

**MATERIALITY OF MIGRATION: EXAMINING THE IMPACTS OF CANADA-
US BORDER POLICIES IN PLATTSBURGH, NEW YORK**

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my younger sister, Abby, who, in the same semester that I am finishing my master's degree, is just beginning her own. She supported me through my writing process, and I plan to reciprocate that support throughout hers, but Abby, remember that for now, and for the next couple of years, I have more degrees than you.

ABSTRACT

The Roxham Road unofficial border crossing, located between Quebec and New York State, was an unintended consequence, or “loophole,” of the Canada-US Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA), a border policy that prevented migrants from attempting to cross at official land ports of entry and, instead, pushed them to cross at unofficial ports of entry. This thesis explores the impacts of the STCA on migration journeys through the border community of Plattsburgh, New York. I specifically focused on understanding these impacts through an examination of the types of infrastructure and objects associated with migration in this region. Guided by a feminist political geography methodology, I conducted four interviews with local community members and used participant observation methods to construct an understanding of the regional geography. Additionally, drawing from my background in archaeology, I integrated the use of the archaeological concept of materiality to aid in my analysis of how both advocates and migrants interacted with infrastructure, institutions, and objects in the community. This thesis bridges the fields of border studies and archaeology by applying materiality to migration journeys, providing not only a theoretical contribution to these fields, but also an application that furthers our understanding of where and how migrant spaces emerged within the Plattsburgh community, and how artifacts associated with these spaces facilitated relationships between advocates and migrants.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Work described in this thesis received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “ARTIFACTS OF MIGRATION: EXAMINING THE IMPACTS OF CANADA’S BORDER POLICIES IN A BORDER COMMUNITY”, No. Pro00131853, JUNE. 26, 2023.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
CBSA	Canada Border Services Agency
CUNY	City University of New York
IRB	Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
JCEO	Joint Council for Economic Opportunity
ONA	Office for New Americans
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
STCA	Safe Third Country Agreement
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Just the, the whole space, the idea that, that little road in Upstate New York and southern Quebec became a crossroad of the world.

-Augustine

Augustine, an advocate I interviewed during my 2023 fieldwork in Plattsburgh, New York, is speaking about the Roxham Road unofficial border crossing located on the Quebec-New York State border. This crossing emerged as a loophole in the Canada-US Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA), in which migrants could claim asylum through unofficial border crossings. Before the closure of Roxham Road in March 2023, an immense amount of media coverage led to an increased awareness of this crossing to migrants worldwide. By referring to Roxham Road as a “crossroad of the world,” Augustine is speaking to how this heightened knowledge spurred a dramatic increase in the use of this space despite it being a dirt path located on a small country road that dead ends between Quebec and New York State.

This thesis bridges the field of border studies with archaeological concepts to study contemporary migration journeys of people who arrived in Plattsburgh, New York with the intent of crossing at Roxham Road. By understanding not only how migrants move through geographic regions, but also how they interact with local community members, infrastructure, institutions, and objects, we can make sense of the impacts of border policies on their journeys. Just as Augustine attributed expanded awareness of Roxham Road to it becoming “a crossroad of the world,” in applying theories of both border studies and archaeology, this thesis became, in essence, a crossroad of two disciplines.

In this chapter, I will introduce the implementation of the Canada-US Safe Third Country Agreement border policy and how the Roxham Road crossing emerged as a response. This chapter will conclude with my research objectives and an outline of the thesis going forward.

1.1 Canada-US Safe Third Country Agreement

There has been a broad global trend toward the externalization of asylum, with many countries like Australia, the United States, and others within the European Union, preventing migrants from being able to arrive on their territories to make an asylum claim (Frelick et al., 2016; Hyndman and Mountz, 2008). Hyndman and Mountz (2008) termed this practice as ‘*neo-refoulement*,’ which builds from the principle of *non-refoulement* that underpins the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees that prevents states from returning people seeking asylum without first reviewing their claim. In this vein, *non-refoulement* is defined as “the return of asylum seekers and other migrants to transit countries or regions of origin *before* they reach the sovereign territory in which they could make a claim” (p. 250). Hyndman and Mountz (2008, p.268) argue that safe third country policies are one example of the ways in which countries make use of *neo-refoulement*, as they “create a geographical game of hopscotch for asylum seekers, with fewer and fewer spaces through which to pass to make an asylum claim.”

In the context of this study, the Canada-US Safe Third Country Agreement is a policy concerned with how Canada and the US aim to manage refugee and asylum claims made at the shared land border. Within this agreement, both Canada and the US are designated as ‘safe third countries,’ which means that whichever country a refugee arrives in first, is the country where they must make their claim (Falconer, 2019; Frenyo, 2022). Prior to March 2023, the STCA only applied to official ports of entry along the shared border; however, this unusual geography of the

STCA introduced a “loophole” in the policy. This loophole enabled migrants to pass into either country through unofficial points of entry, such as Roxham Road, to claim asylum without being returned to their first country of arrival (Falconer, 2019). As a result, scholars have raised concerns and proposed that the STCA is “more likely to produce illegality than reduce it” (Macklin, 2005, p. 419), and this was seen as migrants began using the Roxham Road crossing in response to the implementation of the policy.

I have identified three main themes within the scholarship that discuss the STCA: (1) predictions related to the outcomes of implementation; (2) differences in legal procedures between Canada and the US; and (3) current border security technology. Prior to the implementation of the STCA in 2004, scholars discussed their predictions for the outcomes and effects of the policy. Both Cutler (2004) and Macklin (2005) commented on anticipated national security impacts, arguing that the STCA would likely lead to an increase in human smuggling and irregular migration along the Canada-US border. This anticipated outcome of the policy was further examined by Sarbit (2003), who analyzed the potential effectiveness of the STCA in addressing two of the arguments made by Canadian officials for its implementation. The first included framing the policy as a response to national security threats, as concerns among the general Canadian public had risen after the September 11th terrorist attacks on the US. The fear was that terrorists would infiltrate the asylum claim system to enter Canada. The second framed the STCA as a way to deter perceived abuse of the asylum system, wherein officials argued there was a need for the STCA in order to prevent migrants from ‘shopping’ around for a better country to live in while facing persecution. ‘Shopping’ had also been perceived as an act that would delegitimize the migrants’ asylum claims.

The above arguments ultimately revolved around the geographic origin of the refugee seeking asylum. Sarbit (2003) used the term “flight path” – the direct or indirect geographical route refugees take to make their asylum claim in Canada – to make note of how the STCA places a greater emphasis on the route and potential ‘asylum shopping’ than on the reasons for claiming asylum. This is supported by Sarbit’s (2003) example of the ‘credibility’ of the path that refugees of Roma ethnicity in Poland might take to Canada, versus the path Central American refugees might take. For instance, refugees in Poland have the opportunity to travel from Poland to Canada via direct flight, whereas Central American refugees are more likely to have travelled through multiple different countries. In this case, Sarbit (2003) said, “Canadian geography rather than Canadian humanity influences who has access to the Canadian refugee system” (p. 145).

Simultaneously to the implementation of the STCA, academics suggested that the reasons offered for the implementation of the STCA were insufficient to justify the policy and predicted that it would not contribute to a more efficient immigration system. Recent work by Frenyo (2022) confirms these predictions based on the circumstances of the loophole in the STCA – documenting an increase in migrants using unofficial points of entry along the Canada-US border since 2004. Before the STCA expanded in 2023, the application of the policy explicitly to official border crossings had contributed to an increased sense of vulnerability around the border in terms of irregular migration patterns.

In connection to the second theme, researchers had also examined the differences in legal procedures between Canada and the United States, as well as the designation of the US as a ‘safe’ country for refugees (Alrob & Shields, 2020; Arnett, 2005; Cutler, 2004). These differences form part of the legal challenge of the STCA before the Supreme Court. Arbel (2013) pointed out that the original intentions for the implementation of the STCA differed between

Canada and the United States, as Canada wanted it for immigration monitoring, while the US wanted it for counterterrorism purposes. Settlage (2012) and Moore (2007) note that these types of inconsistencies in legal procedures often result in non-*refoulement* violations. Non-*refoulement* is a principle of the international refugee regime that states, “you cannot be deported or sent back to a country in which your life or freedom may be in danger on account of your race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, n.d.).

As an example of how approaches to particular cases differ between the two countries, the United States does not recognize gender-based violence as a viable reason for asylum, whereas Canada does (Akibo-Betts, 2006; Arnett, 2005). Asthana (2011) argues that women being sent back to their country of origin or being denied access to an asylum claim due to policies such as the STCA is a violation of non-*refoulement* principles. Moore (2007) notes that this can ultimately result in the US participating in direct *refoulement* and Canada in indirect *refoulement*. In the above case, the STCA is a blockade that prevents women from seeking asylum if they are unable to move from the US into Canada. The inconsistencies in legal procedures between two countries under the same agreement conflict as they should be working together to achieve the same, outcome. Cutler (2004) reinforces this question of how the US can be designated as safe for refugees when the country participates in *refoulement* practices.

Lastly, since its implementation, the STCA has been the subject of several cases before the Supreme Court of Canada. The most mentioned among the literature is the 2007 John Doe case (Glen, 2008), in which the STCA was ruled unconstitutional as it was found to be in violation of several sections of human rights within the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In 2008, the federal government appealed this ruling, and it was overturned by the

Federal Court of Appeal on matters of law rather than on the facts of the case (Settlage, 2012). In October 2022, the STCA was once again under examination by the Supreme Court with intervenors arguing it violates the human rights of refugee claimants. The Court issued its ruling in June 2023 that returned one of the questions to the lower court (Swan, 2022; Tasker, 2023); as of time of writing, the case has not yet been heard.

During the first Trump Presidency, and specifically starting in 2017, there was an increase in migration from the United States to Canada (Alrob & Shields, 2020). This was due to anti-immigration proposals from President Donald Trump, including efforts to build a ‘wall’ between Mexico and the US (Muller & Guthrie, 2020). As reported by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) (n.d.), there was an intake of 18,062 refugee claims between February and December 2017.¹ In Quebec alone, during 2017, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) (n.d.) reported that there were 18,836 refugees intercepted by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). These interceptions were crossings that were made at unofficial ports of entry, such as Roxham Road. Figure 1.1 summarizes entries to Canada at unauthorized points between 2017 and 2024.

¹ The IRB website notes that there is no intake data recorded for January 2017 as the IRB changed their data collection and reporting system at that time.

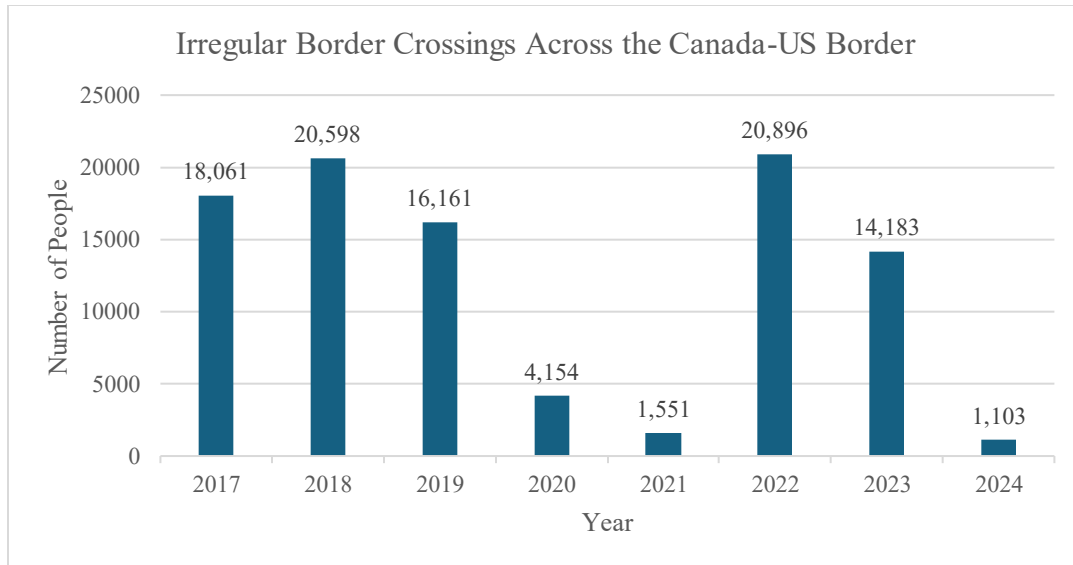


Figure 1.1. Graph of Irregular Crossings from February 2017 – December 2024.²

Prior to 2017, the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) reported irregular crossings through interceptions made by the RCMP after which migrants were taken to official ports of entry (Government of Canada, n.d.; Leuprecht, 2019). The numbers associated with this data include approximately 3,715 in 2014; 4,280 in 2015; and 7,355 in 2016 (Government of Canada, n.d.). These numbers are not reflected in Figure 1.1 as the Canadian government created a new category of tracking irregular border crossings as of 2017 (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, n.d.). Note that in 2020 and 2021, the land border was closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a smaller number of crossings. As soon as the border reopened in 2022, the numbers once again increased. I have included the data for 2024 to demonstrate how the official closure of Roxham Road in March 2023 led to a dramatic drop in entries.

In response to the sudden increase in migration during 2017, then-Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Ahmed Hussen, proposed a plan to ‘modernize’ the

² Data obtained from the intake column of IRB Irregular Border Crosser Statistics.

STCA (Wright, 2018). This plan involved the use of biometrics to more efficiently track migration flows across the Canada-US border (Topak et al., 2015). The idea of modernizing the STCA continued to float around as the IRB reported an intake of 20,891 refugee claims between January and December 2022, with the IRCC reporting 39,171 RCMP interceptions in Quebec. These numbers demonstrate that there was still a significant amount of people crossing the border and trying to navigate the geography of the STCA. Since the initial discussions surrounding the need to modernize the STCA that emerged in 2017, there had been little explanation offered by Canadian officials for how this would be achieved and what it might look like. Negotiations continued behind the scenes, because on March 25th, 2023, former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, along with former President Joe Biden, announced the expansion of the STCA to the entire land border. This meant that the Roxham Road processing centre, which had been opened to address the increase in people crossing the border to seek asylum in Canada, would officially close. Later in this thesis, I will discuss the initial and current impacts of the STCA expansion and Roxham Road closure on migration.

In addition to concerns about the human rights implications of the STCA, other researchers have argued that the policy has changed the geography of refuge around the Canada-US border. Young (2022) argues that the STCA created in-between border spaces for migrants to navigate. The idea of a ‘shifting border’ contributed to the unusual geography of how the STCA was applied to the border from its implementation in 2004 through to its expansion in 2023. At the time, it only applied at official land ports of entry, thus pushing people to cross at unofficial ports of entry and make their asylum claims inland. For example, Arbel (2013) expands on the Court of Appeal’s decision by examining the ‘static’ and ‘shifting’ border principles under the STCA. The aforementioned 2007 John Doe case, that went before the Supreme Court, was

overturned on procedural elements rather than on the merits of the case. In her examination of the case, Arbel (2013) analyzes how “each court’s conception about the location and operation of the border influenced the results obtained in each case” (p.66). Therefore, because John Doe did not make his asylum claim at the Canadian border out of fear of being rejected and sent back to the US, the Federal Court decided that, under the ‘shifting’ border principle, the Canadian border had moved to him. However, the Federal Court of Appeal argued that under the ‘static’ border principle, John Doe’s case was invalid because he had not presented himself at the border to make the claim. This case demonstrates that the border is not always static and can conceptually be moved (Hyndman & Mountz, 2020). With these principles working simultaneously, the border is now both in one place and in another, thus allowing the Federal Court of Appeal to reach any decision they desire.

While scholarship written on the STCA frequently discusses the outcomes, statistics, and drawbacks of the implementation of the policy, there is very little work done to address the people themselves who have been affected by this border policy. This is a significant gap in this research area as it is important to understand the impacts that border policies have on the people who interact with them. However, it is understandable that it is difficult to access stories of lived experience of migrants with precarious status, due to the legal and ethical boundaries, as well as the levels of comfort of the migrants themselves. When developing my methodology for this project, I had anticipated the unlikelihood of speaking directly with people who have crossed or attempted to cross the Canada-US border. As an alternative, I decided to engage with local advocates and community members in Plattsburgh, as they had firsthand experiences and interactions with migrants passing through the community. I also used artifacts connected to these border spaces and migration journeys as a proxy for examining the impacts of the shifting

and unusual geographies of the STCA. Roxham Road is one of these unusual spaces created by and associated with the STCA, which is why I focused my analysis of the impacts of border policies on migration at this crossing.

1.2 Roxham Road

Roxham Road emerged as an unofficial port of entry due to the funneling effects of the implementation of the STCA (Cote-Boucher et al., 2023). It had also become an increasingly busy unofficial border crossing and garnered a high amount of media coverage (Smith, 2022). In this section, I will examine the limited research conducted on migrants who have crossed at Roxham Road (Figures 1.2 & 1.3) and artistic projects centred on the crossing that bring awareness to these migration journeys.



Figure 1.2. Roxham Road Sign.



Figure 1.3. Dead End Sign Leading to the Roxham Road Crossing.

Smith (2022) conducted a study that focused on the reasons why migrants might choose to cross the border at Roxham Road. He did so by interviewing people who had previously crossed and determined two major components behind their decision making. Most of the people that Smith (2022) interviewed were living with precarious legal status in the US. They revealed that the driving factor for crossing the border stemmed from the fear of deportation after the Trump administration announced policy changes in the US. Their reason for choosing Roxham Road was due to the accessibility of information in the media concerning how to cross the border there and what the procedure would entail. Romero (2021) asked similar questions to refugees living in Canada, regarding the decision-making process and influential factors for crossing the border. Though, she expanded further by also interviewing case workers at refugee centres and Canadian government officials. Case workers were chosen as they can provide insight into the

process of mediating and advocating for refugees, while government officials can highlight the relevant relationships between provincial and federal policies.

Both Smith (2022) and Romero (2021) interviewed refugee claimants on their decision to seek refuge in Canada in response to the Trump administration policy changes. Smith (2022) conducted many short interviews with migrants, focusing specifically on their reasons for crossing at Roxham Road. He did not, however, spend very much time with them to gain an in-depth insight into their lives. Romero (2021) focused on the experience of the process after crossing rather than their experiences of crossing at Roxham Road. Given these projects, it is important to note that while there is an abundance of media attention surrounding the Roxham Road border crossing, there is very little scholarly work done specifically on migrants who have used this point of entry or the advocates who supported them.

In addition, another mode of research conducted on Roxham Road examines visual representations of lived experiences of crossing the border. These representations cover the collection and documentation of artifacts through photographs of migrants crossing at Roxham Road. Fan (2022) and Cressman (2019) highlight the visual documentation of migration journeys and stories by examining Michel Huneault's 2017 project titled, *Roxham*. Huneault's project consists of a series of photographs and audio recordings that document the lived experiences of migrants crossing at Roxham Road. The photographs highlight the objects being carried by migrants whilst masking the identity of the person, thus giving viewers an opportunity to both understand the situation and empathize with the migrants when they are able to see familiar objects. Another project, *Roxham Road to North Elba*, by Bill McDowell, ran from October 2022 to January 2023 through Burlington City Arts in Burlington, Vermont. This display was a photographic series that focused on the relation between current migration journeys through

Roxham Road and historical evidence of the Underground Railroad. McDowell aimed to link the past with the present to inform current thoughts and perspectives of immigration and borders. Some photographs include people crossing at Roxham Road, as well as objects left behind near the border crossing. These types of displays not only bring attention to what is happening politically but also make it easier for stories to be easily disseminated to the public.

Through a comparison between visual representations and scholarly work focused on statistical analyses, Fan (2022) notes that, “images and impactful headlines were widely distributed on media, while migrants and refugees barely had the chance to tell their own stories” (p. 63). Projects such as *Roxham* and *Roxham Road to North Elba*, provide opportunities both for migrants to have a voice in the events they have experienced and for public awareness. Similarly, the main focus for my thesis is to contribute to the raised awareness surrounding migration journeys affected by border policies in the Quebec/New York State Region. In the following section, I will outline my three research objectives for this project.

1.3 Research Objectives

This research project aims to better understand the geographies of migration journeys and impacts concerning the Canada-US border. The first objective for this project is to examine the unintended consequences of the STCA by asking how it impacted both migration journeys through the border community of Plattsburgh, New York, and community members within Plattsburgh. Scholarship on the STCA demonstrates that the effects of this border policy have been more harmful than beneficial and can be displayed through the unintended loopholes, like Roxham Road, that emerged in both the policy and the border. While media reports demonstrate a high level of awareness of how to get to this crossing, migration journeys to Roxham Road are

unavoidably populated with “points of immobility” along the way (Mainwaring and Brigden, 2016). Mainwaring and Brigden (2016) mention that points of immobility are a forced pause in a migrant’s journey in direct response to border policies like the STCA. There are various reasons for these pauses, including applying for visas, waiting for family members, securing a job to support the next leg of the journey, and turning to human smugglers (Freund, 2015). As I discussed earlier, Young (2022) mentioned that the STCA facilitated the idea of a shifting border. In my analysis of the effects of the STCA and points of immobility on migration journeys, I explore how the border is experienced in a multitude of locations ranging from New York City, to Plattsburgh, to the boundary line itself.

