CANADIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

IN A NEW AGE OF EMPIRE
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Canadian National Identity in a New Age of Empire

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Abstract:

This dissertation maps the militarization of Canadian culture under the War on Terror. The first section examines the rise of everyday life militarizing cultural practices such as the Yellow Ribbon campaign to Support the Troops, Red Fridays, and the Highway of Heroes. The second section takes up militarizing cultural texts: the most recent wave of Canadian Forces recruiting advertisements, the CBC radio play *Afghanada*, and Paul Gross’s 2008 film *Passchendaele*. Across these diverse sites of analysis I argue that it is precisely through the mobilization of the previous national myths of multiculturalism, peacekeeping and tolerance that the contrary cultural politics of the new militarism coheres.
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Throughout its participation in the American-led “War on Terror,” Canada’s role in the world and perception of itself have shifted dramatically. Not only have Canadians come to re-evaluate the cherished idea of themselves as a “nation of peacekeepers,” military tropes, narratives, themes and values have come to inhabit the national consciousness in profound new ways. The militarization of Canadian culture, however, is not merely a shift in perception or feeling, but a wholesale economic, political, sociological and cultural movement including the remaking of the Canadian Forces, the redirection of national resources towards the military, the militarization of civilian institutions, and the vesting of national identity in themes of military valour and patriotism. The past ten years have seen successive minority and majority Canadian governments reimagine Canada’s role in the world to fit within an emerging global Empire that mobilizes various forces in various ways to enforce global capitalism.

The idea that the last decade has seen a massive shift in Canadian culture is now quite widely accepted. Over two consecutive days in July of 2011 the Ottawa Citizen hosted a debate between former military officer and current
esteemed University of Ottawa Political Scientist Paul Robinson and the much lauded Canadian military historian and former York University professor Jack Granatstein on the question. Both agreed that a transformation had occurred, which Robinson characterized as having “highly undesirable consequences” and, conversely, Granatstein celebrated as the appropriate recognition for the importance of a military all but banished from Canadian life (“In peacetime, soldiers are scorned”). For Robinson, certainly no anti-war activist, the new militarization of Canadian culture and discourse “helps to legitimize the waging of war and to militarize foreign policy,” elevates “the military into a moral elite of super-citizens” which “damage[s] the structure of civil-military relations” and skews government spending priorities towards military ends. Granatstein, in contrast, confirmed his reputation as a stalwart intellectual advocate of militarization, arguing that we have soldiers to thank for the very freedom to criticize militarization in the first place, and concluding by quoting a Rudyard Kipling poem and suggesting that Canadian culture and society would ultimately benefit from this shift in priorities.

This dissertation addresses Canadian national identity in the present, post-9/11 context, specifically the cultural work involved in the conflict between the nation’s increasingly militarized engagements and security culture and its mythologies of peacekeeping and multiculturalism. In the field of cultural studies, many leading theorists argue that we are living in a new age of Empire, one characterized by the rise of neoliberalism (defined briefly as the ideological
project of the sovereignty of the free market – a more detailed description follows in Chapter One), corporate-led globalization, and militarization. The production of scholarly work in this area has increased since I began formulating this project, attesting to the timeliness of Canadian militarization as a topic of inquiry. My dissertation asks the vital questions: What does neoliberal globalization and attendant militarization mean, on the cultural level, for (English-speaking) Canada and its legitimating myths? How is the nation being imagined, articulated, and (re)produced at this historical juncture, with what pedagogical and political import?

While in hindsight Canadian militarization may be hard to miss, its advance has been incremental. There were, for instance, several milestones: we might think of then-Prime Minister Jean Chrétien’s enthusiasm to commit troops to what appeared at the time to be post-Taliban “peacekeeping” operations in Afghanistan (which were, in fact, nothing of the sort – it was a NATO-led mission overseen by the US to protect a regime hand-picked by the US), as well as his coy refusal to join George W. Bush’s “coalition of the willing” to invade Iraq (again misleading because of Canada’s permanent and ongoing support for the US military machine both in terms of officer exchanges as well as the Canadian Navy’s participation in joint policing efforts in the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf) (Engler, *Black Book* 143-158). We can track the moment the subsequent embattled minority Paul Martin Liberal administration opted to commit Canadian troops to a leadership role in the volatile Afghan province of Kandahar, which
led ultimately to a much more intense combat operation against the Taliban insurgency and most of the troop casualties from 2006 to 2011. We can note the first victory of Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s minority “New Government” which almost immediately made good on its election pledge to increase military spending and implement what came to be called the *Canada First Defence Strategy* which advanced a vision of the military not only as a combat ready “modern military,” but as a key part of Canada’s economic future, integrated into plans for industrial, research and labour-force growth (20). Harper’s agenda was catalyzed as the increased violence of the Khandahar mission “proved” his message: that the world changed on September 11 and that this changed world demanded a new Canada, one which knew who its allies are and how it can help them (Dobbin “Harper Happy”). Subsequent scandals about the torture of Afghan detainees under Canadian jurisdiction, the failure of the NATO mission to defeat the Taliban, and the purchase of exorbitant military hardware failed to halt the rising popularity of the Conservatives and, in 2011, they won a majority government, in part thanks to the careful identification of their party with the military (Hyslop). Throughout this period, in spite of a slim but consistent majority of Canadians’ opposition to the war in Afghanistan and the efforts of peace and anti-war activists, a shift occurred in Canadian culture such that, in the Fall of 2011 Canada could contribute $50-million (by conservative and Conservative estimates) (Payton), hundreds of “smart bombs,” several fighter jets and a operational commander to the NATO mission to unseat Libya’s Muammar
Gaddafi with almost no public debate or outcry (“NATO ends seven month bombing”).

In brief, my argument is that the transformation of Canadian culture and society in the post-9-11 moment does not simply break with the traditions of previous legitimating myths of peacekeeping and multiculturalism, but rather actively inhabits and transforms these myths into justifications for the increased militarization and securitization of Canadian foreign and domestic policy. In making this argument, I treat peacekeeping and multiculturalism as sites of struggle, contest and compromise among diverse groups and interests. While it would be a gross oversimplification to say that peacekeeping and multiculturalism were better social ideals than today’s militarization and militarism, the space they held open for the collective struggle over social meanings was more vibrant and substantive than the much eviscerated and tokenistic spaces for public debate rendered up by emergent discourses of Canadian militarism. At the same time, the re-appropriation and control of those previous myths by the resurgent political right in the present moment indicates their productive power as sites of continued affective and ideological investment. I argue that the turn toward militarization conflicts jarringly with the (previous) dominant cultural signification of Canada as a nation of peacekeepers. Each of this dissertation’s chapters identifies a tendency of the cultural production of militarization, and locates those tendencies in specific cultural sites. The first analyzes the “Yellow Ribbon” and “Red Fridays” campaigns to “Support our Troops,” as well as the “Highway of Heroes”
phenomenon, as militarized cultural practices of everyday life. The second chapter takes up the most recent recruitment advertisements of the Canadian Forces, the CBC radio drama Afghanada, and the 2008 film Passchendaele as cultural texts that reflect and participate in militarized cultural production. I argue that it is through the mobilization of the older legitimating myths of peacekeeping, multiculturalism and tolerance that the social transformation of Canadian society, culture and policy is enacted.

Ultimately, this transformation is not for the sake of militarism alone. I argue it is both part of and contributes vitally to the neoliberal transformation of Canadian and global cultures, societies and economies. The past 40 years of neoliberal globalization have seen corporate and financial power grow, become less fettered, and enter ever more spaces of life, with a corresponding growth in the gap between rich and poor within nations like Canada and around the world (McNally). Much debate circulates about the kind of power that now exists, whether neoliberal capitalism has become a truly global phenomenon characterized by nodes and flows encompassing the entire globe (Hardt & Negri Empire; Multitude), or whether those flows of money and power are not all equivalent and capitalism still has a headquarters located in the United States (Harvey The New Imperialism). Indeed, the Wall Street financial crisis of 2008 -- and the “grass-roots” American financial crisis (Haiven) which lingers long after the bankers responsible have been subsidized by the public purse in unprecedented government bailout packages -- along with the rising power of
emerging economies like China’s--complicate the easy assumption of a rhetoric of American imperialism. And yet, in Canada narratives of American imperialism take on a particular salience. Canada has functioned as a natural resource extraction-based colony, first for the British Empire and subsequently for the American one: approximately 73% of Canadian exports go to the United States, and Canada is the United States’ largest foreign supplier of oil, natural gas and electricity ("Canada-U.S. Energy Relations"; "Imports, Exports and Trade Balances"; "The Canada-U.S. Trade Partnership"). The corresponding Canadian debate, whether contemporary Canada is to be understood as a junior partner in American Empire, or as an agent of imperialism in its own right, is, I argue, not an “either-or” scenario but rather a symbiotic tendency: the more Canada supports American imperialism through shared military and economic projects, the more it is able to craft for itself a “harder,” more “masculine” national identity and impose its own will on unfortunate global “others”. Certainly this seems to be the realpolitik goal of recent Canadian administrations, as articulated clearly by Prime Minister Stephen Harper:

The world is now unipolar and contains only one superpower. Canada shares a continent with that superpower. In this context, given our common values and the political, economic and security interests that we share with the United States, there is now no more important foreign policy interest for Canada than maintaining the ability to exercise effective influence in Washington so as to advance unique Canadian policy
objectives (“The New North Strong and Free”).

If Hardt and Negri’s assertion that all that remains for global capitalism is to sweep troublesome regimes into the fold is too swift, assumes too much and credits too little the power of peoples around the world to create and inhabit alternative narratives, their metaphor that the geo-political landscape is increasingly dominated by a state of global civil war in which all military ventures become “policing” actions, bringing “rogue” governments into line with the global economy remains an apt characterization of contemporary discourses and rationales for war.¹

Within this new neoliberal militarizing Empire, popular discourses of Canadian national identity in English-speaking Canada include both pride in the ideal of peacekeeping developed by post-war Canadian Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson and, at the same time, a national self-deprecation over those same peacekeeping values re-interpreted by politicians and conservative public intellectuals as (feminized) military inadequacy, especially in comparison to the United States (see for instance Mackenzie esp. 249-256). The operation of such myths conveniently obscures the often contradictory underlying issues of national political economy, Canada’s status as a world leader in the new surveillance and security economy of “international policing,” and recent military deployments in theatres of conflict such as Afghanistan and Haiti (Gordon 276-325). Increasing militarization in Canada bumps up against the legitimating myths of the nation-state in unique and under-examined ways, not confined to the realm of the strictly
political, but finding expression more broadly in cultural forms. I am interested in the dense cultural practices through which the Canadian nation-state reproduces itself and its sovereignty in a global age of contested and shifting sovereignties between the state and the power of transnational capital.

At a time when much work is being done on the decline of state power due to the increasing influence of supra-national organizations, transnational corporations, and regional and non-state actors, the prominent place given to the nation-state in my research bears mention. There are, of course, multiple perspectives on the kind of power that is most characteristic of the present moment, from Hardt and Negri’s articulation of transnational capital as increasingly constituting its own globally sovereign Empire, to Leo Pannitch and Sam Gindin’s insistence that the state continues to be the important locus of power, even as it most frequently offers that power up to the dictates of capital. All seem to agree, however, that neoliberal globalization has dramatically shifted the politics of state power and sovereignty. Zygmunt Bauman instructively points out that “of necessity, the legislative and executive sovereignty of the modern state was perched on the ‘tripod’ of military, economic, and cultural sovereignties” (Globalization 61). He argues that due to a number of factors, but most pressingly the growing power of transnational capital, each leg of that tripod has arguably become compromised. The proliferation of “weak states” capable of acting as “local police precincts” in maintaining the order requisite for business, but not capable of strong autonomous resistance (should they desire it) is not
incongruous with, but an expedient feature of a new phase of global capitalism (68). At the same time, the policing and security protocols of the neoliberal state reallocate state spending from social programs to prisons, militaries, and related policing and surveillance, a building up of a particular kind of state that contradicts the espoused right-wing antipathy to “big government.” As Wendy Brown describes, the “weak” state’s crisis of authority generates anxiety in which the building up of “walls,” both literal and metaphorical, proliferate. After the Berlin Wall that physically partitioned the worlds of capitalism and communism fell in 1989, supposedly ending “wallowing” as a tenable practice, Brown examines the revived building of walls (between, for instance, the US and Mexico, Israel and Palestine, South Africa and Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, India and Pakistan,) that target particular populations and, against the increasing reality of globalized, mobile populations and porous and permeable boundaries, attempt to impress upon citizens the power and the integrity of the state like theatrical props (Walled States 8).

While Benedict Anderson’s now famous concept of nations as “imagined communities” was a seminal contribution that theorized the relationship between national identity and the emergence of specific communications technologies, others since Anderson have elaborated complex and proliferating forms of identity amidst globalization that are not nationally bound, notably Arjun Appadurai who argues that identity must be understood to coalesce amidst transnational cultural flows and Wendy Brown who argues that factors other than
nationality, such as regionalism, religion, and ethnicity, increasingly take on a primary importance in the production of identity and of social relations more profoundly ("Neoliberalism"). All of these factors and more encourage us to understand the production of political power and sovereignty as not only the prerogative of national governments, but complicated and interwoven configurations of citizens, migrants, international institutions, non-governmental organizations and, importantly for this dissertation, cultural producers – both formal and informal. As I discuss throughout, in this new era of what Hardt and Negri have called “permanent war” (Multitude 12-18)—a global condition in which the spread of capitalist accumulation makes all spaces of life a battleground between people and profit and which mobilizes asymmetrical warfare as a violent means of global policing and accumulation—logics of militarism and militarization are no longer the exclusive prerogative of states and their official armed forces but rather permeate and redefine everyday life, from privatized paramilitary organizations to civillian social institutions like schools, universities and hospitals, to industry and economics. As militaries themselves are still by and large state institutions, however, and as the discursive formations that characterize military imperatives are largely, though not inescapably nationally bound, (by which I mean only that the relevent contexts of the rhetoric, myths and justifications for war are national contexts) the nation-state is already prioritized by my research topic. Far from being eclipsed by the expansion of global Empire, neoliberalism and its unequal returns increase the weight of the contest over the
nation-state, how the nation is imagined (as under siege, under threat from immigrants and terrorists—groups often racially rendered, and often conflated) and how the sovereignty of the state is reproduced. All this is to say: rumors of the death of the sovereign nation state are far exaggerated, and an investigation of how national policy, society and culture are militarized can offer important tools for understanding the complexities and nuances of the shifting relationships between states, citizens, and global capitalism in both its most triumphant and most precarious moment.

As has already been indicated, this dissertation understands Empire in ways broadly akin to those employed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, though not without reservation. Hardt and Negri’s approach focuses on the emergence of global capitalist power as a disciplinary force which conscripts states, individuals and other actors to police one another’s obedience to the dictates of the increasingly unfettered global market and its directive to facilitate capital accumulation no matter what the human, social or ecological cost. From this perspective, we can understand the transformations of Canadian culture, policy and identity discussed in this dissertation as the contested adaptation of Canada and its populations to a new age of neoliberal globalization. The idea of Empire as less a single, unilateral geopolitical hegemon and more as a diffuse economic, political and cultural pressure allows me to read militarization as the product of various actors’ attempts to grapple with, contest or concede to (as well as enforce, manipulate or resist) the imperatives of transnational capital. For
instance, as I will illustrate, the Conservative administration of Stephen Harper warmly embraces the neoliberal doctrine and believes that opening the Canadian economy and society up to global capital (through privatization, pro-business laws, anti-union legislation and the dismantlement of the state’s regulatory capacity)\(^2\) is key to Canada’s future prosperity. Militarization, for the Harper Conservatives is a means to respond to the pressures of and find a place within Empire. Each of the examples of cultural production I study in this dissertation can be read as attempts to negotiate, articulate or respond to Empire.

Hardt and Negri’s model of global power has come under strenuous criticism from a variety of corners. For one, many authors note that “empire” as a transnational policing mechanism for globalized capitalism has much in common with previous moments of capitalist imperialism and isn’t very new at all (Barrwaki and Laffey). Other critics take issue with Hardt and Negri’s assertion that, today, Empire embraces all capitalist countries (and arguably non-capitalist ones) but simply uses them differently, pointing out the persistence of inter-imperialist rivalries among both capitalist and non-capitalist states (for instance, the one presently brewing between the United States and China over access to Africa’s mineral wealth, or between the US/Europe zone and the OPEC cartel over the fate of the world’s oil supplies (Boron 73-86). Similarly, others accuse the authors of minimizing the persistence of older imperial and colonial patterns of exploitation: global wealth still overwhelmingly flows North to (post-) colonial capitals from Southern (post-) colonized zones. The rhetoric of Empire, these
critics contend, makes it appear that everyone and everywhere is equally guilty and equally the victim of global capitalist exploitation (Mookerjea). Still others are skeptical of Hardt and Negri’s enthusiasm for the idea of “immaterial labour” as the ultimate arbiter of value and exploitation under a new global empire, pointing out that the vast majority of the world’s workers (in both the formal and informal sectors) are conducting resolutely material tasks and typically harvesting or producing material things, almost always for someone else’s profit (Caffentzis). These critics argue that Hardt and Negri reproduce a very limited “first world” perspective infatuated with the magic of new media and communications technology (Dunn). Critical race theorists have also argued that Hardt and Negri’s homogenization of struggle into the triumphant “Multitude” erases the significant and often violent differences at work that prevent solidarity and alliance among heterogenous actors (Semati). And feminist critics have been highly skeptical of Hardt and Negri’s penchant for theoretical jargon that enables the virtual erasure of patriarchy and the global gendered division of labour from their paradigm (Federici; Schultz).

I tend to agree with these criticisms; my attachment to Hardt and Negri’s Empire model in this thesis has more to do with the way it allows us to stress transnational policing and the emergence of transnational capital as a driving force of cultural, political and economic transformation, and rather less to do with my agreement with their entire paradigm. Their model allows me to situate the militarization of Canadian culture, the neoliberal turn in state policy, and the
geopolitics of the War on Terror along the same continuum. Further, it allows me to reconcile a recurring problem in the analysis of Canada’s geopolitical significance: is it merely a favored pawn in America’s quest for global hegemony, or is it an imperial power in its own right, both competing and conspiring with Uncle Sam (see Gordon 221-22)? By tentatively working alongside Hardt and Negri’s idea of Empire, I can focus on the nexus of state power, cultural hegemony, cultural agency and the structures of feeling that presently animate Canadian culture. The analytic advantage of the idea of Empire as Hardt and Negri offer it, is that it stresses the importance of culture and what I will later describe as “reproduction” (a term they unfortunately avoid in favour of “biopolitical production”) in global economic and political change (Schultz).

Critical to these cultural politics is the advancement of militarization through older Canadian mythologies. As Eva Mackey has argued, the imagining of the Canadian nation is a fertile site from which to theorize the dense cultural practices involved in the production of nationhood more generally, both because of its specific colonial-settler history, and its official state multiculturalism policy as encoded in the Multiculturalism Act (1988). Posited against the United States, Canadian national identity is articulated as “nicer,” multicultural, a nation of peacekeepers, conveniently locating the agents of oppression (racism, patriarchy, class antagonism) outside the body politic. Peacekeeping, multiculturalism, and tolerance have been roundly critiqued as mechanisms that both legitimate and reproduce existing inequalities within the nation. Critics on whom I draw,
including Mackey, Himmani Bannerji, M. NourbeSe Phillip, Sunera Thobani, and Sherene Razack, have been key figures in challenging these myths as central to the perpetuation of unequal social, cultural and economic relations in Canada along the lines of race, gender, ethnicity and class. But in the present context, dominant myths of peacekeeping, multiculturalism, and tolerance are offered up for debate most urgently from right-wing political parties that would like to see such ideals abandoned, rather than from a left interested in interrogating their correspondence to either present and historical reality or emancipatory projects.

I interrogate the particular ways the militarization of Canadian identity builds upon, intersects, or destabilizes other national myths in the context of changing governmental and military policy post-9/11. More broadly, I am interested in how the culture of militarization rehearses, reentrenches, reproduces and re-scripts power relations at work in Canadian society as they express themselves in racism, sexism (patriarchy), colonialism and exploitative class relations. “Culture” is at work here as a vital, contestatory and contested force, in terms of what neoliberal militarization is doing to culture as every-day lived experience, and how political battles are waged through culture as a terrain of struggle (Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism* xxv). Attention to cultural production as a vibrant field of contestation is a neglected dimension of the emerging scholarship on militarization in Canada. I demonstrate that it is through the mobilization of these previously-existing legitimating myths that “The New Canada” is crafted.³
My understanding of mythologies draws on the work of French structuralist and semiologist Roland Barthes, who might be described as an early herald (but not an advocate) of the post-modern discrepancy between the signifier and the signified. He argued that myths were not merely the mistaken fables of “primitive societies” but a key part of the sociological and cultural life of modern, industrialized nation-states. Barthes described myth’s double function, that “points out and … notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us” (117), arguing that it is “the fundamental character of the mythical concept to be appropriated” (119, italics in original). That is, myths are both something we inherit and receive as members of a community, but also something we are always appropriating and reconstructing. I draw on this dialectical concept of mythology, along with both Gramscian and Foucauldian approaches, to explain how, in the shifting representational field of Canadian national discourse, two kinds of power are at work: there is, on the one hand, a hegemonic field of meanings created and maintained by state actors and cultural producers, and at the same time citizen/subjects are productive of their own governmentality by making use of and contributing to discourses of citizenship and national character.

If at one time one-way communication of official policies through rigid establishment organs (newspapers, the church, the school system, etc.) targeted public opinion, today in an age of diverse and savvy publics fed on a steady diet of advertising and habituated to the proliferation of voices and ideas in the digital arena, the drums of war sound more subtly, more intimately, and more
ubiquitously. Like corporate marketers who have learned not to fight but to harness consumer-made media through techniques like “crowd sourcing” and the cultivation of brand “memes,” (see Hesmondhalgh) the state military apparatus today depends on developing a careful and clever relationship to grassroots pro-military initiatives. For instance, as I will discuss, the Red Fridays campaign which appears to have been initiated independent of government oversight has become one of the key ways militarization is built and spread within communities, normalizing war as a domestic as well as political affair, and doing the crucial work of conflating the fate of the unimpeachable troops with the relatively unpopular war they are fighting. In contrast, were the government to issue propaganda posters urging loyal citizens to show pride in their troops by wearing red on Fridays, this would be seen by many as a form of pro-war propaganda and might even invite backlash against a seemingly archaic and heavy-handed attempt to “tell people how to think,” on formal or aesthetic grounds alone (T. Clark 7-8). But as a citizen-led initiative, which operates at the level of community meetings, online message boards and supermarket conversations, the Red Fridays campaign is infinitely more effective. Even when the state actively, publically sponsors militarist cultural production, as I argue is the case with the film Passchendaele and the Afghanada series, it does so in ways that highlight the ostensible autonomy of the artists involved and that produces cultural products that frequently (indeed, conspicuously) display the values of ambivalence, skepticism and regret that contemporary Canadian audiences would
appear to prefer over a more jingoistic and hyperbolic military nationalism associated with a past age⁴.

At issue here is a debate within cultural theory that has yet to be fully resolved. When speaking of the relationship of the state, the military and culture, it is tempting to imagine a relatively simplistic model of hegemony: in order for the state to maintain unequal class relations and carry out what should be unpopular actions (like wars) it relies upon and mobilizes a “historic block” of non-state or para-state actors to wage cultural warfare. The media, the schools, the church and other institutions use their power to help establish a “common sense” that, for instance, glorifies military nationalism and the nobility of the government’s mission. While articulations of the idea of hegemony, from its origins in the work of Antonio Gramsci through the early Birmingham School (H. Davis 138-139), are generally more sophisticated, it is against this rather austere model of cultural power that ideas of governmentality emerged. Writing against what he perceived to be a stifling Marxist orthodoxy in the radical edge of the French academy, Michel Foucault made it his project to develop a model of cultural power with everyday people and their agency at the centre (see Bratich, Packer and McCarthy). For Foucault, conspicuous and blatant state propaganda and repression were less interesting than the ways people convinced and policed themselves, and the way they turned their everyday actions and interactions into networks of power and counter-power (*Governmentality*). From this perspective, which was instrumental to the development of many more recent forms of cultural
inquiry, “common sense” is always being produced and reproduced through people’s interactions with each other and with institutions. From a Foucauldian perspective, we might understand militarization as built among people as they negotiate their relationships and their lives amidst unequal power relations.

It seems to me that the study of Canadian militarization does not fit entirely within either of these theoretical camps. On the one hand, unlike, say, consumerism, which is a broad cultural tendency animated by people’s actions within a capitalist society, militarism and, in a more diffuse way, militarization are typically tied to particular government policies. On the other hand, unlike many other government policies, militarization depends on and reinforces grassroots, everyday actions and relationships. It would be incorrect to say that the government merely orchestrates Yellow Ribbons, Red Fridays and the Highway of Heroes from a shady cultural command centre outside of Ottawa. But it would be equally incorrect to imagine that the government is not acutely aware of and subtly involved in all these campaigns. Likewise, it would be incorrect to assume that these campaigns are merely people’s gullible and simplistic reproductions of support for government policy (for instance, many of their initiators and participants are unimpressed by what they perceive to be the government’s neglect of soldiers), and equally incorrect to presume that these campaigns in any way undermine or run counter to the government’s agenda of militarism and militarization. Quite the opposite. Part of the work of this project for me is to try to read where the heavy influences of the state and market end and
where and how the agency of citizens begins in the militarization and transformation of Canadian cultural values. But this is a central tension throughout. Rather, neoliberalism has advanced a transformation in the way the state and the market work on and through people’s cultural agency, such that the distinction between coercion and force, structure and agency has become effectively blurred. Neoliberal militarization as a project of social transformation without an identifiable “headquarters,” but suffused throughout the remnants of public institutions and increasingly organizing social life according to the dictates of a “common sense” logic of violence, severely imperils existing and future democratic possibilities.

**Cultural Studies, Peacekeeping and Multiculturalism**

The objective of the tradition of Cultural Studies that I adopt is to develop flexible, interdisciplinary, self-reflexive and deeply responsive and historical theoretical tools to analyze and confront the contemporary forms of power that now exist. From its inception, crystallized in the Birmingham school, (Williams, Hall, Richard Johnson, Grossberg, et al.) cultural studies has taken as its project the imperatives of radical democracy, and sought to build an understanding of how power works on the level of culture in response to earlier Marxist paradigms that were insufficient on their own to explain cultural developments such as the apparent failure of socialist projects and the emergence of fascism in Europe. The
question that continues to animate my cultural studies is the question of revolution, by which I mean the pedagogical and transformative project of radical democracy, of creating its shared intellectual, cultural, and material way-houses, in which the utopian may stop a while. Throughout many of its historical and contemporary iterations, Cultural Studies has been animated by the necessarily utopian impulse that a better world is possible, and has aimed at generating “better knowledge of the political world, knowledge that opens up new and hopefully progressive possibilities of struggle and transformation” (Grossberg 274-5). Institutionalization, disciplinarity, and the pressures of cultural production under neoliberalism have resulted in much work being undertaken that disavows this radical heritage (R. Johnson 42), but it has been and continues to be the province of cultural studies to attempt to understand the interplay between culture, ideology, subjectivity, and power in specific contexts— to map the apparatuses within which values are normalized and subjects collectively and individually make meaning out of their experiences-- in order to change them.

