Employment Survey; Recently cut the last longitudinal 4) Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID), as well as the LifePaths database in 2014, which was a modelling tool developed in the 1990s with data starting in 1971 to project demographics trends into the future, intended to help shape public policy on pensions, education, and health care (Wolfson 2015)
government began spending on over eleven national ‘innovation programs,’9 in the past twenty years, focusing on retaining research leaders, cultivating high quality research, targeting industry funding, and academia-industry-government (AIG) partnerships (Cozzarin 2006, 48-51; Metcalfe 2010, 495). The ‘triple helix’ of AIG is becoming more fully integrated, with industrial internship programs (e.g. MITACs), the development of science and technology parks, government institutes (e.g. ‘Centres of Excellence’ in Canada), ‘industry liaison offices,’ and other programs: the university assumes the role of not just “supplier of knowledge and human capital”, but also new industrial actor creating intellectual property (Dzisah 2010, 260; Fisher & Atkinson-Grosjean 2002, 449; Metcalfe 2010, 494).

For the university itself, integration into the knowledge economy was partiality internal (responding to the real or adjusted retrenchment and ‘targeting’ of public funding) and external (shifts in government R&D policy), ultimately leading the institutions to take entrepreneurial stances (Dzisah 2010, 555; Metcalfe 2010, 489; Newson et al 2012, 54). The restructuring of federal transfers in Canada dropped government operating grants as a total of university operating funds from 80% in 1990/91 to 53% in 2012/2013, with private contributions (e.g. partnerships and tuition increases, rising by over 90%) making up the difference (CAUT 2015, 5; Metcalfe 2010, 497). Nations10 began to targeted funds in the late 1980s and 1990s to accelerate or recover economic growth, driving institutions and researchers to shift focus to ‘resource acquisition’ so as to win grants, research funds, and partnerships for basic operations and new expenditures (Metcalfe 2010, 494; Newson et al 2012, 51; Cozzarin 2006, 49). To do so, universities adopted ‘performance management’ techniques with a focus on quantitative inputs and outputs, diverted funds to administration, invested in industry liaison offices, engaged in ‘program prioritization’ to ‘weed out weak programs,’11 and put pressure on faculty to make their department’s ‘lean, productive, and popular’ through ‘strategic planning, performance evaluations (e.g. gaining grants), and unit reviews12 (Newson et al 2012, 53; Smeltzer & Hearn 2015, 352; Newstadt 2014).

One characteristic of this shift is the privileging of ‘applied’ research (market applications) over ‘basic’ research (curiosity or discovery driven), eventually blurring the divide (Dzisah 2010, 556).13 For example, among the Tri-Council bodies (which fund graduate and faculty research) the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council’s (SSHRC) base funding decreased in real terms by 12.1% since 2007; the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) by 4.1%; the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) by 7.2%, while

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9 See Cozzarin 2006 for an excellent overview.
10 With Canadian funding contingent on commercialization and industry partnerships (Fisher & Atkinson-Grosjean 2002, 452). For example, the federal government formalized an agreement with the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada to triple the amount of commercialization from academic research by 2010, leading income from commercialization of university intellectual property to rise 131% from $23.4mn in 1999 to $54mn in 2006 (Metcalfe 2010, 508).
11 An often expensive process which routinely favours science, technology, and engineering courses over those in the Humanities or Social Sciences (Dehaas 2014).
12 Meanwhile, contingent faculty are teaching more courses for less money and graduate students often live under the poverty line in Canada (CAUT 2015; Yelland 2015).
13 Some have criticized this as a threat to academic freedom and impartiality, with industry partnerships and the entrepreneurial university often bypassing peer-review system and limiting how research can be articulated, disseminated, and how findings can be affected (Dzisah 2010, 558; CAUT 2015, 3; Pinto 2015, 300).
NSERC funding aimed at applied research increased by 1178% from 2001-12, the success rate for all Tri-Council applications dropped from ~25% in the 1990s to 10-15% in 2014, and the government is increasing pressure to shift funds toward specific programs\(^\text{14}\) (CAUT 2015, 3; Taliano 2013; Linnitt 2014). The pressure of the entrepreneurial university is driving the humanities and social sciences to ‘demonstrate their relevance’ in a market paradigm, either in attracting enrollment or in transforming their research outlook toward ‘relevant impact’ on “government, health, or business sectors” and making ‘partnerships’ (e.g. with ‘matching’ funds from non-academic) (Coleman & Kamboureli 2011; Peters & Besley 2008, 98, 187). Although this can have the positive effect of directing critical capacities to public issues, often the effect is shying away from controversial research, such as on immigration or assisted suicide (Hager 2015; Pinto 2015, 300). Again, agnotology begins to flourish as the R&D policy narrative shapes the infrastructure and orientation of public research in Canada.