The second objective asks how changes in the STCA affected the operation of existing and emergent infrastructure and corresponding institutions in Plattsburgh and bordering regions. With the implementation of the STCA and the subsequent increase in migration, Plattsburgh emerged as one of the last major points of immobility for migrants before crossing the border at Roxham Road. In direct response to this, several taxi companies, motels, gas stations, and members of the local advocacy group, Plattsburgh Cares, began working together to provide services to migrants. Over the years, migrants have been dropped off by buses at the Mountain Mart, a gas station on the outskirts of Plattsburgh. From there, they either met with Plattsburgh Cares members to arrange a room at the nearby Rip Van Winkle Motel or were picked up by taxi drivers and transported to Roxham Road. In my analysis, I discuss the ways in which institutions like the Mountain Mart and Rip Van Winkle Motel were repurposed by both members of the community and migrants who were passing through and how infrastructure, such as the Roxham Road border patrol station, was constructed to control and manage migrants.

The third objective is to understand to what extent artifacts of the border region can serve as tangible representations of border policies at work by asking how materiality, in the absence of migrants, can inform aspects of migration journeys. Materiality of the border refers to the objects left behind or discarded within the region, as well as objects given to migrants by community and advocacy members. The conceptual framework for this project, outlined in chapter two, further discusses how interactions between migrants, community members, and objects generate a rounded perspective of how materiality shapes and influences perceptions of migration journeys. While we cannot presume that there is meaning attached to the objects left behind, their presence promotes aspects of the visibility and tangibility of border policies. The shift in where and how the STCA applies to the border presents both a challenge and an opportunity for considering the geography and materiality of the border, border control practices, and migrant journeys.

This thesis will contribute to our understanding of how Canada-US border policies affect the operation and look of migration journeys through Plattsburgh, New York. Specifically, in connection to my second and third research objectives, certain spaces and objects within the border region can indicate where migrants and community members interacted with each other, as well as where they encountered the STCA and how they navigated it. Additionally, my methodological contributions point to interviews with community members who had firsthand experiences with migrants, combined with my own observations of how the community interacted with each other, the city infrastructure, and migrant material culture. These methods provided a well-rounded perspective of the geography of migration journeys through Plattsburgh to Roxham Road.

1.4 Thesis Outline

In Chapter Two: *Contextualizing Migration Journeys*, I contextualize the migration journeys taken through Plattsburgh and to Roxham Road in response to the effects of the STCA, introduce my conceptual framework, and provide maps to situate the locations of the research site and important spaces within it.

In Chapter Three: *Methodology*, I discuss how feminist political geography informed my approach to examine the everyday experiences of Plattsburgh community members who regularly interacted with migrants. Specifically, I used interviews and participant observation methods for data collection. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the importance of taking a reflexive approach to research and the limitations of this project.

In Chapter Four: *Repurposed Spaces and Places*, I analyze my observations of the different routes and transportation options available to migrants during their journey to Roxham Road. Within the chapter, I discuss the impacts of the STCA on multiple infrastructures within Plattsburgh and surrounding border regions, focusing on the pre-existing but repurposed buildings, and the purposeful, installed interventions to manage migration.

In Chapter Five: *Artifacts of Migration*, I discuss the different objects associated with migration journeys, where they are found, and how they are circulated into the community and elsewhere. This chapter also sheds light on how everyday experiences impact the humanity of migration journeys and the effect border policies have on multiple people.

In Chapter Six: *Conclusion*, I conclude the thesis with an overview of my key findings linked to my research objectives and a discussion on future research opportunities that may apply to broader contexts.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUALIZING MIGRATION JOURNEYS

In this chapter, I will contextualize different components of migration journeys that influence how they operate. Given that the STCA is unique to the Canada-US border, the appearance of these journeys to Plattsburgh and Roxham Road differ from those taken to official border crossings. I will introduce my conceptual framework, in which I discuss approaches taken by both archaeologists and social sciences researchers to understand a multitude of factors that influence journeys from start to finish. Finally, I have provided maps of the area to contextualize the research site and other relevant spaces.

2.1 Migration Journeys

2.1.1 Points of Immobility

In many research projects centred on the geographies of migration journeys, scholars focus on the beginning and end stages of the journey, with little attention given to what happened in-between. As I had laid out in my first research objective, some scholars have begun to shift their research to focus on these in-between spaces, noting that journeys include points of immobility in which the migration journey is stalled for a variety of reasons (Mainwaring & Brigden, 2016; Collyer, 2010). Mainwaring and Brigden (2016) explain that “clandestine journeys are often punctuated with long moments of immobility that blur the sharp edges drawn by academics and policymakers to demarcate the beginning and end of the migration process” (p. 15). On a related note, Collyer (2010) argues that “the characteristics of fragmented journeys highlight the drawbacks of viewing migration as a relatively rapid transition between defined points of origin and destination” (p. 279). The above quotes demonstrate that the entire migration process needs to be acknowledged to understand migrant journeys.

In her ethnographic research on the migrant journey through Mexico, Brigden (2016) observed and interviewed migrants in Mexico who were waiting to make an asylum claim in either Canada or the US but had been stalled for a long period of time. The article's title, *Improvised Transnationalism*, points to Brigden's (2016) observations that migrants would alter the appearance of their national identity to become 'invisible' or provide a sense of anonymity when passing through different territories. In particular, Brigden (2016) mentioned a story of a woman from El Salvador who had been waiting in Mexico for her asylum claim to go through. Before making the journey to the US, the woman had considered borrowing documents from local Mexican children for her own child, in the hopes of passing more easily through the border. Broadly, there were also situations in which migrants would simply change the way they dressed, acted, and spoke in order to best match the culture of the country they were in (Brigden, 2016).

Similarly, Freund (2015) focused on these in-between stages of the journey and how migrants make home in many different places by "draw[ing] on multiple national, regional, local, family, and autobiographical narratives of the various locales in which they have lived along their migration routes" (p. 62). In particular, Freund (2015) interviewed a woman from El Salvador who had made it to the US, worked for a year to earn money, returned to her home country to retrieve her children, returned to the US to apply for Canadian visas, and ultimately settled in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This attempt to create a sense of home during each leg of her journey, provides an example of the many stops migrants encounter during the process.

While acknowledged but often overlooked in research centered on migration journeys, points of immobility are not unusual occurrences. As demonstrated, there are many factors that influence and shape the circumstances behind points of immobility and how they play out, and

when these stalled periods are brought to the forefront, they provide clarity to the migration process as a whole.

2.1.2 Visibility of the Border

While policies on paper and general public discourse portray a borderline as a hard, unmoveable divide between two countries, researchers have demonstrated that, in practice, the location of the border can be challenged. For example, Brigden and Mainwaring (2016) discuss how the act of internal policing, such as highway checkpoints within a country, restructures the border in a way that allows it to move and intercept migrants. These acts expand the borderzone into adjacent areas and can go as far as peripheral countries, much like how the STCA shifted the border to determine the outcomes of the 2007 John Doe case, which I discussed in the previous chapter. As such, Young (2022) also discussed shifting borders in relation to internal policing by providing an example of a woman, who is originally from Honduras but was living in the southern border region of Mexico, who frequently navigated spaces that were in-between the border. These spaces exist along the Mexico-Guatemala border region in which internal policing checkpoints extend and push the border further into Mexico, thus allowing a space between the borders to emerge. By conceptually expanding the physical border, “these internal checkpoints mean that the immediate borderzone becomes a space that is literally in-between borders” (Young, 2022, p. 581). In connection to the unusual geography produced by the STCA, the concept of a shifting border both discouraged and promoted unofficial points of entry along the Canada-US border (Young, 2022).

This scholarship on migrant journeys asks us to think about where the border actually takes place. It pushes us to consider that a borderzone may not be only or directly at the physical borderline and helps to explain how “the border effect has become more invisible and diffuse and

can be encountered everywhere, and not just in borderlands themselves” (Hamilakis, 2018, p. 9). Hamilakis (2018) points out that while the physical locations of borders are becoming increasingly more challenged and shifting towards invisibility, migration journeys highlight these border regions through tangible, material objects left behind.

De León (2012) and Soto (2017) both examine the physical traces of migration journeys that are left behind in the Mexico-US borderlands. De León (2012) focused on objects such as clothing, shoes, and water bottles that are scattered around the Sonoran Desert by migrants who have attempted the border crossing journey. These objects were representations of migrants on the move who had to make decisions on what to keep and what to discard. Soto (2017) directs attention to the markings and graffiti that were created in highway culverts by migrants as a way to indicate that they had been there or to warn others where border patrol might be stationed. Brigden (2018) also conducted research focusing on migrant material culture along a migration corridor in Mexico. However, this study consisted of a different viewpoint by examining how the infrastructure of the border region can become a visible structure for migrants to orient themselves within space as they “converge en masse in freight train yards in southern Mexico as a site for both information and transportation” (p. 76). These three examples of research studies represent the visible components of migration journeys when the people who made the journeys are often unseen or inaccessible. This concept informed my approach to my project as I focused on how material entities, such as objects and infrastructure, aid in providing visibility to those who make migration journeys through Plattsburgh, New York.

2.1.3 Perceptions of Journeys

In an attempt to understand the different perceptions that people have towards migration journeys, Tyrikos-Ergas (2018) conducted a study on how people interact with and perceive

migrant material culture by focusing on life jackets left behind by refugees on a Greek island. For locals, the life jackets represented evidence of an invasion, whereas at the same time, celebrities were using demonstrations of the life jackets to raise awareness in pro-refugee presentations. During an interaction with a young refugee who had previously owned one of the life jackets, Tyrikos-Ergas referred to the life jacket as a positive symbol of the girl's journey. However, she had dismissed that thought because she did not want to be reminded of her difficult journey with a tangible representation. The above examples demonstrate four differing perspectives on the symbolism of migrant material culture and showcase the ways in which objects are viewed vary depending on who interacts with them.

The different ways in which migrant material culture is perceived is further supported by Siegenthaler and Bublatzky (2021) who mention a project concerned with the documentation of refugee objects in the Mediterranean. They note that these objects “remain as the only visible testimony of a risky trans-Mediterranean journey and have mostly been found left behind in abandoned refugee boats” (p. 290). Due to the nature of the legality and risks surrounding undocumented migration, opportunities to speak directly to migrants are scarce, thus researchers can turn to examining and interpreting these journeys through the objects left behind. As demonstrated by the previous examples, these objects may represent a variety of narratives for a variety of people, nevertheless, one thing they all have in common is the ability to highlight and make visible the migration journey. An interesting point to note from Siegenthaler and Bublatzky (2021) is their criticism of the use of the terms ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ in reference to migration journeys. Rather, they propose the terms ‘sighted’ and ‘unsighted’ to acknowledge that these journeys and borders exist but are not always physically seen. Siegenthaler and Bublatzky focus on objects to set up archives of migrant's stories as “[objects] remain in the hands of a few

individuals, families or communities who share this experience in a third space, beyond the official narratives of those states which decide over their status and futures.” (p. 286). This highlights that there are stories that go unseen by certain people, i.e., the general public and/or border patrol guards, but are not completely unnoticed. Focusing on objects as tangible representations of migration journeys urges people to acknowledge that these journeys are taking place and pushes back against the implications of using the word ‘invisible’ to describe migration journeys. For this project, I studied objects in a similar way to Siegenthaler and Bublatzky, in the hopes that the objects would serve as a tangible representation of the ways in which border policies affect migration journeys.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

My project title, “Materiality of Migration” is one that combines concepts and theories of archaeological thought with those from the scholarship on migration journeys. I will cover the ways in which both archaeologists and scholars working with object methodologies define the use of artifacts and materiality and show how these two outlooks on objects intertwine to paint a picture of modern migration journeys. I will also explain my use of the term “artifact” to describe different components such as people, infrastructure, geography and landscape, and objects, involved with or representative of migration journeys through Plattsburgh, New York, as well as those that have been affected by these journeys. For example, I am directing attention to the infrastructure and institutions that were either created or went through a process of repurposing in direct response to the increase in migration. This includes the development of self-owned taxi companies, the establishment of Plattsburgh Cares, and the use of the Mountain Mart gas station for advocacy reasons. These are all important components, and I argue that they can be examined through a contemporary archaeological lens as each plays a role in and tells a

story about how shifting border policies, like the STCA, affected migration journeys through Plattsburgh.

For context, my bachelor's degree is in the field of archaeology, though I was also interested in human geography and had taken a course on border studies with Dr. Young. Through this course, I was introduced to the work of Jason De León, mentioned in the previous section. De León is an archaeologist who works with contemporary migrant material culture along the Mexico-US border. From there, I was inspired to continue learning about the possible connections between human geography and archaeology and it led to the hope that I could intertwine my archaeological knowledge and training with border and migration studies into a master's thesis. A significant part of my archaeological training comes from having participated in two archaeological field schools – one at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump in Alberta, Canada, in 2021, and the other at Tel Dhiban, Jordan, in 2023. These experiences provided me with firsthand knowledge and practice of the analysis and cataloguing of artifacts, as well as the opportunity to be immersed in the context of the site and surrounding landscape. While these experiences are directly related to archaeological field work, I was able to take pieces of these practical skills and apply them to my fieldwork in Plattsburgh, including taking note of the directions, distances between locations, and the situational context of the site. In particular, one component of my methodology includes making observations of the geography and landscape. I did so by mapping out important locations relevant to migration journeys and the distances between them, reinforcing the importance of analyzing a geographic landscape in relation to all components rather than looking at each in isolation from the other. My experiences with both archaeology and human geography had initially inspired parts of this thesis and resulted in me

grappling with how to explain the archaeological contribution to the approach I am taking to study migration journeys through Plattsburgh.

2.2.1 Archaeological Methods

In the field of archaeology, the term “artifact” directly corresponds to portable objects made by humans (Renfrew & Bahn, 2016). Examples include dishes, books, and tools. These objects are collected and analyzed by archaeologists to learn about past humans and how they utilized their resources, created relationships, and moved through landscapes. In reference to archaeological research, Renfrew and Bahn (2016) say that the analysis of artifacts at archaeological sites is “most productively studied together with their surrounding landscapes and grouped into regions” (p. 49). Thus, demonstrating that in order for archaeologists to understand the full picture of a site, they must look at all relationships within it from the smallest objects to the landscape as a whole. In the case of migration journeys in Plattsburgh, this means understanding the connections and relationships between spaces and how people interact with them, specifically through their objects and stories.

Related to this, when discussing materiality within the field of archaeology, Praetzellis (2016) says that materiality seeks to “understand how things (not just artifacts) came to represent the unspoken ideas that people infused into them” (p.156), much like how the Mountain Mart had come to represent migration journeys in Plattsburgh, despite its original intended use as a gas station. When taking a “materiality” approach to archaeological research, all aspects of the site, such as relationships between people and the physical world, should be taken into consideration. This is demonstrated through an example Praetzellis (2016) offers about the Easter Island statues, or *moai*. When referring to Sue Hamilton, an archaeologist who based her interpretation of the Easter Island stone heads within the framework of materiality, Praetzellis (2016) points out

that “rather than looking for the answers to specific questions about what happened here, [Hamilton] is trying to get an ‘island-wide understanding’ by looking at the system of quarries and roads that brought the *moai* to their resting places” (p. 160). Praetzellis notes that while examining these statues, archaeologists must consider a range of factors to determine their meaning. This includes not only what the statues were used for and how they were transported, but also the effect and influence this process had on the people. This concept contributes to the outlook I am applying to migration journeys through Plattsburgh as there are many materiality factors, such as infrastructure, transportation, and border policies that define and influence the configuration, experience, and impacts of migration journeys.

Archaeologists such as Jason De León and Gabriella Soto have used their training to apply archaeological concepts to contemporary migration journeys across the Mexico-US border. They analyze the objects migrants either bring with them or leave behind in the Sonoran Desert not only to determine the importance and use of the objects themselves, but also as a guide for tracking these migration journeys through the desert (De León, 2012; Soto, 2017). While De León and Soto focus on the objects associated with migration journeys, both also speak to the different infrastructure and actors involved in the process, whether intentionally or not. De León (2013) opens and concludes his paper with scenes he had observed during his stay in a migrant shelter, thus giving the reader a sense of what this geographical space looks like and how migrants, volunteers, and businesses such as shops selling water bottles, shoes, and snacks, interact with each other and operate in this space. Conversely, Soto (2017) specifically looks at highway culverts where migrants temporarily resided for shelter. These culverts contained physical traces of people moving through them, such as personal items and graffiti, but the focus

of that project was on the interactions between migrants and spaces and how they temporarily create a sense of place while in an unfamiliar and exposed landscape.

In both of the above examples, I have pulled out the concept of infrastructure and how it has a place within migration journeys. The infrastructure in question includes communal buildings and gathering spaces, like in De León's (2013) study, as well as places of ephemeral residence in Soto's (2017). Both articles provide key aspects to how migrants move through spaces and how these spaces evolve over time or are repurposed in response to migration journeys. Specifically, in Soto's (2017) study, we can see that location plays an important role in the function and use of such infrastructure, as the highway culverts had offered a temporary shelter for migrants traversing the desert and in turn, became a key symbol for migration journeys in the region. In the case of the Mountain Mart and the Rip Van Winkle Motel in Plattsburgh, their location, at the fringe of the city, specifically on the highway heading north towards the border, placed them in a prime spot for use by migrants and provided the opportunity for their context to shift from their intended use (a gas station and a motel) to a known place for migrants and advocates to connect.

Building on this, Hamilakis (2018) says that "in the study of migration, [archaeologists] have often shown how landscape can become a crucial material agent in the process of border crossing" (p. 7) and circling back to Praetzellis' (2016) example of the Easter Island *moai*, he notes that "a road is not merely a way of transporting things from one place to another. It is part of a memory-building system by which the journey of the *moai* and red *pukao* and *ahu* stones contributed memories to the features that continued after they were in place" (p. 161-162). In regard to migration journeys through Plattsburgh, infrastructure and physical items such as suitcases left behind by migrants or information posters hung up by advocates can be observed as

representations of the material landscape. This coincides with how the migrants in Soto's (2017) study navigated the Sonoran Desert landscape and in turn, included it as a material agent in the narrative by leaving traces behind such as objects and graffiti markings.

Based on these characteristics, the research conducted by De León (2012) and Soto (2017) informs and contributes to my conceptual framework approach as one part of my analysis is focused on interpreting the function and role institutions have in migration journeys. This includes the Mountain Mart, the Rip Van Winkle Motel, and the RCMP border patrol station located at Roxham Road, among many others.

2.2.2 Ethnoarchaeological Approach

Aligned with the above examples, Hamilakis (2018) uses an ethnoarchaeological approach to analyze contemporary migration sites. Ethnoarchaeology is the study of “both the present-day use and significance of artifacts, buildings, and structures within the living societies in question, and the way these material things become incorporated into the archaeological record” (Renfrew & Bahn, 2016, p. 191). Some archaeologists adopt the use of ethnography in their work to observe how contemporary communities interact with material items in order to understand how their ancestors might have interacted with them.

In his work, Hamilakis (2018) applied these concepts to understand the circumstances and daily lives of people living in refugee camps. In particular, this can be seen through his visit to Moria, the ruins of a refugee camp on the island of Lesbos, Greece, abandoned and destroyed in 2020 due to a fire of unknown cause. While tragic, the fire preserved portions of the last moments in time of Moria and ultimately provided researchers and archaeologists with the ability to ‘excavate’ the refugee camp and in Hamilakis’ (2022) terms, Moria became “more

‘readable,’ better understood as a ruin” (para. 7). While there, he documented physical and tangible signs of migration including buildings, fences, and graffiti in an attempt to capture the lives of migrants who lived there before its destruction. In his study on the materiality of migration in Moria, he stated that “the objects, the ruined structures, the humble materials...are stories in wood and stone and plastic, not in any metaphorical sense but in a directly physical, material, tangible, and experiential sense” (Hamilakis, 2022, para. 8). These material features make up the archaeological landscape of Moria and tell a story about the people who had lived and transited throughout.

2.2.3 Visual Research Methods

Similar to how archaeologists approach their work, researchers who use visual research methods, such as object elicitation, study the relationships between people and their objects through a contemporary lens as they are able to interview living participants. Scholars who utilize object studies are often interested in making sense of the relationship between people and their material culture as personal objects are thought to be an extension of the self and everyday lived experiences (Woodward, 2016). Drawing from an example of a researcher who studies migration and uses object elicitation in their work, Owen (2022) interviewed individuals from the United Kingdom who had recently moved abroad and were keeping their remaining objects in self-storage units as a way to hold onto their belongings without having to make decisions on what to discard during the move. Owen (2022) notes that “what individuals take with them, and what is left behind, are important choices in experiences of mobility” (p. 1004) and that “instability and uncertainty in future life events are instrumental in forming the meaningfulness of an object” (p. 993). In another example, Dudley (2011) worked with the Karenni people, a group of refugees living in long-term refugee camps along the Thailand-Burma border. This

group of people had been forced to flee their home country of Burma and live in these camps indefinitely. In the meantime, they used items they had brought with them, such as yarn and tools, to create a sense of home by hanging them up as decorations, creating pieces of clothing, and building infrastructure similar to that of their previous living conditions.