Ontologically, then, as a trans-national, anti-imperialist, anti-racist, anti-colonial anti-capitalist feminist researcher, my project is indebted to the ideas of many theorists who may or may not appear explicitly in these pages, such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Patricia Monture Angus, Anne McClintock, Silvia Federici, Andrea Smith, Starhawk, and Cynthia Enloe, to name only a few. I understand knowledge to be the product of struggle and collaboration from many situated sources, which entails methodological
approaches that take into account multiple sites of the production of meaning, from economic structuring forces, to cultural investments, to everyday life experiences, in order to generate the most effective analysis. I variously appear in this work as political economist, cultural and literary critic, polemicist, and social ethnographer, in the interdisciplinary cultural studies traditions of critical race theory, trans-national feminism, Marxism, political philosophy, and international relations theory. I own at the outset that I am more interested in how the traditions from which I borrow can aid my specific project, explaining militarization and cultural politics *in a context that has been explicitly invested in the disavowal of militarism*, than in debates between and among them. At its bed-rock level, this project is about current forms of capitalist relations — global, neoliberal, and imperial — and how the militarization that increasingly characterizes these relations affects community, national belonging, everyday life, and democratic possibilities in Canada. Militarization and the cultures of backlash politics that militarism enables comprise a cultural dominant in Canada after 9/11. Especially because of the historic and contemporary role of multiculturalism, peacekeeping and civility, worthy sites of struggle in themselves, in Canadian national mythology, the Canadian case is a useful site from which to reflect back on contemporary theorizations of culture, power and resistance.

In the Canadian context the peacekeeping model of international intervention is commonly dated to the Suez Canal Crisis of the 1950’s when Pearson helped orchestrate an international, non-interventionist force to intercede
in what was a major international crisis. Since that time, Canadian military personnel have been involved in peacekeeping missions, though perhaps not as frequently or impressively as most Canadians assume. UN peacekeeping, though favoured in Canadian mythology, is characteristically preferred by “doves” in Ottawa while “our NATO commitments” are prioritized by “hawks.” It may come as a surprise, then, that Pearson himself, a cunning and accomplished statesman rather than any kind of pacifist, played a formative role in the establishment of NATO as well as his more celebrated peacekeeping efforts (Pearson 29-48).

Indeed, his preferred nickname, “Mike,” was bestowed upon him by a commanding officer in flight school who thought “Lester” an insufficiently manly name for a military pilot (“Lester Bowles Pearson - Biography”).

To revisit the Suez Crisis briefly: established in 1869 and operated by an Egyptian-chartered company, the canal was of strategic importance first to European colonial ambitions and later to European oil, trade and military interests. The president of Egypt, Gamel Abdel Nasser’s growing ties with the Soviet Union, in particular, arms deals that ended Egypt’s reliance on the West, fanned the flames of colonial and geopolitical tensions in the region. France, Britain and Israel invaded Egypt in July of 1956. It is infrequently acknowledged in the Pearsonian myths that the “trigger” behind this invasion which Pearson famously helped to ameliorate was Nasser’s decision to nationalize the Suez canal, reclaiming control of the world’s busiest and most vital shipping artery from the Western powers. This nationalization was itself a political move in
response to the United States and Britain attempting to punish Egypt by retracting their support for the Aswan Dam project. The United States did not support the invasion for strategic reasons of its own, but it was American might behind Pearson’s plan that carried the day (Whitworth, *Men, Militarism and UN Peacekeeping* 30).

Pearson’s role was to plan an exit strategy for the invading troops that saw the creation and deployment of the first United Nations Emergency Force, made up of soldiers from eleven countries, to de-escalate the War and maintain negotiated armistice lines. Pearson initially proposed that the invading French and British troops be re-designated “peacekeepers,” a ploy which was too transparent to garner American support. It should be noted that the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and subsequent conflicts played a major role in the Suez Crisis as well, and under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion Israel initially refused the terms of the armistice. All this is to say, many complex geopolitical interests and diplomatic manoeuvres were involved in the Crisis, but in the popular re-tellings of the Canadian peacekeeping story the complexity of these poorly-understood factors are reduced to a muddle that supports Canada’s preferred self-understanding as a force for peace and even-keeled, sober interventionism in a world of chaos and crisis.

For Pearson, Canada’s interest was in repairing the cordiality of strained relations between the two great powers, Britain and the United States, between which Canada was poised. He received a Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 for his efforts
and later became Prime Minister. Yet it wasn’t until the end of the Cold War that peacekeeping emerged as a dominant mode of military intervention, furnishing the necessary momentum for continued military engagement in the absence of a clear enemy, reaching its apex in the 1990’s (Whitworth, Men, Militarism and UN Peacekeeping 17). Nonetheless, peacekeeping became eminently useful as a language in which to craft a new military identity after the decline of the previous military narratives and aspirations of “ready, aye ready” loyalty to the old “UE,” which continued to be an important cultural narrative long after the eclipse of the United (British) Empire and into the Second World War.

In part, Pearson’s and subsequent administrations’ enthusiasm for an international military role for Canada was driven by the transformation of the Canadian economy from a “hewer of wood and drawer of water” for the British Empire to an industrialized independent trading nation which found itself in an advantageous position following the destruction of much of Europe during the Second World War. But a generation later, Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s Liberal government (1968-79 and 1980-1984) articulated a vision of “the just society” that did not include military spending among its national priorities, and the military establishment and critics on the right continue to attribute the decline of the Canadian military to the peacekeeping model of those lean and languishing Trudeau years.

During the cold war, Canada provided about 10% of all peacekeeping troops to the UN, a percentage impossible to maintain into the 1990’s because of the
dramatic growth in peacekeeping operations (Robinson 2). But by the late 1990’s, however, and well in advance of the War on Terror, Canada had already diverted the vast majority of its military resources away from UN peacekeeping in favour of NATO and other American-led military projects. As Bill Robinson, senior defence policy analyst of the Rideau Institute explains, “as of December 2010, there were 84,316 UN peacekeeping troops (plus 14,322 police personnel) participating in a total of 15 missions around the world. The record for the largest number of peacekeepers ever-- 88,885-- was set in March 2010” (Robinson 7). Canada contributes just 56 military personnel to these operations, 0.07% of the total, making Canada 60th on the list of 102 contributors, between El Salvador (with 64 personnel) and Greece (with 52) (Robinson 7). “Rwanda contributes 63 times as many personnel as Canada does, (3,512)”, he writes, “highlighting an uncomfortable fact about contemporary peacekeeping: the overwhelming burden of current UN peacekeeping operations has been transferred to the poorer countries of the world” (7). For Canadians invested in the idea of Canada as particularly good at or committed to peacekeeping, shouldering “the white man’s burden” of managing global civility and creating order, the revelation that Rwanda and even Yemen (with 73 soldiers currently deployed) outstrip Canada’s performance ought to give pause for concern.

Critical scholars, particularly anti-racist feminists (such as Sandra Whitworth, Sherene Razack, and Cynthia Enloe) have long criticized the degree to which peacekeeping narratives serve to obscure the militaristic nature of
peacekeeping engagements, reify militarized masculinity, and promote an unrealistic idea of national innocence, benevolence and moral authority. But like the current attack on the idea of multiculturalism, in the present political moment the attacks on and redefinition of Canada’s preferred military role come most forcefully from the right, which sees peacekeeping as an effeminate relic of a bygone age, both inappropriate for the new world of the War on Terror and, retrospectively, responsible for the laxity in national and international policing that allowed that Terror to be waged in the first place (Granatstein, *Who Killed* 1-34; Mackenzie 249-253; see also the *Canada First Defense Strategy*). Yet, as I will demonstrate in the coming chapters, it is precisely Canada’s presumed history of noble peacekeeping ventures that is used to justify and explain Canada’s current more imperialistic engagements. Indeed, in spite of intensive Conservative party messaging to the contrary, in 2008 only a meager 53% of Canadians agreed that Canada’s combat mission in Afghanistan was, in fact, a war, illustrating both confusion about the legal justification of the mission and the tenacity of peacekeeping myths (“More Canadians Oppose Afghanistan Extension”).

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Like peacekeeping, multiculturalism has a much-storied Canadian history. In 1963, the liberal Pearson government established the *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*, also known as the “*Bi and Bi Commission*,” which was mandated to
inquire into and report upon the existing state of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada and to recommend what steps should be taken to develop the Canadian Confederation on the basis of an equal partnership between the two founding races, taking into account the contribution made by the other ethnic groups to the cultural enrichment of Canada and the measures that should be taken to safeguard that contribution (Royal Commission).

The 1960’s and 1970’s was an intense period of social struggle, nation building, economic development and change in Canada, most notably in the Quiet Revolution that transformed Quebec society, but also in terms of civil rights and anti-imperialist campaigning. It is commonly understood that Trudeau’s vision of a “just society” based on cultural pluralism accommodated the linguistically and culturally distinct heritage of Francophones and of Quebec through many sweeping reforms, while at the same time de-fanging Quebec nationalism by rendering it one of many culturally distinct groups. Following the “Bi and Bi” Commission’s final report in 1969, multiculturalism (rather than the recommended French-and-Anglo bi-culturalism) became an area of government policy, later enshrined in the Constitution, its Charter of Rights and Freedoms, (1982) and The Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988).

Official state Multiculturalism has had many critics, from Quebec sovereigntists who saw its potential to erode Quebec’s status as an autonomous nation, to conservatives worried about the integrity of the dominant, British
Canadian nationalism, to those “other ethnic groups” and those on the left concerned that official multiculturalism does not affect the cultural hegemony of the dominant groups and leaves structures of racism and racial privilege firmly intact. Any introduction of multiculturalism will necessarily oversimplify the social, cultural and economic events of those two decades enormously, and indeed lose something of the dynamism that characterized the relationship between diverse demands for social justice made of the state and the state’s responses to, amelioration or containment of those demands. This is to say nothing—yet—of academic debates about multiculturalism, race and class in Canada.

In introducing multiculturalism here let me tentatively suggest that Canadian society after Multiculturalism in 1988 was more inclusive than before it became a language of struggle in 1968. If progress has been made, and let me hasten to identify the seriousness of that “if”, it is in part because of the articulation of multiculturalism as a horizon of social possibility, and of the material resources—funding-- made available for a variety of educational and cultural initiatives. For instance, official multiculturalism offered an institutional lever (and sometimes funding) by which state cultural institutions like the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board could be pried open to host work by a wider diversity of Canadian communities. The influence of multiculturalism on official documents and practices, from school curricula to public-sector advertising, meant a changing face of official Canadian self-representation. And the legacy of state multiculturalism cannot be separated from
other government initiatives to mitigate systemic and structural racism (meager as they may be) such as employment and pay equity, the development of hate crimes legislation, and the establishment of Human Rights Commissions (now under attack) (see Day 117-207; Mackey 50-70).

In spite of this, I agree with critics like Himmani Banerjee, Marlene NourbeSe Philip and Richard Day that multiculturalism is not sufficient to end racism or solve Canada’s “ethnic” problems. The global capitalist system of which Canada, its racism and its multiculturalism is a part, fundamentally relies on the production of racial difference, and always has. While the exact dimensions of this reliance changes over time (for instance, as I will discuss later, following the work of David Theo Goldberg, today it relies on a logic of “racelessness” which masks racial inequality with neoliberal, free-market equality), it cannot be eliminated as long as the broader economic system of exploitation remains in place. This is not to say that overcoming capitalism will cure society of racism; only that we need to understand the problems multiculturalism set out to solve as being at the intersection of political, social, cultural and economic life. From this perspective, official multiculturalism was and is the ongoing product of a compromise between an economic system reliant on inequality, a society born of racist divisions, and the struggles of marginalized and exploited groups for justice, mediated by state policy concerned with both civic inclusion and the management of difference. As such, multiculturalism is a zone of contention that both opens up and closes down opportunities for critical
anti-racist work.

It is important to note the optimism and idealism that animated multiculturalism, as well as the shifts the policy has seen in its 40 year career. As articulated under Trudeau it was the product of a moment of progressive Canadian nationalism. The most recent iteration of multiculturalism under the Harper administration, where it has been integrated into a newly consolidated Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism (rather than its previous homes in and around the Ministry designed to address culture and the arts) signals a more instrumental and disciplinary role interpretation, integrating “immigrants” into Canadian culture and supplementing the idea of “citizenship” as a set of rights and (more importantly) responsibilities. As I will argue, as part of the logic of militarization, multiculturalism has been conscripted to help define a much more conservative vision of Canadian belonging that stresses market freedoms, nationalism and personal values over a shared vision of a just society. Indeed, Canada’s reputation for multiculturalism is mobilized as a justification for its increased involvement in international militarized policing operations in the interests of spreading the ideals of tolerance and personal freedom to global hotspots deemed to be wanting.

It is instructive to juxtapose Trudeau’s “just society” with Harper’s “New Government”: both are clear articulations of an avowedly nationalist vision, although they emerge from very different places on the political spectrum. Both administrations have been guided by comprehensive visions of society that have
transformed what Canada looks like, socially, culturally, economically, and politically. It is notable that the institutions and myths of peacekeeping and multiculturalism were forged within the Trudeau administration and their systematic dismantlement and transformation has been a key element of the Harper Agenda: in both cases, public institutions and policies are places where cultural politics over national identity and meaning play out. The fact that the Trudeau and Harper years each mark a kind of generational touchstone is not incidental: these are two moments of the culture of the baby boomers as a demographic, who came of age with (and were often enthusiastic agents of) “Trudeaumania,” even if they considered it a way-station en route to more radical or sweeping social change. Harper’s success seems to indicate that this same influential demographic now views multiculturalism and peacekeeping as “failed”, “naïve”, and “idealistic.” This indicates a transformation of Canadian culture under the War on Terror, as well as under the neoliberal policies that preceded it. In some ways, the enthusiasm of baby-boomers for social transformation and the generational belief that society and culture are shared political projects, which allowed Trudeau to advance his agenda, have been harnessed for Harper to advance his. When the influence of the baby-boomer generation declines in another few decades, and widespread social idealism and struggle is no longer even a youthful memory, inhabiting and defining Canadian cultural politics will become the purview of subsequent generations raised under the banner of militarism, neoliberal austerity, and individualist consumerism, and
it remains to be seen what room for social vision and collective action against oppression and tyranny will be possible then.

**Chapter Breakdown**

The first chapter, “The Everyday Lived Culture of Canadian Militarism: Yellow Ribbons, Red Fridays, and the Highway of Heroes,” investigates militarization on the level of everyday lived culture and cultural practice, beginning with a material and symbolic history of the Yellow Ribbon Campaign to “Support Our Troops,” which I read as neoliberal pedagogy, a technology of global, neoliberal empire. What was the genesis of these cultural practices in Canada, what are their particular histories, and what meanings do they hold for the people who engage in them? I argue that the Yellow Ribbon intentionally conflates public support for soldiers (who are understood to engage in work that is both self-sacrificing and noble) with support for the particular mission in Afghanistan, and with support for a war-time government. It is the very ambiguity of the sign that renders it effective as a political and pedagogical tool and as a weapon for the transformation of Canadian society into an engine of neoliberal accumulation and dispossession.

This chapter then takes up the “Red Fridays” campaign (wearing red on Fridays to support the troops) and, supplementally, the “Highway of Heroes” phenomenon. In contrast to the controversial position of the Harper government not to lower the flag on Parliament Hill for the death of each soldier (158 at latest
count in November, 2011 – see “In the line of duty”), the outpouring of public
sympathy (in all its complexity) surrounding the bodies of soldiers returning from
war seems to insist that each death be marked as an individual sacrifice. The
dominant reading given to the heterogeneous meanings and expressions of
emotion in this memorialization practice homogenizes the meanings of those
deaths as sacrificial, patriotic, and heroic. The heroism-in-death motif is
reminiscent of discourses circulating during the First World War in which
Canada’s “maturation” from colony to independent nation was widely seen to be
purchased through blood sacrifice. In a gruesome analogy, which is explicit in the
public statements by government officials such as Defence Minister Peter
MacKay7, the blood sacrifice of Canadian soldiers in the present is understood to
purchase a role (and a particular kind of role) for Canada in the new (American)
world order8.

Specifically, I will use Henry Giroux’s articulation of neoliberalism and
Cynthia Enloe’s work on militarization, culture and agency to argue that these
pseudo- or semi-autonomous cultural practices (which I document through
newspaper articles and individual, commercial, and institutional websites)
following the first Gulf War, constitute an aestheticized and stylized mimicry of
political community, that takes the place of and helps circumvent restitution of
vibrant democratic processes (Kellner). Though these practices bear the hallmarks
of professional public relations strategies, the techniques of the public relations
industry have advanced to such a degree that they operate on the intimate level of
people’s affective desires: a direct connection between the Canadian Yellow Ribbon campaign and public relations firms would prove a powerful, but non-essential support to my argument.

As the first chapter focuses on cultural practices, the second chapter, “Militarized Cultural Production: Canadian Forces Recruitment Advertisements, *Afghanada*, and *Passchendaele*,” attends to militarization and cultural production, performing close readings of these distinct cultural texts I take to be emblematic. The self-representation of the Canadian Forces in their most recent wave of recruitment ads both explicitly builds upon older legitimating myths of the peace-keeping military as engaged in “helping” work (through images of military personnel engaged in fighting domestic fires and floods, for example)\(^9\), and re-works those values for a present geo-political reality in which moral ambiguity must be conquered. The slogan “Fight fear. Fight chaos. Fight with the Canadian Forces” demonstrates this shift, with the “fighting” emphasis at odds with previous peacekeeping language.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s radio drama, *Afghanada*, purports to offer the listener a “grunt’s eye-view” of the war, embodying a kind of imperial nostalgia in keeping with Canada’s dominant British-colonial heritage, that casts this military intervention as a civilizing mission —and a formulaic one characterized by a befuddled bureaucracy and the staple characters of war-fiction. Audience anxiety over foreign wars in a changing global world may be assuaged by these conventions that explain Afghanistan and the conflict in familiar terms.
With its well-worn stereotypes of conflicted local commanders, impossibly benevolent agendas, untrustworthy natives, and hostile terrain, it seems to matter little if this is a depiction of Afghanistan in 2009 or 1839 (the date of the first British invasion of Kabul). Finally, Paul Gross’s much-lauded *Passchendaele* re-stages WWI for the present, articulating a militarized moment of community formation and by extension a militarized basis for national sovereignty. I ask of all three texts: what notion of “Canadian-ness” is proffered? How are military activities characterized? Which narratives about the nation are deployed, and to what ends? Who are the important subjects? And what can be said of the contexts in which each of these texts were produced? Specifically, I read the Canadian Forces recruitment ads through Eva Mackey’s critique of multiculturalism, *Passchendaele* through Daniel Coleman’s articulation of “white civility” as a central organizing principle in Canadian literature, and *Afghanada* through Sherene Razack’s analysis of the imbrication of peacekeeping within colonial logics of racial violence. These textual examples support my larger thesis, that the legitimating myths of peacekeeping and multiculturalism are cultural catalysts that are used in the present context to spell their own undoing.

After identifying diverse sites of analysis (cultural practices, film, radio, advertising, and print) and employing a range of interdisciplinary research methods (close readings, material history, discourse analysis, cultural critique) in the previous chapters, my conclusion “Terror Abroad and Terror At Home: The New Canadian Exceptionalism” argues that current exceptionalist discourses
mark a break with previous modes of negotiating national identity: it is precisely through the mobilization of previous legitimating myths and their affective and pedagogical value that the new, neoliberal order re-scripts “Canadian values” in its own interests. So it is through mobilizing the image of the (emasculated but noble) “peacekeeper” that the “New Canadian Military” (Blatchford *Fifteen Days*) is erected, and justification for a “home-grown” Canadian-exceptionalist military coheres[^10].

In my concluding remarks I note that an understanding of Canadian militarism is not complete without attending to the violence of the colonial project at the core of the nation. This project requires, on the one hand, the constantly evolving cultural work of what Goldberg has aptly termed “historical amnesia” and the re-production of narratives of colonial belonging and legitimacy (*The Threat of Race* 157) -- myths, as I show, that link militarism, sovereignty, and racially-coded civility. At the same time, however, the colonial project demands the very material exercise of sovereignty over contested land, an increasingly militarized exercise of sovereignty that appears as an emergent tendency on Canada’s political horizon[^11].

Canada’s consolidation as a colonial settler state once depended on imperialist cultural assumptions, explicitly racist laws and their militarized enforcement, as well as autonomous or informal racial policing by white settler-citizens. White settler-Canadians proved willing to “go beyond” state policies, to take initiative and actively create and maintain the racial character and content of
citizenship (such as in the white backlash movements against the Black Loyalist settlement at Birchtown, Nova Scotia [1784], the landing of “immigrants ships” such as the Komagata Maru [1914], the St. Louis [1939], and the Sunsea [2010], the [late 19th century] “Canada First” movement’s agitation for a whites-only immigration policy, etc.). Today, however, the theft of indigenous lands and the racial division of neighbourhoods, workforces, and access to resources occurs through largely economic, ostensibly “raceless” procedures: addressing racism can present an even more difficult challenge when race itself is rendered invisible and unspeakable by the ideology of “colour-blindness” that relies on an absolute equivalence between de-historicized social subjects (and is, of course, not “blind” to colour at all). Legacies of colonialism repeat themselves in the seemingly neutral garb of economic necessity and market neutrality, in which race-based exploitation is privatized and outsourced from the ostensibly “race-neutral” or “equal opportunity” state to the corporate sector (Goldberg, *The Racial State* 219).

Yet when race becomes associated with a site of collective resistance (as, for instance, in the case of indigenous struggles over land, Tamil protests over Canada’s inaction on the situation in Sri Lanka or Canadian Arab and Muslim communities’ anger over racial profiling and extradition) we see the resurrection of a mythology of the civil and innocent (white) nation beset by terrorism and unintelligible racial disruption to which the only answer is increasingly a militarized one. Instrumental to the Canadian state throughout its tenure, today
this process is understood and approached from a neoliberal economic vantage point: the (potential) “disruption” of race becomes cast in terms of economic liability for the state, and by extension its “real” citizens, (white) taxpayers. Militarized cultural production and attendant forms of racially inscribed patriotic nationalism link the terror abroad to the terror of militarized neoliberalism at home, rapidly constricting and homogenizing “national values”, discourse and public life, at the expense of justice and democracy.

Caveats

This project is ambitious in its breadth, attempting to tell a story about a deep and rending cultural shift even as, with foreshortened vision, we are still amidst it. The cultural formations I make visible in these pages are an outline, roughly sketched, of more substantive and vertiginous changes wrought by neoliberal militarism on democratic possibilities in Canada.

First, I agree with critics like Richard Day, Himmani Banerjee and Marlene NourbeSe Philip that, in Philip’s words "multiculturalism can't end racism" because racism is an integral part of the political economy and sociology of Canada as an unequal and unjust capitalist country built on colonial expropriation, the serial exploitation of waves of migrant labour, and a deeply-rooted culture of white supremacism. I also agree with critics like Sherene Razack, Sandra Whitworth, Yves Engler, Todd Gordon, and Noam Chomsky that peacekeeping has always been in part a neocolonial and neoimperialist ruse,
mobilized by wealthy nations to police the world in their interests. But it is important to remember that both multiculturalism and the ideal of peacekeeping emerged as government attempts to contain, harness, redirect or diffuse social tensions and social movement energies. While both policy areas arguably work to serve the interests of elites, they opened up a language in which certain demands could be made of the state. The ideal of peacekeeping allowed anti-imperialist activists to point to a shared signpost for (what most people assumed to be) a softer, gentler foreign policy and form of global citizenship. More profoundly, official state multiculturalism opened up funding for language classes, the redrafting of school curricula, Human Rights commissions, multicultural media, and other forms of state and cultural infrastructure that allowed anti-racist activists to intervene in Canadian society. While it is crucial to see how peacekeeping and multiculturalism operated as pernicious myths, if we miss the way they were the product of and opened up space for struggle, we delimit our understanding of cultural power and possibility. If we approach these myths completely cynically, we also miss how dramatically they contrast with the bald and uncompromising culture of securitization and colour-blind neoliberalism that characterize today’s cultural politics of militarization. While peacekeeping and multiculturalism may have contained and channeled debate on war, culture and Canadian identity in ways that made them "safe" for the powers that be, these newer tendencies silence that debate almost altogether. There is a deeper question of cultural politics here, one that maps on to the ontological “revolution or
reform” debate, regarding how we value institutions and cultural processes that are incomplete and inevitably compromised.

Second, I have many questions that I have not been able to answer during this phase of my research. Sometimes this has been because information is explicitly classified or otherwise unavailable due to “national security” concerns, like, for instance, the genesis of and budget allotted for the Yellow Ribbon campaign within the Canadian Forces. It would be useful, for instance, to have a sense of how much the Canadian government allocates to “psychological operations,” “public relations” and information management, and whether the Yellow Ribbon campaign marked a substantial deviation from past practice or an intensification. However, as I discuss in Chapter One, the line between grassroots and “organic” support for troops and “Astroturf” social movement mimicry and propaganda is no longer clear. The new culture of militarization is enabled in different ways by both government support and people’s everyday performative acts. Recent trends have seen governments employ public relations firms to manufacture what appears to be authentic citizen mobilization in favour of military policy, among other things (see Stauber and Rampton, Best War Ever 5-16). But reducing pro-military activity in Canada to orchestrated disinformation would be inaccurate, impossible to prove, and would risk contributing to the ubiquitous culture of conspiracy theory thinking that is symptomatic of people’s alienation from and powerlessness in the face of the present political culture. From the 9/11 Truth movement to the anti-Semitic belief in a secret Jewish cabal,
conspiracy theories seem to offer some agency over a world in which power works in complicated and obscure ways, not merely through insidious government agencies but through people’s everyday actions and, most importantly, in which free market capitalism is the biggest conspiracy of all. From the design of the post-war Keynesian world system at the Bretton Woods summit in 1944 (which led to the establishment of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the supremacy of a gold-backed US currency) to the ongoing management of the neoliberal world order at the highly publicized meetings of the globe’s elites at the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the struggle of the capitalist class to consolidate, reconcile and maintain their economic power is an open secret, even when cloaked in the rhetoric of peace, human rights and an end to poverty.

Also, I have at times longed for the collaboration of a quantitative researcher, with the skills (and especially, the resources) to conduct national surveys, for instance, on the use of Yellow Ribbons and how people feel about them over time. This kind of work would be invaluable for me in the exploration of my research questions, but would not replace the project I offer here: the flexibility and interdisciplinarity offered by a cultural studies approach that combines textual readings with discourse analysis and cultural critique provides a unique opportunity. Despite its many probable shortcomings, the kind of breadth and cultural mapping that I have been able to undertake in this project offers an essential contribution to any discussion of cultural politics in Canada after 9/11.
and how we got from “there” to here. In keeping with this approach, this project reads the new Canadian militarism as the product of multiple, often conflicting forces. The cultural field I describe is messy and often contradictory. For instance, Canada’s new role in Empire is imagined as both the continuation of a noble heritage of peacekeeping and the gifting of Canadian multiculturalism to the world and as a transcendence of the effeminate, passive role of UN peacekeeper and the recognition of the dangers and limits of multiculturalism in that nefarious internal and external “outsiders” can prey on Canadian’s good nature. As a result, untangling this dense, overlapping web of cultural production and meaning is difficult, resists linear argumentation and necessitates revisiting key themes.