**Privatized Knowledge**

The combination of retrenching publically accessible data generation and the marketization of research has led to privatized access. Alongside the entrepreneurial university in the academic industrial complex is the juggernaut academic publishing industry, wherein high price walls – upwards of $40.00 CDN for a single peer-reviewed article – preclude anyone without institutional access (e.g. the public, non-academic or smaller institutes, etc.) from accessing academic research (Pollock 2014). However, academics ‘choose’ to publish in these for-profit journals (many making 30% of their revenue in profit) because they are all highly ranked, and so integral to beginning or maintaining a career in academia (Pollock 2014). A more obscure case is private databases, such as those which contain identifying information for the holders of government securities. For example, the Government of Canada tracks these financial instruments and lists an ‘International Securities Identification Number’ (ISIN) tied to each holder, the only catch being that those numbers are indexed in a private database which requires a membership (Bank of Canada 2014). Consequently, the creditors of Canadian debt – and indirect influencers of fiscal policy – cannot even be determined, precluding an analysis of politics, linkages, and consequences.

**Agnotology & the Moral Austerity Narrative**

"We have to govern ourselves responsibly, we have to live within our means … to grab that [competitive] future" – Stephen Harper (2013).

Although the argument that debt slows growth and that austerity would revitalize it (e.g. the work of Reinhart and Rogoff – ‘expansionary fiscal consolidation’) was empirically (incorrect and excluded data) and conceptually (a simple correlation - slow growth was more likely to cause public debt than v.v.) flawed, it still gained traction with international policy experts\(^\text{15}\) (94). Austerity policies also have 'lock-in effects,' wherein cuts to public expenditures,

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\(^{14}\) While Tri-Council programs will receive $46mn extra/year starting in 2016/17, $30mn is allocated to market driven research, and $9 to supporting federally sponsored research (CAUT 2015, 4).

\(^{15}\) Even the multiplier assumptions of fiscal consolidation were spurious and vastly exaggerated in economic outlooks (Mackenzie 2012).
revenue, and less economic stimulus leave governments with fewer options for addressing economic downturns while disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable (Levinson 2013, 91; Blyth 2013, 13; Marks & Little 2010, 196). These cuts are believed to inspire "business confidence" since the government will neither be 'crowding-out' the market for investment by sucking up all the available capital through the issuance of debt, nor adding to the nation's already 'too big' debt" (Blyth 2013, 2).

However, austerity is more than a policy orientation, it is a moral economy built around practices of consumption which frame responsibility for reduced consumption as a necessity to secure the future of the political community (Clarke & Newman 2012, 316). This leads to an 'austerity policy narrative' ('moral austerity') in many cases, an example being Canada. In neoliberalism, central government is seen as an excess, a sort of 'political obesity,' while 'lean government' will result from a regimentation of society and responsible self-discipline of the body: a "lean and mean state (via decentralized and localized provision) can provide better social services" (Turner 2006, 224). Austerity is directly informed by these moral ideas of government size and consumption, demanding a smaller and less intrusive state for the good of the community (Knight 1998). Government debt (consumption) is also stigmatized as amoral spending which "we can't afford" (Turner 2006, 224; Knight 1998, 109).

In Canada, the rise of neoliberal common sense was exemplified in Ontario's 'Common Sense Revolution' promulgated by Mike Harris in the 1990s, wherein what was framed as a 'crisis' of exorbitant public indebtedness (resulting from 'irresponsible fiscal management' as opposed to trade deficits and shifts in the regional political economy) sought to shape common sense around right wing populism, a strong 'us vs. them' rhetoric, and the moralisation of consumption (Knight 1998, 106). There was a moral resonance around budgetary deficits and their 'sources' (e.g. 'bloated' bureaucracy, public sector benefits, and lazy and dependent welfare recipients) as costs which Ontario "couldn't afford," with governmental and personal austerity as the only 'responsible' solution (Knight 1998, 125; Marks & Little 2010, 196). In this way, debt was framed as morally suspect and a burden on future generations. Both individual bodies (welfare recipients) and the body politic (state debt and expenditures) must internalize self-discipline and reduce their consumption so as to contain themselves and secure the future of the community (Clarke & Newman 2012).