In both Owen (2022) and Dudley's (2011) studies, it is clear that there are many different approaches to gaining insight about a person's life through their material culture. Both examples demonstrate that the relationship between migration and objects is one of difficult decision making on what objects are the most important when on the move. However, the act of decision making varies greatly between the two as Owen's (2022) participants moved freely and still had access to and possession of their belongings in the storage units, whereas Dudley's (2011) participants were forced to flee and had to make quick decisions in the hopes that the objects they brought with them would be sentimental, but also practical and useful as they were heading into a precarious and uncertain future.

In a public, artistic display, Trinh Mai Thach's installation, *Quiet*, centred on bringing awareness to the lives of Vietnamese refugees by hanging traditional funerary Vietnamese sashes, adorned with printed faces of those lost and words typed from their letters, from the ceiling for people to walk under. Espiritu and Duong (2018) say that "in hanging the sashes from the ceiling, making them too high to read, Thach invites the viewer to imagine rather than read the letters' content, thereby bypassing the risk of further exposing the families' private grief to curious strangers" (pg. 595-596). Thach's art installation was able to represent the complexities between bringing awareness to migrants' lives and situations while maintaining confidentiality.

In this study, I am drawing from both archaeological and social sciences approaches, specifically ways of analyzing objects, infrastructure, institutions, and the geography and

landscape of the border region. Due to the precarity of migrants passing through Plattsburgh, I elected to make use of artifacts as a proxy for understanding migrant journeys. Taking inspiration from these different areas of research and how researchers handle artifacts in an interdisciplinary context, I am reinforcing that there is not one, singular aspect that defines the whole migration journey.

2.3 Mapping Key Sites

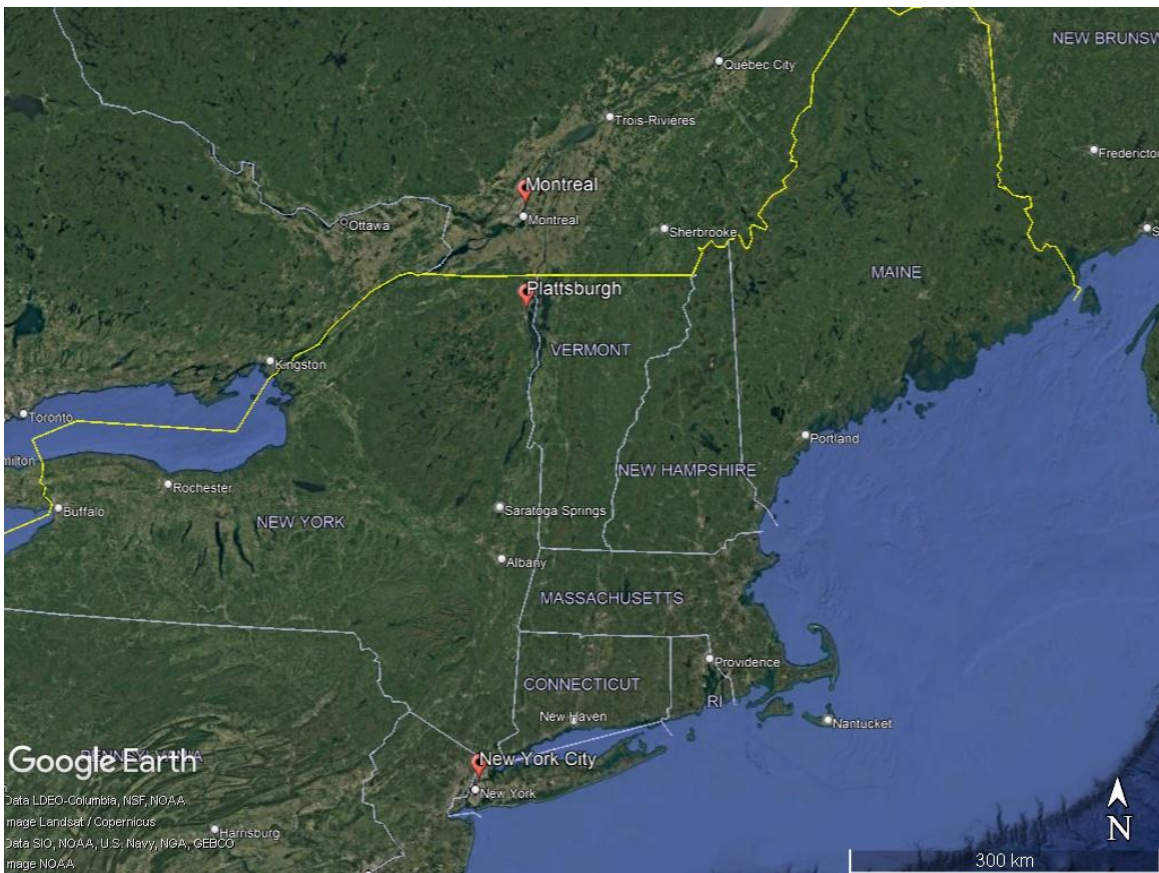


Figure 2.1. Plattsburgh in relation to New York City and Montreal.

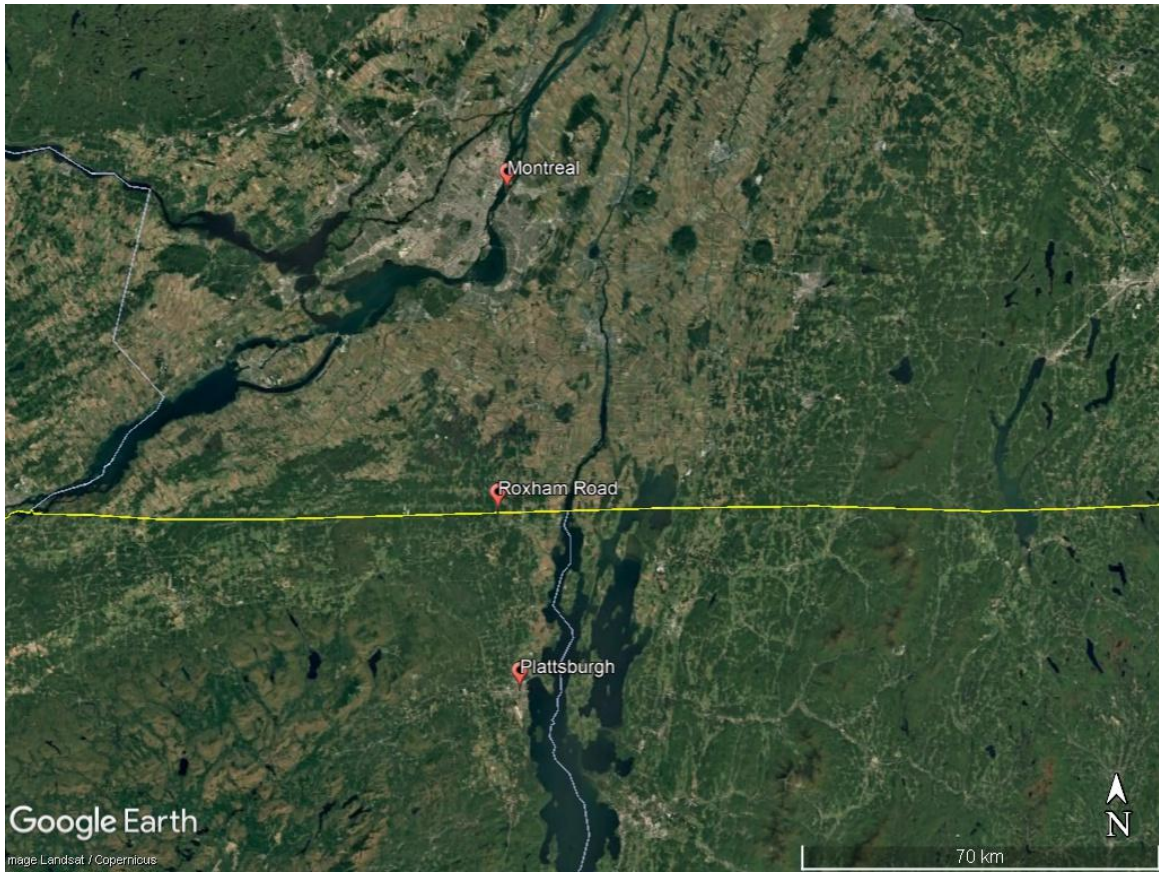


Figure 2.2. Roxham Road in relation to Plattsburgh and Montreal.

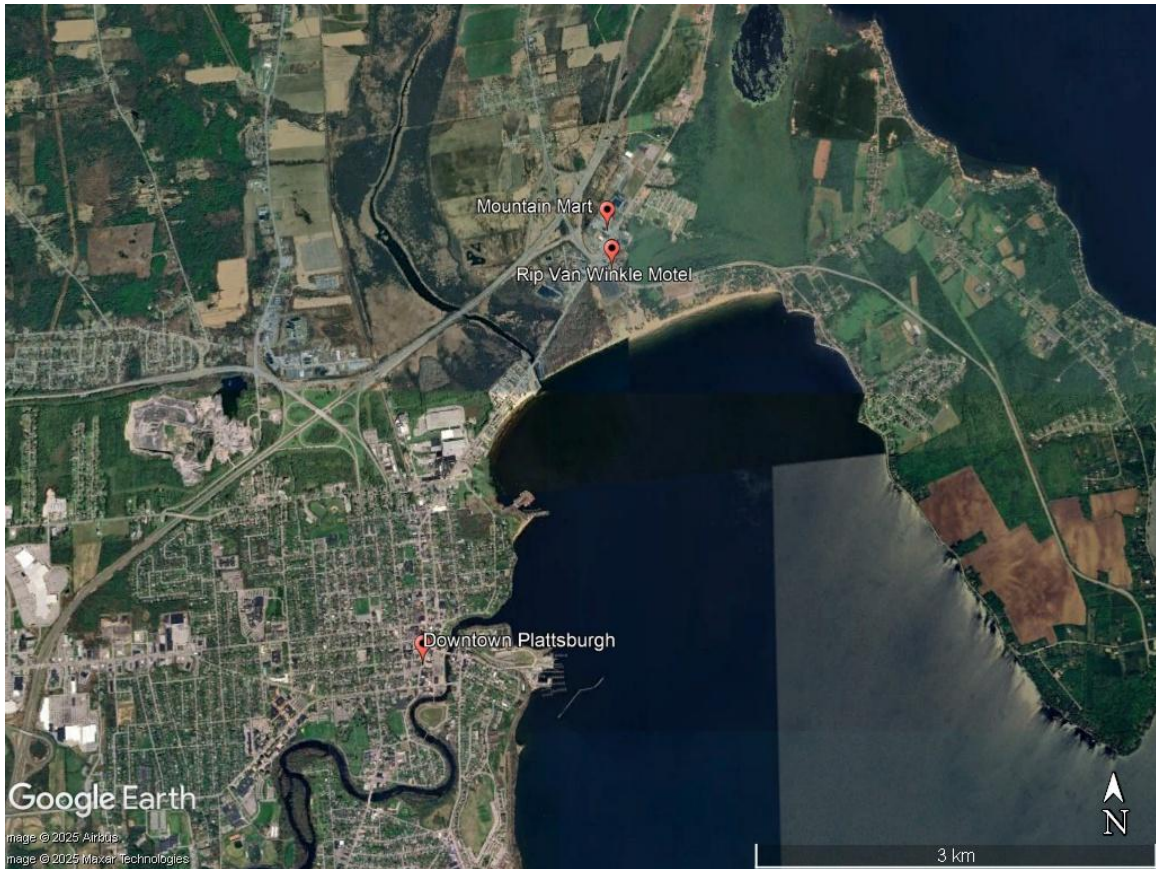


Figure 2.3. The Mountain Mart and Rip Van Winkle Motel locations in Plattsburgh.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I contextualized the different components of migration journeys that impact the way they look and how they operate. These components connect to immobility during the journey, the operation of the border itself, and different perceptions that influence the overall point of view on migration journeys. Each describes moments within journeys that are unpredictable. In regard to the conceptual framework, it will be utilized throughout this thesis as a way of thinking about the process as a whole, including the spaces and objects associated with migration journeys through Plattsburgh to Roxham Road.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I will discuss feminist political geography and how this theoretical framework informed the methodology of this project. As such, my data collection plan consisted of a multiple-methods approach by employing the use of both interviews and participant-observation. The aim of this project's methodological plan was to include the lived experiences of border community actors in the narrative. To do so, I visited Plattsburgh, New York for two weeks in August 2023 to conduct interviews with local community members about their experiences with migrants and shifting border policies. To supplement the interviews, I used participant-observation methods to map the geography and landscape of Plattsburgh and its surrounding border regions, as well as observe how the community interacts and operates. In August 2024, I returned to Plattsburgh for a few days to take note of any changes that had occurred over the previous year, though this visit was strictly for observational purposes, and I did not conduct any interviews.

3.1 Feminist Political Geography

Feminist political geography informed my methodological approach for this study. Over the past two decades, feminist political geography has morphed, grown, and come to represent a wider umbrella encompassing frameworks such as feminist geopolitics (Hyndman, 2019). With roots in the 1990s and early 2000s (Kofman and Peake, 1990; Hyndman, 2001; Hyndman, 2004), feminist geopolitics works to bridge feminist theory with political geography and “spans a range of subjects and scales...illustrat[ing] that global processes, whether economic, political, or socio-cultural, are experienced in localized, everyday, embodied ways” (Hyndman, 2001, p. 212). The broader lens of feminist political geography has taken such concepts further by pushing for social

change, reworking how knowledge is produced, and advocating for an “openness to new voices, perspectives, relationships, and strategies” (Staeheli & Kofman, 2004, p. 6), all of which challenges the masculinist approach to research.

Staeheli and Kofman (2004) and other scholars in feminist political geography (Hyndman, 2019; Sundberg, 2003) have critiqued the masculinist approach of examining knowledge from an all-knowing or universal perspective, as it disregards the impact of power structures on the experiences and stories of people. To counter masculinist approaches to research, Sundberg (2003) emphasizes that research must focus on marginalized bodies, places, and forms of knowledge, and the researcher must therefore ensure they are not inadvertently using their position of social status, race, or gender to shape the research design. Thus, following a masculinist approach and framing researchers as objective and unbiased not only ignores power relations but limits the knowledge that can be gained.

When researching marginalized groups of people, Staeheli and Kofman (2004) state that feminist political geography redirects attention to the “structures and processes that create marginality” (p. 5). Therefore, to examine political processes and how policies realistically unfold on the ground, an understanding of how those structures were created must be considered. This is illustrated by Mainwaring’s (2016) focus on migrant agency and how the ways in which the media depicts migrants and speaks for them takes away migrants’ opportunities to share their personal experiences and tell their stories. A research focus on feminist political geography enhances our understanding of how policies directly affect people and provides an opportunity for critique and potential action on inequalities caused by political structures.

A common theme I encountered while examining the literature regarding migration across the Canada-US border is that there is a tendency to focus on the statistics of migration

while glossing over the stories of the people whom these policies affect. As a framework, feminist political geography allows people, such as migrants who are directly affected by various policies and practices, to determine what the narrative should look like. Reynolds, Wu, and Young (2023) aimed to bring narratives of migrants into focus as foundational to understanding the histories and geographies of the Canada-US border. Their article opens with an excerpt by Maria, a Salvadoran woman, who was told she was a criminal simply for crossing the border into the US. Maria responded by saying she “didn’t kill nobody. ...[she] just crossed” (p. 1199). This disconnect concerning the legality of crossing the border is what spurred Reynolds et al., (2023) to take on a counter-archiving methodology for their project, which they defined as one that “positions people who have been displaced as important producers and bearers of knowledge whose voices are central to ongoing struggles over membership and human rights, and to understanding both how the border functions and their impacts” (p. 1199). This can be supported by Tellez’s (2008) fieldwork based along the northern Mexico border, where she researched gender discrimination and violence against women. She did so by listening to the narratives of female activists in the region and placing emphasis on how the border is “not just a site for ‘leaving and arriving’ but also includes within this site the lived experience and agency of these migrant women through the narratives of Mexicana border crossers” (p. 547). Methods that involve listening to the narratives of people who are often overlooked and spoken for rather than with, provide a better understanding of the ways migrants and border communities are affected by border policies.

Building on the above examples, Hyndman (2019) notes how feminist political geography has sought to “render visible that which has been conveniently partitioned off as private space,” (p. 8) by drawing focus to the layers of diverse structures that inform this

knowledge. Staeheli and Kofman (2004) also consider the concept of private and public spaces by discussing how feminists “attempt to recover the private sphere as a space of politics...by demonstrating the fluidity of the private and public spheres, and by highlighting the ways in which power and experiences from one sphere can infiltrate the other sphere” (p. 9-10). With a focus on the role of the public and private spheres, and the spaces and places in which they emerge and take place, a conversation about the ways in which political structures and policies actually affect and influence lived experiences can be held (Staeheli & Kofman, 2004; Hyndman, 2004).

These conversations lead to a “wider range of perspectives and embodied experiences in research and in politics” (Staeheli & Kofman, 2004, p. 12), fitting well with the purpose of my study, which began with my desire to explore the impacts of the STCA on migration journeys through Plattsburgh by speaking to local community members. Throughout this thesis, I have constructed an understanding of these impacts by examining how community members, such as advocates, taxi drivers, and motel owners, worked together to support migrants arriving in Plattsburgh. These support systems emerged in relatively unexpected spaces and places, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Grounding my research in a border community at the centre of a contemporary border crisis is crucial to understanding the geographies of migration journeys. I made the deliberate decision to interview local advocates and to engage in participant-observation of the community, both of which allowed me to look at the impacts of policies as they played out in personal, localized ways. My focus was on the experiences of community members who witnessed this mass migration event from a stationary point of view, and as such, I decided not to interview migrants themselves. I acknowledge that engaging with migrants would have brought migrants’

voices to the forefront and offered deeper insight into their migration journey experiences through Plattsburgh, as well as what they might have experienced during transit and other points of immobility. However, from the beginning, I was also aware of the innate precarity involved with the subject of migration journeys, particularly due to the heavy researcher, media, and border security presence that had remained consistent over the past few years in this geographical region. Specifically, I am referring to the precarious position of migrants and how they might not have wanted to talk to me out of fear of drawing attention to themselves and being identified, which is a significant reason why I decided to focus on speaking to local community members.

Although my participants were willing to provide context about journeys through Plattsburgh, they were mostly unwilling to talk in-depth about their personal interactions with migrants. This stemmed from both their desire to keep this information confidential, but also that they, themselves, recognized that they did not have the ‘insider’ knowledge that migrants would have had. Using a feminist political geography approach in my study provided a lens for understanding what can be known about how community members interact with, make relationships with, and create support systems for migrants journeying through Plattsburgh. Interviews with community members who interacted with migrants, observations of the types of infrastructure and objects associated with migration in this region, and examining the regional geography and landscape helped me gain an overall understanding of the impacts and outcomes of the STCA on migration journeys in this region.

3.2 Interviews

3.2.1 Narrative Methods

Tracy (2019) discusses that interviews themselves, “enable the researcher to stumble upon and further explore complex phenomena that may otherwise be hidden or unseen” (p. 156). Specific to migration studies, Fedyuk and Zentai (2018) note that, “interviews have proved indispensable when researching vulnerable groups on the move” (p. 171). Information that is revealed during interviews with individuals who have interacted with migrants may provide a new or previously uninvestigated perspective to how border policies affect the relationships between migrants and the community, rather than focusing on the statistics (Cordero-Guzman, 2005; Romero, 2021; Roth et al., 2018).

Building on this, Dunn (2021) says that “one of the major strengths of interviewing is that it allows you to discover what is relevant to the informant” (p. 150). This follows Mainwaring’s (2016) approach to migrant agency as it allows the opportunity for people involved in migration journeys to provide context about their lived experiences. As I had mentioned above, previous studies that revolved around the impacts of the STCA tended to focus on the legality of the policy rather than the voices of the people who are affected by it. In the case of my project, I was determined to speak to community members who were frequently involved in these processes, as I had hoped that they could shed light on the effects of a small border community becoming the hotspot for migrants planning to cross the Canada-US border. In her research, Besplug (2021) notes that “listening to people’s stories...can tell us not just about the world around us, in a reflective sense, but also that it creates the world in which we live, in a generative sense” (p. 50). Both Dunn (2021) and Besplug’s (2021) work directs our attention towards the benefits of using narrative methods as the information gathered will be what participants want us to hear, rather

than what we expect to hear. Dunn (2021) and Besplug (2021) point to the notion that interviews provide insider access to the perspectives of different people when those feelings or pieces of knowledge are typically removed from or unrelatable to outsiders such as media outlets and policy makers. Listening to these stories provides the opportunity for researchers to bridge the gap between personal lives and broader political contexts (Cameron, 2012). In short, rather than analyzing policies on paper or relying exclusively on the perspectives and narratives of state officials, feminist geographers direct our attention to the people who are affected by these border policies, the everyday spaces in which the policies are experienced, and where the impacts of borders play out.