At times, this dissertation may appear to place a very strong emphasis on both the importance and the agency of the new Conservative government and Stephen Harper in particular. There is good reason to do so. As I will elaborate in chapter one, this government is unique in its mobilization of populist right-wing sentiment to advance a revolutionary shift in Canadian politics and society (Dobbin, Harpers Hitlist; Macdonald 19-47; L. Martin). Animated by an activist fervour, this party, which was first elected in 2006 and gained a majority in 2011, is not only possessed of a neoconservative vision of Canada’s future, it is an extremely disciplined and coordinated political machine. Stephen Harper, and more generally his office and inner circle, have succeeded by maintaining almost unprecedented party discipline and, in spite of two successive minority governments, using a wide variety of political tools and channels to advance a
highly coordinated agenda and a devastatingly effective media and public relations strategy (see Healy, ed.; L. Martin). This dissertation advances an argument that stresses militarization as a constitutive part of something much broader than particular government agendas and figure heads (that is, global capitalism and Empire as a whole). But I am careful to attribute credit where it is due: without Harper’s “New Government” and its precise and skilled interactions with grassroots and global forms of militarization, the cultural politics of the war would have taken shape differently. Of course, other governments before Harper’s have advanced militarization, neoliberalism and empire in other ways, and should the context require it, will no doubt do so again. Focusing on Harper’s Conservatives, then, is not primarily to assign to them moral culpability, nor to attribute them supreme Machiavellian intelligence, but rather to pay attention to the way global forces are articulated by local actors and through tensions between them.

I will invariably at some point be accused of not supporting the troops, or at least asked to clarify my position on some version of that question. First, a great many people in my family and community have at some point served in the Canadian Armed Forces and its precursor, the Canadian Expeditionary Force, at the cost of life and limb. Remembrance Day was the second most important holiday in my family growing up, as it continues to be in my hometown (and it was with some sense of amazement that I found Remembrance Day was not a statutory holiday in Ontario when I moved there). It is with a keen sense of the
importance of the military as an institution that has shaped Canadian society, and
the primary impact of the two World Wars on small towns and communities, that
I frame this project and that I find this work so important. The civic ethos that
drives many to military service, the genuine desire for altruism, service, and the
prospect of meaningful and gainful employment, are no small matters.

Despite gesturing toward a personal investment in this issue, (baldly: I
don’t want any more working-class kids from home blown up or blowing other
people up for the profit of Big Oil,) the idea that the right to a political opinion
can or must be earned through biography, or through military sacrifice, which is
the logic underneath much historical and contemporary rhetoric (see chapter 2), is
terrifying indeed. My contention here and throughout is that militarism changes
the notion of “support.” The question becomes, not merely, “do you support the
troops,” or “do you agree with this war,” or “what, if any, version of the Canadian
military do you support” or “do you believe in ‘asymmetrical warfare’ between
modern military powers and guerilla armies that resemble people’s militias
coalesced against foreign invasion,” but rather, “are you willing to approve of
militarism as the highest civic ideal, and the one that re-organizes all the others?”
Unequivocally, I am not: it is with the utmost urgency that I argue Canadians
must reject this imperative and insist on holding open a rapidly shrinking space
for the articulation and negotiation of collective democratic social ideals, the very
pulse of the democratic spirit with the potential to interrogate and redefine what
constitutes genuine human “security”.

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For instance, many specialized kinds of productive and reproductive labour might be considered essential to the reproduction of the nation, and these kinds of work (not only the work of the professional soldier) also involve personal sacrifice and dedication, such as the feminized labour of childcare and healthcare workers, or the underpaid, chronically precarious, and increasingly migrant agricultural labour of food production. Unlike with other specialized forms of work, however, the imperative to “support the troops” that accompanies contemporary Canadian militiary valorizes and demands impunity for both the goals and means of the profession (warfare) and the conduct of individuals employed in it. Equivocation about supporting the troops becomes immediate grounds for removal from public debate. The association of military culture with the rape of women in the countries where peacekeepers are deployed, with rape and violence against domestic partners and children, and with ritual hazing, abuse, racism, and misogyny has been well documented but seldom considered important (see, for instance, Must Boys Be Boys?: Ending Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in UN Peacekeeping Operations, a policy document from the Washington-based research and advocacy institute Refugees International). I have long suspected that a majority of Canadians would prefer to see a more “national defence” and emergency-preparedness focused military, and to see those people well “supported” in the sense of being adequately equipped and well compensated, during and after their service. This suspicion was confirmed in a Nanos research poll for the Globe and Mail which showed that, in spite of the
rapid acceleration of militarism in Canada over the past ten years, most Canadians still prioritize UN peacekeeping, followed by North American security, as the top military priorities, with only 21% of Canadians supporting or “somewhat supporting” another mission like Afghanistan (C. Clark). These findings indicate that peacekeeping, for all its evil uses as a rationale and justification for neo-imperial adventurism, remains to some degree alive in the public imagination as a term and an ideal to be struggled over against the tide of Orwellian “newspeak”. The poll also found that Canadians prioritize healthcare, jobs and the economy, the environment, and tax reductions over military spending, much to the dismay of the article’s authors, who strive to imbue their story with the righteous indignation of patriotism, wagging a disciplinary finger at the ungrateful Canadian public.13

More seriously, in a democracy, the military, along with the police and the government, must be subject to the will of the people. Since this valourization of soldiers accelerated, one current of the popular logic circulating between government, commentators and individuals is that the soldiers themselves must know best. Deferring to “troops on the ground” awards soldiers an ostensibly unassailable position based on superior access to the knowledge of combat and their willingness to make “the ultimate sacrifice.” This argument is flawed in several ways. First, it counters the other received narrative about soldiers which rationalizes their role as legitimate executors of violence—that they are unpolitical, “ordinary” Canadians “just doing their jobs.” Popular culture
depictions of soldiers, as I will illustrate, depend upon the figure of the “grunt” who is just an average guy, who doesn’t know anything about the politics of the mission, who just tries (often heroically) to do his job to the best of his ability.\textsuperscript{14} Positioning the soldier then as the arbiter of justice undoes the claim that troops can know nothing about the politics of war, the claim which assures their reprieve from the legal and ethical codes that prohibit taking another person’s life. More importantly, though, soldiers who are asked to do things most of us would find difficult, offering their lives and killing other humans, need to be able to rely on an active citizenry to make political decisions reflecting the most careful ethical and political deliberations, and to stand behind those decisions and their consequences, lest the lives and labour of those soldiers be sacrificed frivolously, in controversial deployments serving partisan and cynical ends. Hypothetically, in a functional and accountable democracy the blood of any soldiers’ victim killed with the sanction and authority of the state is on the hands of every one of us. This, at least, is at the basis of the compact of the modern nation-state, that promises, by removing violence to its internal and external borders and monopolizing its legitimate uses, a civil space. If we were credulous about the functional existence of this kind of compact to begin with, military supremacy that elevates soldiers to the level of judges, heroes, celebrities, and model citizens, undermines it.

My project hopes to make clear that cultural militarization has been deployed, extremely effectively, by government agencies with specific intentions
and outcomes like increasing recruitment, as well as general outcomes like reducing public opposition to the war. Cultural militarization has also occurred through the efforts of unaffiliated individual cultural producers who range from members of the professional creative class (as in the producers of *Passchendale*, *Afghanada*, Canadian Forces Ads) to the individuals who participate in the “support our troops” culture (Yellow Ribbons, Red Fridays, Highway of Heroes). These less coordinated efforts have had the sometimes intentional and sometimes incidental effect of shifting political culture and concepts of national identity to the right. Cultural agency, here, is a dense, plastic and problematic term. The concept of agency in cultural studies has arrived at a place where it connotes all things to all people, from little more than the co-optation of resistance, to the ability of individuals to respond to power as it is exercised over their lives. Certainly in the instances I describe (which are, for various reasons, the key instances of cultural militarization in post 9/11 Canada) agency can be seen to be operating: it operates in several directions at once, and this is not incongruous but neither is it necessarily liberatory. The agency of individuals to make meaning of their experiences is exercised within the much greater agency of both transnational capital and the state to inscribe meaning onto people’s experience (and both are maintained by individuals as agents). All this is to say, arguing about the degree of agency and autonomy at work in militarization ultimately doesn’t get us very far. As a term, the way “agency” circulates becomes indistinct from “power”; too dangerously empty of content for my comfort, perhaps
generating conceptual bagginess where a sharp tool is needed. I find myself in search of a term that has not yet been abstracted and emptied of content, divorced from democratic imperatives, appropriated to the vicissitudes of academic production, a term that resists the easy individualization of collective problems. (After all, agency and resistance are everywhere, and yet capitalism does not tremble.)

Many cultural theorists, critics, and social justice activists dream of living in a world free of alienation, where access to meaningful and creative labour is the rule, rather than the exception. “Support our troops” culture, as I argue throughout, acts against such possibilities because it narrows public discourse and aspirations, supplants civic and social ideals with militarist ones, supports “redistributive” neoliberal military economics that furthers the transformation of the welfare state to the security state on an unsustainable basis of economic revenue, and, finally, exalts the soldier as agent and foregrounds the soldier’s ability to make live or let die as the primary, militarized kind of agency in an age of total war.

Those outside of Canada might have an interest in this project as a cautionary tale and local evidence of global neoliberal trends in militarization and cultural politics, such that an officially “multicultural,” “peacekeeping,” and ostensibly liberal nation can be conscripted for war within an overarching logic of racial neoliberalism, a dire warning, perhaps, on the political project of liberalism itself. As Henry Giroux writes, there can be no other name for a society so
enthralled with its soldiers than a burgeoning “protofascism” (Giroux, *Proto-Fascism*).

1 Importantly, Hardt and Negri developed their concept of Empire as the policing force of global capitalism *before* the events of September 11 and the subsequent War on Terror. Indeed, their impetus was the NATO-led, UN supported operations in the former Yugoslavia (see Empire 67-113). While their 2004 book *Multitude* updated their analysis to encompass the War on Terror as a “global civil war,” it is important to recognize, going forward, that Empire, in their analysis, begins to form after the fall of the Berlin Wall and manifests itself as a global capitalist order that includes even non-capitalist states in a worldwide matrix of biopolitical inter policing.

2 For an overview, see the essays collected in Healy’s *The Harper Record*.

3 The phrase “the new Canada” is intended to resonate here with the Harper administration’s self-branding as “Canada’s New Government” and Christie Blatchford’s celebration of what she terms “Canada’s New Military” in *Fifteen Days*.

4 This is more accurate in regard to *Afghanada*, and perhaps less so in regard to *Passchendaele*. Of course the case is more complicated than this hasty gloss would suggest, and I approach the substantial differences between these two texts in my second chapter.

5 As I discuss in my article, “Redressing Redress.”

6 More specifically, this was the decade in which UN peacekeeping was a preferred model of military intervention among major world powers. Though UN peacekeeping engagements have continued to rise, the wealthy countries of the world have all but abandoned peacekeeping, and now leave poorer nations to shoulder the majority of the peacekeeping burden. Bill Robinson discusses this in his report I cite later in this section (7).

7 The speech in which Peter MacKay invokes the battle of Vimy Ridge as the moment “when Canada came of age -- when we shook off our status as a junior player and strode onto the world stage”, is available at: http://www.forces.ca/html/index.aspx?m=0&lang=en&sid=241&sm1=0&sm2=3&sm3=0&content=241&news=1&option=481#481
I again call attention to my tendency to sometimes imply that Canada is not an agent of imperialism in its own right, with its own corporate interests, which it certainly is. There is a much-romanticized notion that Canada, good and virtuous, is bullied by the United States into a position of economic dependence, a handmaiden of the American empire. This position, that much too easily conflates the power of transnational capital with the United States, is most true when speaking in the register of militarization, military-industrial complexes, and military spending and weapons research. I merely signal here the popular understanding of the motivation behind Canada’s current military policy as, among other things, an attempt to curry favour with the United States.

Viewable at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_6vK_JSSTo

I previously cited the Department of National Defence’s website, www.Afghanstan.gc.ca, as claiming that it is because of the history of peacekeeping that Canadian soldiers are uniquely “fit” to carry out this war. Since that time (July, perhaps) the messaging has changed, and now the website states explicitly that “this is not a peacekeeping mission” and that “it’s a tough job and we have the right people for it”, an interesting invocation of peacekeeping as a failed project, another approach of the right.

For instance, the Canada First Defence Strategy outlining the growth of the CF over the next 20 years describes the objective of maintaining security around national events like the 2010 Olympics, which are based on the development of stolen Native lands, and more generally the militarized response to Indigenous activism. Of course, it is because of the imbrication of those legal dispute resolution mechanisms within a system designed to protect and further the interests of the Canadian state that Indigenous activism becomes necessary in the first place.

In Canada, where the politics of race and state race-making has been so inflected through “the Indian problem,” a curious thing happens where, amidst the general climate of neoliberal racelessness in which citizens come to believe that “we’re all equal now” and that history has become irrelevant, because of the specific forms of racial management it has inherited in the Indian Act, the state cannot yet dispense with race-making altogether. I merely flag this here as a bigger discussion I pick up on throughout.

That this poll was taken prior to the most recent national election in which Stephen Harper’s Conservatives won a majority government gives cause for concern. If only 21% of Canadians would support such a mission in future, how is it that they elected a government so far from their stated values, one that saw fit to immediately take the lead in a new bombing campaign against Libya? My conclusion circles back to these questions.
Incidentally, I suspect this “grunt” is also much over-represented. While it would be an impossibly obscure equation to try to calculate the actual percentage of military members deployed who have achieved only the lowest level of training versus numbers of deployed soldiers who are highly-skilled, and then compare that figure to numbers of “grunts” represented in fiction and film, let me simply broach the question here with the proviso that the Canadian Armed Forces that reach deployment are, by international standards, very well trained. Perhaps the prevalence of the “grunt” may reflect American tendencies (and cultural texts), where a much vaster war machine depends upon the steady influx of soldiers who are typically deployed with far less education.
Part One: The Everyday Lived Culture of Canadian Militarism: Yellow Ribbons, Red Fridays, and The Highway Of Heroes

In this chapter I examine the way militarization is produced through the everyday actions of individuals through populist campaigns to “support our troops.” Examining first and foremost the widespread adoption of Yellow Ribbons as a symbol, I then address the “Red Fridays” campaign, which encouraged people to use red clothing to make a weekly visual statement of support, and, finally, I turn to the Highway of Heroes phenomenon of citizens lining the 401 highway to observe the repatriation of the bodies of soldiers killed in combat. In each case, I examine multiple influences on and complicated histories of these practices, and stress that, in spite of the fact that these initiatives are apparently grassroots acts of private citizens, they participate in and contribute to a culture of militarization that ultimately serves the increasing muscularity of state policy and Canada’s integration in global Empire.

The Yellow Ribbon Campaign

The Yellow Ribbons that have become so ubiquitous in Canada as the emblem of the national “Support Our Troops” campaign are highly charged semiotic tools in a battle for control of public discourse, marking the growing militarization of Canadian society in an age of empire. I read the Yellow Ribbon
here as neoliberal cultural pedagogy (a concept I define below), an everyday means by which individuals learn and teach specific cultural values and narratives, both explicitly and implicitly. In contrast to previous moments where the state relied upon more obvious forms of propaganda to militarize society, the new Canadian militarism that I explore in this thesis, I will argue, depends upon and mobilizes citizens’ capacity to produce meaning. As a symbol and a commodity, and perhaps more importantly as an everyday social and cultural practice, the Yellow Ribbon offers a glimpse into the dense cultural and political forces involved in the re-scripting of Canadian national mythologies, according to a logic of militarized neoliberalism.

Within a global social and political context marked by the triumph of the market over social values, the career of the Yellow Ribbon in Canada facilitates a shift away from “peacekeeping” as a dominant legitimating narrative. This shift, is supposedly necessary given the harsh realities of our “post-9/11 world,” an idiom whose expression in Canada entails the need to forgo social spending in favour of ever-expanding military budgets, the sacrifice of civil liberties and due juridical process on the altar of loosely-invoked national security concerns, and to submit to more invasive and restrictive immigration policies.

This shift was clearly articulated in the transtion from Liberal to Conservative governments in 2006, though it was at work long before. As Michael Byers (43-44) documents, the previous rhetoric of the Liberal Party had stressed the Afghan mission (which had been intensified and moved into the
dangerous region of Kandahar shortly before the fall of Prime Minister Paul
Martin’s minority government) as the continuation of Canada’s noble traditions of
internationalism and foreign aid, while quietly avoiding the word “peacekeeping.”
By contrast, the newly minted Prime Minister Harper made it a priority in March
of 2006 to fly to Afghanistan and performatively address troops as hardened
veterans of a bloody war against a savage terrorist enemy who would not hesitate
to attack Canada. “Canadians don’t cut and run,” Harper famously intoned (Byers
44).

Rather than suggesting that once-upon-a-time peacekeeping was an
untroubled manifestation of the national character, however, I examine the
discursive and political ramifications of the decline of the peacekeeping narrative
as an ideal and an organizing logic, and the growth of other modes of
understanding military engagement-- a shift that I argue has occurred largely in
the absence of broad public dialogue and democratic debate and that was in part
facilitated by the use of Yellow Ribbons and other “support our troops” cultural
practices. As I will argue, part of the work the Yellow Ribbon does, even in its
ambiguity, is to provide the illusion of a democratic consensus on the homefront.
With a symbolic history quite specific to the United States, I am interested in how
the iconography and language associated with the Yellow Ribbon came to have
such a profound influence over the cultural politics of Canada’s participation in
the War on Terror.

First, I sketch the global political context in which the rise of
militarization has become such an urgent tendency of nation-states. I then examine the cultural history of the Yellow Ribbon as a symbol in its specific historical contexts in the United States. After elaborating on the turn toward militarization in Canada, I discuss the crucial role played by the Yellow Ribbon, and the campaign to “support our troops” more broadly, in consolidating support for (and effectively silencing opposition to) the war. I argue that it is the very ambiguity of the sign that has rendered it such a potent force for the occlusion of public debate and, to borrow Sunera Thobani’s (2007) fitting appellation, the “exaltation” of certain kinds of national subjects. We are witnessing a “Yellow Ribbon coup” whose cultural and political ramifications we ignore at our peril.¹

**Neoliberalism and militarization**

The Yellow Ribbon may be understood as a uniquely North American populist response to the recalibration of the politics of national belonging in neoliberal times. Briefly, neoliberalism refers, on both the economic and the political level, to the set of policies associated with the so-called “Washington Consensus”: at the proverbial “end of history,” nation-states should reject a logic of social welfare and autonomous economic development in favour of free-market capitalist policies oriented towards the liberalization of trade regulations and tariffs, the deregulation of industry, privatization and deep cuts to social programs, and tax cuts to private and corporate interests (Harvey, *A Short History* 13). The root of the term, “liberalism,” refers to the values of individualism, individual rights and freedoms, and private property associated with liberal
enlightenment figures such as Rousseau and Adam Smith. For Smith and his followers who popularized the idea of the “free market,” this included the freedom of merchants and the emerging bourgeoisie from the intervention of and heavy taxation by the state (Perelman 177-200). However, the “neo” in the term neoliberalism signals a considerable departure from the values associated with the comprehensive philosophy of liberalism that emerged during an era in which the reigns of power were more firmly held by the state. In the contemporary context in which the power of transnational capital challenges the sovereignty of the state, neoliberalism signals a distrust of any notion of collectivism or public interest and encourages the collapse of all forms of social relations into the market: it is, in short, free market fundamentalism (Giroux Terror xix). This neoliberal agenda, then, for which the Free Trade agreements between the United States and Canada served as an example and template, has been a prime instantiation of the rise of corporate-led globalization which has seen the mobilization of new transportation and communication technologies amplify business and financial mobility and power. Today, these transnational flows of money and private power police the behaviour of nation-states and their populations to an unprecedented degree.

These factors and others have led to a reconfiguration of politics, as described above via Zygmunt Bauman: with military, economic and cultural sovereignties arguably compromised, the proliferation of “weak states” is not incongruous with, but a desired outcome for a newly liberated transnational capital (68). These “weak states” are ideally capable of acting as “local police precincts” in
maintaining the order requisite for business, but not capable of strong autonomous resistance, were indeed such resistance desired. At the same time, the dictates of capitalist accumulation demand the evisceration of the welfare state and, in its place, the strengthening and consolidation of the “warfare” or “security” state (Giroux, *Terror 8*). Such intensified policing and security protocols see the reallocation of state spending from social programs to prisons, militaries, and related policing and surveillance, a building up of a particular kind of state bureaucracy that contradicts the espoused neoliberal antipathy to “big government.” This tendency, which Ismael Hossein-zadeh calls “redistributive militarism,” consists, in his words, of “a combination of drastic increases in military spending coupled with equally drastic tax cuts for the wealthy. As this combination creates large budget deficits, it then forces cuts in non-military public spending (along with borrowing) to fill the gaps thus created” (*Political Economy*; and “Income distribution”). Hossein-zadeh documents this process, revealing a dramatic correlation between post-9/11 militarization and increasing income inequality in the United States as public funds are redirected to semi-private military industries.

Cynthia Enloe demonstrates that, as this neoliberal restructuring destabilizes societies around the world, counter-movements rise in resistance (*Maneuvers* 292-297). This resistance to the advance of privatization, the erosion of the commons, and the increasing gulf between rich and poor is met with the concomitant rise in militarization and “securitization” necessary to subdue local
unrest (Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* 36-50). In addition, as the work of Henry Giroux attests, neoliberalism is also a profound cultural politics: in North America, the hyper-militaristic spectacle characteristic of the post-9/11 corporate media environment fuels the cynicism, fear and isolation characteristic of a neoliberal culture (*Terror* 105-124). In the absence of a meaningful public sphere, this cultural politics anticipates the security state, rendering dominant conceptions of the public reducible to sites of (classed and racialized) contamination and threat. As Giroux writes,

> War provides jobs, profits, political payoffs, research funds and forms of political and economic power that reach into every aspect of society. As a mode of public pedagogy, a state of permanent war needs willing subjects to abide by its values, ideology and narratives of fear and violence. Such legitimation is largely provided through a culture addicted to the production of organized violence, largely circulated through various registers of popular and media culture that extend from high fashion, television and Hollywood movies to the production of violent video games and music concerts sponsored by the Pentagon. The spectacle of war demands a culture of conformity, quiet intellectuals and a largely passive republic of consumers (“Militarized Conservatism”).

In this sense, dispossession, repression and war are the literal business of Empire, where, as Hardt and Negri argue, militarization takes on the guise of policing to enforce the compulsory neoliberal capitalist order (*Multitude* 12-32).
The American-led War on Terror, as Randy Martin points out, is less about the cold-war struggle between opposed ideologies and more about the United States’ imperative to mitigate risks to global accumulation and open up new spaces for capitalist expansion (17-60). This strain of what Naomi Klein has called “disaster capitalism” creates global spaces of policing and repression to extract resources and create cheap sources of labour and opportunities for “reconstruction” (Shock Doctrine 3-20).

It is this business of international policing that frames Canada’s revamped role in empire. As Todd Gordon illustrates, Canada’s capacity for “global leadership” in just this area has been and will be called upon as one of its expanded roles in the new global order (300-310). To a greater extent than most civilians are aware, Canada’s armed forces have become deeply integrated with the American military establishment, including the sharing of training facilities on both sides of the border, joint training missions outside of North America, and the routine placement of Canadian troops on “exchange” within American regiments, including during active-duty combat situations in which Canada is not officially a belligerent, such as Iraq (Staples, Marching Orders). Indeed, the expanded opportunities offered by placement under American command are sought after by those rising stars seeking professional advancement in the Canadian military, as the careers of current Chief of Defence Staff General Walter Natynczyk and former Chief of Defence Staff General Rick Hillier attest. This integration has become a central feature of the military topography of North America, as well as
a site of future military aspirations, most notably in the “Fortress North America” protocols: the push to create a hermetic security barrier around Canada and the United States to defend their ostensibly mutual interests (Barlow; Staples “Fortress”).

By the early 2000’s Canada had allocated the vast majority of its fighting capacity away from the United Nations to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and United States-led “policing” projects. Chief among these are the ongoing naval patrol of the Persian Gulf and, of course, participation in the ground war in Afghanistan. The Liberal government of Jean Chrétien declined to participate in George W. Bush’s “coalition of the willing” and invade Iraq, sensing that since Iraq had no connection to the 9/11 attacks, and Canadians had a relatively high level of public political literacy (a level of literacy and skepticism that I will argue has subsequently declined) the logic for an Iraq invasion would remain wanting (Barry). The logic for participating in the invasion of Afghanistan, however, was evidently deemed more compelling, given that Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda, on whom the attacks were blamed, were known to be operating there, and given the pressure the government may have felt to demonstrate solidarity and support for the United States given the “with us or against us” tenor of American foreign policy at the time. Indeed, it was widely understood that Canada’s participation in Afghanistan kept us out of Iraq, and at the same time provided access to lucrative military and reconstruction contracting opportunities. At least, fears that Canada’s non-participation would mean
exclusion from these profitable corporate opportunities was given much air-time (Dobbin, “Harper is Happy”).

The Afghan mission has been explained by Liberal and Conservative governments both as a war in the sense of the heroism and strategy of combat, and as a policing or enforcing mission in justification, an explanation that conveniently elides the sort of global neoliberal consensus that is being policed and enforced, along with the points of rupture, tensions and divisions which underlie that consensus. In addition, as Engler demonstrates, Canada routinely sends RCMP and other law-enforcement officers to “at-risk” countries around the world to train local police forces (Black Book). As both Engler and Gordon note, given the complicity and culpability of Canada’s law-enforcement agencies in creating and perpetuating conditions of violence and fundamental human insecurity within Canada’s borders, forms of violence that replicate and further patterns of colonial and imperial violence against indigenous and racialized bodies, we can discern resonances with older modes of imperialism and domination (66-133). In this vein, Razack has written about the crusading impulse of racialized international policing in Canada’s brutal “peacekeeping” engagement in Somalia (Dark Threats). Indeed, as David Theo Goldberg makes clear, the organizing logic of the contemporary security state and its involvement in global affairs is inherently a racial one: historic injustices, inequalities, and local forms of oppression and exploitation persist and intensify under the banner of formal legal equality and free-market economic inequality and are reproduced
through military actions that aim to police world affairs. However, the racial aspects of global violence disappear from the public discourse making way for the preoccupation with white injury that comes to dominate the “colour-blind” neoliberal society (*Threat of Race* 219). As Goldberg illustrates, as market freedoms come to replace and stand in for substantive democracy and as the public sphere is eroded by military and economic power, it becomes more difficult to see (and to challenge) the racialized aspects of both the war abroad and the war at home. Similarly, Canadian critics like Razack (*Casting Out*) and Thobani have noted how an appeal to a raceless universalism is, in fact, at the very heart of Canada’s justification for imperialist intervention, notably the recently minted (though long percolated) “Responsibility to Protect” doctrine which gives NATO nations the right to intervene in global hotspots where they perceive universal human rights to be violated (see Gordon 301-8). By now, it should go without saying that, as David Harvey makes clear, this “responsibility” is unevenly enforced so as to ultimately benefit the economic interests of powerful Western states and, more generally, the global neoliberal capitalist system of which they are a part (*The New Imperialism*).