Austerity returned to Canada after the GFC, with 2010 marking a new round of fiscal austerity featuring social service retrenchment, devolution, and privatization (detailed below) (Whiteside 2014, 175). Austerity policies are framed as responses to a 'crisis' in Canada so as to construct a "climate of fear" around economic insecurity and the future promise of continued precarity so as to evoke moralizing responses targeting those (including the state) who 'consume irresponsibly' (Russell 2014, 55). Even in late 2014 in Canada when the budget was all but balanced, Prime Minister Harper called 'alternatives' (not cutting spending, increasing taxes, and 'ignoring' deficits) to austerity "basket cases" (The Canadian Press 2014). While the virtuous necessity of 'shared sacrifice' often means abnegating the most vulnerable, it is also used to discipline government spending (Marks & Little 2010, 196; Clarke & Newman 2012). Editorials before the Ontario 2014 election stated "if you make five bucks a day, you can't spend […] eight […] It's time to tighten some public belts" while another argued that government must be forced "to live within its means as families across this province do every day in tough times" (Simpson 2014; Editorial 2014). Progressive Conservative candidate Tim Hudak has said directly that "we are asking government to tighten its belt, the way every day Ontarions have" so as to "bring back jobs" (Hudak 2014). However, moral austerity has
engulfed the political spectrum, shifting questions to how austerity should be implemented rather than whether it should be. For example, the centre-left New Democratic Party's (NDP) Andrea Horwath stated "if citizens are expected to tighten their belts [...] its only right that government does the same" while the centrist Liberal's Kathleen Wynne tasked Finance Minister Charles Sousa with "tightening the province's belt" and said that "government could be leaner" (Horwath 2014; Babbage 2014). Government consumption (expenditure and debt) is framed by evoking moral laxity, irresponsibility, and overconsumption. The virtuous necessity of austerity (reduced consumption) is anchored in the futurity of economic performance and job growth, sustaining moral austerity’s common sense.

Austerity evokes the 'common sense' of self-disciplined consumption as a moral, responsible, and individual act for the self and the community. However, the austerity narrative is completely false: countries which implemented austerity experienced declines in their GDP proportional to the intensity of austerity (Levinson 2013, 94; Krugman 2014). Seven years after the global financial crisis, IMF forecasts outline another significant decline in potential growth (they argued the same thing in 2012 and earlier) in austerity economies as compared to pre-recession levels: the US is pegged at just 2.0% a year in the coming years, while for Canada it is 1.8% (despite the fact that we are now entering our second quarter of -0.6% growth, a textbook recession) (Jackson 2015; Mackenzie 2012). The IMF devotes an entire chapter outlining low rates of business investment, and concludes that they are not investing (in Canada as of 2014 capital was sitting on $686bn) … because the recovery is weak: fiscal austerity, meant to ‘open’ the field for private investment, has had the exact opposite effect (Jackson 2015; Sanger 2014). This should not be in the slightest bit surprising, as one of capital’s defining attributes is, as we have seen in its approach to R&D, risk aversion.

In Canada by 2015, years of austerity cut at least 37,000 federal employees and over $36.8 billion in cuts, bringing revenues and expenditures to their lowest levels in 50 years (‘making the government lean’) (Tencer 2014; Yalnizyan 2015; Whiteside 2014, 175), cut taxes to their lowest share of the economy in 70 years (‘promoting private investment,’ with $20bn before the crisis) (Sanger 2014; Yalnizyan 2015), reduced interest rates to 0.5% (‘monetary stimulus’) (Tencer 2015), and have a labour surplus of 1.2mn (‘reserve army of labour,’ with hundreds of thousands more underemployed) (Sanger 2014; PEPSO 2013). However, recovery is still stagnant: unemployment exceeds pre-recession levels (6.3% in 2006 vs. 6.9% in 2014), self-employment has increased by 8.6%, the service sector has grown by 37.8% (while manufacturing declined by 11.2%), and part time employment grew by 15.2% (PEPSO 2013; Jackson 2015). Finance Canada’s own economic multipliers (supported by private sector economic analysis firms) show that public spending has a greater effect on economic growth: for example, for every $1bn cut from health care and social service, the economy loses 18,000 in direct and indirect jobs and $2bn, while an income tax cut of $1bn will only generate 6,000 jobs and boost the economy by $1.3bn (Sanger 2014). Of course, part of the slowdown can be attributed to the collapse of the oil market and the global volatility of commodities, which Canada is increasingly susceptible to given our parochial focus on entrenching ourselves as a peripheral hinterland economy (Pittis 2015).