3.2.2 Potential Participants

I started my research plans with the intent to spend time in Plattsburgh to speak with a range of actors who regularly interact(ed) with people attempting to cross. I had hoped they could serve as key informants with firsthand knowledge of the types of questions I was interested in asking. When mapping out the interview component of my data collection methods, I focused on choosing local community members based in Plattsburgh who played an active role in migration journeys. Ultimately, I narrowed down my categories of potential participants to members of Plattsburgh Cares, taxi drivers, and motel owners.

For each of these categories of local community members, I had hoped they would be willing to provide context to the different experiences and interactions they had had with migrants arriving and passing through Plattsburgh. I was also interested in asking how migrants personalize their migration journey experiences with the different objects they leave behind or take with them. Lastly, I was curious about how the landscape and infrastructural components had changed in response to both the implementation and the expansion of the STCA. Below is a

general overview of why I was interested in interviewing each group of potential participants and what I hoped to learn from them.

Advocates: I chose to interview Plattsburgh Cares advocates as they could speak to the many different components of how migrants experience Plattsburgh before crossing at Roxham Road. Advocates are typically the first group of people migrants seek out after arriving and have firsthand knowledge of the organization of food, shelter, and transportation for migrants. The first topic I was interested in discussing during the interviews included where local advocacy resources are located, such as food banks or information posters. Secondly, I had hoped they would be able to provide information as to how the STCA has changed the community and migration journeys over a timeline spanning its establishment, the first Trump presidency, COVID-19, and the then-recent expansion of the policy in March 2023. Each of these events contributed to the shift in where and how people tried to cross the Canada-US border. For example, during the Trump Presidency, Roxham Road rose in popularity as a transit point in response to his anti-immigration speeches, while during the COVID-19 pandemic, the border between Canada and the US was closed (see Figure 1.1). These events speak to how the STCA affected migration to Plattsburgh, and the use, abandonment, and demolition of Roxham Road. Lastly, I was interested in learning about the objects advocates had encountered, including where objects that were left behind were found and the types of items advocates would provide to migrants.

Taxi drivers: I chose to interview taxi drivers as the context in which they interacted with migrants differed from members of Plattsburgh Cares. In this case, the taxi drivers could speak to the moments between picking up migrants at the Mountain Mart and transporting them to Roxham Road. I was also interested in learning about the creation of personal taxi companies

in response to the increase in migration and how the business had been affected according to the same timeline of the STCA that I outlined above. Lastly, taxi drivers could provide information regarding the types of objects left behind in taxis or at Roxham Road and what factors might indicate the items as being left intentionally or unintentionally.

Motel owners: I chose to interview motel owners as they could speak to their interactions with migrants in a space that serves as a temporary point in time where the migration journey is interrupted or halted to plan for the next portion of the journey. These points of immobility provide context to how the journey is full of uncertainty and consists of many twists, turns, and unexpected directions (Mainwaring and Brigden, 2016). I wanted to interview motel owners about how they provided and arranged room availability for migrants, as well as the types of objects motel staff would find in the rooms and what they would do with the objects after the occupant had left.

3.2.3 Recruitment

Approximately one month before travelling to Plattsburgh, Dr. Young had reached out to her connections in the city. This provided me with the opportunity to briefly introduce myself to some of the people living in the community and explain that I would be visiting Plattsburgh for two weeks in August 2023 to conduct fieldwork. This was an important aspect to include in the beginning stages of my research as it created a space for building a relationship between myself and community members. It was also useful as this relationship allowed the community members to understand that I was not going to Plattsburgh for a quick interview and then leaving, but rather I was going with the intent to spend time in the community and listen to people's stories to gain an in-depth understanding of their situations.

During my planning, I thought it would be a better idea to start the interview recruitment by connecting with advocates and community members in-person so I could represent myself as more than a faceless email address. Therefore, once I had arrived in Plattsburgh, I started the formal recruitment of participants for interviews. Returning to the concept of building both a relationship and a notion of trust between me and my initial contacts, I had hoped that I would be directed to, not only who they thought would be most beneficial for me to interview, but also those who would most likely allow me to interview them. The migrant support sector of this community is quite small and close-knit, so my ability to connect with potential interviewees was highly dependent on word-of-mouth, recommendations, and people advocating for me.

Once I had arrived in Plattsburgh and with some support from Dr. Young, I set up meetings with the contacts that I had previously emailed. I was given several suggestions of potential participants I could reach out to, which ranged from advocates to taxi drivers to migrants themselves. As I had previously mentioned, I made the active decision to interview members of the community who had interacted with migrants during their journeys, rather than migrants themselves. This was informed by previous work conducted by Reynolds et al., (2023) which outlined the anticipated difficulties in recruiting El Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Haitian migrants to discuss their lived experiences crossing the Canada-US border, as they had precarious legal status. Romero (2021) noted that while it was easy for her to obtain interviews with refugee case workers, many refugees themselves were reluctant to be interviewed. Based on this information, I had also anticipated a low participation rate from migrants within the Plattsburgh community. Therefore, I chose to direct the interviews towards community members, such as advocates, as they have important knowledge to provide to the overall story of migration through Plattsburgh.

There were a few limitations to my recruitment for which I was unprepared, one being the impact that media has had on this community. Due to years of near constant media coverage, many of the advocates I wished to speak to, declined to be formally interviewed. Through personal communications, most told me that they were tired of the mass number of media articles and news channels reaching out to them and wary of their words being twisted or misconstrued. This resulted in a lower participation rate than I had anticipated, as other research projects and media articles gave the impression that there was an ample number of advocates who would be willing to be interviewed. Nonetheless, it was clear that this over-saturation of media presence had halted people's willingness to be interviewed. In one circumstance, I had approached a gas station employee about possibly setting up an interview, and they responded by saying they would be fired if they talked to me. Despite the difficulties in recruiting participants, I was able to interview four people during my time in Plattsburgh including two advocates, one taxi driver, and one motel owner. The opportunity to interview a participant from each category that I had initially outlined was beneficial as it created a well-rounded picture of the connections between those that are involved with migrants and migration journeys in Plattsburgh.

3.2.4 Interviewing Process

When developing my semi-structured interview guide, I began by creating a list of general themes I was interested in hearing about from each participant and used them to develop my questions. These themes ranged from how the STCA border policy impacted migration and businesses in Plattsburgh, to the geography and landscape of the region, to how infrastructure, spaces, and objects intertwined to create a tangible representation of migration journeys. I formatted the guide so that it began with a general structure to cover questions that related to overall experiences of living in Plattsburgh and interacting with migrants, regardless of who I

was interviewing at the time. I then narrowed it down to specific questions relative to each group of potential participants. These questions catered towards providing insight into how the STCA impacted their specific business and the different ways the participants interacted with objects associated with migration (see the full interview guide in Appendix 1). In order to adequately capture the experiences and views of my participants, I wanted to ensure that the interviews were semi-structured and consisted of questions that would elicit meaningful answers and allow the participant to tell a story (Turner, 2010). In addition, I also left space for questions or topics I wanted to follow up on if a participant mentioned something relevant. Something I had not anticipated was the amount of information the participants were willing to give. While some were happy to answer any question and/or prompt I had put forth, others were apprehensive and elected not to answer certain questions.

At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the informed consent document with the participant and received verbal consent to both interview and audio record them. One participant had requested to not be audio recorded but allowed me to take written notes. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, I assigned each participant a pseudonym. I elected not to use pseudonyms for organizations, such as Plattsburgh Cares, or for businesses, such as the Mountain Mart and the Rip Van Winkle Motel, as I was given permission to name them within this thesis. Moreover, due to the high media presence surrounding these organizations, they are widely known and continually researched. Below, I have included a table (Figure 3.1) outlining the pseudonyms I assigned to each participant, their occupation, and the date of the interview. I provided only limited demographic information, as the Plattsburgh community is quite small and additional information could easily identify the participants.

Pseudonym	Occupation	Date of Interview
Maisie	Advocate	August 10/2023
Jeff	Taxi Driver	August 11/2023
Alvin	Motel Owner	August 12/2023
Augustine	Advocate	August 14/2023

Figure 3.1. Table of Interview Participants.

In terms of the ethics of representation, I was, and still am, continuously conscious of the precarious nature of this topic, both regarding the precarity of the migrants involved, but also to the discourse about migration in the current political climate. I did not want to represent migrants or migration journeys in a negative light, nor did I want to present myself as ‘speaking for’ migrants, especially as someone with an outsider’s perspective. I acknowledge that this topic is one which has garnered an oversaturation of media presence, and the people involved have felt over-researched. Therefore, I focused my analysis on understanding the complexities of migration journeys through the eyes of my participants.

3.3 Field Visit

3.3.1 Participant-Observation Methods

Participant-observation is the act of spending time and immersing yourself in a community you wish to research (Laurier, 2010). The role of the participant-observer is both to participate in community activities as well as to observe how the community operates. This includes taking field notes, pictures, and in my case, informal conversations with key actors in the Plattsburgh region. As I mentioned earlier, when developing the methodology for my project, I was aware that conducting interviews in migration and border settings comes with a certain apprehension from potential participants and are therefore not guaranteed. This knowledge led to

an understanding that I would likely not be able to gather enough information through interview methods alone. Fedyuk and Zentai (2018) noted that in this field “the interview as a method rarely stands on its own; it is often combined with other methods, such as participatory or non-participatory observation, focus group discussions, or oral history and life-story data collection, in order to obtain a fuller understanding of the issues” (p. 173). Many scholars note the importance of this dynamic between interviews and participant-observation methods within qualitative research (Boccagni & Schrooten, 2018; Iosifides, 2003; Roque et al., 2023). Romero (2021) points out that in research on migration across borders, participant-observation provides the opportunity to “engage actively with the participants of the study” (p. 16) as it gives the researcher the ability to interact and create relationships with people. I decided to include participant-observation in my methodology as it complements interviews and aided in providing a well-rounded perspective of how people interact with others and the geography of the border region.

3.3.2 Geographical Observations

One of my reasons for visiting Plattsburgh included the opportunity to see the research site for myself so I could understand the different geographic components that play into and affect migrant journeys to Roxham Road. This decision also developed from my background in archaeology, as I am accustomed to conducting fieldwork at the site, or *in situ*. These factors allowed me to situate myself within existing literature and familiarize myself with the spaces and places within this border region. An additional benefit to visiting the site was that it allowed me to get involved in the community and make connections with several people.

My objectives for observing the city included: locations and distances of important sites such as the Mountain Mart and the Rip Van Winkle Motel; how these spaces were connected to

each other and perceived by the community; how the meaning of these institutions had shifted in response to increased movement through the city; and potential migration routes to and from Plattsburgh. While I did focus on Plattsburgh, I also expanded these questions to how activities within Plattsburgh connect to and interact with other locations such as New York City, Champlain, New York, and both the Roxham Road unofficial border crossing and residential street.

Based on the list above, I grouped my observation methods into two overarching categories. The first was location based and for this method, I drew from Brigden's (2018) study of a migration corridor in Mexico. Brigden (2018) notes that by "traversing short segments of it, walking within shelter facilities and using sight clues (watching people, things and their movements)," her discussions of the landscape were better informed. In Plattsburgh, I focused on a landscape analysis in which I began by mapping out the city's geography through field notes and photographs. I highlighted important sites and infrastructural components within the city to determine the physical distances between them. These sites include the Mountain Mart, the Rip Van Winkle Motel, and other locations associated with advocacy such as food banks and information centres. Lastly, I situated Plattsburgh within a larger geographic view by mapping it in relation to New York City, Champlain, the Canada-US border, and Montreal.

To follow through with this method, I spent the two weeks I was in Plattsburgh familiarizing myself with the layout of the city including the street system and the differentiation between downtown, residential areas, and industrial areas. I did so by going on many walks and driving around. The walks were useful in that I was moving slower and was able to notice details that I otherwise would not have if I was in a vehicle. Walking also provided me with insight into how far the distances between buildings are if one does not have a form of transportation. I had

also encountered areas of the city that were almost completely inaccessible by walking. For example, one day, I was dropped off at the Mountain Mart and quickly realized that due to its location along a highway, there were no crosswalks, and I was essentially stuck there unless I ran across the highway. Luckily, Dr. Young came to pick me up, but for migrants who would get dropped off by the Greyhound bus at the Mountain Mart, the only safe option for leaving would be hiring a taxi.

3.3.3 Community Observations

The second category I included in my observations was community based; however, I ultimately took on more of the observer than the participant role as there were few opportunities for me to participate in community or advocacy activities. Nonetheless, these observations focused specifically on how community members perceived and interacted with each other. Iosifides (2003) based his fieldwork in Athens and researched the lives of migrant workers. He used a similar multiple-methods approach by utilizing participant-observation alongside interviews. To gain an understanding of how the community operated, his observations occurred in settings that were “mainly places that immigrants used collectively as leisure or meeting points, such as certain cafeterias or game houses, squares or places of living (hotels, flats etc.) and working places and sites” (p. 439). I often frequented the Mountain Mart as it was an institution that saw the largest gathering of migrants, advocates, and taxi drivers. During my first full day in Plattsburgh, I had informally met with a group of local advocates at the Mountain Mart. They had suggested I meet them there as they go every day to meet with any migrants who might get off the Greyhound bus from New York City. While the advocates and I were talking, I witnessed a migrant family arrive and one of the advocates excused herself to go and meet with

them at another table. I did not hear the discussion nor meet the family, but the advocates explained that this was not an uncommon occurrence at the Mountain Mart.

I was also interested in how people had influenced these different institutions and how their actions had changed the meaning of these spaces. This method included many informal conversations with local contacts regarding general information and questions about the community. I had also initially reached out to a handful of local political figures, though never got a reply. Regardless, I explored the online public information provided on these political figures and their relationships concerning migrants and Roxham Road. This directed me to a YouTube channel called *Home Town Cable Network* run by Calvin Castine, a member of the Plattsburgh-based Clinton County Legislature. His channel consists of many videos documenting Roxham Road updates and events concerning border activities.

3.4 Data Analysis

My study design was informed by feminist political geography. Thus, I was inspired to follow the approach of Sundberg (2003), who reinforced that the focus of qualitative research needs to be on marginalized bodies, places, and forms of knowledge. As such, I maintained constant awareness of my positionality and engaged in reflexivity throughout the process of data analysis.

After I returned from Plattsburgh, I began the process of transcribing the interviews. I started by typing each recording verbatim, pausing to keep up with the pacing, which enabled me not only the opportunity to listen to the interviews again, but also to dwell on them in greater attention to my perceptions and emerging ideas. Once I completed this process, I began the next step of forming new insights through additional memos and concept mapping.

Cope (2016) states that memos are "...a sort of intermediate-level mechanism to remind [the researcher] of something, to reflect on patterns or connections, to contextualize events, and to forge new links between emerging themes" (p. 374). According to Patton (2002), memos are a form of field notes, which are an essential part of qualitative research and the most important influence on the data analysis. Memos not only capture details that might otherwise be forgotten, but they also provide a way to engage in continual reflexivity. My initial interpretations and reflections were based on memos that I had taken in relation to both the interviews and my observations from my time in the field. As an informal and quick way of taking notes, memos enabled me to quickly capture key thoughts and ideas. They became especially useful later in the analysis process when they served as important and authentic reminders of my initial thoughts and observations. However, when I began developing the main themes of this thesis, I found that some of my initial interpretations had slightly shifted after gaining more context and a deeper understanding of the data. In tune with reflexivity, Birks et al., (2008) states that "the researcher must expect different ideas to emerge and operational directions to change in response to what is found in the data. These variations are identified and mediated through memos" (p.71). Thus, while memos are useful in that they allow a researcher to capture their initial thoughts, memos also serve to reveal deeper meaning when dwelled upon further into the analysis process.

Earlier in my analysis process, I considered the use of concept mapping; however, after creating a map based on certain objects associated with migration journeys to Roxham Road, I found that I was struggling to make connections through this approach. I found it more effective to make structured lists and groupings when organizing my thoughts, as concept mapping was too abstract for me. As such, I began with grouping the data into six general themes: (1) artifacts and infrastructure, i.e., any mention of objects left behind or given to migrants by advocates; (2)

the businesses involved in migration journeys, i.e., taxi companies and motels; (3) interactions my participants had with migrants; (4) the geography and landscape of Plattsburgh and the greater New York/Quebec region; (5) modes of transportation; and (6) the effects of the STCA on migration journeys through Plattsburgh and Roxham Road.

For the next step, I delved deeper into those six general themes and broke them down into specific categories that were common among all interviews. This included, for example, not only looking at what types of objects were left behind, but also how those objects circulated within the community and where they might have ended up. After I had examined each theme in greater detail, I began taking note of similarities between each interview and those that differed in opinion and/or perspective. For example, both Maisie and Augustine mentioned the role of advocates passing out toys to children. Maisie referred to this act as providing a luxury not a necessity, while Augustine said that toys, “became really important as [she] went on. [She] could see what an impact that they had on the entire family.” Differences and similarities between each participant’s experiences allowed me to recognize the complexities of how border policies affect migration journeys from the point of view of local community members.

In order to sort through my collection of observations, I decided to intertwine them into the interview themes outlined above. This was simply due to the nature of observation, as I could not physically observe the STCA, nor did I have the opportunity to observe migrants crossing at Roxham Road. In general, the majority of my observations fell into the themes connected to the landscape and geography of the Plattsburgh region, as well as the types of infrastructure associated with migration journeys.

In the case of my project, I did not interview migrants, and I was not able to physically handle the objects that my interview participants discussed, so I relied on taking an interpretive

approach to understanding the significance (or lack thereof) of the objects. My analysis focused both on interpretations of my participants as well as my own; however, this does come with a caveat that not one single interpretation should be considered the correct one. Throughout the analysis process, it was interesting to observe the perspectives and interpretations of my participants regarding their interactions with migrant material culture, though it must be noted that without talking to the owner, we can never be certain about its significance, meaning, or the reason it was left behind. That being said, just the act of discussing these objects allowed for a connection to be made between the researcher, the interview participant, the migrant, and the reader of this thesis that transcends the barriers of not knowing one another.

3.5 Reflexivity and Limitations

Billo and Hiemstra (2013) note the importance of reflexivity and flexibility within research by contributing reflections on their experiences conducting research on the everyday lives of participants in Ecuador. They both had initially planned to use interviews and participant-observation within their research projects, though quickly discovered that the outlines they had made on paper were only roughly transferable to in-person fieldwork. For example, Billo discovered that the groups of people she had anticipated as potential participants were not interested in speaking to her, so she shifted her research methods from interviews and surveys entirely to participant-observation. By doing so, it allowed her to learn about the locals' daily lives by observing and participating in community activities.

With Billo and Hiemstra's (2013) work in mind, it was clear to me that the interviewing component of my project would require reflexivity and flexibility within the process. As a novice researcher, I learned firsthand about the importance of active listening during interviews. Adams

(2012) notes that, “interviewing requires that we listen in new ways that are challenging and unsettling, that we put aside our analytical inclinations and really engage in listening” (p. 402). However, despite being conscious that I was supposed to be engaged in active listening, I found that I was frequently reminding myself to pay attention to the participant’s words and was distracted by the pressure of figuring out what to say in response.

The setting in which the interviews took place also created disruptions to the flow of the interviews. In most cases, the interviews were held at the participants’ job during work hours, as those locations were the most convenient and comfortable for my participants. This meant that there were frequent interruptions from others, as well as background noises. For example, my interview with Jeff took place in his home garage and we often heard cars driving by and neighbours mowing their lawns. Similarly, during my interviews with Maisie and Augustine, they had to be prepared to respond to text messages or phone calls due to the nature of their role in advocacy groups.

Lastly, as this was my first introduction to conducting interviews, there were moments in which I felt unprepared in terms of inexperience. In some cases, I was conflicted on how to act or respond based on what my participants were saying, especially when they would relay tough stories about what they had witnessed and/or heard from migrants. I realized very quickly that there is an extreme difference between reading these types of stories in a news article or a published paper and being exposed to the stories firsthand and in-person. Given this, I learned to appreciate the benefits of qualitative research when researching people’s lives, as it provided me with the opportunity to understand the daily lives of people involved in migration journeys to a greater extent and the intimacy of supporting and witnessing migration journeys.

Harris (2016) notes that geographers “wrote about the ability of the walking interview to provide a better understanding of how the geographical context shapes human lives” (p. 366). Initially, after reading Harris’ (2016) article on the usefulness of walking interviews to geographers, I was tempted to use this method. However, due to the distances between locations and points of interest, as well as the fact that the interviews took place where the participants felt most comfortable, I was unable to conduct walking interviews. Still, I can see the benefits to this type of interview within a border community as it would have allowed me to observe the landscape through both my and participants’ eyes.