While there is debate as to the exact degree of autonomy Canada enjoys to set its own foreign and military policy in this new age of empire, it is nonetheless a rapidly militarizing country². Indeed, it is perhaps because of its waning or contested sovereignty under neoliberal Empire that militarization is fervently pursued as a technique for ensuring Canada’s continued relevance in the great
game of geopolitics. Canada’s myth of peacekeeping, with its implied (but rarely defined and elaborated) moral authority, positions Canada as singularly entitled to act as an international policing agent. It is through this mobilization of older notions of Canada as a colonial icon of “peace, order and good government” that the nation’s pivotal role in Empire is negotiated, and through which the militarization of Canadian culture advances. The Yellow Ribbon is a key part of this process, and a telling example of the kind of cultural work militarization now entails.

As critics like Enloe, Sandra Whitworth, Razack and Thobani note, militarization is a deeply gendered process that traverses and makes use of systemic and cultural racism, sexism, xenophobia, and homophobia in historically and contextually specific ways. In the case of Canada in the present, like in many historical moments, curtailing democratic discourse and debate in the interests of “national security” and identification with “our boys in the field” is both a contributing factor and a key effect of militarization. As Enloe observes, “the more militarization transforms an individual or society, the more that individual or society comes to imagine military needs and militaristic presumptions to be not only valuable, but also normal. Militarization, that is, involves cultural as well as institutional, ideological, and economic transformations” (Bananas 4). In Razack’s exposition of the racist, colonialist and patriarchal logics at work in the Somalia scandal (Dark Threats), she makes clear that hypermasculinized rhetoric and feeling suffuses not only the soldiers’ barracks, creating a moral universe in
which torture and rape are acceptable, but also the perception of soldiers back home, justifying and rationalizing their actions. Similarly, Whitworth documents the ways Canada’s military engagements are seen as expressions of and contests over national masculinities and the masculinity of the nation (Men, Militarism and UN Peacekeeping). She traces how peacekeeping is both masculinized and feminized within the debate over Canada’s place in the world. As Enloe notes, the hypermasculinization germane to militarism compliments the cultural politics of neoliberalism that stress competitive individualism and market warfare as the most important and noble aspects of human affairs and that reduce “feminized” values of care, compassion and solidarity to devalued private or charitable spheres (Globalization).

All this points to militarization as more than a matter of foreign policy and spending decisions. Militarization is an ongoing cultural production. I suggest we can understand this cultural work of militarization as a “pedagogical” project in the broad sense that scholars of critical pedagogy have established. The complicated and dynamic ways social values are learned, reproduced, contested and changed exceeds strictly classroom-based learning and involves multiple overlapping sites of social learning and teaching from homes and communities to corporate and independent media to the workplace and institutions such as the military (Giroux, University in Chains 76). The advantage of a pedagogical approach to cultural politics is that it is a frame of criticism forged in understanding the complicated and shifting power relations of meaning making.
that circulate within and between social institutions and the actors who inhabit them. This approach makes visible the way in which any approach to social transformation contains a crucial pedagogical element. We must be attentive to the ways militarism is taught and learned through both institutionalized and everyday cultural spaces and to what militarization teaches people about identity, belonging, hope, fear privilege and entitlement (see Saltman). The recent $15.5 million dollar surge in Canadian military marketing and recruiting (which I detail in my discussion of the new Canadian Forces Ads in the second chapter) represents a militarist onslaught against public discourse and opinion (“Feds Double Spending”). But as Giroux makes clear, the militarization of culture does not take place merely through the pomp and circumstance of official state militarism. Rather, it represents the rise of a ubiquitous cultural politics that aims to instruct social institutions and relationships to replicate, accede to, or recognize the ultimate importance of the military in social life:

Militarization suggests more than simply a militaristic ideal - with its celebration of war as the truest measure of the health of the nation and the soldier-warrior as the most noble expression of the merging of masculinity and unquestioning patriotism - but an intensification and expansion of the underlying values, practices, ideologies, social relations and cultural representations associated with military culture. What appears new about the amplified militarization of the post-9/11 world is that it has become normalized, serving as a powerful educational force that shapes our lives,
memories and daily experiences. As an educational force, military power produces identities, goods, institutions, knowledge, modes of communication and affective investments - in short, it now bears down on all aspects of social life and the social order. As Michael Geyer points out, what is distinctive about the militarization of the social order is that civil society not only "organizes itself for the production of violence," but increasingly spurs a gradual erosion of civil liberties. Military power and policies are expanded to address not only matters of defense and security, but also problems associated with the entire health and social life of the nation, which are now measured by military spending, discipline and loyalty, as well as hierarchical modes of authority (“Against the Militarized Academy”).

For instance, popular broadcast programming in Canada like hit TV series *The Border* (which liberally dramatizes the heroic tribulations of officers of the Canadian Border Services Agency) and the radio-seriaal *Afghanada* (which I take up in the next chapter), while rehearsing a carefully cultivated ambivalence about Canada’s participation in the War on Terror, normalize militarization as an integral aspect of Canadian culture. Similarly, the recent shift in the symbolic politics of Remembrance Day ceremonies, the commemoration of the battle of Vimy Ridge, and the “Highway of Heroes” phenomenon have moved the rituals and cultures of militarism from the barracks to the level of everyday life in profound new ways.
Of course, there is a danger of over-inflating the “newness” of any cultural practice and Canada has a history of military engagement prior to 9/11 and an established cultural politics of commemorating those wars and the soldiers who fought in them. The distinction between past militarizing cultural practices of the First and Second World Wars and militarizing cultural practices today requires some elaboration. In the decades following the First World War, cenotaphs were erected by municipalities and community organizations across the country to commemorate the war dead, often modeled on the memorials commissioned by larger centres such as the cenotaph designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens at Whitehall, London (Skelton, Gliddon and Stamp 99). Likewise, chapters of the Royal Canadian Legion (formerly the Canadian Legion of British Empire Services League) were established in 1926 not merely as veterans’ fraternal and service organizations but as spaces of community life following the First World War, and during and after the Second World War (Hale). The social worlds of Canada during the two World Wars, themselves distinct moments, are removed from social life today by years and generations, but also by the development of the comprehensive infrastructure of a modern state and by the subsequent systematic neoliberal attack on the same, not to mention a revolution in military affairs and technology (no less profound than the one that shocked the world during the First World War) that sees “traditional” warfare abandoned in favour of “asymmetrical” and “counter-insurgency” warfare between unequally matched combatants. Legion halls, for instance, were created by and for male veterans and
their families (female veterans, like my grandmother, were not eligible for membership) with an explicit mandate to serve and advocate on behalf of those members, prior to some of the most important developments in the establishment of social welfare like Medicare, and during a period in which the sheer numbers of veterans returning from war created a social context that was, at the time, unprecedented. The advocacy of the Legion was essential to the development of state protocol around the treatment of soldiers and veterans, from the consolidation of the War Allowance in 1930 to the establishment of the department of Veteran’s Affairs itself as a state bureau (Finkel 128). Legions and cenotaphs and other memorials have been a part of the Canadian cultural landscape for nearly a century, exercising an important influence in civic and military discourse as part of a broader society that has included various moments in the life of the welfare state and more robust notions of civics and nationalism.

In contrast, while Yellow Ribbons and Red Fridays may lend credence to government prioritization of increased military spending, how that spending might or might not translate into support for soldiers is certainly a matter of interpretation. While these new practices may not aim to accomplish specific and tangible benefits for soldiers in the same way as direct Legion lobbying, their more symbolic and representational character and their filtration through new media technologies allows them to permeate civilian life and politics in a way that legions and cenotaphs originally did not, so we can trace both continuity with and departure from older practices. Beyond both intensification and seepage into all
areas of social life, there is something else I am struggling to articulate about these militarized cultural practices that feels somehow newly duplicitous: they knowingly or cynically perform or mimic a kind of conversation that they, at the same time, refute and preclude. While military engagements and their various cultural counterparts have arisen in specific historical contexts in Canada, and those established practices also gain strength and flourish under this new wave of militarism, these new practices seem to target civil society and its idioms.

Militarization, then, is not merely something that happens to culture but something made up of both concerted cultural interventions by powerful forces (like the state, the military or big media) and the way this is incorporated, negotiated, or contested in everyday cultural practices. As mentioned previously, these practices emerged from both hegemonic and governmental exercises of power.

It is in this context that the Yellow Ribbon has emerged as a near ubiquitous symbol, primarily as a magnetic decal on car bumpers but increasingly as an official symbol affixed to public and private buildings, hanging from flagpoles, emblazoned on T-shirts and under the ice at hockey games. We can understand Yellow Ribbons as a pedagogy of Empire, a means by which the Canadian imaginary and public discourse is disciplined to understand and acquiesce to the political, social, economic and cultural transformations of neoliberal militarism. The Yellow Ribbon works as a dense and ambiguous symbol or cultural touchstone, as a genuine everyday cultural practice, and as a
commodity with its own acquired social and material histories. Its very ambiguity (does it imply support for the troops or support for the war? And what does support mean across the various specific and as well as general contexts of its use?) is not accidental but works to delimit, enforce and militarize the borders of public debate around questions of national policy and, by extension, national “character”. At the same time, the ribbon affirms and “exalts” certain preferred national subjects: the masculinized, normative and morally unimpeachable young men (and to a lesser extent, women) whose sacrifice is not only the salvation of the national character, but retrospectively becomes its foundation and guarantor.

A slim but consistent majority of Canadians have been opposed to the War in Afghanistan from its beginning, except for a brief period during the summer of 2007 (Boucher). According to successive surveys by major pollsters Ipsos Reid, in August 2006 “52 per cent of respondents believe[d] Canadian troops should not be deployed in Afghanistan and should be brought home as soon as possible” (“Slim majority”). In July of 2009 they reported that “support for the mission holds steady at 48%,” (“Support for Mission in Afghanistan Holds Steady”) and most recently in December 2009, 66% of Canadians opposed extending the mission again and 53% continued to oppose it altogether (“Canadians Decline”). Evidently, there is a deep tension in the national imaginary, though one that has been largely silenced in the dominant media coverage of the war. Within this context, the Yellow Ribbon teaches that to be Canadian is to support Canadian soldiers (who are, in this formulation, hastily and unscrupulously homogenized to
want to be in Afghanistan themselves) and that to question or disagree with the government is to disrespect soldiers. The assumptions bound up in the Yellow Ribbon function to circumvent the fact that the debate about Canada’s role in the War on Terror has, despite the efforts of some critical academics, media pundits and anti-war activists, only occurred in extremely limited and perhaps even inoculating ways. It binds the national imaginary to the contradictory sense that the world and Canada’s role in it have changed, and yet that they remain the same: peacekeeping is a noble but failed project eclipsed in a world riven with terror-- but Canada, as the great peacekeeper, must engage in waging dubious foreign wars of aggression in the interests of peace and (somehow) democracy.

Canada’s engagements in the world ostensibly flow directly from a national ethos that Daniel Coleman has dubbed “white civility,” of racially imagined, well-scrubbed and industrious fair-mindedness stretching back into the nation’s colonial patrimony. Within this imaginary, the troops “over there” are seen to be acting in ways entirely consonant with the national character “over here”, both demonstrating and establishing “peace, order and good government” with a quiet and courteous but firm civility. The Yellow Ribbon both speaks to and rearticulates these aspirations. As much as it normalizes and justifies the imperial policing mission in Afghanistan and around the world, it also helps police public discourse in Canada, ensuring that the tangled web of normative assumptions it represents and propounds from the back of so many cars on Canadian highways (especially during its peak usage which I estimate from 2006-
2008) continues to go unquestioned.

**The cultural history of Yellow Ribbons in the United States**

The cultural or symbolic history of the Yellow Ribbon is quite illuminating. While the pedigree of the Yellow Ribbon most easily recalls the first American-led war in the Persian Gulf under George Bush, Sr., the symbol has a longer (if, in places, somewhat misty and vague) history in the United States, stretching back to the nineteenth century with American artist Frederick Remington. Chronicler of the post-Civil War American West, Remington’s depictions of an heroic U.S. Cavalry with a yellow stripe on their pant-legs and sometimes sporting yellow neckerchiefs as they “won” the West, enjoyed great popularity with urban audiences. Remington’s images follow the racial and colonial patterns of representation that we might expect: largely invisible is the unspeakable genocidal brutality.

*Figure 0 - Frederic Remington, Lieutenant Powhatan H. Clarke, Tenth Cavalry, 1888. Oil on canvas (fragment)*

*Figure 0 - Frederic Remington, Through the Smoke Sprang the Daring Young Soldier*
toward Indigenous peoples and nations that occurred at this time, and for which the cavalry lives on in particular infamy (Churchill 222-245). An arm-chair cowboy and journalist, Remington lived in New York and is said to have only spent limited time in the West himself, suggesting that the authenticity of his depictions lies more in their representation of how nineteenth-century Americans wished to imagine the West than in their verisimilitude (Dippie, Reming and Russell 3).

The 1949 John Ford film, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, re-imagines this scene of genocidal conquest for the highly militarized post-War American audience, drawing heavily on Remington’s artwork as well as the virile and adventuresome notion of masculinity to which he pays homage (Dippie, “One West” 39-43). The film was a remarkable cinematic achievement in its time, with breathtaking landscape shots filmed on location in the Arizona desert, self-consciously and meticulously re-staging Remington’s images for the screen. In one of his most popular and iconic roles, John Wayne stars as Captain Nathan Brittles, a cavalry officer beloved by his troops and facing mandatory retirement at the end of long military service. The female lead is the niece of the outpost’s
commander (Capt. Brittles’s supervisor) who is wooed by both the incompetent, rich neophyte officer from New York and the young roughneck officer who, in true American spirit, has climbed the ranks to become Brittles’s second-in-command. She places an ostentatious Yellow Ribbon in her hair to demonstrate her loyalty to one of her suitors, but doesn’t disclose which. The presence of this well-to-do young lady, ostensibly on a tour of the Arizona country, drives much of the plot, requiring strategic military manouevers led by Brittles to deliver her to safety from rampaging Indians. In the end, Brittles saves the day by disobeying orders and leading an early morning raid on the Indian encampment to scatter their horses before the looming battle can take place. The cavalry is portrayed as lenient and tolerant in accomplishing its objective without bloodshed and in allowing the Cheyennes and Arapahos their lives, following Brittles’s directive to “make ‘em walk to the reservation, [it] hurts their pride.” A letter offering Brittles a reassignment and commending his service comes through just in time for him to ride off into the sunset, leaving the fate of the outpost in the now-capable hands of his young protégé whom, of course, the young miss has chosen as her mate. Love triumphs, the patriarchal nuclear family (that Brittles himself has sacrificed for the army and his nation) is restored in the young couple, and the spirit of American individualism saves the day and paves the way for westward expansion. In this film we catch an early glimpse of the dense and profound cultural work done by the Yellow Ribbon to bind together in one ambiguous symbol the emotive aspirations and meanings of militarized nationhood.
The film included a now authoritative version of the traditional folk song "'Round her Neck She Wore A Yellow Ribbon," which is said to date from the civil-war period:

`'Round her neck she wore a Yellow Ribbon
She wore it in the springtime and the merry month of May
When you ask her why she wore it
She wore it for her lover who was far, far away

The film’s version substitutes in the final line, “She wore it for her lover in the U.S. Cavalry/Cavalry/Cavalry/She wore it for her lover in the US Cavalry”.

The Yellow Ribbon’s claim to originate in this historical moment, and its associations with both the colonial, civilizing mission and with women’s waiting, reveal to us its importance to the ideological work of the imperial project. Virtuous women, willing to be tempted but forever faithful, are stock caricatures of the imperial military adventure, as are renegade bad-boy soldiers who turn out to be ultimately honourable in the end, the ineffectual pencil-pushing bureaucrats who get in the way of real men’s work, and the irrational racialized belligerents in need of the stern (gauntleted) hand of paternal authority. The imperial masculinity of the soldier, that must be brave, adventuresome, and unwilling to be tied down, has its classic counterpart in feminized domesticity and the association of women with the domestic space-come-nation that requires defending. Indeed, as Andrea Smith underlines, securing the loyalty of settler women to the patriarchal imperial project has been chief among the concerns of early colonial culture, and a major
factor in the sexual violence of settler men enacted as a weapon of genocide against Indigenous women (18-30). Thus, the icon of the Yellow Ribbon brings together the genocide of Native American Indigenous people, the patriotic nationalism of the colonial-settler state, the submission and loyalty of women to militarized masculinity and patriarchal order, and the American myth of the triumph of the pioneering, individual spirit over both hindersome and emasculating bureaucracy and other expressions of collectivity.

The next major appearance of the Yellow Ribbon was as a popular song recorded in 1973 by Tony Orlando and Dawn. “Tie A Yellow Ribbon ‘Round the Old Oak Tree” was the tale of a woman waiting for a man’s return from prison and his anxiety about her loyalty, and it shared the trope of women waiting with the earlier song and film. But it was to become associated with the return of soldiers from Vietnam, an association that Orlando himself helped to solidify when he performed it to honour returning Vietnam veterans as part of Bob Hope’s pre-game show at the 1973 Cottonbowl, an event that elicited a standing ovation from over 70,000 football fans⁴ and permanently linked the song and symbol to American military adventures overseas and the “war at home.” It was during the Iranian hostage incidents of 1979-1981 that the Yellow Ribbon emerged as a popular cultural practice. Penne Laingen, wife of hostage American diplomat Bruce Laingen, used the ribbon to signify support for the American hostages and was instrumental in its dissemination through hostage-supporting activist groups such as “No Greater Love” and the “Family Liaison Action Group” (FLAG)
which she helped found and which received broad and sympathetic media coverage which encouraged other Americans to take up the symbol in support of these families (Heilbronn 9). Interestingly, these groups were supported in their efforts by some AFL-CIO unions.

Doug Kellner documents how, in its next phase, the Yellow Ribbon came to signify support for American soldiers in the first Gulf war (Media Culture 211-216). The Iraqi detainment of Americans and other foreign nationals in the early days of the war was popularly understood in the United States as similar to those previous international hostage incidents, and initially the ribbons were linked to those detainees, rather than to soldiers. The high percentage of reservists that were “called up” from their everyday lives to serve was another point of sympathy with the American people. American troops were sent to the desert to wait on political orders (chiefly, they were waiting for President Bush to win approval from Congress) and also to wait out the aerial bombardment before the start of the ground war. The slogan “until they all come home” (Heilbronn 9), popular in the early days of the war, lubricated the shift in the Yellow Ribbon’s signification from hostages to soldiers who were now understood to be “held hostage” by
effeminate political bureaucracy, and even, as Kellner (1991) documents, by the “hostile” and “savage” landscape itself as dust storms forestalled the action in the desert (15-16). Kellner scrupulously details how the first war in the Gulf marked a new level of social saturation with media and propaganda, and indicts the media (then-new sensationalistic 24-hour news programming, television, and public relations corporations in particular) for their role in creating public support for the war and severely limiting public debate and discourse.5 The “embeddedness” of journalism (as in the ostensibly independent reporters “embedded” within military units) is so commonplace that the myth of a critical, independent media as the fifth estate of a healthy democracy is almost entirely lacking in credibility: that is to say, democracy itself is widely acknowledged to be in peril, and the myth of the independence and integrity of the media is deployed cynically, both believed and disbelieved (see also Nichols and McChesney). Further, as Kellner illustrates, major American television and news agencies took their cue from the policy of the George Bush Sr. administration and became prominent war-boosters well in advance of public opinion. Bush Sr.’s administration saw the need to overcome what they described as “Vietnam syndrome,” (Gulf TV War 24) the reluctance of the people to support foreign military campaigns that would be costly in terms of taxes and young American lives, and embarked upon the Gulf War with an aggressive strategy of media management, from placing false information in major liberal newspapers (where they were thought to garner more credibility than conservative papers) to fabricating evidence of Iraqi troop movements
(Kellner *Gulf TV War*, 613-614). It was during this time that the Yellow Ribbon gained widespread popularity, and became immediately identifiable as a patriotic emblem coupled with the “support our troops” mantra.⁶

The Yellow Ribbon, then, works as a public force for revising history, creating in the popular imagination a continuous (enough) American national lineage that moves from a celebrated narrative of colonial adventurism, through the epic patriotic sacrifice of undervalued individual soldiers and their wives and girlfriends during the Vietnam war, in order to construct a present in the throes of moral decay, in need of salvaging forgotten values through militarized leadership and order, and the patriarchal and racially organized order in which they make sense. I find recalling Eric Hobsbawm’s notion of “invented tradition” as a technique of the modern nation-state here compelling: he argues that traditions are invented to convey both the time and timelessness of the established order to which they belong:

“Invented tradition” is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.... However, insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of “invented” traditions is that the continuity with it is largely fictitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations
which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition (3).

Further, Hobsbawm shows that while the specific content of “tradition” might be vague, the practices were well defined and high compulsory. The crucial element, he writes, “seems to have been the invention of emotionally and symbolically charged signs of club membership rather than the statutes and objects of the club.” Traditions “work”, then, by fabricating a sense of social cohesion and the formation of collective identity (10-11). According to these criteria, the Yellow Ribbon qualifies as an invented tradition, one that, via the “suitable historic past” of colonial frontierism (from John Wayne to Vietnam) responds to the novel situation of neoliberal militarization in the present.

The Canadian Context

In terms of its effect on public discourse and identity in Canada, “supporting our troops” through the use of the Yellow Ribbon has become a common, if initially a borrowed, cultural practice. With such effort put into inventing the Yellow Ribbon as an explicitly American tradition, it is remarkable, indeed, that the practice was so seamlessly transposed into a very different Canadian cultural landscape. Given that the Canadian media spectrum is so dominated by American content, perhaps we can attribute this
transposition at least partially to the pressure Canadians may have felt to support our troops the way the Americans do, out of a sense of national pride and/or fraternal cultures of masculine rivalry. The American icons the Yellow Ribbon invokes, from cavalry taming the “wild West,” to the charismatic machismo of John Wayne himself, to the Vietnam War, are not tropes shared by Canada, and even run counter to the predominant Canadian mythologies of peacekeeping and multiculturalism. One of the few concerns about Yellow Ribbons to meet with some degree of success has been the concern that they are American, harkening pre-9/11 and persistent Canadian fears about American cultural imperialism (Simons). I have also found in sharing my research in presentations and conversationally that this is a message which people are ready to hear and find easy to take away from my work. In another register, however, the distinction between “borrowed” and “homegrown” traditions leads away from the effects of the practice in Canadian society and as part of a larger project of neoliberal change. In spurring the growth of popular identification of national belonging and virtue with soldiers and forms of militarized engagement the Yellow Ribbon’s ambiguity is devastatingly effective. The Yellow Ribbon ceases to have any real “message” but instead binds together the often contradictory narratives and affective impulses of militarism and national idealism. The saturation of social space with demonstrably “war-happy” media coverage, the militarization of everyday life cultural practices through the idiom of caring and loyalty to soldiers who are understood to be “just doing their jobs”, and the militarization of public
and civic life as an engine of neoliberal transformation, that Kellner meticulously documented in the US during the First Gulf war, can all be currently observed in Canada, and with similarly alarming results (Winter 179-225).

It is important to contextualize the adoption of Yellow Ribbons in Canada as both a continuation of older militarist tropes as well as the transformation of those tropes in ways that justify and entrench support for Canada’s new role in Empire. As I touched on in the introduction, in the Canadian context the primary national narrative of a “nation of peacekeepers” is based on the peacekeeping model of international intervention usually understood to have emerged under Pearson with the Suez canal crisis of the 1950’s. It wasn’t until the end of the Cold War, however, that peacekeeping became a dominant style of military intervention, experiencing its hallmark decade in the 1990’s. Whitworth calls our attention to the contradictions and costs inherent to imagining and executing “peace-keeping” as a military act (*Men, Militarism and UN Peacekeeping*).

Despite the carefully maintained and managed image of the peacekeeper as “warrior-prince-of-peace,” soldiers serving as peacekeepers under the UN have raped, assaulted and murdered local women and children in numerous cases for, as Whitworth writes, “part of what goes into the making of a soldier is a celebration and reinforcement of some of the most aggressive, and most insecure, elements of masculinity: those that promote violence, misogyny, homophobia, and racism” (*Men, Militarism and UN Peacekeeping* 15). Indeed, Whitworth points out the vital function of the notion of “moral purity” and the “benign and
altruistic” image associated with peacekeeping in Canada’s national mythology. In order to imagine self/nation as good and moral, it is necessary to imagine those places that require peacekeeping as “disordered, chaotic, tribal, primitive, pre-capitalist, violent, and exclusionary” (Men, Militarism and UN Peacekeeping 19; see also Razack Dark Threats).

The critique of peacekeeping and its work within Canadian culture has been an important part of critical projects that take to task what Himani Bannerji has called “the dark side of the nation.” I argue that it is precisely through mobilizing the myth of a nation of peacekeepers that the new breed of Canadian militarism is advanced. There is a swelling chorus of critique in particular social justice and academic circles⁷ about the vital function of this “moral purity” and benign and altruistic image associated with peacekeeping in furnishing Canada with a sense of national innocence. This “cult of innocence”, always in danger of slipping solipsistically into a culture of national superiority, is central to the way in which Canada reproduces itself as a modern, colonial-settler state and its institutional management of internal difference. In Mackey’s elegant turn of phrase, Canada all too easily “appropriates the identity of marginalization and victimization to create national innocence, locating the oppressors safely outside the body politic of the nation” (12).

An example of this dynamic, as it pertains to contemporary militarization, is the official response to the question “Why are we in Afghanistan?”⁸ First, of course, it is interesting that the Department of National Defence has a prominent
webpage specifically addressing this question, signaling the level of unease about the justification for the war. The official three-part response, briefly, is that 1) “the Afghan government asked for our help,” 2) “what’s good for Afghanistan is good for us all,” and 3) “because it’s a tough job and we have the right people to do it.” Leaving aside the purposeful obfuscation of the conditions under which the Afghan government under Hamid Karzai came to ask for “our help,” as well as the dubious legitimacy of any government installed via “regime change” (and the blatant absurdity that being subjected to an eight-year bombing campaign is “good” for Afghanistan), it is the third item that is especially telling. The website is unequivocal that Afghanistan is not a peacekeeping mission. There are no ceasefire arrangements to enforce or negotiated peace settlements to respect…As well as military personnel, the Canadian effort in Afghanistan includes diplomats, development workers, police officers, and experts in human rights, good governance, the rule of law, and the institutions of a healthy democracy.