Despite all of the above, austerity is still salient with the public (over 90% believe it is a priority in an August 2015 poll) and the government, which sold shares of General Motors in a desperate attempt to balance the budget for 2015, followed by a spending plan that locks in program spending below inflation and population growth – a ‘slow austerity’ (Mainstreet 2015; Rozworski 2015). The moral austerity narrative is extensive, legible, and relatively cohesive. The
data which could legitimate or disprove it, however, is not: as will be discussed in the following section, the ‘on the ground’ data – on people’s standards of living, income, and employment – is precisely the data that is the most difficult to accurately come by with the cuts to the census and Statistics Canada. The cuts wrought by austerity in Canada create the conditions under which they can continue by cultivating agnotology around austerity outcomes and internal logics.

**Agnotology, Public Research, and Policy Design (or Change?)**

"Most of the key policy issues that are of ‘concern to government and its citizens are in the areas most in need of good social science research evidence’" (Bannister & Hardill 2013, 167).

Recalling the ways academic research is undermined or refocused toward marketized ends, it is important to remember that it *can* have an impact of public policy if it is translated in a way that is legible to policy makers and the public (Gunderson 2007). The social sciences (and humanities) hold the potential to help interpret and address complex social issues (e.g. on the externalities, internal contradictions, and politics of austerity as illustrated above) by bringing to light what is ex-nominated, challenging hegemonic views, and providing theoretical and empirical evidence in a way that helps the vulnerable and marginalized (Bannister & Hardill 2013, 168; Gambrill 2010, 26). Perhaps a positive consequence of the ‘impact agenda’ is that it compels researchers and institutions to expand their interactions with other actors (including community partners) (Bannister & Hardill 2013, 167). At the same time, translating knowledge in a way that “gains purchase and voice in policy making and delivery” may blur the line between legitimating political projects and evincing their assumptions, violences, and externalities (167).

While research is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for policy change (recall the Canadian, and indeed almost global, pivot to austerity post-GFC), it can be used to legitimate policy choices or, when actually utilized, form the basis of evidence-based policy. Retrenchment and managerialist mechanisms instituted in government and at universities as a result of austerity and the pressures of the knowledge economy may make it difficult to conduct reliable research, narrowing knowledge generation and interpretation capacity and thus our ability to deal with complex problems (Smeltzer & Hearn 2015, 355; Gambrill 2010, 28). Aside from undermining knowledge production and interpretive capacity, policy-makers are limited by information overload via omnibus bills and executive centralization, which controls access to information and significant policy projects (e.g. international agreements) (Savoie 2010).

Research can be utilized – or circumvented – at each stage of policy making (problem identification, legislative action, policy adoption, and evaluation) and involves deploying evidence and constructing a plan, with knowledge informing the available options and their applicability (Gunderson 2007, 588; Cartwright 2009, 129; Howlett 2009, 155). Governments require “policy analytical capacity” – which demands quality data, researchers, and collaborative efforts to expand interpretation - to utilize evidence, and this applies to stages as early as data collection to as late as post-implementation review (Howlett 2009, 154). Policy making made without knowledge is made in ignorance.

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17. Or research which does not fit corporate or political objectives (Hager 2015).
"How might Canada expect to meet the policy challenges of the future when we no longer have the ability to understand where we are today?" (Stabile & Bednar 2013).

With the cuts in Statistics Canada and other departments which analyze socio-economic trends, policy makers, researchers, and the public lack the capacity to effectively analyze how people are living - whether they are thriving, surviving, or neither. Even the statistics provided in the previous section on the correlation between particular economic indicators and austerity were very general, and give a poor picture of peoples’ lived experiences. A 2003 study on precarious employment in Canada utilized Statistics Canada’s data, finding that precarious employment (i.e. part-time, temporary work with few to no benefits, job security, or protections) rose between 28-34% from 1989-94 (Cranford 2003, 7). The study looked at intersections between employment categories (i.e. permanent vs. temporary), union coverage, degree of regulatory protection, and income level: data which have been undermined since 2006 by massive and ongoing cuts to Statistics Canada (impacting their staff and research capacity)\(^\text{18}\) and the long-form census (7). The cuts to Statistics Canada have elicited complaints from many economists about the quality of labour market, residential housing, and even demographic data, issues which are especially compounded by the end of the long form census (Globe and Mail 2014).