In the case of participant-observation, it is also important to note that this method and its findings are based on the interpretation of the researcher. With this comes the potential for misinterpretation and bias, such as preconceived notions or expectations regarding results based on previous research. McCurdy and Udlam (2014) warn that while researchers are at research sites to solely observe, “it is inevitably influenced by our relations with the research subjects and our interpretations of what we observe” (p. 41). As I had mentioned earlier, I took on the role of the observer as there were few opportunities to engage in activities through the role of the participant. For example, I had initially hoped to spend time volunteering with Plattsburgh Cares by putting food bags together to give to migrant families. This unfortunately did not end up happening as the bags had already been assembled.

3.6 Conclusion

The methodology for this project consisted of a multiple-methods approach including interviews and aspects of participant-observation. The interview process allowed me to meet, interact with, and learn from individuals in the community who were heavily involved in the

migrant sector of Plattsburgh. I was able to supplement the interviews with participant-observation in which I familiarized myself with the geography and landscape of the city and surrounding regions. After coding the interviews, consolidating my observations, and breaking six general themes down, I created two overarching themes that captured the essence of how migrants and migration journeys were affected by the enforcement of the STCA. In the succeeding chapters, I will discuss the complexities of the repurposing of institutions in response to migration journeys and the materiality of migration.

CHAPTER 4: REPURPOSED SPACES AND PLACES

In this chapter I will introduce the different types of infrastructure involved in migration journeys through Plattsburgh. I begin by discussing the geography and landscape of the region through covering the forms of transportation and routes that migrants may take during their journey to Plattsburgh. As my first visit to Plattsburgh was in August 2023, I will lay out how the initial STCA expansion had introduced an interruption in the flow of migrants moving through and within the community, and how this affected operations concerning the community and its infrastructure. I will also discuss how over time, the community repurposed specific institutions to accommodate the increase in migration through the region. The Mountain Mart, the Rip Van Winkle Motel, and the city's taxi business sector are all examples of pre-existing institutions that were repurposed as a way to mediate interactions between advocates and migrants. Finally, I will discuss how the RCMP border patrol station was constructed on the Canadian side of Roxham Road to process and manage migrants passing through more efficiently. In addition to the border patrol station, signs, security cameras, and garbage bins were installed to control and monitor migrants' movement and behaviour.

4.1 Transportation and Routes to Plattsburgh, NY

During my second visit to Plattsburgh in August 2024, I decided to take the bus from New York City to Plattsburgh as part of the participant-observation component of this project. For this research, I needed to experience not only one of the known possible routes that migrants take after entering the United States, but also the entire sensory process including travel time and distance, as well as navigating through different and unknown spaces. The day before I was scheduled to leave for Plattsburgh, I visited the Port Authority Bus Terminal (Figure 4.1), which

is the main bus depot in New York City and the one from which migrants travel to Plattsburgh. My intent was to explore the layout of the building and observe the general environment. Located in southwest Manhattan, the Port Authority Bus Terminal is a very large building with a complex array of hallways on several levels connected by escalators and long stairways. It is busy and easy to get turned around. Throughout the building, there were many signs that indicated the presence of plain-clothed police officers and advised people to report suspicious behaviour. In the bathroom stalls, there were posters that provided phone numbers for reporting human trafficking cases.

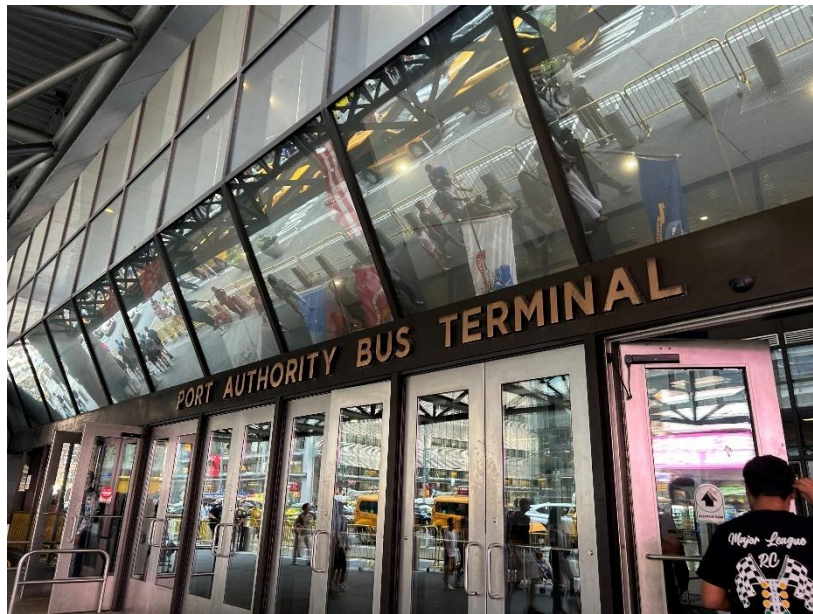


Figure 4.1. Port Authority Bus Terminal, New York City.

Earlier that same day, I received a notification that the departure location for my bus had been changed from the Port Authority Bus Terminal to a small parking lot eight blocks away and across the street from Penn Station. While at the bus depot, I asked an attendant at the Greyhound information desk about this change in the schedule. She informed me that the Greyhound company had been recently bought by Flixbus but did not offer any further

explanation for why the departure location had been changed. Given that the Port Authority Bus Depot had an extensive number of departure gates, when I arrived at the bus stop in the parking lot the next morning, the change in location seemed random and unusual. The new spot had been an old parking lot turned into an ad hoc bus station. There were a couple of buses there, but no signs indicating which bus was which, no office, and no staff, other than one man wearing a security vest. There were no options for seating, so people were sitting on the broken pavement alongside an adjacent building. Being there in early August, it was very hot and humid, and there was no shelter from the sun. Everyone was out in the open and on display. I cannot confirm whether there were migrants in this parking lot, as my intentions were purely observational, though, for potential migrants, this situation could be very confusing to navigate, not to mention stressful and unpleasant. They would have been encountering a last-minute departure location change to a busy street corner where there were no opportunities for being discreet and no reassurance that they were in the correct spot until boarding the bus.

Once I was on the bus, I noted that the official route included four stops between New York City and Montreal: Ridgewood, NJ; Albany, NY; SUNY Albany, NY; and Plattsburgh, NY. As the bus made its way north through New Jersey and back into New York State, the landscape changed dramatically from urban cityscapes to rural countryside with residences and commercial buildings scattered sparsely within the natural environment. The bus ride was approximately six hours with the last few hours travelling through northern New York through dense forests covering large hills. It felt as though the highway we were travelling on was isolated from the rest of the world. This same landscape extends on into Canada, so people who plan to walk to the border will encounter similar geography and potentially be faced with a multitude of hazardous

situations. This includes the possibility of getting lost in the woods, encountering wild animals, or dealing with adverse weather, all of which could result in loss of life.

As discussed in the previous chapter, depending on their country of origin, migrants may not have the necessary clothing required for this section of the journey or the season in which they undertake it. In a similar sense, many migrants may not be prepared for the northern New York State landscape that consists of mountains and forests. As Maisie explained:

They don't, what is perceived as New York City is perceived as New York State. So, and most of these families have walked and travelled through eight, seven, six...seven or eight countries, including the jungle. So, it's...would not be unreasonable of them to think they could walk from New York City, but what they aren't thinking is, there's walking through a jungle and then there's walking through the mountains.

In the above quote, Maisie notes there is a possible misperception about the geography of the region which poses a riskier and more difficult journey than migrants may have anticipated. Also related to misperception, Maisie mentioned that in some cases, individuals would pay taxi or Uber drivers in New York City to drive them to Plattsburgh, thinking that the two cities were in close proximity to one another. This route would involve a five-hour, approximately 500-kilometre drive that would ultimately cost them between \$1500 and \$2000 USD.

In addition to taking the bus, walking, and hiring a taxi or Uber to travel from New York City to Plattsburgh, migrants' journeys may also be directed by human smuggling operations. As I discuss further in chapter five, driving personal vehicles is another mode of transportation between the two cities. Beyond the various modes of transportation that migrants may use, there are also multiple other routes to Plattsburgh that bypass New York City altogether. When I asked Maisie about these routes and potential timelines, she provided a detailed explanation of how the routes are all different and depend on the person:

It's not necessarily, 'I cross the southern border, and I go right to the northern border,' it's a lot of, individuals will cross the southern border, they could be in Texas, they could be in Florida, they could be in the Midwest. They may cross the southern border in the middle of the winter, may stay somewhere in the south trying to secure some type of employment or, you know, means of income, and then will work their way through. You know, some are tourist visas as they fly right into New York City and head right up. It's, it's no two are the same... So, some people, it's taken, um, eight, ten, twelve months to get to the US.

Despite the multiple different routes and timelines that migrants may have taken on their journey, until the expansion of the STCA in late March 2023, each path was similar in that the goal had been to cross at Roxham Road. In the following sections, I will discuss the effects of the initial announcement and implementation of the STCA expansion, and the subsequent closure of Roxham Road, on both community members and corresponding infrastructure.

4.2 Roxham Road Closure

When the STCA expansion was announced, there were many migrants who ended up stranded in Plattsburgh and surrounding regions like Champlain and Rouses Point. At the time of the interviews, Augustine mentioned that the news of Roxham Road closing had mostly spread to anyone attempting to cross, though some migrants still held onto the hope that they would qualify for an exception. The basis behind these exceptions include: the claimant having family members with Canadian citizenship, if the claimant is an unaccompanied minor, if the claimant is a document (visa) holder, or if the claimant has been charged with an offence and is subject to the death penalty in the United States (Government of Canada, 2023; Bridges Not Borders, n.d.). In the meantime, migrants would stay in Plattsburgh from 12 hours up to a few days before being informed that they do not meet an exception and would be turned away at the border if they attempted to cross.

Augustine expanded on the ways in which the community of Champlain had encountered migrants and how it differs from Plattsburgh strictly due to geography and being located closer to the border:

But now that they get turned back to the US, and if they're released, sometimes at the main border right up the road here, [border patrol] will just tell them to start walking south...So, they'll just start walking, so, this is the first collection of buildings that they're going to find once they leave the border. And now, it's not that unusual to see people walking by. If they have money, it's okay because they can call a taxi and they can get to Plattsburgh and they can get to the bus station. If they don't have money up here, they're stuck because we don't have, we don't have a [Champlain] taxi service.

As Augustine pointed out, migrants who were turned away at the border were faced with the need to figure out an alternative plan as they had become essentially “stuck” in the United States. However, it was a difficult task to initially leave Champlain, and as Maisie mentioned in her interview, it was just as difficult to leave Plattsburgh after returning:

Most families could conceivably just get a bus ticket back where they're going, except there are no buses out of Plattsburgh, sometimes for two or three days. So, while they may have enough money for a ticket, they don't have enough money for a hotel room, to buy food, to buy clothing, to buy things that have been lost.

Suddenly, there was an abundance of migrants left stranded in Plattsburgh which already had limited and dwindling resources and support. The initial border closure also greatly affected those who worked with migrants, like advocates and taxi drivers. In particular, Plattsburgh Cares was low on funding and by the time I was there for my fieldwork in 2023, the financial issues were substantial.

During an informal conversation with some advocates, I was invited to join a small meeting with Plattsburgh Cares at St. Joseph's Church for a “North Country Immigration Community Roundtable & Workshop,” in which the participants planned to discuss trends,

issues, and updates on migration through not only Plattsburgh but also New York State more broadly. The roundtable was an event held specifically to benefit those who worked with the migrants arriving in Plattsburgh at the time and consisted of Plattsburgh Cares and local community members, health care workers, and students studying and/or interested in migration through New York State. Each person was given the opportunity to discuss reports relevant to their respective fields. Two important updates arose during the meeting. One was that there were many migrants still arriving in Plattsburgh from New York City hoping to cross into Canada, insisting that they had met an exception that would exempt them from being turned away from the border. The other was that this continuous flow of people was putting a great deal of strain on existing infrastructure in terms of money and space. In particular, one participant who worked as a nurse in the hospital mentioned that the Plattsburgh healthcare system was overrun, illustrating that many different aspects of the community were affected by the STCA expansion.

In addition to the general meeting, a PhD student from the City University of New York (CUNY) presented her research regarding the different resources for migrants in the entire state of New York and how she planned to create an accessible map of them. These resources included food banks, hotlines, healthcare facilities, and addresses for local advocacy groups. Specific to Plattsburgh, some of these resources include the New York State Office for New Americans (ONA) which provides legal services, English classes, and health and wellbeing support; the Joint Council for Economic Opportunity (JCEO) which has set up a food pantry in downtown Plattsburgh (Figure 4.2); the Clinton County Housing Assistance Program; and Saint Alexander's Catholic Church and St. Joseph's Community Outreach Center who work closely with ONA and the JCEO to provide assistance to new immigrants.



Figure 4.2. JCEO Food Pantry in Downtown Plattsburgh.

These examples demonstrate how the STCA expansion affected the ways in which the community operated in terms of advocacy groups like Plattsburgh Cares and other local social services providers. In the following section, I will discuss the timeline of how different types of institutions were repurposed in response to migration journeys and how they were affected by the STCA expansion and closure of Roxham Road.

4.3 Repurposed Institutions

In this section, I will highlight three instances in which institutions and spaces within Plattsburgh were repurposed and evolved in response to the growing number of migrants passing through Plattsburgh. This includes the Mountain Mart, the Rip Van Winkle Motel, and the Plattsburgh taxi services. Each of these were pre-existing institutions that had an original intended use linked to their respective business but were modified in some way to support the

needs of both the migrants and the community. I will also briefly touch on changes that had happened between my fieldwork in 2023 and 2024.

4.3.1 The Mountain Mart

The first institution I will be discussing is the Mountain Mart, which as I previously discussed, had over time transformed into the main bus stop for Greyhound buses arriving from New York City. Beyond this, it also became known and the pickup spot for catching taxis to Roxham Road and served as a meeting spot for Plattsburgh Cares members and migrants.

The Mountain Mart space is surrounded by a large parking lot and the gas station (Figures 4.3 & 4.4). The building itself is a convenience store consisting of both typical convenience store snacks and drinks as well as a Dunkin Donuts outlet where one can purchase coffee and donuts. There is an indoor seating area for customers to sit and enjoy their food – the same area where Plattsburgh Cares members meet with migrants who had just arrived. It is a space meant for people to sit down and socialize; however, it is not entirely welcoming or designed for people to stay long, as it is a cramped area on display from all angles, including from the front door and the cashier's till. Given that many meetings held in this space consist of advocates and migrants, and that I had a few meetings with advocate members myself, it felt as though we were being constantly monitored and watched.

The geographical location of the Mountain Mart had a large impact on why it became such an important space for migrants and migration journeys alike. Located in an agglomeration of shops, restaurants, and motels north of Plattsburgh, the Mountain Mart was the last major stop for migrants to disembark the bus before it would cross the border into Canada through the Champlain-St. Bernard de Lacolle official crossing. The Mountain Mart is also located next to an

intersection that separates the old highway from the new one, leads to downtown Plattsburgh, and is across from a road that provides access to the beach and the ferry to Vermont. Regarding its intended use as a gas station and convenience store, it is in a prime location for both locals and tourists to access. For migrants and advocates, it ultimately acted as a central spot to mediate conversations and planning strategies.

I had been informed through several personal communications and interviews that the Mountain Mart was “the place to be” if I wanted to fully understand the migration process in Plattsburgh, as it was the space where migrants would first arrive, advocates would meet with families, and taxi drivers would wait in the parking lot. I visited the Mountain Mart many times during my 2023 fieldwork and while I was there four months after Roxham Road had closed, I did observe one migrant family meeting with members of Plattsburgh Cares. As I had mentioned in chapter three, I did not overhear this conversation, though it was interesting to see firsthand how migrants and advocates utilized this public space to conduct private meetings. In this case, the Mountain Mart provided an easygoing, comfortable space for difficult, and potentially traumatic, conversations.

The Mountain Mart is an example of a migrant space that was created in response to the increased number of migrants passing through Plattsburgh. These spaces include areas, buildings, or types of infrastructure that had become synonymous with migrants as a result of the increase in migration journeys through Plattsburgh. While business at the Mountain Mart was run as usual, advocates and community members who were associated with the migrants were key actors in modifying and adapting the space to best suit their needs. For example, during the meeting between the family and the advocates, locals and tourists would come into the shop, wander around, purchase items, sit at other tables nearby, and go about their day with zero regard

to other activities taking place. For the members of Plattsburgh Cares and other local service provision agencies, the building became a site for weekly meetings of their group and a place to make themselves available for people potentially needing assistance in navigating their migration journeys.



Figure 4.3. The Mountain Mart Sign.



Figure 4.4. The Mountain Mart Parking Lot.

When I returned to Plattsburgh in 2024, the Mountain Mart was no longer in use as a bus stop and, instead, we were dropped off in front of the Clinton County Government Center along one of the main streets near downtown Plattsburgh. This was extremely unexpected as, even though it had been over a year since the STCA expansion and there were far fewer migrants passing through Plattsburgh, the Mountain Mart had become an important hub as well as symbol representing migration journeys. During my subsequent visit to the Mountain Mart, there was a new sign posted on the front door acknowledging the switch and indicating that it came into effect July 15th, 2024 (Figure 4.5). There was no evidence of the previous signs which included information on services available to immigrants through ONA or the advertisement for Greyhound bus tickets available for sale.



Figure 4.5. Information Posted on the Mountain Mart Door.

Logistically, the change to this bus stop likely coincided with the switch from Greyhound to Flixbus, though it could also indicate an underlying shift in migration patterns through Plattsburgh. In response to Roxham Road being closed, there were fewer migrants who would have been utilizing the Plattsburgh stop along the route between New York City and Montreal. This once again shifted the function of the Mountain Mart back to its original intended use as a gas station and convenience store. However, there are still a few reminders left behind that indicate its past use and the lasting effects that came along with it such as the new sign indicating the bus stop change and the old signs posted that say, “No Overnight Parking,” and “No Loitering Please” (Figures 4.6 & 4.7).



Figure 4.6. 'No Overnight Parking' Sign.



Figure 4.7. 'No Loitering Please' Sign.

4.3.2 The Rip Van Winkle Motel

Due to its proximity to the Mountain Mart, the Rip Van Winkle Motel had also shifted into a migrant space as it provided an easily accessible place to stay for migrants arriving at the Mountain Mart bus stop. Similar to the Mountain Mart, the Rip Van Winkle Motel had become an important hub and symbol for migration journeys through Plattsburgh but differed in the sense that the owners began catering their services exclusively to migrants (Figures 4.8 & 4.9).

According to Alvin, this happened because an agreement was formed between members of Plattsburgh Cares and the motel owners to work together to decrease the costs of motel rooms for migrants. This was mostly through donations made to Plattsburgh Cares and the JCEO, as well as through advocates covering the costs personally.



Figure 4.8. The Rip Van Winkle Motel in August 2023.

I was informed by Alvin, during my interview with him, that the owners of the Rip Van Winkle Motel also own the Golden Gate Lodging Motel in Plattsburgh, which is located approximately one kilometre south of the Rip Van Winkle along Highway 9. Subsequently,

during my observations of both motels, I noticed that the two had significantly contrasting appearances. The Rip Van Winkle Motel was run down and messy-looking, whereas the Golden Gate Lodging Motel, catering more to tourists, was nicely kept and clean. The location also determined the type of atmosphere each motel offered, as the Rip Van Winkle Motel is located on the outskirts of the city and the Golden Gate Lodging is located closer to downtown in a residential area with beach access (Figure 4.10).



Figure 4.9. Entrance to the Rip Van Winkle Motel



Figure 4.10. Plattsburgh Lodging Sign along Highway 9

During my fieldwork in 2023, I asked Alvin how the STCA expansion and the closure of Roxham Road had affected motels in this region. He explained that the occupancy levels had dramatically increased due to the amount of people who travelled to Plattsburgh in hopes of crossing the border before it was too late. Specifically, he said that the Rip Van Winkle Motel started doubling up rooms because of this increase and it had gotten to a point where there were 8-10 people per room. At the time of the interview, Alvin mentioned that the occupancy levels had been like that for three or four weeks. Considering that the interview took place approximately four-five months after the STCA expansion, this was likely due to migrants' unawareness of the border closure or hopes of still meeting an exception.

When I returned in 2024, however; the Rip Van Winkle had been under renovation (Figure 4.11). Given the amount of time that had passed since Roxham Road had closed, one

could assume that it was being fixed up in response to the decrease in migrants needing a motel over the past year.



Figure 4.11. The Rip Van Winkle Motel in August 2024.

The Mountain Mart and the Rip Van Winkle Motel are examples of infrastructure that existed prior to the increase in migration but were modified both practically and symbolically in response. In the next section, I will discuss how the city's taxi business shifted in response to migration through the emergence of personal taxi companies.