Here, peacekeeping is loosely invoked as a failed practice insufficient for the current theatre of combat. In military and conservative circles, the above passage takes on a piercingly sardonic quality, as peacekeeping, as practiced primarily through enforcing “ceasefire arrangements” and “negotiated peace settlements” is sullied and tainted with naïvete, ineffectiveness, passivity, and emasculation (connotations acquired from soldiers’ experiences of being unable
to effectively enforce such agreements in conflicts like the UN-mandated peacekeeping operation in Rwanda – see Mackenzie 221-228). A liberal, civilian audience might read the passage without irony as stating the facts of the mission in Afghanistan and miss the full scope of the sardonic overtones, but even so the passage carries connotations of disciplining an insufficiently savvy and supportive civilian population. An important subtext here is the belief in military and defence policy quarters that most people who support the idea of peacekeeping as an expression of Canadian values are unfamiliar with the specificity of peacekeeping as practiced by the Canadian Forces. The references to ceasefires and agreements to enforce is instructive, delimiting for an ostensibly ignorant and/or idealistic public the scope of how peacekeeping has been defined by government. At the same time that it invokes and inscribes failed peacekeeping as an open secret, however, it is precisely a history of and aptitude for peacekeeping that is slyly deployed to justify Canada’s decision to take on such a leadership role in an imperial war of aggression, retribution, and resource control. This capacity for leadership is emphasized by the reference to the non-military expertise Canada is contributing to the building of a “civil society” in Afghanistan. It is thus that that the re-deployment of the peacekeeping image becomes so pernicious, enabling military and political goals that are the antithesis of what UN peacekeeping, in its most earnest idealistic moments, might have stood for.

Military ventures which participate in promoting the “nation of peacekeepers” mythology against a barbarized “other” are, as Razack so cogently
argues, always about the making of self, a process fundamental in a Canada that has yet to reconcile with its originary moments of colonial violence (Dark Threats 32-36). In other words, peacekeeping as a legitimating myth allows for a dominant Canadian national identity that defines itself in relation to both the belligerence of its more powerful southern neighbours, and at the same time against the supposed barbarism of the targets of its “benevolent interventions” so as to avoid facing the ongoing colonial barbarism at its core (16). Unable to recognize and face the genocidal intentions on which the national project has been erected, Canada requires other modes of understanding itself in the world, fueling the reproduction of identity crises as moments of state pedagogies of patriotism (Mackey 107-110). It is for this reason that Canada is such an important player, both materially and ideologically, in the spread of neoliberal imperium. By erasing its history of colonialism and violence, Canada is able to make a claim to an enlightened interventionism and to the moral high-ground from which international policing becomes not merely a national specialty but an unquestionable moral responsibility (see Gordon 66-68, 122-123).

The policies currently being put in place that will shape coming generations reflect a neoliberal economic agenda and militarization as an engine of social transformation. This social transformation is intended by its architects to enact Canada’s “coming into its own” on the world stage, its assumption of full national manhood. Of course, this version of national maturity is based on a junior partnership in American empire and “holding the bully’s coat”, as Linda McQuaig
puts it. It is the function of the Yellow Ribbon campaign and other aspects of “support our troops” culture in Canada to supersede a desperately needed national conversation on these matters by conflating support for those much invoked “brave men and women who serve this country” with a deliberate re-scripting of national social ideals. The Yellow Ribbon has been a key part of this process.

Though Canada did not enter into the war in Afghanistan under the direction of Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, his two consecutive minority governments have used its pretext to wed their extreme neoliberal agenda for social restructuring to ramped-up military spending and a militaristic notion of national belonging. Harper, a self-proclaimed Christian fundamentalist, is former head of the National Citizen’s Coalition, a “libertarian-conservative” think-tank and lobby group that protects the identities of its contributing members while funding various secretive far-right political and election campaigns (see MacDonald; L. Mackey).

Numerous constituencies have come to recognize this Harper government as a different beast than even previous Conservative administrations, riding roughshod over established governmental policies and practices, such as they are (Gergin; L. Martin)⁹, recently including the infamous prorogation of parliament (twice) (Mendez), the Machiavellian machinations to prevent public disclosure in the Afghan detainee scandal (Carleson; Hiltz; Ling), direct interference in supposedly arms-length government agencies including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Findley; Pinchin) and Statistics Canada.
(M. Cohen), and, most recently, the foreclosure of parliamentary debate on key issues including the budget (Mallick) and the “omnibus crime bill” (T. Cohen; Murphy). With what many consider to be an activist agenda and a zealous fervor, Harper’s administration has successfully managed to cut corporate taxes (Whittington) and social programs (a difference in degree rather than a substantial departure from previous laissez-faire Liberal governments – see Weir) with only a minority mandate and has successfully intervened directly in various levels of government, including ostensibly independent organizations, in order to discipline what they see as lax or liberal elements, to quell dissent and to consolidate power (Gergin).

Among the centerpieces of Harper’s self-styled “New Government” agenda is the unprecedented twenty-year $492-billion dollar Canada First Defence Strategy: A Modern Military for the Twenty-First Century (CFDS) first introduced in the 2008 budget. The report mobilized the image of brave Canadian soldiers dutifully accepting their orders despite being woefully undersupplied and promised to reverse the decline of the Canadian armed forces. This became a key pedagogical moment for the government to link military spending to neoliberal austerity and a purposefully slippery notion of Canadian values. The warfare or security state, as many scholars have noted, is not more fiscally responsible or tight-fisted than the welfare state. Where, in the most socialist-leaning moments in Canadian history, could one find such grandiose plans for government spending dreamed up and enacted, with neither years of
mass movement lobbying nor public hew and cry? Against claims that military spending has been left to languish, Bill Robinson writes, “Canadian military spending is not low, whether measured in terms of absolute spending, economic burden, or historical trend. Canada is currently spending more on the military than it has at any time since the end of the Second World War” (13). While the practical difficulties of achieving this level of military spending this rapidly have necessitated a slightly tempered projection of these increases, delivered by finance minister Jim Flaherty in the revised budget of 2010, there is no doubt that military spending will continue to increase over the life of the CFDS plan (see Robinson’s charts 1 and 2, below). Canada’s military budget for fiscal year 2010-2011 stands, conservatively, at $22.3 billion, or more probably at $23 billion (Robinson 1).

Figure 0 - Robinson: Canadian Military Spending 1980-81 to 2009-10

Chart 2. National Defence budget as reported by Department of Finance, 2010

Note: Excludes incremental funding for deployed operations in Afghanistan and in support of the 2010 Olympics.

Figure 0 - Robinson: National Defence budget 2005-6 to 2017-18 (projected)
The CFDS is, in fact, a key component of the Conservative plan for Canada’s economic future: the vast expansion of military spending, funding for military research and the development of military infrastructure across the country heralds the bolstering of the Canadian military-industrial complex as the economic salvation of the nation. The “renewed relationship” between the Canadian Forces, the defence industry and research and development organizations that the Strategy marshals into effect entails “streamlined” protocols for the procurement of defence contracts, greater industry consultation, and a revised “industrial benefits” policy aimed at “encouraging industry to make long-term investments in Canada” (20). The plan claims that Canadians will benefit from this transfer of wealth from the public coffers to the military and its private partners via the creation of “high-tech, high-value sustainable jobs in all regions—directly through the development of military capabilities and indirectly through technological spinoffs and commercial applications” which will “put Canadians to work protecting Canadians” (20). Indeed, the plan even foresees the deep imbrication of Canadian institutions like universities in this corporate-led, publicly subsidized militarization of the Canadian economy (12), as other more autonomous sources of research funding are cut or left to atrophy. While the report relies largely on euphemism and implication, the overall message is clear: in prioritizing NATO and NORAD, the CFDS outlines the Harper government’s vision of Canada’s future as an eager if junior participant in a neoliberal American empire, and one in which bolstering a military-industrial complex by
courting American arms manufacturing subsidiaries takes the place of supporting domestic industries (3).

Further, the Strategy bears a striking resemblance to the measures Jack Granatstein advocates in his book, *Who’s War Is It?: How Canada Can Survive In the Post-9/11 World*. An extremely influential public intellectual of the right known for his other works, *Who Killed The Canadian Military* and *Who Killed Canadian History*, Granatstein sits on various advisory boards to government and played a formative role directing the Canadian War Museum. His work argues against ideals of multiculturalism and peacekeeping in favour of “national interests,” including the “return” to a narrow official history and narrative of national identity that privileges the accomplishments of “our” British and European forefathers and celebrates the Western, industrialized nation-state as the pinnacle of enlightenment and progress. In *Whose War Is It*, Granatstein anticipates a dystopian “what-if” scenario calculated to induce panic and militaristic fervour, in which the Canadian military is over-committed abroad, there is a major natural disaster like an earthquake on the West Coast, and at the same time a terrorist attack against Canada. Enumerating current military capabilities and equipment, he makes the argument that Canada would be ill-prepared to meet this nightmare constellation of challenges should they occur, and lobbies for long-term reliable funding for a modern military. *The Canada First Defence Strategy* foresees--and plans for--just such an eventuality, even using the same rhetoric and examples. This, to ensure the smooth continuation of the War
on Terror while at the same time using the military to provide security for the contentious 2010 Olympics which saw the theft and corporate development of unceded Indigenous lands as well as the channeling of public funds away from much needed low-income housing and social infrastructure (see Shaw 2008). Indeed, if the surveillance of Vancouver anti-poverty activists and Indigenous youth is any indication, at least one of the targets of the “new military” is already identified as Canadian citizens, Indigenous peoples and any others who oppose the reckless pursuit of individualistic corporate profit.

The very title of the *Canada First* plan recalls the cultural tradition of the popular “Canada First” club and social movement of the post-confederation era founded in 1868 and active through the 1870’s. Encompassing *The Nation*, a weekly Toronto paper, a club called the National Club, and a political party called the National Association, the Canada First movement gained widespread public influence, espousing a nationalist platform that included White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant-only immigration, along with ideas of male suffrage and a preferential national industry program (Coleman *White Civility* 20). A lobby group for the interests of the elite in the new nation of Canada, the Canada First Movement espoused a homogenous, pan-British ethnicity as the true or natural Canadian identity, and, infamously, fomented settler unrest in Upper Canada during the Red River Rebellion (1869-1870), especially after the execution of Thomas Scott, mobilizing racist militias and lynching parties to meet Riel’s representatives as they traveled East to negotiate (Reid 88-90. See also Bumstead). In addition, the
phrase “Canada First” has had subsequent lives in the Canadian white supremacist and anti-immigration circuit. It would strain credulity to suppose that conservative nationalist advisors in the Harper government could have avoided encountering previous knowledge of this movement (especially considering Harper’s mentor and lead advisor Tom Flanagan wrote an influential book on the Riel Rebellion and its place in early Canadian politics).

It should not be surprising, then, given the historical tradition that it invokes, that the *Canada First Defence Strategy* marks a cultural as well as a policy shift away from the mythology of peacekeeping to a far-right vision of a military, thoroughly integrated into the social fabric and economy of the country and fit to defend unspecified “Canadian national interests” from a world teeming with external and internal threats. What is surprising is that as a minority government, the Harper administration was able to pass this $500 billion plan with so little public attention. It speaks to the way militarization works at both economic and cultural levels towards broad social transformation. Key to this process in Canada has been the importation and local reinvention of the Yellow Ribbon campaign to “support our troops” and it is to this cultural pedagogy that I now turn.

**Yellow Ribbons in Canada**

Though Yellow Ribbons had begun to trickle across the border into Canada in small numbers during the first Gulf War (1990-1991), the practice only gained mass appeal with Canada’s mission in Afghanistan as part of the War
on Terror. While Yellow Ribbons proliferated on car bumpers soon after Canada joined the War effort in 2002, public debate about the ribbons themselves arose regarding their use on public property. At the time, the anti-war movement was quick to point out their primary function: to conflate support and sympathy for the individual soldiers with support for the mission and to foreclose debate on whether “our troops” should be there at all. It was also acknowledged by elders within anti-war circles\textsuperscript{14} that challenging even an unpopular military engagement is most effective before troops are deployed. After there are soldiers that are perceived to be in harm’s way, the parameters of public discourse shift from the politics or the necessity of engagement to discussions of soldiers, their families and sacrifices. The Yellow Ribbon’s function was and is to expedite this shift and, by extension, to imply that the time for “politics” is over, now it is time for rallying around the flag (Taylor “Supporting the Troops and Free Speech”).

To my knowledge, there has yet to be an empirical sociological or anthropological study of Yellow Ribbon use in Canada, and such a study is beyond the scope of this dissertation. If we can extrapolate from studies conducted in the United States (Heilbronn; Mariscal), people’s use of Yellow Ribbons is complex and conflicted. As Lisa Heilbronn illustrates, Yellow Ribbons are useful to people precisely because they are ambiguous and ambivalent and allow users to express a wide variety of meanings. But the form of the Yellow Ribbons themselves (they can very easily be placed almost anywhere), their relative ubiquity, and the fact that they are not the symbol of any single
organization or campaign means people are rarely called to actually articulate
what their ribbons mean to them and what position they are claiming by their use.
In order to make visible the cultural work they do in the Canadian context, this
section “reads” the Yellow Ribbon as a text that negotiates and normalizes
Canada’s and Canadians’ more muscular integration into Empire.

There has been very little public debate over Yellow Ribbons in Canada. One exception is the adoption of the symbol by public services including fire
departments, police forces and government offices. Proponents of the ribbon’s use on public vehicles and property argued strenuously that the ribbons and the idea of supporting the troops was apolitical and ought to be inoffensive because, they imagined, everyone agrees about our duty to support the troops regardless of their opinion about the war (Patrick and Kari). Contrarily, those who opposed their use on government buildings and vehicles challenged the idea that supporting soldiers waging a contentious war was a neutral or apolitical position and resented the military incursion into daily life. Resulting debates tended to be dominated by the loudest and most affectively successful voices, rather than the most cogent arguments. After much controversy on the question of when to remove the bumper-stickers, former Toronto Mayor David Miller arrived at the position that it was not the role of city councilors to debate federal policy. An estimated $3,000 dollars from the city budget had been spent outfitting the city’s fleet of vehicles (Patrick and Kari).

In terms of the material lives of the ribbons themselves, there are two
different trajectories by which the bumper stickers (and related paraphernalia) enter circulation. Estimates of how many have been produced are impossible to gauge as there is no single centralized dispatch. On the one hand, anyone can “unofficially” place an order for a batch from their local print shop, and many regiments, legion branches, churches, and other community groups order them, sometimes for use as fundraisers, sometimes with their own logo, regimental number, maple leaf, cross insignia, camouflage, desert theme, or other particularity included in the design (see Ward for details in the American context). Indeed, the “Yellow Ribbon” template is the same that is used for all variety of ribbon campaigns. So in one respect, the Yellow Ribbon as a commodity has an economic or material life in a small but growing “support our troops” industry that emblematizes the way state mythology and free enterprise can partner in a pedagogical project.

On the other hand, the “official” trajectory of the ribbons is the Department of National Defence-sponsored “support our troops” campaign, which is orchestrated through the semi-privatized Canadian Forces Personnel Service Agency (CFPSA – see Strategic Plan). The “support our troops” campaign is one of their prerogatives, and their military-oriented CANEX discount department stores carry all manner of “support our troops” merchandise, including branded water bottles, t-shirts, hats, and other items of clothing. As the name suggests, the CFPSA supports Canadian Forces personnel in a variety of capacities, one of which is overseeing delivery of privatized on-base services such
as barber shops, tailors, and fast-food chains, including the Tim Horton’s coffee stall on location at Kandahar airfield. Where once those services would have been provided “in house” offering fairly reliable employment opportunities for military spouses prone to frequent relocation, even this militarized re-productive labour is made precarious by its contracting out to third-parties. Profits generated from these “public-private partnerships” are ostensibly funneled back into services that benefit military personnel themselves.¹⁵

The grey area surrounding the CFPSA and military chain of command subtly encapsulates a contradictory tendency of militarization under neoliberalism. The states’ monopoly on violence is considerably shaken by the global rise of private-security contractors like Blackwater that behave as mercenary armies under the sovereignty of capital, home-grown militias that arise in suspicion of the state, and the systematic privatization of non-combat military roles and services. The contest between state-based and de-territorialized powers and interests marks a different kind of collaboration between capital and the state, where the normal rules of free trade, elsewhere held sacred and supposedly iron-clad, exist in quite functional militarized states of exception and compromise. At the same time, in free trade agreements such as NAFTA and the GATT, military exemptions are virtually the only area protected from the sweeping liberalization of domestic industry for international competition. Christopher Spearin’s discussion of privatization and the Canadian military is instructive:

In other words, as informed by neoliberal thinking, in order to obtain
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economies of scale and get the most out of its investment in personnel resources, the CF is to be a body of war-fighting specialists who are "directly essential to the achievement of the defence mission." CF personnel are to concentrate more upon war-fighting or "tooth" skills, whereas many logistical functions-the so-called "tail" of the military- are turned over to the private sector. Certainly, the number of activities that form the CF's tail are many: transportation, supply services, food services, construction engineering, military training, information technology, and equipment and base maintenance. In total, these activities equate to approximately $3.5 billion, or one third of the entire DND budget, a tempting amount that DND planners can potentially expose to the rigours and assumed cost efficiencies of the commercial marketplace (1097).

Further, he writes, while inhabited by neoliberal imperatives, defence privatization can sometimes stand at odds with more traditional neoliberal implementation practices:

The objective is to have capabilities, rather than to have efficiencies and their related presumed reduced costs. As suggested by one SNC-Lavalin employee with regard to contracted personnel in Afghanistan, "this was not designed to be a money saver. If you like, we're here to augment the bayonets." When he was chief of defence staff, General Raymond Henault echoed this sentiment with respect to private contractors serving in Bosnia. "[Contracting] may not produce financial savings but I anticipate benefits in
operational flexibility and on relieving pressures” (1102).

All this is to say that militarization creates a relatively unique space of contestation, in that the masculinized emotional response it commands allows for all sorts of deviations from the rule. The military in Canada and militaries generally are a kind of laboratory or testing ground for new strategies and technologies of power, social organization, and control. The lack of clarity regarding the CFPSA’s official status muddies the waters about where, exactly, the impetus behind the “support-our-troops” campaign originates. Ultimately, the CFPSA answers to the Vice Chief of Defence Staff, whose office created the CFPSA as an “administrative construct” to help administer “Non-Public Property” and funds—that is, it was established explicitly to save costs through privatization (see Strategic Plan 2006). Is it then a civilian company owned by DND? A para-military organization? A military-corporate service agency? In the United States, contracts for the “America Supports You” support-our-troops campaign went primarily to PR giant Susan Davis International, for a final sum not yet tallied, but expected to be around $5 million yearly (Farsetta), but the “America supports you” campaign is only one of many similar initiatives. The information about Canada’s campaign is, as yet, publicly unavailable.16

On one hand, it matters a great deal whether private corporations were contracted to manufacture public acquiescence to a controversial military intervention, testifying to the growing and un-checked power of public relations firms to intervene in public debate and policy making. In another sense though,
whether the architects of Canada’s public relations strategy on the War on Terror turn out to be internal to the military and schooled in “psychological operations,” or free agents from a private firm is of secondary importance to the function of the ribbons as resources for individuals in their own creation of shared narratives of fear-based and homogenous community and belonging.

Despite the media’s failure to present critical, investigative or substantial coverage of the war and the Harper government’s intensive public relations, the general population in Canada seems to hold the war in Afghanistan and those fighting it conceptually distinct. Major pollsters Ipsos-Reid found that while only between 44% and 48% of Canadians overall support the mission in Afghanistan, there are significant regional differences: “Albertans (62%) are most likely to support the mission, followed by those in Ontario (52%) and British Columbia (50%). A minority of residents in Saskatchewan and Manitoba (46%), Atlantic Canada (39%) and Quebec (38%) support the current mission.” However, when asked whether they were proud of the troops, Albertans continued to rank first (93%), followed by Atlantic Canadians (86%), BC and Ontario (82%), Quebecers (76%), and finally those in Saskatchewan and Manitoba (64%). According to the most recent figures, 66% of Canadians indicated they opposed extending the mission again, and 53% continued to oppose the mission altogether.17

It will likely surprise no one that Alberta, widely acknowledged as the right-wing heartland of Canada, home of the former ultra-conservative Reform federal party and host to uninterrupted Conservative rule provincially since 1971,
leads the way in support for both soldiers and the war, but what I find most interesting about these results is that in Atlantic Canada, densely saturated with military bases and over-represented in military recruiting, support for soldiers is strong at the same time as the most opposition to the war itself is evidenced, save in Quebec (see also Boucher).

Of course, the participation of Quebeois soldiers in the War has been more controversial than in the rest of the country, though perhaps not as controversial as may have been expected. The reasons for this are still hotly debated. Strains within Quebec nationalism have always included, on one hand, a greater appreciation of social services and on the other a stronger mistrust of the state than in the rest of Canada. The contemporary expressions of politics and social struggle against neoliberalism in Quebec and between Quebec and Canada are complex and mapped out on many different levels. That only 38% of Quebec residents support the mission, while 76% are proud of the troops, is interesting. For commentators like Chantal Hébert and Derrick O’Keefe, support for both the Conservative and Liberal parties plummeted in the 2011 election because of their consensus on extending the Afghan mission into 2011, leading to the a historic surge in support in that province for the New Democratic Party, who until that point had never had a foothold in the province. Compared to the rest of the country, anti-war sentiment is relatively high in Quebec. Montreal has also been the site of some of the continent’s largest anti-war demonstrations and in July of 2010 a radical group sent bombs to military recruiting offices in Trois-Rivières
(“Group claims responsibility”). But a more detailed analysis of the nuances of Quebec’s opposition to and support for the Afghan mission, its intersections with Quebec political and cultural nationalism, and the broader implications for the future of Canadian politics and culture in general, are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

More generally, I think the poll results lend credence to my suspicion that the least “politicized” use of Yellow Ribbons is actually when they are used by military members and their friends and family. Or rather, this is where they are most severed from a larger political agenda and do what their proponents claim they do: demonstrate care for soldiers. This ability to maintain conceptual discretion between soldiers and the wars they fight, far from offering a simple “out,” however, foregrounds the need for broad public debate on the conditions we are willing to impose upon young men and women, and on what exactly might constitute adequate “care” and “support,” even as it silences those very practices so necessary to full public engagement in this most pressing issue of public interest. A case in point is that support for the Conservatives among their pro-war “base” has not seemed to suffer in the slightest (given that, in February 2011 they won their first majority) in spite of the Harper Government’s decision to cut funding from Veterans Affairs (“Veterans Across Canada Protest”), their replacement of military pensions and disability allowances with (ultimately smaller) one-time payouts (Mulholland), and the systematic violation of Canada’s privacy laws by the Department of Veterans Affairs in accessing and sharing the
personnel files of troublesome veteran activists (Curry, “Privacy”).

In a very real sense, the social services needed to support soldiers, and which, after several years of neoliberal assault, are currently being dessicated in those very soldiers’ names, are the same services required to support everyone else: access to medical care and a range of specialists and therapists in their own communities, childcare (often flagged as one of the most pressing needs of military families whose work necessitates irregular hours and greater mobility, not unlike like anyone in shiftwork), fair remuneration, equipment, supplies and training for their labour, and even opportunities for leisure and recreation, all of which are taken as necessary for battle-readiness. The days of blaming soldiers for the actions of their commanding officers and politicians are long over, at precisely the same time as basic human decency is thrown to the wind at Abu Ghraib, at Guantanamo Bay, by the “Kill Team” in Afghanistan. If not “The Universal Soldier” of Buffy St. Marie’s anti-Vietnam anthem, the public needs to come to a decision on who it is willing to hold to account, and to become, in turn, accountable.¹⁸

The Yellow Ribbon’s career outside of the primary instances I have discussed here are telling. For instance, during a 1993 uprising at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville, Ohio where prisoners rebelled against inhumane (and highly racialized) conditions, Yellow Ribbons were used by the local community as a gesture of concern for prison guards held hostage (Hielbronn, 174). They were also used in 1992 to show support for Los Angeles
police Chief Daryl Gates who defended the beating of Rodney King
“comment[ing] that he hoped the victim had “learned something” from the
beating and that the fifty-six blows would convince him to “turn his life
around” (Mariscal 114). These two instances explicitly link the Yellow Ribbon
with a defense of whiteness and an imperial, racially ordered world-view.

Despite this telling ideological trajectory that links the Yellow Ribbon
explicitly with whiteness and the defense of racial privilege, however, I do not
dispute that the every-day use of the Yellow Ribbon is, more often than not,
driven by heart-felt care and concern for soldiers (and their families) who are
imagined to be “just like us” and “just doing their jobs.” I argue that they provide
a powerful pedagogical resource for people to make sense of and find their place
within the political, social and economic turmoil and decay caused by neoliberal
globalization. By mobilizing patriotic affect, Yellow Ribbons as performative
and declarative acts offer a sense of collective identity and purpose in a changing
and obscure world and help map community, politics and nation in a time of

This new slant on an old nation-building project requires the constantly
evolving cultural work of what David Theo Goldberg has aptly termed “historical
amnesia,” the active work of forgetting, repressing, and “burying alive” (The
Threat of Race 157) of the racial past and its very lexicography, followed by the
endless reproduction narratives of (neo)colonial belonging and legitimacy. As I
will argue more fully in my discussion of Passchendaele in the next chapter,
Canada is a nation founded on colonial violence, dispossession, and loyalty to the British Empire and this legacy is both obscured and perpetuated by the constant reinvention of myths that link militarism, sovereignty, and racially coded civility. So the Yellow Ribbons, then, can be best understood as acts of a certain kind of cultural agency, but they are far from neutral.

Yellow ribbons, then, are a key tool by which this legacy is both carried forward into the present and shaped to support Canada’s shifting role in Empire. It is embraced and used by independent citizens as a tool to define identity and meaning in a moment of historical flux and uncertainty. Support for the troops appears to offer an extra-political form of social solidarity without any real commitment to community outside of a symbolic gesture. At the same time, everyday Yellow Ribbon practices have been eagerly but subtly embraced by political decision-makers as both evidence of support for the war and as a means to conflate support for soldiers with support for the mission, and, more broadly, support for a pro-war government and its broader neoliberal/militarist agenda. In this way, Yellow Ribbons are not merely symbols: they are tools by which Empire is advanced in Canada, by which Canadian culture and identity are transformed. They both represent and enact this shift. In this sense, Yellow Ribbons act pedagogically: they are teaching tools that school the public in complex ways. They are less didactic than they are disciplinary – they delimit and shape, rather than facilitate discussion and debate.

The forms of social life and social subjects to which neoliberal policies
give rise, stripped of a meaningful democratic possibility, are easily mobilized by
the fear and the promises espoused by far-right and neo-conservative agendas. It
would be intellectually and politically irresponsible to ignore the resonance
between the social transformation that Yellow Ribbon politics inculcates, and far-
right and avowedly fascist regimes that have historically quelled dissent by first
demanding and instituting public displays of loyalty, such as the signing of oaths
and the wearing of colours by civilian and targeted minority populations.19 While
everyday users of Yellow Ribbons and the governments that promote them would
insist they are icons of free expression and respect for “the democracy our boys
fought and are fighting for,” they work to transform and constrain public space
and discourse. The ability to move freely as a private citizen is undermined by
this kind of imperative to a declarative politics20, and part of the work the Yellow
Ribbon does is to act as the thin edge of that wedge. The political and ideological
neutrality that proponents insist the Yellow Ribbon expresses is key to the
operation of its power and central to the difficulty public intellectuals and interest
groups have faced in challenging it. Indeed, some elements within diverse anti-
war movements in many cities adopted the Yellow Ribbon under the slogan,
“Support our troops: bring them home!” (Nossal 120; Taylor, “Supporting the
Troops”), evidencing the pressure felt by demonstrators to articulate a position
critical of government policy that still respected soldiers. While the symbol
creates a politically expedient ambiguity between support for soldiers and support
for the War, the Yellow Ribbon’s deeper success is its sheer ubiquity and the way
it narrows and militarizes forms of subjectivity, collective identity and belonging.