The voluntary National Household Survey utilized in 2011 has poor returns from the top and bottom rungs of the economic ladder, leaving mainly mid-income respondents who create a false representation of Canada as a thriving middle class society (Scharper 2015). Vulnerable populations (new immigrants, Aboriginals, low-income, single parents) and those with highest income had the lowest response rate (Scharper 2015). For example, in Hamilton, a city in Southern Ontario, 17 census tracts were excluded from the 2011 census data for low response rates, compared to 2 in 2006; most of the excluded tracts came from lower income neighbourhoods more reliant on government assistance (Black 2014). In another example, 2014 Statistics Canada data on employment categories found that 83.1% of workers in Southern Ontario are working full time, while an independent study conducted by McMaster University and the United Way found that number to be only 50.3% (Statistics Canada 2014; PEPSCO 2013, 3). Similarly, Statistics Canada data does not replicate an independent University of Toronto study which illustrated widening inequality in Toronto over the past four decades (Scharper 2015). The effect of agnotology is this: how can policy makers design, adjust, or implement social assistance, labour market policy, or any public policy given these vast gaps in knowledge?

**Conclusion**

“Voters can no longer hold their elected representatives to account for gaps, oversights or hidden failures" - Carol Goar, 2015 (PressProgress 2015).

“I think, though, this is not a time to commit sociology” – Stephen Harper, 2013 (Singh 2014).

The shifts catalogued in this paper have the effect of entrenching particular narratives, accumulation regimes, and politico-economic orders by undermining the ability of policy

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\(^{18}\) Which saw them stop all of their longitudinal studies and even run out of funding on a survey of 25,000 companies in 2012 to assess hiring needs and skills gaps in Canada, with the results left unprocessed (Globe and Mail 2014).
makers, public researchers, and citizens from understanding the effect of particular policies and phenomena, thereby foreclosing evidence-based critiques of the state. Although it was not covered directly, agnotology also opens a discussion of insularity, such that even with policy evidence (despite its decreasing reliability in Canada), certain narratives continue to hold sway. That being said, it is indisputable that knowledge is important and necessary for effective, let alone critical, policy making and public accountability. For example, support for the Conservatives’ security bill, C-51, is contingent on how informed a citizen is: only 38% of those who have read an analysis of the bill support it compared to 82% who have not read about it (Johnson, 2015). This is why agnotology is such a threat to not only policy capacity, but public accountability of government. At the same time, contending against agnotology cannot merely be a project of ensuring we have a robust and public data collection and production apparatus – as information can be elided, destroyed, and instrumentalized to serve policy narratives – but one that drives us to question assumptions, violences, externalities, and suffering.

Austerity, and neoliberalism, are adept at mutating narratives, ideas, and events to sustain themselves. Indeed, under the moral austerity narrative of scarcity and sacrifice, public funding for research, accountability, and particularly the humanities and social sciences, is under threat as they are not ‘productive’ or ‘profitable’ (Coleman & Kamboureli 2011; Peters & Besley 2008, 88). The ability to ‘turn thought against or onto itself’, the kind of self-reflexivity that can be engendered in the humanities and social sciences is essential for political literacy, critical thinking, and careful policy-making (Bannister & Hardill 2013, 168; Gambrill 2010, 26). At the same time, although researchers, analysts, and the public have a long road ahead if we are to rebuild this country’s research apparatus, we must be attuned to the social, economic, institutional, and epistemological pressures (e.g. positivism) to develop ‘productive’ research that provides use-value, causality, and certainty (Frieberg & Carson 2010, 153). Such pressures goad us into committing lies and eliding the fundamental limits of knowledge and interpretation, and make us forget to think about whose interests we ultimately serve: delineating what constitutes knowledge (‘evidence’) and its place will always be a power-laden, and therefore political, process (Gambrill 2010, 26).

Bourdieu has said that knowledge is not “primarily emancipatory but located in social contexts of power” (Dzisah 2010, 559). That is exactly why publics must be able to observe the assumptions and marginalization occurring around them, connect their observations to intersecting interests, narratives, and assumptions, and take that knowledge as a threat to all based on our foundational interdependence and not on the atomized ontology of neoliberalism: to commit ‘sociology,’ even if Prime Minister Harper warned us not to (Singh 2014).
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