4.3.3 Plattsburgh Taxi Services

While the taxi business is not a building like the Mountain Mart or the Rip Van Winkle, it is an important form of infrastructure involved in the movement of migrants throughout the border region. During the interviews, many of my participants noted that the biggest shift that had evolved within the taxi business was the development of personal taxi companies and the

subsequent price gouging in response to the increased competition. Personal taxi companies refer to a single individual whose main form of business was transporting migrants from Plattsburgh to Roxham Road. These differ from official city taxi companies that had had multiple drivers working and transporting both migrants and locals. This development process was demonstrated through the CBC documentary, *Road to Roxham*, in which it noted the sudden appearance and effects of emergent personal taxi companies.

Specifically, the documentary revolves around an interview with Mary Ann Ero, a taxi driver who started her own company, Spanky's Taxi. She talks about the process of dropping migrants off at Roxham Road. In particular, she noted that many people within Plattsburgh, including herself, had never heard of Roxham Road until the "refugee crisis," and when asked why she thought new taxi drivers were arriving in Plattsburgh, she responded by saying, "they've heard about people making money. They want to make a quick fortune." (CBC Documentary, 2020, 6:52). Hirsch (2017) also mentioned that during the initial increase in migrant arrivals in the area, many taxi drivers were overcharging migrants and forcing them to pay approximately \$300 for the 30-minute drive from the Mountain Mart to Roxham Road. Soon enough, the news of this made its way to the Attorney General of New York's office and taxi drivers had begun to be monitored more closely. Both sources show that the increase in migrants had a direct effect on how the taxi business operated and how drivers interacted with each other afterwards. In particular, Maisie said that while she understood that it is a business, there is a difference between a business and price gouging. Maisie then mentioned that it got to a point where some taxi drivers had started to police each other, themselves:

So, when they found somebody that was price gouging, or doing something wrong, they actually were like, no, no, no, those rules don't, they apply to all of us. So, they actually had several that, you know, you hear different stories: they would charge them, they

would tell them that they would undercut the other driver, and then they would get them out in the middle of nowhere and pull over the van and say, ‘get out now, or the price just went up.’

One scene in the *Road to Roxham* documentary shows a couple of taxis waiting across the street from the Mountain Mart and as soon as the Greyhound bus pulled in, the drivers drove to the parking lot to intercept the migrants. Maisie relayed that, initially, due to this form of competition and high demand for picking up migrants, there was “a lot of drama” among the taxi drivers in the parking lot of the Mountain Mart, of which she noted during her interview:

There are always some unscrupulous people everywhere that will take advantage of people in crisis, but the taxi drivers that were, you can’t say less...more honest? You know, that the, the taxi drivers that understood the trauma that the families were going through would often say, ‘be careful, because when he gets you out there, he’s going to charge you more money,’ you know?

Nevertheless, according to my participants, situations like price gouging and arguments between taxi drivers were issues that were more frequent during the earlier years. Over time, a significant amount of camaraderie had developed between the taxi drivers, advocates, and migrants, as I had mentioned in the previous chapter.

Lastly, in the CBC documentary, Mary Ann was asked if she was ever worried about being arrested for driving migrants. She responded by saying that the risk was always present as one could make the case that they were knowingly transporting people who intended to cross the border undocumented. She qualified this by saying it is not illegal to drive people to their destination. However, once the STCA expanded and both Roxham Road and the legal “loophole” were officially closed, there was an air of uncertainty concerning the legality of transporting migrants. At the end of his interview, Jeff revealed that he was still receiving calls about

transporting migrants to the border but was refusing as he was worried that if he were caught, it would be categorized as human smuggling.

The Mountain Mart, Rip Van Winkle Motel, and taxi companies all demonstrate how existing infrastructure was impacted by the growing number of migrants passing through Plattsburgh. It was clear during my fieldwork in 2023, that the taxi business was the first to see the effects of the Roxham Road closure as the stakes were higher for any driver attempting to continue transporting migrants. During my fieldwork in 2024, my observations focused on noting the changes that had happened to the Mountain Mart and Rip Van Winkle Motel since my visit in August 2023. Both institutions ultimately had shifted away from acting as a central place and space for migration journeys. Nevertheless, reminders, like the aforementioned poster taped to the door at the Mountain Mart indicating that the bus stop had moved, continued to represent the lasting effects of migration on this community infrastructure.

4.4 Installed Interventions

In this section, I will discuss examples of infrastructure that did not exist prior to the increased use of Roxham Road but were constructed and incorporated into the environment in response. The first example pertains to the operation of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) border patrol station – or Regional Processing Centre – that was situated on the Canadian side of the border. The second example focuses on the signage, security cameras, and the blue garbage bins that are associated with, and located at, the unofficial Roxham Road border crossing. Each of the above categories were constructed in response to the STCA and demonstrate how the policy and the state worked together to manage migrants and control how they would approach and interact with the Canada-US border.

4.4.1 The RCMP Patrol Station

Constructed in 2017, the RCMP border patrol station was the first building migrants would encounter after crossing into Canada (Figure 4.12). It served as a way to ensure the safety of migrants regardless of their situation until it was ultimately demolished in September 2023 as a result of the closure of Roxham Road. Maisie described the benefits of having an official RCMP building and border guards at Roxham Road:

What was happening at Roxham Road was a very smooth, thought out, compassionate process for entry of individuals. They were being vetted; everything was taken care of. It was, it was quite a process to see.

Similarly, Augustine commented:

The Canadian government had set up such a well organized process at Roxham that unless things went wrong, like people got lost getting there, it was, not to [migrants], but to us looking at the process, it was a very well organized process that should always be successful.



Figure 4.12. The Roxham Road RCMP Station in August 2023.

The patrol building was originally constructed to manage the flow of migrants crossing the border and the border guards were stationed there to enforce it. Over time, both the building – and specifically the space leading up to it on the US side of the border – had become part of an ad hoc gathering area for advocates, taxi drivers, migrants, and border patrol guards. As a taxi driver who observed many interactions between migrants and the Roxham Road space, Jeff was adamant on how he would stay and make sure the migrants had made it across the border safely:

I stayed there until they're all crossed, and I helped them. I would help them with their luggage as far as I could and when they got all the way across, I'd watch, then I'd leave. I've always done that. I'd get hollered at sometimes.

Jeff placed a significant amount of emphasis on how he “always felt bad for the people,” when they would have to leave their stuff behind on the other side of the border. If migrants were

unable to carry something across, or had forgotten it because of the highly stressful situation, they were not allowed to go back to get their objects. However, Jeff also mentioned that some of the patrol guards were “so nice” that in the winter, when the snow was thick and difficult to walk through, the guards would look around to make sure no one was watching and help him bring things across the border. Jeff explained how he bent the rules in the migrants’ favour when they had left things behind:

You’re allowed to take whatever you can carry. You can’t walk over with a handful of stuff, come back, and get more. Whatever you can carry across, that’s it. The nice one, the nice Canadian guards would let me drag it as far as that invisible line up there and kick it rest of the way.

This shows how, regardless of their professional occupation, many people in this border community worked together to achieve similar goals. As demonstrated through these examples, the border guards sometimes turned a blind eye to Jeff’s acts of nudging pieces of luggage across the border. Augustine also shed light on the dynamics between all actors involved in the border crossing process:

Yeah, it really is a, for the most part, it’s been a very good working relationship with law enforcement. People don’t realize that, but they generally, despite the stereotypes, just want people to be safe. And regardless of how one feels about immigration, and I know those officers don’t particularly like that, they just want to keep people safe.

In these regards, Augustine reinforced that most of the people who worked closely with migrants and were heavily involved in the operations that took place at Roxham Road, made sure that the process happened smoothly, and migrants were treated well. Overall, this discussion demonstrates that despite the construction of the border patrol station specifically for monitoring

and controlling movement, it had also been repurposed to represent a sense of community and solidarity in support of helping people cross the border.

The guarantee of this safe and easy process set up at Roxham Road was taken away in light of the sudden STCA expansion, which came as a surprise to many as it was announced just one day before it was officially enacted in March 2023. Jeff mentioned that the closure completely stopped him from working, as he said, “when they shut the border down, we were automatically, bam, done the same day. We didn’t, we only had one day warning. Just one day, they came and told us.” Migrants were, and still are, the most affected by the closure. Those who were either starting or in the midst of their journey were faced with three options depending on their circumstances and/or progress. These options included: crossing elsewhere in a more clandestine manner; attempting to meet an exception when claiming asylum at an official border crossing; or, like many who were already situated in or around Plattsburgh at the time, rushing to cross within the last few hours of operation on March 24th, 2023. As I had previously mentioned, many migrants did not know that the border crossing had closed and were arriving in Plattsburgh with nowhere to go afterwards. Maisie mentioned that that created a major problem for the community as Plattsburgh Cares advocates had less than 24 hours to prepare for an influx of migrants in a city that had already overwhelmed their resources and infrastructure:

When the STCA changed, that changed significantly, because most individuals still don’t understand what they need to get through and are being turned around. And most individuals have exhausted all their funding and are just left here, in our region, where there is no shelter, so there’s no place for them to go.

Afterwards, I asked Maisie how the border closure had affected migration initially and what she believed would come out of it in the near future. She mentioned that it would not deter migrants

but would rather push them to cross through the woods nearby, putting themselves in higher risk situations:

That is one issue – it has increased the numbers of people that are crossing into Canada completely circumventing any type of order, so, when they were going through Roxham Road, they were at least checking, being processed.

The only other time Roxham Road was closed to everyone attempting to cross was during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this case, the RCMP building was completely shut down and the border guards on duty were assigned to tell people that they were not allowed to cross. Maisie relayed that, “once COVID hit, and started, and the border closed, no one could get through. We saw a lot of individuals that were coming and staying in Plattsburgh for two, three, four months.” She explained that the reason people would stay in Plattsburgh month after month waiting for the border to reopen was because they would receive a general announcement every few weeks that the opening had been delayed by another month. During this time, many migrants were stuck in this liminal space, and they could not continue with their journey, which added extra strain on the Plattsburgh community. Many of my participants noted that the impact of COVID-19 left them wondering how much longer the community could support migrants passing through. Augustine revealed that, “some of [them] thought it would never reopen. The fact that it did reopen was surprising in a way.” She then mentioned how she thought that the border closure during the COVID-19 pandemic was essentially comparable to a trial run for how the STCA expansion would impact the community.

I had the opportunity to drive up to Roxham Road and observe the border patrol station during my visit in 2023. At this moment in time, the policy had already changed, and the patrol station was non-operational, but the building was still standing. By the time I returned in 2024,

the building was long demolished (Figure 4.13). While the Mountain Mart and Rip Van Winkle Motel existed prior to the increase in migration journeys, the RCMP border patrol station emerged as a direct response to it. Unlike the other institutions, the operation of the patrol station depended entirely on the loophole that had partially opened the border and the movements of migrants to this place that elicited the Canadian government’s response in the form of the processing centre.



Figure 4.13. The Absence of the RCMP Station in August 2024.

4.4.2 Security Cameras, Signs, and Garbage Bins

Following what I had laid out in the conceptual framework in chapter one, I have decided to highlight the signs, security cameras, and garbage bins at Roxham Road as key features and objects that represent the community and state-organized infrastructure that was specifically put in place to monitor and control the movement of people (Figure 4.14).

The ‘Road Closed’ and ‘Stop. Do Not Cross’ signs and the security cameras were installed at Roxham Road as a government-issued form of monitoring along with the stationed

border guards. While the patrol station was set up to manage the aftermath of those who decided to cross, the signs and cameras were installed to control how migrants interacted with the border and guards initially. When I visited for the second time in 2024, both the signs and the cameras were still there. Unlike the patrol station, the signs and cameras will likely remain indefinitely as a general warning of the borderline's location and of the existence of the STCA border policy.

Similarly, when I visited in 2024, the blue garbage bins were also still there, indicating that there was still a potential for use. Through a personal communication, I was informed that a local advocate arranged for the placement of these blue bins at Roxham Road, as prior, there had been a less-official cardboard box sat beside the path. Once the blue bins were placed, they were initially emptied and maintained by the advocate until they asked the town of Champlain to take over because the bins are within the town's boundary. While these bins were not government-mandated or organized, they are akin to the signs and cameras in the sense that they all manage and influence human behaviour in the border space. For example, Calvin Castine, a local Legislator from Plattsburgh, runs a YouTube channel called *Home Town Cable Network*, in which he posts video updates about migration and activities at Roxham Road. In his video titled "Roxham Road Update 2-15-23," posted on February 15th, 2023, he informally interviews a resident who is seen actively picking up garbage, including a phone case, from the ground and placing it in one of the blue bins. This act represents the conditioned response humans have for cleaning up and throwing things away, regardless of the situation.

During both my 2023 and 2024 visits to Roxham Road, I did not look inside the blue bins as the situation and context of being that close to an unofficial border crossing with security cameras watching, was uncomfortable. If the context had been different, it would have been extremely useful to see and have access to the contents inside the bins. However, it may have

been more informative if an analysis of the contents had taken place over an extended period of time. In such a case, many pieces of information such as, the frequency of particular objects, the amount of damage items may have received, reasons for throwing objects into a garbage bin, and potentially an indication of the political impact on certain items, all could have revealed an interesting assemblage of artifacts.



Figure 4.14. Security Cameras, Signs, and Blue Bins Located at Roxham Road.

Currently, these features still exist at Roxham Road and are the only physical reminders and representations of the process that had happened before the building was demolished. In reference to the expansion of the STCA, Jeff commented that:

Roxham Road is never, ever going to be open again, never, no matter if they open up Hemmingford or whatever. Roxham Road is done. That's all done with.

Overall, the RCMP building and its corresponding features added to the highly publicized crossing, but since the STCA expansion, there is little evidence left of such a monumental migration between Canada and the United States.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed how migration journeys through Plattsburgh affected infrastructure before, during, and after the expansion of the STCA and the subsequent closure of the Roxham Road unofficial border crossing. The first section of this chapter focused on many different routes that migrants may take to get to both Plattsburgh and Roxham Road. During my second visit to Plattsburgh in 2024, I opted to take the bus from New York City as a way to observe one of these potential routes. The subsequent parts of this chapter focused on the different types of infrastructure and businesses that were repurposed or emerged in light of the increase in migration. In particular, I noted that the Mountain Mart, the Rip Van Winkle Motel, and the Plattsburgh taxi business sector fell under infrastructure that pre-existed the initial opening of the Roxham Road border crossing but had evolved over time to accommodate the needs of both local community members and migrants who passed through. Whereas, the RCMP border patrol station and its associated installations, like security cameras, signs, and garbage bins, fell under infrastructure that emerged in response. These institutions became migrant spaces where the effects of the STCA and migration journeys were made visible.

CHAPTER 5: ARTIFACTS OF MIGRATION

I always tell stories, and the stories are just little snippets because I don't know, I don't know all the backgrounds. People share little bits with me but, but the fact is that we are, we have more in common than we don't. And when you tell the stories of, you know, the, the girls in the party dresses who got out but had no coat, or you tell the story of, there was a girl who arrived with a violin and I said, 'oh what a beautiful instrument,' but she didn't have a coat. I had a bright red one, I put it on her, and [her father] just burst into tears. It's just that act of human connection, now we're all tied together.

-Augustine

As Augustine reflected on various interactions that she had had with migrants preparing to cross the border at Roxham Road, the materiality of migration presented itself through the party dresses, the violin, and the lack of winter jackets. As I outlined in my conceptual framework, materiality within archaeology is concerned with understanding the intricate relationships between humans and objects. In this study, three key themes emerged related to objects associated with migration journeys: objects left behind by migrants; the circulation of objects left behind; and objects given to migrants. Each of these themes describes a different way that migrants and various Plattsburgh community members encounter objects. Those that were ultimately circulated within the community tell a story about the ways in which different people treat items after they had been left behind. Those that were given to migrants through acts of advocacy highlight the support that migrants receive during this point in their journey. Together, and by examining the ways in which individuals interact with these objects, a greater understanding of how the STCA border policy affected migration between the Canada-US border can be achieved.

During the interviews I conducted with my participants in 2023, each mentioned many different types of artifacts they had encountered throughout the years. I was unable to view any of these objects myself as they were not easily accessible at the time of the interview or my

participants did not have them anymore. However, during my second trip to Plattsburgh in 2024, as I was stopped at a tourist sign along Lake Champlain, just outside of Rouses Point, I happened upon a small child's shoe placed perfectly upright on a tree stump overlooking the northern border. I thought this was interesting as it was the type of shoe that would be worn at fancy events akin to weddings or parties. It was clean, and the way that it was positioned upright made it seem as though it was put there purposefully with the intent to be on display. At the same time, there were several border patrol vehicles and a handful of officers on the scene patrolling the boat dock. Through a short, informal communication, I was told that border patrol was monitoring boats arriving at and leaving from the dock to make sure the individuals were locals, as the dock is approximately 1.2 kilometres south of the border.

With this accumulation of information, we can infer that there had been recent irregular border crossing activity in this area, so one question remains: why was there only one shoe? Many interpretations could be offered, but one possibility is that, given its location next to the border, the shoe belonged to a child and had fallen off as their family was attempting to cross the border. Augustine mentioned a very similar situation when I spoke with her in August 2023, as she recalled finding a little boy's boot on the ground and said she was "sure he was being carried, and it had fallen off his foot." She figured that his parents did not realize it had fallen off in the spur of the moment, as they likely would have picked it up out of the snow.

Much like in the field of archaeology, we can use these artifacts – the shoe and boot, as tangible pieces that designate the region as part of a complex migratory system. While it is not possible to connect each object left behind to someone in particular, these objects can represent contemporary stories and evidence of the past presence of people.

5.1 Objects Left Behind

While I was interviewing participants, I asked them to provide me with some examples of objects that they had encountered during their time in migrant spaces and when interacting with migrants. These spaces include the Mountain Mart, the Rip Van Winkle Motel, taxis transporting migrants, and Roxham Road in general. In response, each participant listed off several items that could be deemed as ‘expected,’ which included worn out shoes and dirty socks, blankets, various items of clothing, and pieces of luggage that were too heavy to carry across the border when it came time for the migrants to choose what to take with them. These objects were either damaged and/or became unusable during the journey and were discarded. We can compare this to the work of De León (2013) in which he described finding water jugs and worn-out shoes that had surpassed their use and were abandoned throughout the Sonoran/Arizona borderlands. In cases like these, the items were discarded because they had become unmanageable and could potentially slow migrants down. For example, unnecessary energy may be spent by holding onto an empty water jug in a situation where there is little to no easy access for refilling it or wearing shoes that are worn-out with holes and tears. I encountered similar circumstances of specific objects left behind in and around Plattsburgh and Roxham Road.

In addition to the generalized objects outlined above, there were also items exclusively mentioned by individual participants. These objects directly related to the participants’ occupation or type of involvement in migration journeys. Alvin, the motel owner, mentioned that he would frequently find a variety of electronic devices including laptops, tablets, and phones left behind in motel rooms. When I asked why electronic devices were being left behind, he offered an explanation that perhaps it was a tactic to avoid detection at the border. On both the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)

websites, it is noted that their respective border agents have the authority to examine any digital devices being carried across (Canada Border Services Agency, 2025; U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2025). The basis of these migration journeys is clandestine in nature, so any attempt to avoid identification is in the migrants' favour. Why these devices were being left in motels as opposed to taxis or elsewhere could, perhaps, be explained by a certain level of anonymity or off-the-grid protection that existed between leaving the motel and arriving at Roxham Road. Given that there were border officials and security cameras waiting for migrants at the border crossing, the potential for making a direct connection between the person exiting and the devices left behind in the taxi was increased. Thus, leaving electronic devices at the motel would create a barrier with little to no connection as to whose device belonged to whom.

Augustine mentioned that, during her time at Roxham Road, she had also encountered pieces of identification that migrants would discard before crossing the border. In her case, these objects were in the form of personal items such as IDs, Social Security cards, written notes, and court papers. During her interview, it became clear that Augustine's focus was on the intimate objects that could potentially be connected to specific individuals. She mentioned that she would collect these items, and if they were damaged or ripped up, she would reassemble them. To Augustine these objects were:

Small pieces of day-to-day life that these people who were, felt they had to go to a new country, had left behind, and it was just another way of bearing witness to the fact that they're just like you and me with our ID cards, but have to, have to make a big decision to, to relocate.

Later in this chapter, I will discuss how Augustine collected these personal objects left at Roxham Road with the intention to give them to the New York State Archives in hopes of creating a space for educating the public.

Jeff, the taxi driver, mentioned that many people travelling with children would throw their car seats out in the dumpster or clothing donation bin in the parking lot of the Mountain Mart. This happened as a direct result of too many people in the taxi and not enough room for things that take up unnecessary space in that moment. Jeff also explained that oftentimes, so many people were piled in the taxi that parents had to hold their children and babies on their laps during the ride.

In the above discussion, Alvin, Augustine, and Jeff noted the different types of objects they had individually encountered. In each case, the type of object related to the participants' occupation or the spaces they would situate themselves within. In this section, I provided a general overview of what an expected object left behind may be and the circumstances behind it being discarded. I then outlined specific types of objects that my participants had encountered during their involvement in migrant spaces. In the following section, I will discuss abandoned vehicles as an example of an object deemed as both unexpected and unusual by each of my participants.