**Red Fridays**

There is a similar if less well-known campaign to support Canadian troops by wearing red on Fridays, another militarized everyday cultural practice. Like the Yellow Ribbon campaign, the Red Friday campaign began in the United States around 2005 and subsequently migrated across the border, taken up by military members themselves and their families. Largely confined to military bases and employees, and occasionally extending to portions of the communities in which bases are located, “red Fridays” began as strictly shirt-wearing and has since migrated into other activities. The shirt-wearing alone, which was intended to provide a means for individuals to quietly show their support for the military throughout the public and hence “politically correct” spaces of their lives, has not gained the same level of public recognition and mass participation the Yellow Ribbon has enjoyed.

In Canada, the practice is held to be a home-grown, grass-roots phenomenon, attributed to a frequently-forwarded email (ostensibly) crafted by two military wives, Lisa Miller and Karen Boire. The email (often preceded by a sentimental patriotic story) appears as follows on the website for the “Red Friday Foundation Miller and Boire established:

> Just keeping you "in the loop" so you'll know what's going on in case this takes off.

> RED FRIDAYS ----- Very soon, you will see a great many >people
wearing Red every Friday. The reason? Canadians who support our
>troops used to be called the "silent majority". We are no longer silent,
>and are voicing our love for God, country and home in record breaking
numbers. We are not organized, boisterous or over-bearing.

We get no >liberal media coverage on TV, to reflect our message or our
opinions. Many Canadians, like you, me and all our friends, simply >want
to recognize that the vast majority of Canada supports our troops. Our
>idea of showing solidarity and support for our troops with dignity and
>respect starts this Friday -and continues each >and every Friday until the
troops all come home, sending a deafening >message that.. Every red-
blooded Canadian who supports our men and women afar will wear
something red. >>

By word of mouth, press, TV -- let's make the Canada on >every Friday a
sea of red much like homecoming football game in the >bleachers.
>> >>
If every one of us who loves this country will share this >with
acquaintances, co-workers, friends, and family. It will not be long >before
Canada is covered in RED and it will let our troops know the once
>"silent" majority is on their side more than ever, certainly more than the
>media lets on.
>> >>
The first thing a soldier says when asked "What can we do to make things
better for you?" is...We need >your support and your prayers.
>> >>
Let's get the word out and lead with class and dignity, by >example; and
wear something red every Friday. >>

IF YOU AGREE -- THEN SEND THIS ON.. IF YOU COULD CARE
LESS THEN HIT THE DELETE BUTTON.. >> IT IS YOUR CHOICE.
>> >>
THEIR BLOOD RUNS RED---- SO WEAR RED! --- Lest we Forget,

>Lest we Forget. HAVE A GREAT DAY!21

The email itself, which “went viral” around March of 2006, raised
suspicions for both supporters and critics, as various textual and rhetorical factors
seemed to indicate some kind of hoax. For instance, the email always appeared as
though it had previously been forwarded many times: no one, even in
conservative/pro-military chatrooms and online haunts, had received an original
(or only once or twice removed) version. The references to homecoming football
games, “red-blooded” (Canadians?) and “God country and home” are well-worn
tropes of Americana. Additionally, many versions of the missive appeared in
circulation in support of, alternately, Canadian, American, and United Kingdom
militaries. Popular internet sources suggested that the campaign originated in the
US in the spring of 2005, in the following form:

You will soon see a lot of people wearing RED on Fridays. Here’s why…
The Americans who support our troops, are the silent majority. We are not
“organized” to reflect who we are, or to reflect what our opinions are.
Many Americans, like yourself, would like to start a grassroots movement
using the membership of the Special Operations Association, and Special
Forces Associations, and all their friends, simply to recognize that
Americans support our troops. We need to inform the local VFW’s and
American Legion, our local press, local TV, and continue carrying the
message to the national levels as we start to get this going. Our idea of
showing our solidarity and support for our troops is start Friday, and
continuing on each and every Friday, until this is over, that every RED-
blooded American who supports our young men and women, WEAR
SOMETHING RED.
Word of mouth, press, TV- let’s see if we can make the United States, on any given Friday, a sea of RED much like a home football game at a university.

If every one of our memberships share this with other acquaintances, fellow workers, friends, and neighbors, I guarantee that it will not be long before the USA will be covered in RED – and make our troops know there are many people thinking of their well-being. You will feel better all day Friday when you wear RED!

Let’s get the word out and lead by example; wear RED on Friday.

Please forward this to everyone you know!!

Wear RED on Fridays. SUPPORT THE TROOPS! WE LIVE IN THE LAND OF THE FREE BECAUSE OF THE BRAVE. FOR US, THEIR BLOOD RUNS RED!! GOD BLESS AMERICA.22

The possibility that the Red Friday’s campaign was orchestrated by a wing of the American military establishment is not farfetched. For the uninitiated, “Special Operations” is an elite division of the US army also known as the Green Berets, specializing in what is euphemistically termed “unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, special reconnaissance, direct action, hostage rescue, and counter-terrorism.”23 Known for serving or collaborating with the CIA, “psychological operations” is certainly within the purview of the military unit most called upon to assist with unsolicited regime changes overseas24. The Special Operations Association is a fraternal organization of past and present
members, and while technically a “grass-roots” movement from among their ranks might be possible, in this context it twists the democratic principle of the term beyond recognition and, indeed, into its opposite.

In Canada, then, Lisa Miller and Karen Boire ran a website called “married to the Canadian military” as well as maintaining a social networking group on Facebook specifically for increasing public awareness about Red Fridays, both of which have subsequently lain dormant, the former having been taken off-line circa 2008-2009 and recently replaced, removing archival materials. Unlike the original, the replacement website for Married to the Canadian Forces states that the Red Friday idea “was originally an American initiative. The idea was brought to our site back in March 2006 and from there it blossomed into a Canada-wide effort.”

There is currently another and more prominent website called “Red Fridays” that claims to be the pro-bono efforts of public relations practitioner Brian Muntz. This site offers Yellow Ribbons, lapel pins, magnets and other patriotic-themed souvenirs for sale and includes listings of upcoming events, resources, directions on how to become involved, and coaching and assistance for people wanting to host Red Fridays events, especially in workplaces and schools. To date, only one school is publicly listed as having held such an event, Foley Catholic School in Brechin, Ontario. The suggested main points encourage emphasis on the argument that Red Fridays constitutes a non-partisan display. This is a calculated effort to establish such patriotic, militarized events as
acceptable in these venues, in a kind of retro-active “tradition”: rallies in the workplace and school are expected to become acceptable and gain legitimacy as universal, un-political acts simply because they will then have been allowed before. Recalling the endless prayer in public schools debates, this tactic strategically places any government or schoolboard that would object to the displays right where the new right wants them-- in the position of having to choose between supporting the events or being perceived as smothering citizens’ autonomy and patriotic troop-supporting for the sake of a “politically correct” agenda.

Organizations occasionally officially adopt Red Fridays, such as the municipality of Petawawa, Ontario, home to Miller and Boire and to CFB Petawawa, one of Canada’s most populous military bases. The municipality promotes the Red Fridays initiative with the following illustrative endorsement:

Because it's easy to do, doesn't cost a penny unless you don't own something red and is so powerful in itself. During these troubled times worldwide, many Canadians feel helpless, they want to support our troops but are not sure how. Well, wearing red on Fridays is a very visible, tangible way to acknowledge the sacrifices of not only our troops but also their families. Please join in this wonderful campaign and let's see Canada turn red from coast to coast.27

Rallies and other public events to Support the Troops, often officially
sanctioned or directed by various levels of government, increasingly use the red
shirt tactic to demonstrate “solidarity” with soldiers (“Thousands attend”). In one
such “Red Friday” rally, Prime
Minister Stephen Harper
addressed an estimated crowd of
10,000, declaring that “Canadians
owe their freedoms to soldiers
like those fighting in
Afghanistan,” and that “all of our
freedoms were created by the men and women who in our history were prepared
to lay down their lives for those freedoms.” The Prime Minister used this
opportunity to bolster grass-roots public support for military spending,
announcing to the cheers of the assembled throng that “this government is
committed to rebuilding the Armed Forces of Canada and we are overwhelmed
with the support we are getting to do that” (“Thousands attend”). In February of
2011 Harper used the previously minor occasion of “Flag Day” to institute a
practice of giving flags from the
Canadian Peace Tower atop
Parliament Hill to “worthy
Canadian patriots” and
inaugurated this practice by
awarding flags to Lisa Miller
and Karen Boire (“PM pays tribute”). And in May of the same year Canadian Chief of Defence Staff Walter Natynczyk attended a “massive” Red Friday rally in Petawawa (“Canada Chief of Defence”). The Harper government, eager to maintain and extend grassroots militarization in order to build support for future military initiatives, has clearly thrown its weight behind the Red Fridays campaign.

Finally, in my research I only encountered two minor instances of concern or scandal about “Red Fridays,” and those concerned were in favour of participating in the workplace. Parliament Hill staff wanted to participate in this patriotic effort but were stymied by their formal dress code. They therefore negotiated the ability to display a red ribbon on their uniforms as it was deemed to be “non-partisan,” like the Remembrance Day poppy, the only other allowable adornment for those employees (“Thousands attend”). Similarly, in the private sector, employees at a Petawawa location of the unrivaled Canadian coffee chain Tim Hortons’s (whose decision to place a highly profitable outlet at the Khandahar Air Field was widely praised) had their requests to doff their uniforms and wear red on Fridays denied by Head Office. Fearing backlash, the coffee giant agreed its employees could wear small red pins to show their support, but not before several prominent figures in the Red Friday’s campaign, including Miller and Boire, rationalized the firm’s move, conceding that the controversy the shirts might invite could be bad for business (“Tim Horton’s Relents”). The readiness to excuse and justify the right of corporations to micromanage their employees from
afar, as well as their right to “controversy free” space, is noteworthy (since, due to the Khandahar location, we can surmise that militarization was not among Tim Horton’s’ concerns).

Despite proving useful for government and military purposes, the Red Fridays tactic has met with what must be considered at best a partial success. Designed to demonstrate the values of a “silent majority” against a supposed vocal minority in opposition to the war, the Red Fridays campaign has at any rate not met with the success its progenitors anticipated in their hopes to “paint this country red.” The failure of the red shirts compared with the ubiquitous Yellow Ribbon is demonstrated by lack of Friday participants, and more tellingly, by the fact that most (off-base or civilian) Canadians seem not to have heard of it at all. To speculate, this may be because, compared to the Yellow Ribbon which stays in place once people have stuck it on their cars, campaigns requiring regular, participatory actions of individuals also need substantially more resources to escape the limited cultural spheres in which they emerge, notably including key organizers to hold them together, direct energies and momentum, and reflect the goals and accomplishments of the campaign back to its participants. In the case of Red Fridays, even those who would like to participate may have difficulty remembering to don their red apparel every Friday morning unless they are living in a community that particularly supports and re-enforces the behaviour. Also, the translation of internet activism into activism in the real world is never guaranteed.

The emergence of branded red t-shirts that identify themselves as “Red
Fridays” shirts with a “support our troops” Yellow Ribbon design on red material (a departure from the original intention of a more subtle political statement that could fly below the radar of policies against controversial and partisan politics) is, in a sense, indicative of the failure of the practice to gain legibility and catch on to the degree that such didactic explanations would become unnecessary. On the other hand, since I have not found any instances of Red Fridays practices being forbidden in the workplace (excepting the two accommodated instances above), and since such a story would tend to garner significant media attention, it might also be the case that flying below the radar turned out to be ultimately unnecessary.

An important point of divergence between the two symbols is that one strain of the meanings the Yellow Ribbon carries with it, as we have seen, is concern over the government policy that commits the lives of soldiers to controversial missions. Rather than the “until they all come home” messaging that to some extent still resonates around the Yellow Ribbon in popular imagination, the Red Friday practice demonstrates less ambiguous support for the military and for governmental authority. For instance, Ottawa NDP MP Paul Dewar participated in a Red Friday rally while attempting to maintain the distinction between the supporting the troops and the war and focus on their safe return. In response to Dewar, Prime Minister Stephen Harper decreed that “You cannot say you are for our military and then not stand behind the things they do. We don't start fights, but we finish them and we won't leave until they're done” (Lewis and
Arseniuk) So it may also be that some individuals found the red shirt tactic, associated with the murky business of politics and political positions as such, less desirable than the more ambiguous and ostensibly simple support for troops connotated by the Yellow Ribbon. While the Yellow Ribbons appeal(ed) to a broader audience, Red Fridays appeals to a narrower but more vocal and enthusiastic demographic. Probably, too, it is not inconsequential that buying a Yellow Ribbon and putting it on your car is something supporters only have to do once, while wearing red on Fridays is something supporters have to remember, and do, regularly.

Underwhelming success and direct government involvement aside, however, there remains a considerable base of support for Red Fridays, especially around bases and throughout Southern Ontario, especially when coupled with “Highway of Heroes” rallies and events beyond regular Friday wear.

One of the keys to the success of the Red Fridays campaign can be found in the rhetorical gesture made in its initial email and rehearsed in Red Friday’s speeches since. Despite the enthusiastic presence of some of Canada’s most powerful politicians, Red Friday organizers consistently deploy the idea that participants and supporters are part of a silenced and oppressed constituency and imply that their campaign has ill-defined enemies (like the “liberal media”) who seek to stifle and quench any expression of patriotism and public support for the military. Divorcing the tactic (wearing red) from the cause for a moment, presumably, the goal of such demonstrations is to show the world and
irresponsible or undemocratic political leaders how many people support the position, thereby garnering greater political power and accountability. But when the position is not that of an oppressed group but in fact of the reigning government, the outcomes from such a starting position narrow considerably. As I discuss elsewhere, the political right has learned from and adapted the knowledge and techniques of movements for social justice to suit their own ends. In my analysis of the Caledonia Crisis (“Redress”), and the non-native backlash movements that formed to confront an indigenous land reclamation in Southern Ontario in 2006, I illustrated how organizers mobilized rhetorics and narratives of civil rights, unequal justice and the government’s defense of an unaccountable minority in order to press for redress. But unlike the movements from which these narratives and rhetorics emerged, the anti-native organizers aimed to ultimately entrench the rights and resources of a privileged majority, namely non-native (white) settlers. This cooptation of social justice tropes and languages for reactionary purposes will be familiar to many from the rise of the Christian Right in the United States in the 1980s and their insistence that the American Dream had been stolen from a hard-working, honest and generous majority by various “minority” special interest groups. Most recently, it has been key to the success of media personalities like Glen Beck who blithely adopts the symbols, rhetoric and memory of the Civil Rights movement to launch highly successful attacks on “Big Government” and the Left Wing conspiracies he presumes are behind it. As Susan Searls Giroux paints a harrowing picture of this logic at work in the context
of the neoliberal university and the forms of anti-intellectualism to which it gives rise: “the often uncritical endorsement and bland acceptance of principles such as ‘nondiscrimination,’ ‘diversity,’ and ‘openness’ *in the abstract* are precisely what enabled the Right’s ruthless appropriation and simultaneous divestment of the vision and language of civil-rights era struggles” (26).

In the case of Red Fridays, there is something deeply disturbing about the popularity of the idea that, in Canada, those who “support the troops” are somehow oppressed or repressed. The wearing of colours and other symbolic displays are not the same when undertaken for a cause which is already allied with power and in keeping with government agendas and policies. Indeed, like the Yellow Ribbons, this gesture does not contribute to a debate; it forecloses the debate, demanding that “support for the troops” be the precondition of any discussion about the war. The health of a democracy is compromised when attention shifts from how the government may best support and serve the interests of its people, to how the people ought to support the government and its agents.
Highway of Heroes

In a kind of public ritual that has become known as the “Highway of Heroes” phenomenon, crowds have been lining overpasses along Highway 401 to show their support for soldiers killed in Afghanistan. The bodies of dead soldiers returning from Afghanistan are repatriated by plane to CFB Trenton, near Kingston Ontario, and from there driven in convoy along Highway 401 to the coroner’s office in Toronto. Crowds have been lining overpasses along this stretch of road to honour and mourn the dead since 2002, when the first of Canada’s casualties began returning. After the circulation of a popular Internet petition gained some 60,000 signatures on August 24th 2007, the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario announced that the route would bear the additional name and signage, “Highway of Heroes.” Major supporters include police, emergency medical response, and fire-fighters associations, whose off-duty members are frequently the backbone of such demonstrations, along with other members of the public. As previously
mentioned, these organizations typically share a sense of fraternity and civic duty with the military and identify with military members and the kind of work they do.

Pete Fisher, a Sun Media photographer, captured images of approximately thirty to forty people who gathered on an overpass near Port Hope in that first instance in 2002. Fisher recollects, “My father called me because he was watching it on TV… (he said) if I was looking for photos, the soldiers would be passing by shortly. So I went to a bridge in Port Hope, and a bunch of people were there. I’d say 40 people. I asked them why they were there. They said they saw it on TV and wanted to show their support and condolences for the families. They spontaneously went to the bridge” (J. Hanley).

This “spontaneity” has proved a crucial trope in the legends built up around the “Highway of Heroes” and of the “Red Fridays” campaign. The two streams of political activism have now effectively come together in a collaboration that uses the “Red” brand to market public events such as the “Red Ride” down the “Highway of Heroes” in honour of the wounded soldiers, another in Quebec, and various “Red” festivals and rallies.

Both the highway practice and the “Red” campaigns are deeply rooted at the intersection of nationalism, militarism and masculinity. As discussed earlier, critics like Whitworth, Razack and Enloe make clear that cultural militarization elevates the masculine business of soldiering to among the highest levels of social prestige and demands “home front” demonstrations of national masculinity.
The “Red Rides” in particular participate in and attract another culture of masculinity-- motorcycling enthusiasts-- who get together to ride their motorcycles and sometimes raise money for charity. Central to all these events and practices is the notion that “ordinary Canadians” act spontaneously from their hearts, rebelling against what they perceive to be a culture and a state that does not respect soldiers, to “do what they feel is right”. The claim, then, is that this patriarchal reverence and marshalling of emotion through the well-worn tropes of patriotic nationalism is not political. It is just the natural response of any natural citizen. This is a claim that does the work of government while cloaking itself in liberal individualism, distrust of government, and a problematic idea of populist political authenticity.

Some of the key agents of contemporary “support our troops” culture are a particular group of men that is worth paying attention to. In my investigation of the white backlash movement at Caledonia mentioned above, I found that crucial to the “success” (organization, momentum, continuity, etc.) of the movement were key individuals who were invariably white men who felt aggrieved, who held a reasonably comprehensive political platform or ideology, and who were tirelessly devoted organizers with a fervour and fanaticism rivaled by their love of public speaking. Popular sentiments of the right, such as “anti-government sentiment, opposition to taxes, replacement of the word ‘citizen’ with ‘taxpayer,’ a belief in individual rights, and anti-immigrant and anti-minority sentiments” (Mackey 139) are expressed through these key figures or opinion leaders by a
“straight-shooting,” emotive masculinity; a form of masculinity emblematized by Canadian hockey icon, outspoken commentator, and key supporter of the Highway of Heroes and Red Fridays movements, Don Cherry (Blatchford, “Don Cherry”). There is something beyond the merely homosocial about this kind of fascination with masculine sacrifice, the excess, the fulsome surplus of this kind of patriotism. The performance of this patriotic nationalism is a masculine melodrama, the pathos and the pageantry of which calls attention to the deep anxieties and fears that both motivate such performances and that also threaten to undo them.

This sort of backlash masculinity is not new, though it does emerge within the neoliberal moment of which Canada’s recent militarization is a part. Authors like Susan Faludi have noted the way the crisis of masculinity in a “post-industrial” age often manifests as reactionary political anger. Boys are brought up in a culture that glorifies decisive, powerful and often violent masculinities in fields that range from business to the military, from politics to the police. Yet in an economy where manufacturing work is deskilled where it hasn’t been globalized, where more people work in service-sector and white-collar jobs, and where a family unit can typically not survive on one income (and where wives’ incomes may be higher or more stable than their husbands’), masculinity is thrown into crisis.

Writers such as Daniel Coleman, though, point out that this crisis of masculinity is far from new. He documents the way concerns about masculinity
and masculine ideas of national pride were critical to settler and political narratives of early Canada in ways that linked whiteness, civility and masculine themes of fraternity, the honour of arms, and the righteousness of hard work. Thus the crisis of masculinity felt in the neoliberal moment in Canada is not merely one of cultural ideals versus economic reality – it is also one deeply coded by the nation’s history of colonialism and race, including questions of control over land, of one’s place in Empire, and of one’s own racial and class identity.

While I return to these themes in Chapter Two, the growth in popularity of the male spokespersons of affective militarism can be understood as a belligerent and reactive response to the ever more precarious conditions of life under global neoliberalism and the creeping existential realization that capitalism may not make good on its promises, may have never intended to. The success of this militarized emotiveness stems from its ability to both express and disguise deeply felt fears of loss of control, of the dissolution and reconstitution of racial codes, of financial insolvency, and that the world may not, in fact, operate according to the ways they had been led to believe. Bereft of the illusions of security and abundance promised by capitalism, in this age of neoliberal globalization’s incursions into even their own pocket books, white non-elite men like these are fundamentally adrift. The tenor of this militarist melodrama is a rear-guard defense and systematic obfuscation of gender and racial privilege. These men, in this case Pete Fisher the Sun media photographer, Brian Muntz the public relations practitioner behind the Red Fridays foundation, and many other
bloggers-cum-spokesmen and community activists, promote the attitude that they and other long-suffering “ordinary” Canadians like them simply cannot remain silent any longer in the face of egregious national degradation, of which the supposed unnoticed heroism of soldiers is one expression.

Stephen Harper and his strategists read this cultural tendency very accurately and his speeches affirm but come short of replicating the voices of these “ordinary” men and the “silent majorities” they claim to represent. As I touched on in the introduction, in Harper’s iconic speech to Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan shortly following the election of his first minority government Harper deployed a phrase that was to become one of the key slogans justifying Canada’s continued participation in the war, despite its inability to provide the peace and security the Afghan people had been promised: “Canada doesn’t cut and run” (Byers 44). This rhetorical flourish, which recalls George W. Bush’s successful appropriation of a straight shooting cowboy persona, can be read to show Harper as a man unwilling to back down in the face of adversity, who leads a country that “doesn’t start wars but finishes them,” and who can be trusted to set meddlesome bureaucracy and special interest groups aside in the quest to “get the job done.” In so doing, Harper’s rhetoric promises the restoration of an ennobled and empowered masculinity through the figure of the soldier, a masculinity in keeping with the codes of Canada’s pioneering settler history.

The kind of “anti-government” governmentality these forms of masculinity represent has a longer history in Canada. Part of Mackey’s project her 1999 The
House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada, is mapping the turn toward populist, anti-government nationalism in the early 1990’s. Mackey analyses the “Canada 125” celebrations that took place in 1992, which were originally intended as “Columbus quincentenary” festivities and quickly morphed into celebrations marking one hundred and twenty five years of Canadian confederation, as well as the discourse, pageantry and corporate nationalism surrounding the national referendum on the proposed constitutional amendments of the Charlottetown Accord. She identifies the attempt to “make the celebrations appear populist” as part of the government’s deliberate, dual-facetted policy:

The government felt that celebrations ‘brought to you by the government’ would not ‘go down well,’ due to the recession Canada was experiencing and because of the sinking popularity of the Conservative party. Therefore, rather than have government through a crown corporation, run the celebrations, they formed the ‘Canada 125 Corporation’… [h]owever, the celebrations were explicitly designed so that people would perceive them as not organized by the government. This privatized version of celebration was seen… to be on the ‘cutting edge’ of ‘event marketing’… the second facet of the populist approach was that ‘Canada 125’ would focus on local celebrations of nationhood—creating or piggybacking on existing local festivals and community events….

reducing spending and creating the appearance of celebrations of ‘the
people’ as opposed to ‘the government’ (114-115, italics in original). She goes on to show how this approach allowed the government to save money, spending only 50 million dollars, (compared to, say, the estimated billion-and-a-half spent on the Centennial celebrations of 1967) and inviting the ostensibly “non-political” sponsorship of corporations, thus privatizing the national celebrations in the interests of appearing populist, “grass roots” and non-partisan (115). Further (and especially relevant to the populist and ostensibly grassroots “support our troops” culture currently flourishing) Mackey problematises the distinction between “politicians/government/the state and ‘the people’ as the locus of “authentic and non-political patriotism,” demonstrating how “these categories which construct civil society as a non-political realm of naturalized national identity opposed to the manipulative and political state were used by the government itself in a bid to legitimate its political programme and transform notions of national identity…draw(ing) on common-sense liberal axioms, thereby naturalizing a particular view of national identity and attempting to reinforce particular forms of power” (118). She points to the subsequent success of the radically neoliberal Conservative Ontario premier Mike Harris and the “905” revolution as among the lasting impacts of this conservative populism. “Ordinary Canadians – increasingly defined as white, ‘nonpolitical’ Canadians—began to be a primary focus” of the celebrations and of Conservative policy, and “the definition of ‘ordinary Canadians’ implicitly excluded groups defined as ‘special interest groups’: immigrants, people of colour, lesbians and gays, and even
women” (131). Significantly,” Mackey concludes, it is through the liberal categories of the people, civil society, and the popular that “the Right has been successful in appropriating the conceptual ground of left and liberal-democratic discourse” (140). Glossing the work of Goldberg, she demonstrates how “these key assumptions are mobilized in Conservative policy to redefine citizenship and to naturalize the exclusion of some citizens from notions of national belonging without direct reference to culture, race, sexual preference and gender” (140).

This strategy was taken up and honed by the Harper Conservative party in a strategy that reached its climax in the 2011 elections. The election was carried by a handful of seats won by targeting the most conservative elements of various Canadian ethnic communities who, in the past, had tended to vote for the more pro-multicultural Liberal Party (MacCharles and Woods). The Harper strategy was to address these constituents as also “ordinary Canadians” because of their conservative values (desires for firm law and order, pro-business policies and an “efficient” government) and flatter them as “hard working” and “honest” Canadians in keeping with the nation’s traditions. This was achieved in part by contrasting these constituents’ values and traits with those of “special interest groups”: immigrants and social assistance claimant who were “abusing the system,” liberals and progressives who were “soft on crime,” civil servants and grant recipients on the government gravy train, and anti-war politicians (like “Taliban Jack” Layton) in favour of cutting and running (Réghaï). A similar rhetoric and strategy was employed by far-right politician Rob Ford to achieve his
2011 landslide victory in Toronto, Canada’s (and the world’s) most diverse city (“Toronto’s Angry (Non-White) Voters”).

One of the reverberating implications of these cultural histories and recent events is that the political rhetoric of “grass-roots” democracy is a discursive frame and a representational strategy whose time as an effective or especial preserve of the movements for social justice has passed. In an age of instantaneous social media communication, media saturation and corporate-fueled “connectivity” that feeds the greater machine of neoliberal individualism at least as much as it provides tools for social struggle, the thing previously imagined by social-justice activists as “grass-roots” democracy has become easy for power in North America to fake, or to mobilize. Anti-government populism has now become the territory of the new (or not-so-new) right, and the state is increasingly read as forcing an oppressive, “politically correct” agenda on “real Canadians”, even as it diverts those precious tax dollars from providing for the needs of its citizens through social programs toward military adventures, increasingly costly in life and limb as well as dollars. What new idioms of political expression then, after the co-optation of rights discourse, redress and reconciliation, and even “grass roots” democracy, can appear on the horizon, that simultaneously refuse totalizing and exclusive forms of universalism on the one hand, and, on the other, the vacuity of content-less democratic rhetoric that has led to its inversion and manipulation into formal rather than substantive democracy and whose contents are, increasingly, “proto-fascist” and deployed as justification for war (Giroux
For an administration that so scrupulously micro-manages its public image, the Harper government made an interestingly controversial decision early in its tenure to stop lowering the flag on Parliament Hill for the deaths of soldiers, seeming to belittle those deaths by deflecting attention from them in order to avoid political unpopularity (see “Harper on Defensive” and “Peace Tower”). The more or less organic (which is to say, debatably, not state-sponsored) Highway of Heroes response insists, against the cynical logic of the Harper administration, that each death must be marked, each death be made meaningful, each death must be rendered heroic. Whatever the nature of the debate, Harper’s conservatives stay on message: that while they are just representing “ordinary” Canadians, supporting the troops, (and more covertly cancelling the funding for multicultural programs, equity initiatives, and the arts, and proroguing parliament to avoid political scandal over the torture of prisoners of war) it is the “other side” that is “political”. In 2011, however, after the acceleration of militarist culture throughout public and private venues and the media inundation with the repeated message of soldierly heroism, coverage of deaths and repatriation contributes to patriotic feelings of national sacrifice. As previously noted, this kind of heroism-in-death motif recalls older modes of understanding Canada’s role in the world through the patriotic sacrifice of its young (men), particularly in the national “coming-of-age through sacrifice” narratives promulgated in and about World War I (which I further explore next chapter). The heroism-in-death theme further
allies Canada with a civilizing mission, for it is only within a world-view in which whatever Canadians undertake is right and honourable, and in which the Canadian military and people are assumed to possess a special, peace-keeping, civilizing destiny that the notion of heroism can make sense. If the “bringing civilization and democracy” narrative were to give way to an understanding of the Afghan mission as motivated by shared Canadian and American geopolitical interests to do with the fragility of a fossil fuel-based economy that is at the heart of the kind of capitalism that now exists, what then could render heroic the actions and deaths of professional soldiers? We can find one instance in Defence Minister Peter Mackay’s speech on the death of two soldiers in 2010:

Canada's participation in this United Nations-mandated, NATO-led mission is a true reflection of our values. We will not deter from helping those in need. Afghans are re-building their country and their communities, living conditions are improving.

I join with Canadians, and the Government of Canada, in supporting our troops who are helping create a better future for the Afghan people. We will honour the sacrifice of these brave soldiers by continuing our efforts to build a safe and secure Afghanistan (“Statement”).

The frequent repetition of these sentiments by Mackay, Harper and others “protests too much”: if Canadians unambiguously supported the troops and the mission, and understood it to be a legitimate engagement reflecting Canadian values, it would not need to be said, and repeated with such fervour. Further, I
think it is precisely this conundrum that right-wing policy makers have been
counting on: after soldiers (who are, after all, most frequently working-class
youth and young adults from economically disadvantaged areas) have given their
lives in the service of this mission, anyone who would split hairs about the
mission’s baser (and, at various points, transparent) rationale is immediately cast
as dishonouring the war dead. To question this linked series implies that those
sacrificial deaths may not have been purely heroic, or even necessary.

Indeed, this certainly seemed to be the strategy at work when the decision
was made to ship family members of some dead soldiers to Afghanistan to
participate in memorials as the mission’s mandate was set to expire (yet again) in
2011. Those same grief-stricken family members issued an emotional plea
through the national news media for the mission, which their sons fought so
valiantly for and believed in so heartily, to continue, so that their goals might be
accomplished and their deaths not be in vain. (See, for example, “Families”). The
cost of these ceremonies and transporting the families, it turns out, had not been
authorized, but shortly after the unauthorized use of funds was revealed, the
military announced that a mysterious source of “non-public funds” had been
found to facilitate the continuation of the ceremonies (Rennie).²⁹

The Highway of Heroes, then, is only one part of a much broader cultural
tendency at the complicated intersection of hegemony and governmentality, direct
government orchestration and “independent” citizen-led initiatives. While it
presents the spectacle of grassroots patriotism it is borne of and contributes to a
culture of militarization that a pro-war neoliberal government both harnesses and begets. By linking participation in these spectacles to an idea of “ordinariness” rooted in emotive settler masculinity, the Highway of Heroes recalibrates civic and democratic participation in ways that advance and entrench Empire on the home front.

**Conclusions**

To summarize my argument, the Yellow Ribbon influences public discourse through its purported ambiguity, an ambiguity that serves a pedagogical purpose in offering those who use them (and of course, their interlocutors) a framework for discussion about Canada’s involvement in the war that insists that the important thing is that soldiers be supported. What this support entails (pensions and pay? Increased military budgets to accommodate new equipment? Acquiescing to controversial foreign policies? Reverence?) is unspecified. The Red Fridays campaign, which is less ambiguous (I’ve yet to find evidence that anyone participating claims to support the troops but disagree with the mission), has not met with the same degree of success but has garnered official recognition and participation and mobilized the conservative base. The Highway of Heroes phenomenon, as a kind of public mourning and memorialization ritual, has been successful in drawing an unprecedented amount of sympathetic national and international media coverage. Private individuals, professional associations (particularly fraternities such as police, firefighters, and emergency response
crews), civic organizations (legion branches, veterans’ associations, churches, lion’s club, masons, etc.) businesses, and various levels of government have all participated, allowing the spectacle to perform an “ordinariness” and “unpoliticalness” which reproduces normative ideas about Canadian traits and values that have a decidedly right-wing tenor.

I began this research project expecting to describe and account for a much more organic, autonomous citizen-led kind of cultural militarization, rather than a concerted, heavily-orchestrated campaign to influence the voting public. The evidence continues to mount, however, that Stephen Harper’s Conservative government, and the groundwork laid by previous conservative populisms, has keenly understood, harnessed and supplemented these public responses and activities. It is more than coincidence that the Yellow Ribbons, Red Fridays, and Highway of Heroes ceremonies all proliferated around 2006, just after Harper won his first minority government and when, in response to mounting casualties, support for the war was at an all-time high (Mayeda). The Conservative government enthusiastically embraced and extended the Martin government’s drive for a greater and more intense combat role for Canadian Forces in Afghanistan. That year, Canada sustained what continues to be its heaviest annual toll with 37 deaths, and saw a corresponding intensification of radio, television, and internet coverage of troop movements and funerals. It is not surprising that the militarization of everyday life cultural practices swelled at this time (Mayeda).

If for the Liberal governments of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin,
participating in the War on Terror was seen as politically expedient, for the newly-amalgamated Reform/Alliance/Progressive-Conservative/Conservative government of Stephen Harper, the war became a key opportunity to intervene in and re-shape Canadian values, identity, and public image, which in turn facilitates the ongoing project of militarizing the Canadian economy and neoliberalizing social policy. This chapter has provided an account of how that process has permeated social life at the level of individual cultural practices, (sporting bumper-stickers, wearing colours, and participating in semi-official mourning rituals) and of the important actors and factors involved in the creation of these semi-autonomous, mass participatory practices. Throughout, I have resisted the easy characterization of participants as unthinking “dupes,” manipulated by government or corporate interests filtered through an all-powerful colluding media apparatus. Elements of manipulation are certainly present, but this doesn’t tell the whole story and tends to deny peoples’ own agency and participation in creating the new Canadian militarism. Rather, I have sought to tease out the relationship between people’s desires and beliefs, and the cultural history and pedagogy of militarism that renders it such a potent venue for conscripting and commanding political discourse and, in a real sense, people’s sense of themselves as political subjects.\textsuperscript{30}
Even questionable and controversial wars do end, however, and an end-date for Canada’s mission in Afghanistan has now been set, after much postponement, for December 2011. This ending is presumably not in response to public pressure, however, given the reigning Conservative government’s carte blanche majority, but is due to internal factors such as soldier fatigue and escalating costs. Nor is it a cold-turkey withdrawal of all troops, but a transformation from a war-making deployment to a (much smaller) rebuilding one. The greater “coup” here is that over the past eleven years the Canadian economy has been militarized to such a degree that civilian or “peacetime” prosperity now seems dangerously wedded to military prerogatives, as the CFDS envisioned (10). Witness, for instance, the recent jubilation in Halifax over securing lucrative navy shipbuilding contracts: in the resulting media coverage, no voices of caution sounded over tying employment and economic sustainability to militarism (see, for example, Chase and Marotte; Seed).

While the sovereignty of transnational capital and its power is, increasingly obviously, threatening the viability of all forms of biological and social life on this planet, it is not as yet completely unfettered: my thinking here tends to follow those like David Harvey and Leo Panitch, who remain unwilling to cede the ground of the nation-state in the context of this question, because it remains the prevailing institutional form structuring the contemporary contest for democracy. Moreover, this approach is useful to my research, which brings to the fore the material consequences of the ways in which national discourses are contested and the affective power they wield.

It has been extremely difficult to find useful figures on this. In the United States, Yellow Ribbon use peaked in 2004 (see Ward) at the height of the Iraq war’s popularity. From the number of newspaper articles and public debates (such as they were) about Yellow Ribbons, I surmise that the 2006-2008 period, which saw Canada’s most active and deadly operations in Afghanistan, was the height of the symbol’s popularity in Canada.

In his retrospective on the first Gulf War, Douglas Kellner documents the crucial role played by public relations corporations that was revealed after the fact to have been instrumental in influencing public opinion in support of governmental objectives. Kellner adds an important caveat and so must I, that Lazarsfeld’s “hypodermic needle” or “magic bullet” model of communications has been discredited to the extent that it hardly requires riposte any longer, serving today mainly as an accusation against cultural critics who find structural power relations to still be worth talking about. Of course, individuals are not mere dupes blown hither and thither by the winds of corporate media, and create diverse meanings.
from texts. In the case of the present militarization of corporate media, the affective power orchestrated by media and government spectacle is such that we must wonder, however, whether people’s individualistic reading-capacity is particularly relevant in the absence of a political and social context in which those diverse reading and meaning-making practices can be said to matter. After all, the War on Terror was launched in spite of the largest global demonstrations of opposition in history.

6 It is worth noting that the yellow ribbon bears the hallmarks of a public relations strategy designed to muddy the waters around the justification for the first Gulf War, complete with an All-American invented tradition. As former director of the CIA, George Bush Senior would certainly have been versed in and have had ready access to such tactics. Whether the Yellow Ribbon emerged primarily as a grassroots cultural practice, or as a deliberate “Astroturf” strategy to create the appearance of public support for the war is an important question, but not one on which my analysis here hinges (see Stauber and Rampton Best War Ever).

7 There is a particularly wide gulf between critical academic understanding and public debate. In the course of my research, I have found that people who work for the military come in nearly as many political persuasions as the general population, but tend not to like it when political theorists don’t know anything about their experience of military life, particularly the centrality of the specific technologies and kinds of equipment they work with to do the work they do. The academics and politicians who tend to know a lot about the details of military equipment and specific regiments tend to be on the right (with a few notable exceptions, and even those exceptions tend to be well-liked in civilian circles and less well-respected in military ones.) Our tendency as critical academics and public intellectuals to pay greater attention to discourse and analysis at the expense of knowing, say, how many ships the navy has, a problem that is not without class overtones, does not serve the public conversation well, either in rigour or in credibility. (New shipbuilding contracts have just been announced, but at present there are 12 frigates, 3 destroyers, 4 submarines, 12 coastal patrol vessels, and another 35 smaller auxiliary vessels.)

8 See http://afghanistan.gc.ca/canada

9 For a more full itemization, see the articles collected in Teresa Healy’s The Harper Record.

10 To put this 500-billion dollar price tag in perspective, the national child-care program that was held out as the Liberal party’s “carrot” during the 2006 elections, that was so controversial with the political right and took fire for being a communistic plot, (despite being a user-pay model, based on some provincial
systems now in effect, and despite remaining “in waiting” more than thirty years) was budgeted at a mere 12 billion dollars spread over 5 years.

11 Of course, lobbying need not be public to be effective, rather the opposite, and indeed government agencies and policy makers have in fact been under pressure from pro-military think-tanks like the arch-neoliberal Fraser Institute, the conservative Dominion Institute, and public intellectuals like Tom Flanagan and Jack Granatstein, consultant for the Canadian War Museum and board member of many military and defence initiatives, for some time.

12 For instance, Paul Fromm, one of Canada’s most infamous white supremacists, runs a website called the “Canada First Immigration Reform Committee”.

13 Under the leadership of then-Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, Canada contributed four naval ships, a squadron of CF-18 Hornets, and other medical and support personnel to the United States-led “Allied” effort in the first Gulf War. Though the CF-18 bombing missions marked the first time since the Korean War that Canada had been actively engaged in offensive combat, that war was a shorter one. Canadian troops played a more supportive, and relatively more removed role and did not sustain any casualties.

14 The Voice of Women for Peace is an organization in which I was active around this time, and the predominantly elder membership, having brought critical attention to bear on many previous conflicts, saw this maneuver coming a mile away. In particular, I remember having this explained to me by Dr. Gillian Thomas, Saint Mary’s University, Halifax NS.

15 See http://cfpsa.ca.

16 I am pursuing this line of inquiry, but so far have run up against “national security concerns”.


18 Two brief anecdotes: 1) graffiti on a wall in a working-class neighbourhood near a large urban base: “we’ll support our troops when they MUTINY” 2) A young man, trained for the Canadian Forces, leaves after a year because he disagrees with the Canadian military presence in Afghanistan and with the lack of integrity of the version of hyper-masculinized military culture currently on offer, as he put it to me, “dogs trained by wolves.” What other stories like his are not being heard?

19 As has happened at various points in Canadian history, most notably the internment of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War.
Regarding the imperative to declarative politics, I think that while there are limits to how far my argument here can be extended, it is important to note the sense of danger and hostility a hegemonic support-our-troops culture can convey. The yet more aggressive (but not as ubiquitous) slogan, “If you don’t stand behind our troops, feel free to stand in front of them,” contains an implicit threat. Political freedom and the freedom to dissent, the heart of democracy itself, are undermined when dissent is unsafe, and dissent becomes unsafe when it is believed to be so. That is, there is a difference between the declarative politics of, say, freely choosing whether to display an election sign, and the imperative to display a particular sign, on pain of repercussions: in this hypothetical instance, the first belongs to democracy, the second to fascism.

Red Friday: military urban legend?
http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?88756-Red-Friday-Military-Urban-Legend&s=b41c7b74bb063d904d1785b8782a19d3 and all over the internet.

Again, ubiquitous, but reprinted here from snopes.com.

http://www.specialoperations.org/who_we_are.html


MarriedtotheCanadianMilitary.ca. It should be noted that I have had no end of trouble accessing this incredibly unreliable website.

Redfridays.ca

Municipal website, http://www.petawawa.ca/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=531&Itemid=1

It is likely that the funding came through or was facilitated by the “non-public” Canadian Forces Personnel Support Agency, ultimately still a part of the Defence establishment, discussed above.

Some data is currently unavailable to me that would be useful here: How, exactly, did the idea of the Red Fridays campaign happen to “come” to “Married to the Canadian Military”? Formally or informally? What was the organizational structure or chain-of-command for disseminating the Highway of Heroes practices 2002-2006?
Part Two: Militarized Cultural Production: Canadian Forces Recruitment Ads, *Afghanada* and *Passchendaele*

As the previous chapter attended to militarization and everyday cultural practices, this chapter explores circulations of power through and within different modes of cultural production. I have chosen these specific textual examples partly because they are each among what I understand to be the most important militarizing cultural texts, and because the diversity among them allows me to present some of the subtlety and complexity of cultural representations of militarism and the ways differing approaches and genres can contribute to a shared project. Each of the texts I have chosen, for example, occupies a distinct position in terms of autonomy from or relationship to the state and government funding. The recruiting ads, which are of course government-funded, break down the traditional distinction or arm’s length relationship between the military as an institution and the political agendas of specific governments. *Afghanada*, in contrast, is an “autonomous” production of an arm’s-length (state-owned) crown corporation that is desperately seeking to prove its worth to and ensure its survival against a hostile federal government. Finally, *Passchendaele* is a private, for-profit, free-market cultural production, but one which garnered subsidies from and
entered into a pedagogical partnership with the state. The different kinds of cultural and economic relationships I discuss here demonstrate a range of ways militarization is conscripting cultural production and changing the landscape of cultural politics in Canada.

In particular, I argue that each text in its own way appropriates and rescripts previous Canadian myths towards cultural militarization. The Canadian Forces Recruiting ads play on and reinforce beliefs in Canada’s good natured and generous innocence while at the same time sending the clear message that such traits are no longer sufficient to deal with the threats the nation faces. I read *Afghanada* as inhabiting and advancing an idea of ennobling Canadian ambivalence and concern that celebrates moral ambiguity and conflictedness as political virtues, and I argue that these are already conscripted to militarization. Finally, I read *Passchendaele* as working at the intersection of notions of settler belonging, masculinity and Canada’s place in Empire in ways that link the nation’s foundations in colonialism to its “maturation” into a fighting force in the First World War and to its present post-peacekeeping military commitments in Afghanistan (and beyond). In each case and in general I show how the new culture of militarization depends upon reworking older myths and tropes of Canadian national identity. More broadly, this chapter maps how the new Canadian militarization is intimately connected not only to past myths of Canadian identity, but also past and present systems of power, oppression and exploitation and time is given to working through how, in each case,
militarization relies on, reinforces and/or re-scripts patterns of cultural power and representation based on race, gender, and colonialism.

**Canadian Forces Recruiting Ads**

Over the course of the twentieth century, and now in the twenty-first, the package of techniques, tools and trades geared toward influencing public opinion has grown from the exclusive province of state propagandists and corporate advertising executives to become one of the defining features of everyday life under late consumer capitalism and contemporary warfare (Stauber and Rampton, *Best War Ever*). Of course corporate and state interests are not utterly entwined, but rather enjoy flexible and mutually beneficial partnerships that advance their own-- sometimes compatible, sometimes distinct and even competing-- agendas.

The history and development of communications technologies and the mass media, however, from grandfather of public relations (and nephew of Sigmund Freud) Edward L. Bernays and public relations emerging out of the First World War (Stauber and Rampton, *Toxic Sludge* 22-30), to the centrality of the Internet and new media to corporate globalization, cannot be separated from military research and development.

Certainly after the First Gulf War, as Doug Kellner so carefully documents (*The Persian Gulf TV War*), there can be no doubt about the role of cultural production and the culture industries in contemporary warfare or the intimacy with which cultural producers are firmly enfolded in the embrace of what
Eisenhower termed the “military-industrial complex” (see also Boggs and Pollard; Giroux, *Beyond the Spectacle*; Kellner, *Hollywood*; and Turse). Scholars and critics in the United States have long recognized the multiple intersections between a highly militarized economy and the massive entertainment and culture industries, so that we now speak of the “military-industrial-entertainment complex,” the “military-industrial-academic complex” (Giroux, *University in Chains*), and other phrases that call our attention to militarism as a cultural and ideological force that reorganizes industry, technology, entertainment, higher education, and civil society. Despite the growth of new technological sectors and the “information economy,” and despite the primary role of the Second World War in industrializing the Canadian economy, this same confluence in Canada tends to generate little public attention. This is no doubt in part because of the comparatively tiny scope of Canada’s military and cultural industries compared to the neighbouring United States, and the saturation of Canadian markets with American movies, TV, video games, and computer programs (Galperin; Mookerjea et al. 15-30). Nevertheless, it is important to investigate the particular character of militarization in Canada. While only a drop in the bucket of continental (i.e. mostly American) media, the three examples I present here are demonstrative of the cultural shift in Canadian cultural production. Cultural texts produced under the War on Terror form one important lens through which to study the shift in military values currently underway in Canada, and to discuss the cultural production of that shift. I begin this discussion of the self-representation
of the Canadian Forces through their recruiting advertisements, then, with the full
weight of the history of military propaganda and the proliferation of the military-
cultural industries in mind.

One of the first acts of the Harper government after coming to power in 2006 was to roll out a new wave of media communications targeting American diplomats, business leaders and policy makers. This “boots on the ground” campaign, which was not publicized and received little notice at home, was intended to increase Canada’s profile with Americans as an ally of the United States. Several prominent public locations and subway stations became host to huge ads depicting Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan, bearing the slogan “Canada has boots on the ground”. The Conservatives were eager to distance themselves from previous Liberal administrations that had refused to sign up Canada for the war in Iraq, and to signal that Canada was now open for military business (Cameron). The captions read “Boots on the Ground / U.S.-Canada Relations: Security is Our Business.”

Indeed, Harper was a strong advocate for Canada’s participation in the
Iraq war and a harsh critic of then-Prime Minister Jean Chrétien’s decision to keep Canada officially non-belligerent, and pursuing regime change against the Taliban in Afghanistan instead (Barry). Many critics have noted that while Canada officially refrained from active combat in Iraq, its role on the “Afghan front” contributes to the “global war on terror” by freeing up American resources for Iraq (Gordon 360-366; McQuaig, *Holding the Bully’s Coat*). Support is contributed through the “back door” of military integration that sees Canadian soldiers serve with the American forces, including top Canadian military officials for whom taking up posts in the American military is not merely routine but compulsory, and also through the collaboration of Canadian weapons manufacturers (Staples, *Marching Orders* 20-21). This is to say, while vociferous public opposition must be credited for ensuring this policy decision, that Canada “stayed out of Iraq” is arguably more a semantic victory than a moral one. The “Boots on the Ground” public relations campaign, which was introduced on March 19th, 2006, was timed to co-ordinate with the change of command in Afghanistan that saw Canada take on an expanded role, and to increase publicity for a “Canadian Ally” website that had previously been introduced to inform American policy makers about Canada’s efforts. Following this “boots on the ground” messaging, Harper took his passion for free trade and militarized neoliberal partnership with the United States on the road, to lobby the American business elite for defence contracts. Here as elsewhere, Harper’s rhetoric builds upon Canada’s sympathy and support for the US during the 9/11 attacks, through
support for the Canadian and American troops fighting for our shared principles, toward a shared future of integrated, continental security, free trade and prosperity:

Let us never forget that while, on 9/11, we saw the worst evils of which humanity is capable, we also bore witness to countless acts of extraordinary human courage and compassion… Canada, too, did what it could to help…open[ing] their arms and their homes to 33,000 passengers whose flights were diverted… And so, since then, we have come to understand as never before that all of our challenges: economic, social, and political, are truly global in scope… So allow me to highlight tonight three things Canada has to offer in facing global challenges: First, a strong and robust economy and, in particular, an energy industry that is increasingly one of the most important in the world; Second, a strong partnership in building both a more competitive and more secure North America; And third, a common will to advance, in concert with our democratic allies, our shared values and interests throughout the world. Here, militarism is a convenient vehicle for proponents of neoliberal economic policies, as well as an economic strategy in itself, as well as a complementary ideological project of social transformation. Leaving aside for a moment the criticism that civility is itself a form of violence (to which we shall return), such collusion and deep integration between military and ostensibly civil apparatuses closes the space that was made possible for civil society and debate
by eradicating the distinction between the martial and the civil. It becomes
necessary to ask whether we can even speak of civilians, or what kind of civilian
is possible, under comprehensive economic, social and political military
integration, under indeed the imperatives of militarized citizenship in a military
democracy.

This emerging tendency helps contextualize the most recent wave of
Canadian Forces recruiting ads, which were also introduced in 2006 and intended
to bolster recruitment for the war. At an estimated $3 million in production costs
alone, the initial phase included television commercials, bus and bus-shelter ads,
and posters on university campuses and in working class neighbourhoods in major
Canadian cities (“Canada Forces Ads Zoom In”). The ads were part of an
aggressive recruitment strategy budgeted at $15.5 million dollars implemented to
meet Conservative promises to increase the forces by “13,000 soldiers and boost
the reserves by 10,000 more” (“Feds Double Spending”). Between “Boots on the
Ground” and these “New Canadian Forces” ads, the public image of the Canadian
military was being, in the words of one marketing study, “re-branded” (McMullan
et. al.). Indeed, we see at work here the transition from an older, more overt and
un-nuanced notion of propaganda, to “branding,” a market-based approach to the
intricate management of people’s feelings and associations (Klein, No Logo 3-26).
The need to increase recruitment is presented here as a bottom-line objective, and
shaping public opinion to garner those desired results through “information
management” becomes merely a successful example of increasing market-share
borrowed from the corporate world (McMullan, et. al.).

The ads themselves were tested across the country and launched in Halifax movie theatres in September of 2006, an “economically depressed” area and home to Canada’s largest naval base where the military reportedly hoped to see the biggest increase in enrollment, despite the fact that Atlantic Canadians were already over-represented in the Canadian Armed Forces (“Canada Forces Ads Zoom In”). The ads ran on television and in movie theatres across the country, specifically targeting youth and their parents (R. Smith). This strategy was intended to complement plans to bolster recruitment efforts by targeting specific populations by opening a recruitment centre aimed at Chinese-Canadians in Richmond, B.C., in addition to the one in Surrey, B.C. that targets the Indo-Canadian community (“Feds”). I have not been able to access information on the “media buy” of this ad campaign, although it aired on most Canadian non-cable channels with relative frequency. Importantly, given the general state of Canadian television, it is highly likely that the ads would have been aired during a mix of Canadian and American content.

It would appear that the ads had their desired impact, if judging only by the long duration of the ads’ run:

Military statistics compiled over the past 10 years show that while regular and reserve forces were not always able to meet their enrolment targets for a given year, it was never because of a shortage of interested applicants.

As the death toll in Afghanistan mounted and the political rhetoric
surrounding the mission grew more heated, the number of Canadian Forces applicants rose steadily, sometimes reaching levels twice those at the beginning of the mission. In 2009-10, the Canadian Forces received 25,738 applications, up dramatically from the 2001-02 fiscal year, when applications numbered 13,504—a figure that included existing soldiers seeking transfers to other units. With the mission winding down, the Forces received 18,881 applications in 2010-11. The extensive media coverage of military life in Afghanistan was a key factor in the surge, said Richard Langlois of the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group. Infantry positions, which have historically been difficult to fill, got the biggest boost, Langlois said. Rather than act as a deterrent, the well-documented perils of life in theatre seemed to highlight the urgency and importance of the work being done (“Afghan Mission”).

There was also discussion of easing citizenship requirements and fast-tracking citizenship for those willing to serve, proposed by then-Chief of Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier. This explicit linking of militarism and citizenship also took place in the re-drafting of the study guide for the Canadian citizenship test, to purposefully highlight the inherent “Canadianness” of military service (Friesen, “Ottawa to Remodel”) and the government’s insistence that the military be present and recognized at all citizenship ceremonies (Bercuson; Friesen, “Ottawa Pumps Up Military Role”).