5.2 Abandoned Vehicles

During the interviews, I had asked my participants if there were any objects they had come across that seemed unexpected or unusual for someone to leave behind. Each participant immediately responded with abandoned vehicles and provided an indication of where the vehicles were left abandoned and what happened to them afterwards. While reading through the interview transcripts and analyzing what my participants had mentioned about abandoned vehicles, I began to wonder why both the participants and I had referred to vehicles as being an unusual object to leave behind purposefully. I would argue that it is intertwined with our general

perception of the importance of objects. For example, vehicles are typically seen as highly valuable due to their cost and how they allow people easy access to transportation and independence. However, for migrants, vehicles may only be seen as a form of transportation to the next step in their migration journey and discarded afterwards.

There were three locations in the region with the highest concentration of abandoned vehicles: the Mountain Mart parking lot, along Roxham Road, and in the parking lots of motels. The majority of these vehicles were left in the Mountain Mart parking lot and along the residential portion of Roxham Road just before the border crossing. One potential reason for leaving vehicles in the Mountain Mart parking lot can be linked to the widespread knowledge that the Mountain Mart was used as a taxi pick up spot for transportation to Roxham Road. Therefore, migrants could drop their vehicles off in the parking lot and take a taxi the rest of the way. Those who chose to drive the full way to the residential portion of Roxham Road would abandon their vehicles next to a house and walk the rest of the way to the crossing. As Jeff commented:

I knew some people up there [Roxham Road]. He said a lot of times, he'd wake up in the morning, there's an abandoned car in his driveway. The refugees would drive all the way up there and then park it there.

Alvin noted that he had not seen any vehicles left behind at motels within Plattsburgh city limits, though there were cases of vehicles being abandoned at motels closer to the border in communities like Rouses Point, which is approximately 13 kilometres east of Roxham Road and located just south of the boundary line. In reference to my earlier discussion regarding border guards patrolling the dock just outside of Rouses Point, the town could serve as a last stop for migrants where they might abandon their vehicle before attempting to cross. This points to a

broader view of migration journeys and border crossings through the region, as it indicates that not all of them are situated at Roxham Road.

According to my participants, abandoning vehicles became such a common phenomenon that it was not unusual for them to hear stories of migrants leaving notes on the windshield telling whoever had found the vehicle, that they could take it.

We have people that are abandoning vehicles because they can't take them across. You know, a particular family left a vehicle near Roxham Road, somebody was walking by, they gave them the keys, and said you know, 'if I'm not back in 24 hours, you can have my car and do what you want with it.' But they got turned back in 36 hours and had no vehicle.

-Maisie

Maisie relayed a story regarding a situation community members may encounter when migrants choose to abandon their vehicle. She noted that there is no guarantee that migrants will have the opportunity to retrieve their vehicle in the case that they are turned away at the border. Jeff, who frequently interacted with migrants in a different way and in different spaces, was more accustomed to being the person on the receiving end of migrants handing over their vehicles. As he described the situation:

I've had a couple cars given to me from the refugees that drove here. And of course, there was hundreds of cars that were left there at the Mountain Mart, just left abandoned and they would leave them there for a week or so, then they'd have, whatever that guy's name is over there, come and get them. The scrap yard would come get them.

It is interesting to note the differences in what would happen to the vehicles regardless of whether or not their owners returned. The two above examples suggest that either the vehicles would be taken by someone else or eventually sent to the scrap yard; in either case, it was unlikely the original owners would gain possession of their vehicles again. As I discussed in the previous section regarding objects left behind, when items are discarded and/or found, there is no

way to know exactly where they end up. This can further be analyzed through the absence of information about what happens to these objects. For example, Alvin did not offer a further explanation for where vehicles left at motels go. Much like Soto's (2018) reference to calling these circumstances similar to the object's 'afterlife,' they are once again transferred to another 'life.' However, there is no way to know for sure what happens to the vehicles after they are given to new owners. In short, what we can determine is that the vehicles represent situations in which migrants choose what becomes more or less important when moving towards a certain goal.

Abandoned vehicles may also demonstrate how there can be a disconnect between how we understand what is going on in migrants' lives versus what is actually happening, even when researchers or community members work closely with them. Feminist political geography strives to put the voices of everyday people in the forefront and connects to the reasoning behind how I formed my methodology for this project. By both conducting interviews and observing the community and environment, I was able to better understand the lives of migrants who pass through Plattsburgh through the eyes of community members who interact with migrants on a daily basis. The perspectives provided by my participants offered insight into understanding migrants' situations and the importance of making the effort to understand their circumstances, rather than placing our values, thoughts, and assumptions on what we expect their situation to be. Perhaps, to migrants, these vehicles may be perceived as an object that allowed them the opportunity to control their own movement and gain back their agency in a system where they have very little. By both leaving the vehicles behind and willingly giving them away, migrants are also demonstrating that they are choosing to do so on their own terms. In the previous sections I have discussed examples of objects left behind and where they might go afterwards. In

the following section, I will discuss the circulation of these objects left behind in terms of both their treatment after being found and where they might have ended up.

5.3 Circulation of Objects

5.3.1 Valuable Objects

During my analysis and coding of the interviews, I noticed that each participant had given some indication as to where objects left behind may have ended up. This revealed an important theme around the circulation of objects. As these objects are a part of the remaining physical signs of migration through Plattsburgh, they can represent a larger story of how people move through these border spaces and how community members interact with migrants' objects. In some cases, a subconscious value system is placed on these objects, which I will touch on throughout this section as I discuss the treatment and circulation of objects after they have been left behind by migrants and found or picked up by community members.

To start, each of my participants seemingly had a different perspective on what to do with the objects they found, their importance, and their potential value. During my analysis, three different subthemes emerged pertaining to the treatment of objects after they had been found. These subthemes include objects for profit, objects for donation, and objects for education.

In terms of objects for profit, Jeff mentioned that some of his colleagues would collect objects left behind in the backseats of their taxis and sell them at garage sales. This demonstrates that to those taxi drivers, the potential monetary value of migrants' things outweighs their significance as someone else's personal belongings. Conversely, Jeff provided a specific example of another colleague who would often search the objects for a form of identification in the hopes

of sending them back to the owner because, “that’s the way he is.” Lastly, while discussing how Jeff, himself, acted towards objects left behind, he said:

You know, you would open the luggage, make sure, but it’s just clothes and stuff, nothing that was – to me, not valuable. Maybe to them it was valuable. To me? What am I supposed to do anyway?

Jeff noted that while he does understand that the items inside these pieces of luggage could be valuable to their previous owner, those items left behind were of little significance to him because he had no prior connection to them. He did not elaborate on what he would do with the objects he found in his own taxi but did mention two other cases in which he encountered things left behind in migrant spaces. The first example pertains to objects left behind at Roxham Road and how they are discarded or moved during the times Jeff was not working. As he said, “I don’t know whoever comes out to all that stuff they leave behind, because I’d go back up there, 2-3 hours later, the next bus comes, and it’s all gone.” The second example Jeff provided was that Greyhound bus drivers would contact him after they had arrived in Plattsburgh and found things left behind in their bus:

A lot of people left stuff on the bus, you know? The, the bus driver would call me, ‘they still got their stuff in there.’ [Jeff’s response]: ‘I don’t know what to tell you buddy? Bring it back to Albany, I don’t know?’

While Jeff noted that there were objects left behind at Roxham Road and inside the buses, the final destinations of these objects are absent from this thesis as I was unable to interview the RCMP officers stationed at Roxham Road and bus drivers who might know this information. However, regarding the objects left at Roxham Road, they were likely placed in the blue garbage bins on the US side of the crossing during the times Jeff was picking up more migrants.

Concerning objects left behind in motel rooms, Alvin mentioned that the motel staff would initially keep the objects in storage for up to 30 days. Objects were kept as a precaution in the case of migrants being turned away from crossing the border and heading back to Plattsburgh. After that period of time, the motel workers would begin to offer the items to other migrants passing through or donate them to Plattsburgh Cares. In this particular case, the motel staff were more inclined to approach the objects with a mindset focused on them being other people's belongings and were prepared to return or donate them.

In her discussions of encountering personal items at the Roxham Road crossing, Augustine told me that she describes herself as an educator and believes that to be one of her most important characteristics. Being an advocate, but also someone whose main focus is on educating people, she mentioned that when she would come across objects categorized as personal items or those that may represent migration journeys, such as notes or ripped up pieces of documents, she would collect them. Her intention behind collecting them was to eventually create an archive or an online collection in order to circulate knowledge about migration journeys through Roxham Road to the public, much like the artistic projects I mentioned in chapter two, *Roxham*, curated by Michel Huneault and *Roxham Road to North Elba*, curated by Bill McDowell.

Augustine noted that regardless of the closure of the crossing, there is still a need to educate people on migration journeys and the effects of border policies on them because it is a continuing process:

I did pick up quite a few things that were left behind in the early years because I thought that it's, and I still think, that that's kind of a documentation of a historic event that took place and probably is still taking place on some levels here... Those things were all a little piece of life.

Objects that Jeff found left behind in the backseat of his taxi, those that would be sold at garage sales by his colleagues, those that would be donated to other migrants by Alvin and motel staff, and those that were picked up and collected by Augustine for a future archive, are pieces of people's lives that contribute to a greater story of migration through Plattsburgh. One that allows community members and researchers to understand the implications of border policies through objects that have been separated from their human counterpart.

5.3.2 Non-Valuable Objects

Contrary to the previous discussion about the potential value and significance of items that may have been left behind by migrants, in this section, I will discuss objects that were deemed as 'trash.' These items consist of legitimate garbage, including fast food bags, but also items that were considered useful until they ultimately broke during the journey and were disposed of, such as broken phone cases and strollers.

Placed just beside the path between the border at Roxham Road, are two blue garbage bins. In the previous chapter, I discussed the bins' significance, where they came from, and who handles and empties them when they are full. Recalling Jeff's comment about objects left at Roxham Road 'disappearing' by the time he had returned with more migrants, it can be assumed that those objects were most likely discarded into the bins. In this section, I will touch on the potential contents of the blue bins and what those items could represent or mean to the greater story behind migration journeys through Roxham Road.

While I was unable to look inside of the bins, I had been told by many people during my time in Plattsburgh that all they contained was "trash." However, the designation of all the objects as trash challenges the overarching concept of migrant materiality. As I had mentioned

previously, De León (2013) specifically analyzed empty water jugs and broken shoes as evidence of migrants walking through the Sonoran Desert. While these objects were ultimately deemed as unusable to the migrant, De León (2012) says that “those who characterize the artifacts left behind by migrants as mere “trash” fail to recognize the historical, political, and global economic forces that have shaped border crossing into a well-structured social process with a distinct archaeological fingerprint” (p.478). These objects offer evidence of the wider mobilization of people and, in the case of the blue bins located at Roxham Road, the contents, regardless of their use or categorization, represent this evidence of people passing through and utilizing this specific space (Sundberg, 2008).

Soto (2018) discusses how clean-up workers and volunteers in the Sonoran Desert borderlands make distinctions between what they would likely pick up and keep as opposed to what they would simply designate as garbage. Items that these workers chose to keep consisted of those that elicited emotions of melancholy, such as children’s objects and written notes, which demonstrates that to those workers, these types of items were deemed to be of high importance to collect while the rest were left to stay in the desert as trash. Soto (2018) mentions that “at these moments, the intimate travel materials left behind by migrants entered into what I saw as their afterlives, working beyond the utilitarian function for which they were designed and instead marking the passage of their absent human counterparts” (p.461). Both De León (2012) and Soto’s (2018) work urges us to consider that regardless of the potential categorizations of these objects, they make up a contemporary archaeological site in which each artifact is indicative of the past presence of humans.

As with areas of the Sonoran Desert, there is an assemblage of these types of objects contained within the bins at Roxham Road. Augustine noted this as she said:

Yeah, I mean some of it was legitimate trash from some of the, the taxi drivers would drive through McDonald's, you know, and let people get food. And so, it was that kind of thing and then, but there would be other things, you know, broken down, whatever, broken down strollers and there's just all kinds of stuff.

While both the McDonald's bags and broken strollers were thrown away in the garbage bins, Augustine made a clear distinction between the two. By referring to the McDonald's bags as "legitimate trash," she is denoting that these types of items are intended pieces of garbage that exist to serve an ephemeral, single-use purpose. In contrast, the strollers are objects intended for long-term use but that had broken during the journey and were unusable for the foreseeable future. The accumulation of these objects in the bins is comparable to a midden, which is an archaeological term for waste accumulated in one area due to human activity (Renfrew & Bahn, 2016). In this case, the blue bins began to serve as a contemporary midden for migration journeys through Roxham Road and, like the objects mentioned in Soto (2018), they are all physical evidence of the presence of humans at a certain moment in time.

Throughout this section I have discussed the circulation of objects that had been left behind by migrants during their journeys and where and how different people interacted with those objects. According to my participants, they encountered items that they thought held some kind of significance, like electronic devices and personal documents, and others that were more likely to be given the designation of trash. In the following section, I will discuss the types of objects that are given to migrants during their journey through Plattsburgh.

5.4 Objects Given to Migrants

In connection to my third research objective, centered on the materiality of migration, I was interested in understanding the process behind the types of objects advocates gave to

migrants and how those objects were distributed. Items mentioned include things like warm pieces of clothing, shoes and socks, food, toothbrushes, and things for children like toys, stuffed animals, and books. Many of the items that Plattsburgh Cares members hand out come from donations from community members in the region. During my interview with Augustine, she mentioned that there is a group of women in Champlain that get together frequently with the sole purpose of knitting toques and scarves to give to migrants. She commented that other donations may come from across the country and that one day, she received a delivery of seven boxes of clothing from people in Florida, showing that as the media presence at Roxham Road increased, people from other states were exposed to what was happening in this region.

A majority of donations from the community consist of warm clothing as the temperatures drop quite low in the wintertime in northern New York State. Many of my participants shared their concern over migrants arriving in Plattsburgh in the middle of winter wearing unsuitable clothing for the cold weather. When I asked Maisie why migrants may arrive in insufficient clothing, she responded with a comment about how the migrants' country of origin plays the largest role in what is available to them before they start their journey:

The clothing that they had in their home country, yeah, would not be clothing, they wouldn't have clothing that they would need here, over there, and when they're travelling, they're travelling with just what's on their backs. I can tell you several times, I've had folks tell me that they have nothing because their backpack got pulled off their back in the current in the river because when they're, they're literally crossing through jungles, through rivers...and that's what ends up happening.

In this case, Maisie described a situation in which migrants who began their journey in a country with a warmer climate were less likely to have the opportunity to acquire a winter jacket. On that note, Maisie, Jeff, and Augustine specifically pointed out that oftentimes, people would arrive

wearing flip flops in the wintertime. In this case, people were arriving with what they had, which left them at the mercy of the weather conditions they had encountered.

In other cases, it seemed clear that migrants had viewed crossing the border as a significant event in which they were on their way to a new home and wanted to make a good, presentable impression. In the introduction to this chapter, I presented a story relayed by Augustine about a little girl who arrived at Roxham Road in a party dress and another who brought a violin with her. At this moment in time, neither of them had proper winter jackets but it was more important for these families to present their appearance in the best possible way. In instances like these, donations from both local community members and people who send items from across the country are imperative to provide warm clothing to people who are trying their hardest to get to a safe place. In the following subsection, I will focus on a specific example of advocates providing toys to children and how that act demonstrates a different perspective of the influence border policies have on migration journeys.

5.4.1 Children's Toys

In analyzing Maisie and Augustine's interviews, I flagged their differing thoughts and approaches to giving objects to children. In this short section, I will discuss the act of giving toys to migrant children and the impact that it made on both the children and the family as a whole. The first perspective is demonstrated by Maisie as she said:

They [Plattsburgh Cares volunteers] started gathering small stuffed animals that they could give to children because they didn't bring any toys or luxury that they did not have with them.

Luxury is the keyword that I would like to highlight from this quote as it implies, in relation to toys, that Maisie views them as trivial items outside the realm of necessity. In contrast to

Maisie's assessment, Augustine spent a decent amount of time during her interview reflecting on the importance of giving out toys to migrants as she determined that it not only benefited the kids, but their parents as well. She stated that, "the toys became really important as I went on, I could see what an impact that they had on the entire family." Here, we can see that in Augustine's eyes, handing out toys was one of the most important things she could do, and, to her, it became a necessity:

It evolved a little bit as I understood what was most beneficial for, for the refugees. It's completely not about me, I was able to be there and serve as that person, but that's not at all the focus. I could see that the toys meant a lot to the children, and it was very helpful to the parents as well because you know, someone focusing on your child when you're in a complete disarray? It's, it's helpful and then it just warms your heart, 'somebody else cares about my children,' because most of these flights have to do with parents wanting a better life for their kids.

Not only did the toys make children happy, but they also gave a sense of comfort to the parents by providing them with the knowledge that other people were actively thinking about their wellbeing. While Roxham Road had already been closed for a few months and fewer migrants were passing through at the time of our interview, Augustine noted that she still carried stuffed animals in her car on the off chance that she would meet any families with children. Heinrich (2014) mentions that "[toys] remind us that children have been migrants too, and that migration is a different experience for children and adults" (p.143). While Maisie and Augustine's opinions differ when approaching these types of situations, they both mentioned how advocates, like Plattsburgh Cares and other members of the community, understand that circumstances behind migration affect the entire family.

5.4.2 Shifting Perspectives

In addition to advocacy work that revolved around providing objects, transportation, and different forms of institutional spaces for migrants, I would like to highlight the types of advocacy work that took place to humanize the process. As I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, previous research on the effects of the STCA focused heavily on the statistics regarding how many people were crossing, where they were crossing, and where they might have originated from, whereas little attention was given to the circumstances underlying migration journeys and how they may affect migrants. The aim of this section is to understand how my participants, as community members, grew to understand these circumstances through their interactions with migrants and migrant objects. As Augustine began to involve herself in the migrant community, she realized that “we have more in common than we don’t.” She reflected on this during her interview:

The more you can put a face to immigration, the more you can make people understand. I always say it’s easy, it’s, it’s hard to hate someone close up. You know, I mean, I don’t, I don’t do this, but it’s easy to hate a nameless group until they’re in front of you and they’re talking to you, and you realize that they care about their family, you know, they care about their, their country, and their safety, and their education. And you go, wow, so do I. And then that hatred goes away because now it’s a human.

In the above quote, Augustine recognized that many of the negative views and stereotypes placed on migrants change when a person begins to understand the migrants’ situation. The Canadian advocacy group across the border from Plattsburgh in Quebec, called Bridges Not Borders, maintains a blog for members to share their stories interacting with the Canada-US border. In a blog post written by Joy (2025), titled, *The Woods: Place of Joy and of Despair*, Joy shared how they still encounter things left behind such as gloves, jackets, and blouses in the forest that surrounds the Roxham Road region. They wrote that “in these uncertain times, the best we can

do is lean into our compassion, resist the pressure to dehumanize those who have been forced into hiding, and remember the bodies and hopes and dreams that occupied these discarded clothes.” Joy’s reflection illustrates that they wish to highlight the people and personalities attached to the clothing left behind. Circling back to Augustine’s collection of “small pieces of day-to-day life,” Augustine demonstrated that she had grown to both appreciate and acknowledge that the items represented their human counterparts who were otherwise absent.

In another Bridges Not Borders blog post written by Ann (2024), titled, *The Black Suitcase*, Ann described happening on a suitcase likely left behind by a migrant. They debated about whether to leave it in the woods or take it home, though ultimately, it had disappeared, likely taken by someone else. In their reflection, Ann mentioned that they “had come close to someone in a difficult situation without meeting them or knowing anything about them, except that probably all their worldly possessions had spent a few days in the woods about 100 metres away from [Ann’s] home.” Acknowledging the reasons for objects to be left behind, Ann, Joy, and Augustine had each reflected on how encountering migrant objects helped them feel a sense of closeness to and awareness of migrants without ever having met the individuals.

During my interview with Jeff, he commented on how his opinion of migration had changed once he was actively involved with migrants and saw first-hand what they were going through and how they were being treated. He mentioned that at first, he did not feel bad for migrants as he thought their stories were fake, however; after he began to hear more stories, he realized that this is the reality for some people in this world. Jeff continued by telling me that he grew sympathy for migrants as he began to imagine himself and his family in these situations. Jeff revealed that he began to care more personally for the individuals crossing at Roxham Road once he began to understand the desperation of migrants and the risks that come with the

journeys. He showed this care by making sure the migrants made it across the border and had all their objects with them. In Ann's blog post, they mentioned that "it was upsetting to think that someone had been separated from their few possessions while surely seeking refuge." For advocates involved in the process, many realized that the few things migrants carry with them on journeys are important items they take with them to begin their new life.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter centred on the artifacts of migration journeys that are circulated throughout Plattsburgh, Roxham Road, and the other surrounding border regions. The first section of this chapter specifically focused on the types of objects that migrants left behind during their journeys and what happened to the objects afterwards. In particular, I interviewed four community members who each provided me with an indication of the types of objects they had encountered, where they had found them, and what they might have done with them. I pulled out a specific case of abandoned vehicles as they were mentioned by each of my participants as being significant to how migrants interact with the community. In the second part of the chapter, I shifted gears by focusing on the types of objects advocates would give to migrants. These were collected through both community and cross-country donations. Similar to the abandoned vehicles section, I pulled out children's toys to showcase that objects beyond the 'necessities' are just as important to families who arrive with their children.

Lastly, I discussed the ways in which advocacy developed throughout the region as people began to understand the situation and sympathize with migrants. In many cases, objects left behind that my participants encountered were the last remaining pieces of someone's journey through Plattsburgh, and the circumstances behind the artifacts' abandonment or loss, are directly

correlated to situations where a person must make the difficult decision to relocate. In short, by examining the artifacts of migration, we are better able to understand how migration journeys unfold in the absence of the humans who either left the objects behind or had interacted with them in some way. Not only are these artifacts physical evidence of human occupation in this border region and provide the ability to map out routes and spaces where migration journeys take place, but they also represent the individuals who owned them and how they experienced a certain point of their journey.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The Safe Third Country Agreement is a Canada-US border policy that prevents migrants from making asylum claims at the land border between the two countries. Until March 2023, this policy had only applied to official land border crossings. As such, a ‘loophole’ had been created in the policy wherein migrants could enter either country at unofficial border crossings to make their asylum claim without being turned away. Roxham Road, a rural road that dead ends at the border between Quebec and New York State, became the most well-known unofficial border crossing, complete with an RCMP patrol station on the Canadian side of the border. Plattsburgh, New York, was chosen as the research site for this project because of its proximity to the Roxham Road crossing. The geographical relationship between Plattsburgh and Roxham Road directly influenced the number of migrants passing through the city and the rise of advocacy groups in the general region.

Informed by feminist political geography research that focuses on narratives that capture the everyday experiences of people, my methodology for this study consisted of both semi-structured interviews and participant-observation methods. Through four interviews and immersive observations of the community and landscape of the region, I was able to gain an understanding of the relationship between migrants, their materiality, advocates, and geography. The conceptual framework for this thesis applied both archaeological and social scientific lenses to aid in the analysis and emergence of a well-rounded picture of how migration journeys through Plattsburgh operate.

I outlined three research objectives to guide this thesis. The first objective was to examine how migration journeys through Plattsburgh were impacted by the unintended consequences of the STCA; the second was to observe how changes in the STCA affected infrastructure and the

operation of existing and emergent institutions in Plattsburgh and bordering regions; and the third was to understand how migrant materiality can represent the tangibility of border policies both at the borderline and in peripheral areas. These objectives directly tie into the key findings, below.

6.1 Key Findings

6.1.1 Relationships

Between early 2017 and March 2023, Plattsburgh saw a rise in the number of migrants passing through the city to cross the border at Roxham Road. Initially, this increase was attributed to public discourse concerning the Trump administration and the then-President's public pronouncements and policies related to immigration. Over time, a stronger media presence surrounding Roxham Road heightened global public awareness of the border crossing process and of this site, making it into a "crossroad of the world" in the words of Augustine, one of my participants in this study. The easy-access circulation of this information online prompted the steady use of this crossing until the expansion of the STCA and closure of Roxham Road in 2023.

Through interviews with my participants and informal personal communications, I had many conversations regarding the role and consequences of the STCA on migration journeys to the Canada-US border. Specifically, I asked each person to provide some background information by describing their experiences with and observations of the community's reaction to migration through Plattsburgh.

It became clear through these discussions that, in response to the increase in migration through Plattsburgh, a relationship had formed between advocates, taxi drivers, motel owners,

and migrants in the community that may not have happened otherwise. Each conversation revealed that, in the beginning, the community faced difficulties navigating changes that were made in response to the notable presence of migrants. These changes included the establishment of the local advocacy group, Plattsburgh Cares, and the sudden appearance of multiple personal taxi companies. Over time, a smooth system developed between advocates, taxi drivers, and motel owners, with all of them working together to provide services for migrants. In general, these services included Plattsburgh Cares members working with taxi drivers to transport migrants to Roxham Road or setting up rooms for migrants at the Rip Van Winkle Motel. On a more personal level, advocates and taxi drivers sometimes covered the costs of motel rooms, out of pocket. In other cases, as one participant explained, taxi drivers stood up to Roxham Road border guards who would harass advocates for helping migrants cross. For members of this community, the relationships became so personal, tight knit, and intertwined that many of the people I talked to referred to each other by name.

In response to the growing personal relationships between community members and migrants, certain geographical locations outside of Plattsburgh and Roxham Road also emerged as important places to facilitate these relationships. Locations in the state of New York, such as Champlain and New York City played a role in facilitating interactions between migrants and Plattsburgh community members. People in the small border town of Champlain often encountered an abundance of migrants due the town's proximity to the border. In response, a group of Champlain locals frequently gathered to knit toques, mittens, and scarves to donate to Plattsburgh Cares, in the hopes that these items would be given to migrants. New York City is where migrants often began the final stage of their journey with a bus ride to Plattsburgh. Prior to mid-2024, the Greyhound bus from New York City dropped people off in Plattsburgh at the

Mountain Mart convenience store, where advocates would be waiting inside to meet and consult with migrants, taxi drivers would be parked outside for anyone wanting a ride to Roxham Road, and the workers at the Rip Van Winkle Motel across the street would have rooms prepared for people who needed them.

The relationships that formed, both between people and different geographical locations, demonstrate that the increase in migration through Plattsburgh, as an effect of the STCA border policy, created an intertwined system of people and infrastructure. An example of a long-term implication of these relationships can be seen through the North Country Immigration Community Roundtable and Workshop that I attended during my 2023 fieldwork. During this meeting, a PhD student from the City University of New York gave a presentation about a website that she was developing for the purpose of providing migrants with easy access to a multitude of resources, such as advocacy groups, food banks, and health care services within the entire state of New York. This, bringing together local advocates and academics, hints at the importance of these relationships for collaborations regarding plans going forward, future projects, and long-term advocacy within and outside of the Plattsburgh region.

6.1.2 Migrant Spaces

In connection with my second research objective, and as I discussed in chapter four, changes to the STCA also impacted the ways in which different institutions within Plattsburgh and surrounding border regions operated. The Mountain Mart, the Rip Van Winkle Motel, and the Plattsburgh taxi business all represent existing institutions that were repurposed in response to the growing relationships between community members and migrants. Roxham Road represents emergent infrastructure that was constructed in response to the increased use of the

unofficial border crossing. Each of these institutions became important spaces to mediate interactions between local community members and migrants.

Throughout their institutional repurposing, the Mountain Mart and Rip Van Winkle Motel infrastructure remained unchanged, as the Mountain Mart ran business as usual by continuing to serve as a local convenience store and gas station, and the Rip Van Winkle Motel remained a motel. However, as I discussed in the previous section, the context had shifted over the years in which this infrastructure had also become a space for advocates, migrants, and taxi drivers to gather, thus creating ad hoc migrant spaces within these businesses. In this sense, during the process of adapting to and accommodating for the increase in migration, the Mountain Mart had shifted to become a general symbol of migration journeys through Plattsburgh. Similarly, the Rip Van Winkle Motel owners had repurposed the motel to specifically accommodate migrants, while they simultaneously designated a different motel they owned in Plattsburgh for tourists. The juxtaposition between the institutional designation of each motel contributes to the visible symbology of migrant spaces within Plattsburgh. In keeping with the theme of existing infrastructure, the Plattsburgh taxi services also adapted to the increase of migration by adjusting travel routes to include transportation to Roxham Road, which allowed for the creation of temporary migrant spaces situated in the backseats of taxis. Overall, these migrant spaces developed out of existing infrastructure that were repurposed through relationships formed in response to the effects of the STCA.

In contrast, infrastructure like the Roxham Road RCMP processing centre, security cameras, information signs, and garbage bins, had emerged specifically to manage and control people and their activities within this space. The incorporation of these structures and features affirmed the designation of the Roxham Road unofficial border crossing as an official migrant

space. This is not to say that Roxham Road was not a migrant space before, but the addition of visible indicators worked to define and contain a space with intangible boundaries.

Following the STCA expansion in March 2023 and the subsequent decrease in migration through Plattsburgh, many of the institutions began to revert to their original state. Within the first few months, the effects of the expansion prompted taxi drivers to refuse to transport migrants to Roxham Road due to uncertain legal implications, and the RCMP station at Roxham Road was demolished. During my 2024 fieldwork, I observed that the Mountain Mart was no longer being used as a bus stop for the bus from New York City, and the Rip Van Winkle Motel was under renovation. Migrant spaces, such as these, initially emerged in response to changes in the STCA, whereby institutions were repurposed by community members to accommodate for the increase in migration. Over time, they began to symbolize and represent migration journeys through Plattsburgh and surrounding border regions. While these particular institutions have now faded, they have had a lasting impact that can be observed through past and current research, as can the tangible objects that accompanied both the people and the institutions.

6.1.3 Tangible Evidence

The third research objective, as discussed in chapter five, focuses on artifacts involved in migration journeys and how objects provide tangible evidence of border policies through human interaction and movement. Many objects left behind by migrants in the border region included ‘expected’ items, such as worn-out shoes, dirty socks, and large pieces of luggage. These objects tended to be discarded because they were broken, forgotten in the midst of the journey, or became unmanageable and purposefully abandoned. Each participant specifically noted the presence of abandoned vehicles in the region and designated them as ‘unexpected’ objects to be left behind. Consequently, the expected, portable objects were often found and collected by

locals who initiated the process of circulating them into the community, often resulting in these items being sold at garage sales, donated to Plattsburgh Cares, collected for future archival purposes, or thrown away in the blue garbage bins at Roxham Road.

Other artifacts associated with migration include objects given to migrants by advocates. These consisted of toothbrushes, winter wear, toys for children, and shoes. A majority of these items were obtained through donations from local people in Plattsburgh and Champlain, and also from people in different states who had learned of Roxham Road through the media. The role of advocacy donations in this community not only highlight what migrants might have lacked when they arrived in Plattsburgh, but also the impact of offering things to people who had been in transit across multiple sites with minimal essentials.

The above examples pertain to individual artifacts associated with migration in the Plattsburgh and Roxham Road regions. As an assemblage, the objects represent a tangible series of human experiences that were directly influenced by border policies. Praetzellis (2016) states “materiality is a way of thinking about things/objects that recognizes that they aren’t just tools used by people to achieve human ends. Things actively influence society and culture” (p. 155). Within the Plattsburgh community, these familiar, everyday objects mediated interactions between community members and migrants, resulting in the formation of strong relationships and the ability for the community members to understand and sympathize with migrants and their situations. In this sense, the objects left behind in migrant spaces serve as evidence of the impacts of border policies in a visible, tangible way, even in the absence of their human counterparts.

6.2 Contributions

My study has made important theoretical and methodological contributions, as well as added to the literature on border and migration studies. This thesis took a unique approach in combining human geography with archaeology, which not only bridged these two fields, but also linked corresponding qualitative theoretical frameworks of feminist political geography and materiality. Both frameworks focus on examining the smaller components that make up the fuller picture, whether that be migration journeys in response to border policies and politics, or the significance of objects and artifacts associated with certain practices. Taken together, this combined approach enabled me to gain a more complete understanding of the impacts that the STCA had on migration journeys through the community of Plattsburgh.

By taking a materiality approach to analyzing the relevance and significance that objects have in relation to migration journeys, it became clear that objects were actively mediating relationships and connections between local community members, the migrants who owned the items, and me as the researcher. For my participants, who, unlike myself, were able to physically see, handle, and make decisions about what to do with certain objects left behind, the objects represented a tangible piece of someone else's life that my participants had to then take responsibility of. These decisions, and the ways in which my participants spoke about and described their encounters with migrant material culture during the interviews, provides insight into the different perspectives, interpretations, and understandings that can be made of migration journeys.

In particular, some saw migration as a business opportunity; this includes a handful of taxi drivers who had originally started their own taxi service after realizing the monetary value of transporting migrants, and continued profiting by selling objects, like luggage, forgotten in the

backseats of their taxis, at garage sales. Others, like some motel owners, kept items such as clothing left behind in rooms, and donated them back into the community or to other migrants passing through. Lastly, one of the advocates I interviewed, collected specific objects, like IDs, legal documents, and written notes, in the hopes of creating a visual archive to educate the public on the reality of migration journeys. Additionally, many of my participants noted how their perspective on migration shifted after comparing migrant material culture to their own belongings. Many of the objects left behind consisted of everyday things that everyone has. When discussing these similarities, one of my participants said she realized that “we have more in common than we don’t,” and another told me how he grew sympathy for migrants after relating their objects to things he and his family also owned. These examples demonstrate not only how people interact with migrant material culture, but how these objects, in turn, have influence on people’s actions and opinions.

Like objects, spaces and places also play an active role within migration journeys. During my first visit to Plattsburgh in 2023, the community was just beginning to see the impacts of the STCA expansion and closure of the Roxham Road border crossing. Fewer migrants were arriving in Plattsburgh at that time, but there was still enough activity for places like the Mountain Mart gas station and the Rip Van Winkle Motel to continue being needed and used by advocates and migrants. My project was developed in the midst of a shifting border policy that directly impacted migration journeys and local responses, with unknowns, uncertainties, and changes often presenting themselves over the course of this project. I found myself continuously needing to update certain information within my thesis to keep current with the changes. One of these changes was the demolition of the RCMP station at Roxham Road, approximately one month after I had left Plattsburgh. In response to this, I decided to revisit Plattsburgh the following year.

When I returned in 2024, Roxham Road had officially been closed for well over a year, and these spaces and places that were once continuously occupied by advocates and migrants, had now been deconstructed, like the RCMP station, renovated, like the Rip Van Winkle Motel, or reverted back to their original intended use, like the Mountain Mart gas station.

Capturing what was happening after the closure of Roxham Road was important. At the height of the Roxham Road refugee crisis, there existed a consistent and heavy media presence, making this region widely known and researched. However, after the STCA expanded and Roxham Road was closed, discourse about this crossing had begun to fade, both within the media and the general public. Thus, at the time of my 2023 and 2024 fieldwork, which occurred after the closure of Roxham Road, I was able to capture stories of a time and place that was not otherwise being paid attention to, and these stories could have then been lost. A significant change that emerged in response to the closure of Roxham Road was the absence of support for migrants that was once circulating throughout the community. This support came in many forms, from organizations, like Plattsburgh Cares, which were no longer being funded and were now relying on personal donations to continue their work, to the closure of the RCMP patrol station at Roxham Road, which had served as a safe, smooth processing system for asylum seekers. With this sudden lack of support, it is possible that migrants might be compelled to make more risky, clandestine journeys across the border.

Guided by a feminist political geography framework, I was interested in understanding how border policies unfold on the ground and the ways in which they affect people and influence the appearance of spaces and places. However, being mindful of conducting research at a time of shifting border policy, I was constantly aware of maintaining a reflexive mindset, especially

when it came to interpreting the unintended consequences of how these policy shifts were impacting what was happening in the community of Plattsburgh.

6.3 Broader Context

The purpose of my thesis was to understand how border policies affect people and communities in general, rather than focusing on the statistics related to who is crossing the border, where they are crossing, and from where they might have originated. As such, interactions with and observations of the local Plattsburgh community have provided insight into how individuals who are not migrants themselves, but are actively involved in migration journeys, are also impacted by border policies. Relationships between community members and migrants, migrant spaces that evolved out of the repurposing of institutions to support these relationships, and the tangible evidence left behind by migrants in those migrant spaces, all demonstrate how the STCA impacted human movement and interactions through the border community of Plattsburgh. What is at stake during migration journeys can be represented through specific migrant objects my participants had encountered, like Augustine's collection of written notes, IDs, and legal documents left behind at the Roxham Road cul-de-sac. These types of items are typically seen as being highly important and valuable, especially when crossing a border. However, Augustine pointed out that a majority of these papers were ripped up when she found them. This suggests that the papers had served a highly important purpose up until the point of crossing the border, where the context of carrying identifiable objects shifted as they began to pose a risk for the individual. Other objects, such as shoes, clothing, and toys show that migrants have to make tough, quick decisions about what to bring with them when fleeing their country and what to leave behind along the way.

As I discussed in the conceptual framework from chapter two, Jason De León, an archaeologist who studies objects left behind in the Sonoran Desert at the Mexico-Arizona border, found that local businesses on the Mexican side of the border began to acquire different products to accommodate for migrants continuing their journey (De León, 2013). While those business owners are not migrants themselves, they became actors involved in the process as an indirect impact of border policies, much like the employees of the Mountain Mart and Rip Van Winkle Motel. Similar to De León's research, I was able to gain an understanding of how relationships between people and spaces were formed in the Plattsburgh region of the Canada-US border. While the STCA policy is unique to the Canada-US border, this comparison between how people at the Mexico-US and Canada-US border respond to policies reveals that certain outcomes may be similar across different border regions. By researching the impacts of the STCA on migration journeys through the experiences of Plattsburgh community members, this thesis adds to the growing literature concerning people's responses to such policies and can contribute to spreading awareness of related issues in the current political climate where the topic of immigration is highly prominent.

Policies, like the Canada-US STCA, are unique in that they only apply to specific borders. Nevertheless, there is potential to apply the outcomes of this policy to other border systems around the world. For researchers in similar situations where access to migrants is limited and the focus shifts to interactions with local communities, it may be useful to understand the interconnections between relationships, objects, and spaces that emerge in unexpected places.

6.3.1 Future Research

During my fieldwork in 2023, during informal conversations and observations of the community, a question outside of my original research ideas formed. I began to wonder if

Plattsburgh residents were aware of not only an increase in migration through the city, but migration journeys through Plattsburgh in general. I had the opportunity to propose this question through a personal communication with a contact in Plattsburgh and the answer was, “unlikely.” When I returned in 2024, through another personal communication with a hotel worker, I was informed that Plattsburgh businesses would not survive if it were not for Canadians visiting every summer from Montreal. This, once again, sparked that question, as it was implied that the tourism sector of the community had been keeping the city afloat with no knowledge or awareness of the resources flowing into and out of the migrant sector.

Throughout my analysis and consideration of key findings, this question regarding migrant spaces in Plattsburgh resurfaced and became more prominent in my mind. For example, the Mountain Mart had become a known migrant space to advocates, migrants, taxi drivers, Mountain Mart employees, and researchers, though the business still operated as usual, with both locals and tourists frequenting the store to buy products. It is unknown whether these individuals were aware of the other activities that were taking place while they stopped in at the store, and how that might affect their perspective of the Mountain Mart if they did. In reference to how places, like the Mountain Mart, might gain meaning through human knowledge and actions, Praetzellis (2016) proposes a hypothetical situation in which he states, “to me that hill in the distance is just a lump on the horizon. But to the knowledgeable traditional person it’s the body of a supernatural beast” (p. 157). By bringing a materiality approach into the conversation, Praetzellis (2016) informs the reader that the meaning of certain places “depends on the cultural context of the viewer” (p. 157). Linking this materiality concept to how migrant spaces within Plattsburgh might be perceived, the Mountain Mart may just be a convenience store to the

general onlooker, but it's an important space representing migration journeys to people who are aware of its role and are involved in the process.

Materiality helps demonstrate that spaces may hold different meanings for different people, and through an understanding of the presence of different meanings, we can challenge and question our own assumptions of how we think spaces should be perceived and interacted with. This potential research topic offers an opportunity to provide further education of past, present, and future border and migration issues while simultaneously increasing public awareness, just as this thesis revealed how a handful of Plattsburgh community members shifted their perspective about migration journeys by interacting with spaces that mediated relationships between migrants and locals.

6.4 Conclusion

In a time of uncertainty and change regarding politics around migration, it is important to capture the stories and experiences of community members who have played a part in migration journeys. The increase in migration journeys through Plattsburgh from early 2017 to March 2023 represents a particular moment in time based in a particular location. With the closure of Roxham Road, demolition of the RCMP station, and reversion of migrant spaces to their original form, physical indicators of migration through this border region have been actively diminishing. Narratives provided by my participants through interviews, as well as my observations of the community and landscape, holistically capture and document the experiences, relationships, and materiality of migration journeys through Plattsburgh.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Themes:

1. The impacts of border policies on migration journeys.
2. How the recent border closure has affected business operations.
3. The landscape, geography, spaces, and infrastructure of the border community.
4. Migrant objects found and their correlating stories.

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you worked or volunteered in the Plattsburgh area?
 - a. Have you seen changes in the way the Plattsburgh region operates and how the community interacts over time?
2. How has the landscape changed since the implementation of the STCA?
 - a. Have you noticed changes in migrant traffic?
 - b. Have you noticed changes in infrastructure?
 - c. Have you noticed changes in businesses?
3. Can you describe some instances of your interactions with migrants who have crossed the border at Roxham Road?
4. How has the recent closure of Roxham Road affected the use of your business by migrants?
5. What kind of objects have you found left behind by migrants? (in taxis, motel rooms, etc)
 - a. Are there any objects that stand out to you? Why?