The first wave of the new campaign featured two 90-second commercials,
one with more emphasis on adventure, equipment and military capability, the 
other focusing more on the “service” and “helping” aspect of military service. 
These two themes tested favourably in focus groups with their target audience and 
their parents, respectively (“Canadian Forces Ads”). Both ads involved aspects of 
adventurism, civic duty, fast-paced action, and “helping.” It is hard to verbally 
capture the visual aesthetics of these ads; they make use of rapid jump-cuts 
between shots, embrace a grainy, “hyper-real” film stock effect, and employ 
hand-held camera techniques and angles to add an ostensible “boots on the 
ground” intensity. Unlike more typically propagandistic portrayals of military 
heroism, the ads feature neither music nor voice-over, nor do they feature 
particulated characters or narrative, instead relying on intense images and a 
tense, almost experimental soundtrack centered on a heart-monitor-like “beeping” 
sound that implies the life-or-death intensity of an operating room. This pared-
down, efficient mood, reminiscent of other “post-9/11” militarized popular 
cultural texts like the Fox Network’s 24 and the CBC’s The Border, suggests that, 
in our current “state of emergency,” there is no time for aesthetic ornamentation 
or embellishment. Indeed, even speech itself is wasteful and potentially 
distracting to the defence imperative. The sense of “emergency” pronounced by 
the soundtrack “speaks for itself,” insisting that the “defence” of national space is 
the very precondition of civil discourse, echoing the well-rehearsed argument that 
“the right to speech and dissent” is only guaranteed by military readiness. The 
overarching implication is that democratic criticism can only be tolerated to the
extent it knows when to shut up.

I will attempt to convey something of the feeling of the ads themselves, in which the narrative, such as it is, is constructed through techniques of interruption and brokenness, in the following descriptions. In the first, which I will call the “adventure” ad,

*the first image is an aerial panorama of mountain range, which a caption locates as “British Columbia”. The next scene is of men on a boat rushing to man their weapons- “Gulf of Oman”. Next, the screen cuts to what we imagine to be an Afghan streetscape with soldiers sneaking down an alley. Para-troopers launching from a plane. Soldiers plowing through the bush. A brief image of a naval vessel in the water. The front of a small plane. These images accelerate, along with an accelerating high-pitched beeping sound like a heart monitor. Soldiers bursting into a house, but “shushing” the family inside, not harming them. Sneaking up the stairs, a clear shot of the face of a female soldier behind the scope of a complicated-looking gun, opening a door, and BEEP goes the sound, flatlining, as the room explodes. Next, Canadian Forces are seen ushering bedraggled civilians including a distressed, attractive woman into a waiting ambulance, wrapping them in blankets. “FIGHT FEAR,” reads the caption. Image of soldiers rappelling down a rock face, (which can be discerned, with some effort, as the scene of a remote plane crash) saving the life of a civilian on a guerney and calming his wife. Next, the camera jumps to a small boat
carrying a person of colour in a suit, perhaps rescued at sea, and the caption “FIGHT DISTRESS.” Next, a tank in the desert, shooting at something, a car on fire. Passing rocks to rebuild a wall. “Fight chaos.” A woman standing amidst rubble with a picture of a missing loved one.

Vans driving down the street past her. A young black soldier, smiling proudly. A group of soldiers. “FIGHT”— an image of white male officer surrounded by younger soldiers—“WITH THE CANADIAN FORCES.”

The closing screen bears the logo and website for the CF and the words “OVER 100 EXCITING FULL AND PART-TIME CAREERS”.

The second ad, which I will call the “helping” ad,

begins with an aerial view of a large-scale forest fire, and a caption that reads “Forest fires in British Columbia”. The next image is of a smoky, possibly bombed-out streetscape. Then soldiers in a van donning helmets, followed by another visual of a smoky streetscape with helicopters overhead and a soldier of colour driving a van. Next, another caption appears on the screen that reads “Flooding in Manitoba”, over images of military vans driving through what appears to be chest-deep water. Then soldiers making sandbag walls, dropping supplies from a helicopter, and, prominently, a first-aid shelter erected in the middle of a field marked with the big Red Cross symbol. Fire; helping someone breathe through a mask. Now soldiers in inflatable boats on water. People in distress waving from the top of a submerged vehicle. A school bus up to its windows in water.
Helping a woman with her belongings. Fire again. Helping people evacuate. Another shot of the wavers on top of the vehicle, hauling them up into a helicopter. Another caption, “Rescue off the Coast of Nova Scotia”. A family. A plane, above a ship or possibly two ships, and then a helicopter dropping soldiers into the sea, who swim to what appear to be ship-wrecked civilians in the water. “FIGHT DISTRESS,” the screen reads, in capital letters. House under water. “FIGHT FEAR” soldiers with a Red Cross symbol, helping a family. “FIGHT,” another devastated streetscape, “CHAOS”. “FIGHT,”—attractive male soldier face—“WITH THE CANADIAN FORCES” and a last image of troops. Again the closing screen reads “JOIN US. OVER 100 EXCITING FULL AND PART-TIME CAREERS.”

Both advertisements stress Canadian soldiers involved in largely non-warlike pursuits, even when they are shown in full combat gear. This would seem to reinforce an idea of the Canadian military as a largely non-aggressive force in keeping with national myths about peacekeeping. But in the re-iteration of “Fight Fear, Fight Chaos, Fight—with the Canadian Forces,” a language of peacekeeping is purposefully occluded in favour of a more aggressive style and emphasis on fighting. This shift is especially poignant in comparison to the earnest, civic-minded, and distinctly dated recruiting campaign that directly preceded this wave of re-branding, “There’s no life like it!” (Bergen), which stressed the personal and professional benefits of soldiering. And yet, crucially, the “fighting” represented
in these new ads mobilizes the image of the moral and self-sacrificing peacekeeper, in Sandra Whitworth’s apt phrase, the “warrior-prince of peace,” who is alone capable of imposing order and discipline on a chaotic world (Men, Militarism and UN Peacekeeping 17). “Fighting” activities include putting out bushfires raging through British Columbia, search-and-rescue missions, and ushering bedraggled civilians into Red Cross ambulances, along with the less-frequent and ambiguous combat scenes. The mobilization of these images of soldiers engaged in morally unambiguous helping work, though described as “fighting”, establishes a preferred reading of soldiers (and fighting) as good, self-
sacrificing, and heroic. In actual fact, of course, even before the War on Terror, since the mid-1990’s the Canadian Forces have been deployed almost exclusively to NATO and other US-led missions and increasingly rarely to any strictly “helping” or natural-disaster related missions (Staples *Marching Orders* 1-6).

Indeed, by 2011 98.5% of Canadian soldiers deployed (4,032) were allocated to NATO or US-led projects, where only 1.5% were assigned to UN peacekeeping, and these (63) are typically remainders of long-term peacekeeping missions from the past. In addition, the actual use of resources over time since the Second World War shows Canadian military spending to correspond not to global trends, but in near lock-step with American military priorities, the only major exception being the Vietnam War. These findings speak strongly *against* the existence of a defining peacekeeping (or even “helping”) mandate (see Bill Robinson’s spending chart above).

The over-representation of “helping” work in the new CF ads thus drastically misrepresents what it is Canadian Forces do. True, they are sometimes “called in” during emergencies, but these charitable events are one-off operations that form only a sideline to the military’s primary purpose. In fact, the public expectation of military assistance beyond what is prescribed in the *National Defence Act* of 1985 and the *Emergencies Act* which replaced the *War Measures Act* in 1988, continues to be a source of tension between the military and government.

The scenes of actual combat or combat-like activities that are slipped in to
the heroic pageantry of the ads are staged “chaotically”: grainy film quality, jump cuts, smoke, indecipherable (silenced) shouting and urgency contribute to a sense of a world turned upside down. These techniques, borrowed from “hyper-realist” hyper-masculinized war films like *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and *The Hurt Locker* (2008) and from popular war games like *Call of Duty*, are familiar to young audiences. Viewers, positioned either as soldiers or as victims in need of military assistance, are barred from access to complete information, from any inkling of the point of the mission being depicted to its broader geo-political significance. Context for any action is actively occluded by a cinematic style that reduces the timeline of relevant events to the sheer immediacy of serial presents, in which the only narrative possible hinges upon soldiers and whether or not they can carry out their orders and fulfill their assignments. In a world of chaos, fear and distress, contextualizing military action is dangerous and wasteful, and may fatally hinder the troops who are trained to respond with Canadian-bred instincts that are instantaneously decisive, noble and compassionate. This gut-level politics is part of the idiom of masculinized political feeling discussed in chapter one (and again later this chapter) where the moral intuition of “ordinary Canadians” trumps measured political debate and sober consideration of consequences.

As Razack vividly illustrates in her treatment of the Somalia Affair (covered in detail later in this chapter), Canadian military narratives are increasingly preoccupied with the plight of soldiers (who, we are told, are “just like us”) helplessly caught between orders from obtuse international bureaucrats
and the realities of uncivilized tribal warfare or mob violence in the “heart of darkness” (Bosnia, Haiti, Rwanda, Afghanistan) (Dark Threats). Like this narrative, the Canadian Forces ads reinforce the idea that Canadian Soldiers are inherently good, honest and “average” people who strive to “help” those less fortunate. This approach winnows down the moral ambiguity of contemporary international military intervention to the motivations of laudable individuals. It resolutely locates the “politics” of what soldiers are doing (what wars they fight, what targets they select, what objectives they strive to achieve) as outside the military itself, and glorifies the no-questions-asked discipline and self-sacrifice of those who “put their lives on the line for their country” (and for various ungrateful others) (see Granatstein, “In peacetime, soldiers are scorned”). Indeed, the supporters and proponents of Yellow Ribbons, as I detailed above, achieved much of their success precisely through maintaining “un-political-ness” in order to quell public debate and define opponents as “political” and therefore suspect.

The distinction here between peacekeeping and fighting is not frivolous. As mentioned earlier, military advisors and critics on the right of the political spectrum have long held UN-style peacekeeping to be a failed project, one that, in addition to failing to protect civilians and reign in “rogue states,” generates demoralized soldiers and a public with unrealistic expectations of what military engagement encompasses. On the other hand, critics on the left suggest that not only has “peacekeeping” largely served foreign imperial interests, (Engler, Black Book 4-6; Gordon 300-307) but they also observe the rhetoric of peacekeeping
deployed to invoke an altruistic social ideal that is not substantiated in the actual practice of peacekeeping-as-military-deployment, and that masks and obscures those same, geo-political intentions in which altruism is not a criterion (Razack, *Dark Threats*; Whitworth, *Men, Militarism and UN Peacekeeping*).

Peacekeeping discourse has, despite these criticisms, proved enormously generative in terms of national tropes and pedagogy, as discussed in chapter one, so it is no wonder then that the producers of these ads and their advisors are reluctant to do away with the moral authority proffered by peacekeeping altogether, and instead use it to craft a moral character for militarism—and for nationalism—in the present. According to this narrative, Canada has earned its proverbial stripes through peacekeeping and has now matured into a benevolent enforcer, whose sound judgment and good intentions are beyond scrutiny.

According to some insiders, the messaging in the ads originally included the phrase “fight terror,” which was changed to “fight chaos” due to audience testing results which found “fight terror” to be too reminiscent of then-American President George W. Bush, whose intentions Canadians generally regarded with skepticism (R. Smith). Given Canadians’ historical respect for “order,” (for instance, as the hinge word of the motto “peace, order and good government” of the foundational *British North America Act* of 1867) it isn’t surprising that its opposite, “chaos,” should replace the (too) political concept of “terror” as the main villain and the threat to global peace and security. Like “terror,” “chaos” is an idea or condition, rather than a tangible enemy or even an ideology and, as
such, can at once be applied to any conflict or situation and still function pedagogically to fuel ostensibly altruistic notions of imposing order on savage, backward and chaotic peoples and places. Within the lens of militarized nationalism, overflowing rivers, Taliban insurgents, forest fires and greedy African warlords are all part of a world of chaos that demands Canada’s orderly intervention.

The images of landscape and natural disaster represented here bear mention. Images of sweeping vistas in British Columbia and the Arctic call attention to the means by which they are produced. Here, it is through the aerial photography of Canadian military technology (recording devices, helicopters) that we experience the vastness of territorial space that has been brought under the control and surveillance of the Canadian settler-state. Indeed, the early history of film in Canada shares this preoccupation with territorial management and surveillance, as early film production was largely geared toward encouraging immigration and trade by demonstrating the unclaimed bounty of available land (Leach). At the same time, these representations call attention to their own production and management: it is military technology that furnishes these representations of space and symbolically maintains order, in this sense, ordering and creating colonial space.

In the images where nature is at the root of crisis, such as the British Columbia forest fires and Manitoba floods, this sense of the military as controlling and intervening in a hostile landscape-- indeed, military intervention
as necessary to bring the forces of nature under control for civil society-- re-stages the Canadian cultural theme that Northrop Frye has called the “garrison mentality.” This militarist ordering of colonial space frames the natural world as a potential threat, an embodiment of the hostile, foreign, and unpredictable unknown, to be overcome and shut out through military discipline and vigilance. While on one level, anyone threatened by natural disaster may be grateful for military or any other forthcoming assistance, these representations work to recall, in order to forget, the problematic and unreconciled relationship to land that haunts the Canadian national project. But “vast and empty” is a problematic way in which to represent the ground on which this masculine drama is staged, and contributes to the “terra nullius” myth that the land was “empty” before European settlers arrived. That Canada’s claim to the entirety of the province of British Columbia is contested by First Nations demonstrates that Canada’s sovereignty over what it presents as wilderness is neither uncontested nor unconditional (see Alfred). The removal of indigenous people (and hence their claims) from the land in these representations contributes to a construction of contemporary Canada in which the state possesses omniscient powers of surveillance and control and the ontological threat of past and present indigenous presence on and claims to the (home)land has been expunged.

For instance, indigenous peoples of northern British Columbia such as the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en practiced effective and non-invasive forestry management in the form of sacred as well as practical fires that consumed the dry
underbrush throughout the high-risk season (Gottesfeld; Berkes). The crisis of raging forest fires as presented here erases the original peoples and their traditional ecological knowledge, economies, and even forest fire prevention measures, and offers a militarized, garrison mentality response as the most effective and important. Further, impending ecological collapse is evoked through the images of a nature rendered chaotic and unpredictable, and contributes to fears about increased flooding, forest fires, ice storms and other natural disasters. These carefully managed images of territorial surveillance and control work to inscribe and repeat patterns of settler relations in which militarized responses to crisis, change, and difference become naturalized.

At the same time, the Harper government persists in pursuing bottom-line policies that deny the reality of climate change (Healy, ed. 281-298; McDonald, *The Armageddon Factor* 114-119), offering militarization as the naturalized “solution” to environmental problems. The notion that “Canada’s arctic” requires military defence from external threats (another Conservative party policy and reflected in their *Canada First Defence Strategy*, see also A. Blatchford; Wallace and Staples) replaces calls for substantive environmental protection measures that would slow the rapidly accelerating melting of the arctic shelf, like restrictions on industry or the shuttering of Canada’s single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, the Alberta “Tar Sands” development, considered by some to be the most ecologically devastating project in human history (Healy, ed. 257-280). The way the militarized lens steals attention from the source of ecological problems
and focuses on their military “solutions” demonstrates the tragic hubris and inadequacy of militarized masculinity to grasp the most pressing problems of our time, the survival of human life on this planet (Adley and Grant).

Another key aspect of these advertisements is their depictions of military personnel as a resplendent cultural mosaic, working together to fight chaos/fear/distress with the Canadian Forces. As with the legacy of peacekeeping, the ads mobilize the myth of multiculturalism only to imply that it is over. The diversity of faces in uniform at once congratulates Canada on its ability to overcome prejudice and suggests that the work is now complete, justifying the nation’s duty to spread its values of tolerance, pluralism and individual opportunity overseas.

Picking up on my earlier discussion of Eva Mackey’s work, official state multiculturalism serves to maintain the privilege of dominant groups as it “implicitly constructs the idea of a core English-Canadian culture,” and that other cultures become ‘multicultural’ in relation to that unmarked, yet dominant, Anglo-Canadian core culture” (2). Not only maintaining the dominance of mainstream culture, multiculturalism is central to the legitimating myths of Canadian national identity in allowing the dominant narrative of Canadian national identity to be righteously scripted around (greater) tolerance and progressiveness (than, for instance, the United States). This righteousness and sense of worldly moral virtue casts the nation as blameless in problems, both at home and abroad, caused by racial inequality and oppression, and allows its
agents to mobilize a narrative of victimhood when faced with such crises. Thus, she argues, Canada “appropriates the identity of marginalization and victimization to create national innocence, locating the oppressors safely outside the body politic of the nation” while at the same time managing difference through institutionalization (12).

Crucially, Mackey points out that “contrary to the common sense that circulates about national identity and cultural pluralism in Canada, national identity is not so much in a constant state of crisis, but that the reproduction of ‘crisis’ allows the nation to be a site of a constantly regulated politics of identity” (13). We must be attentive, then, to the mechanisms, policies and institutions by which the state “constantly intervenes in the production of identity and culture” (13).

In previous moments, this crisis has been answered in different ways. In chapter one, I related Mackey’s example of the Canada 125 celebrations which mobilized an idea of “ordinary Canadians” to displace and undermine multicultural claims to justice. The crisis was in one sense answered by the cultivation of a backlash against the perceived rule of “liberal values” that proclaimed the righteousness of conservative, ant-government populism (70). I would suggest that, in the post-9/11 context, militarization is the key means by which the perennial and politically productive crisis of Canadian identity is answered by both the state and many of its citizens. In these ads and elsewhere, military culture, and “support for the troops” is mobilized as something that
“brings Canadians together” and unites them across differences.

But while the soldiers represented in the new CF recruiting ads may be racially or ethnically diverse, all are united in the common project of the “new” Canadian militarism. Projected here as a basis for unity, militarism offers one powerfully compelling model of fraternity. Indeed, as a pedagogical force, the new Canadian militarism “exalts” (to borrow Thobani’s apt phrase) the figure of the soldier (along with their corollaries, the families and patriotic supporters of the troops) into model citizens through discourses of heroic service and sacrifice. This is the key objective of the new Canadian militarism: to leverage older legitimating myths into a national imaginary delineable along appropriately disciplined military themes.

As long as the basis of unity in the pursuit of military objectives (and by extension, in the (neo)liberal capitalist world view on which those objectives depend) remains unquestioned, there is ostensibly room for all in the multicultural mosaic. If, however, one stands outside that basis for unity, through objection to a government policy of intervention— or having government policy object to you— the pluralistic mosaic looks considerably more exclusive (as happened to Canada’s Arab and Muslim communities after 9/11, as Razack documents in Casting Out).

In this sense, “militarized multiculturalism” both relies on and contributes to a broader shift towards what Goldberg refers to as the logic of “colorblind neoliberalism” where, under the benevolent umbrella of the free market, we are
all equal and race no longer “matters” (“Raceless States”). As with Mackey’s assessment of the victimhood culture of the privileged, Goldberg demonstrates how the mere observation of racism is today seen as a disruptive affront to the orderly clockwork of the market/society. The political-economic narrative is no longer one that encourages assimilation into a multicultural mosaic but encourages people to be as different as they want on their own time, so long as it doesn’t interrupt the efficiency and security of their coworkers/fellow citizens. From this perspective, the military has been tremendously successful in conscripting diverse bodies to its extremely strict and efficient hierarchy. Ironically, given that the military is a public institution paid for by government funds and not as immediately oriented by market pressures, it has become the model organization for incorporating and taming multiculturalism. Holding up the military as the emblem of a new era of post-racial harmony both relies on and reinforces the idea that it represents the best the nation has to offer and should be looked to for guidance and inspiration as a model of civic inclusion.

The Harper government is, of course, eager for such an example. Their commitment to this new culture of colour-blind multiculturalism is perhaps best demonstrated by their controversial decision to render the traditional “long form” census “optional,” and thus incomplete and of little use to researchers, policy makers and advocates interested in race in Canada. The Harper government argued that, essentially, the state was not in the business of collecting “private” information from its citizens on a mandatory basis. Critics argued that this move
would eliminate access to reliable data, which would be particularly detrimental to social programs, in particular those that aim to correct systemic injustices (“Liberals Demand Meeting”). The destruction of a reliable archive of data—the only one of its kind—with the ability to demonstrate the informal features of Canada’s racial topography, such as economic segregation of neighbourhoods and schools, areas of potential employment discrimination, environmental racism, vital statistics regarding lifespan and illness, and reliable longitudinal data necessary to assess change over time, indicates how very much the neoliberal state has to gain in the privatization of race. While we might note that the reliability of such data depends upon the reliability and interests of the government or agency creating the archive, and the costs incurred versus benefits to be gained by minoritized communities from different kinds of racial profiling is by no means a clear arithmetic, it remains the case that the Harper regime has consistently tried to reduce data collection in areas it doesn’t want to know about, cutting funds to Status Of Women, the Canadian Law Commission, Sisters In Spirit, and human rights agencies (see Dobbin, Harper’s Hitlist). While government funding for multicultural arts and culture has fared slightly better, it has been made clear that the government is interested in multiculturalism as a “cultural” affair to the extent it poses no discomfort to the market, and makes no difficult demands on government.

The CF recruiting ads are likewise eager to show women as equal participants in the fight against chaos, fear and distress. Both women and men are
pictured as participating in both “helping” and combat operations. And as with multiculturalism, the military is held up as being singularly successful at providing opportunities for women to “earn” (rather than be given or fast-tracked to) success.

Zillah Eisenstein’s articulation of a mode of imperial, patriarchal capitalism that is not necessarily tied to gender, that can be performed by female bodies (like infamous Abu Ghraib torturer Lindy England’s) nearly as easily as male ones, helps to decode the “inclusion” of female bodies in the images of militarized multiculturalism presented here. She writes, “imperial democracy uses racial diversity and gender fluidity to disguise itself—and females and people of colour become its decoys” (Eisenstein 14.) For Eisenstein, the underlying logic of the military remains intact: it remains bound up in a history and present of imperialist, racist and misogynistic values and ultimately protects and empowers capitalist elites, rather than the populations they claim to be defending. Like Razack (Dark Threats) and Whitworth (Feminism and International Relations), Eisenstein argues that the racist and sexist acts of militaries are not the work of “a few bad apples” but the natural outcome of the military institution itself. But in a moment of supposed gender and racial equality, militaries no longer enforce a strict gendered and racial division of labour within their ranks. As Razack shows in her analysis of the racialized soldiers in the infamous Airborne Regiment, who were at the centre of the Somalia Affair, indigenous and black soldiers, though they suffered racism, were welcome within the unit so long as they too espoused
and shared the culture of racism, sexism and homophobia central to the *esprit de corps*. Eisenstein documents how women, too, are invited to participate in the military and often earn high ranks, so long as they perpetuate and inhabit a patriarchal and imperialist institution over which they, ultimately, have no control. Yet despite the fact that the institutions remain committed to patriarchy, imperialism and white-supremacy, the public face of militaries appears more diverse than many other institutions, in part thanks to its careful selection of gender and racial “decoys” that draw attention away from the sexist and racist actions and culture of the military as a whole (Eisenstein 68-92).

The messaging in these CF ads, then, suggests that you may be female in the armed forces, so long as you meet operational targets for effectiveness, so long as you maintain soldierly conduct, so long as you are able to keep your difference from becoming an issue. This showcases the achievement of an extremely limited if hard-won liberal-feminist goal, access to paid work in predominantly male professions, an achievement that contributes to a pervasive (false) sense that women have achieved equality with men within the current system. In Eisenstein’s words, this “partial assault on essentialism and a proof of the plasticity of gender” reduces the claims of feminists with a broader analysis and fundamentally different social vision to special interest pleading (10).

Yet the gains for women and people of colour within the Canadian military are themselves not without a history. After the Somalia inquiries, which included the exposure of racist hazing rituals and subcultures within the Canadian
military, committees were struck and diversity task forces created to improve the Canadian military’s internal diversity and sensitivity protocols. Though objectives were more immediately concerned with improving the public image of the military and increasing recruitment from targeted segments of Canadian society than they were with improving military culture, the outcomes of this process produced an institutional culture within the military that is officially committed to equality (see Pinch et. al., for example). These gains, according to a liberal model of civic inclusion in which equitable representation throughout social institutions is held to be key to the vibrancy of democracy, are not negligible.

Of course, liberal inclusion frameworks are limited in their ability to address structural and systemic power relations, within a singularly hierarchical institution such as the Canadian military and throughout social and political life. Especially in a moment of neoliberal crisis, in which corporate and government attacks on the remaining vestiges of the welfare state and on public servants and trade unions render the claims of liberalism less and less credible, critics from Goldberg to NourbeSe Philip have persuasively argued that multiculturalism cannot “end racism”. While the subtle diversity depicted in the new CF ads is an important marker of the Canadian military’s reflection of social ideals and of a relative level of civic inclusion, gender and ethnic diversity is also displayed as evidence that the era of policies to promote civic inclusion are “over,” that multiculturalism is now a fact rather than an ideal, at least within the military. The folding of multiculturalism into a military depicted as carrying on the noble work
it has always done once again assures audiences that the foundational myths of Canadian identity remain intact and indeed supreme: peace, order and good government.

The work that the ads do, then, is to unite the control of contested territory and imposed order with the (“decoy”) image of the warrior-prince-of-peace, newly promoted from peacekeeper to benevolent enforcer and, in so doing, to reassure a restive public that there is a role for Canada in the world, and that that role has changed and yet remains the same through the continuity of an altruistic tradition of patriotic sacrifice in the name of civilization.

This new wave of recruitment ads perilously reduces and oversimplifies the connotations of official multiculturalism from any concern with the actual inclusion of diverse groups throughout power and decision-making process to a hollowed and truncated question of mere representation. We are charged with asking, what kinds of pluralism are rendered possible when pluralism itself is understood as erected upon and answerable to a militarized foundation? In this way, we might think of the current model of military multiculturalism as being ‘multi-racial’ – and actually, uni-cultural, both in the sense of the military battalion as the laboratory for the assimilation of difference among its members, transforming individuals into homogenized soldiers (even while, in the case of the contemporary CF, celebrating that weak diversity) and in the looser sense of the uniformity of global corporate culture. The limits of tolerable difference in this case have been set to include skin colour, even gender, so long as uniformity of
values and beliefs prevails. Indeed, as Susan Searls Giroux observes in reference to the crisis of the university, but which holds true for the military as well, “the institutionalization of multicultural commitment is, with rare exceptions, an extension of, rather than a progressive alternative to the privatizing impetus of the neoliberal era” (26).

Undoubtedly, the primary target of these extremely professional and slick communications is as much public discourse as the potential recruit. In the United States, the expression “Vietnam syndrome” is used cynically in militarist circles to convey the “problem” of a civilian population who opposes costly and immoral (present and future) wars, thereby interfering in military objectives (Kellner, Media Culture, 64). In Canada, a comparable “Rwanda syndrome” or “Somalia syndrome” of decreased public morale, combined with vocal public opposition to the Afghan mission in particular, needed, from a government and military point of view, to be marshaled into accepting the “New Canadian Military” as a fact of life. These ads certainly helped to “prepare the ground” for the redefinition of Canada’s primary mode of military engagement in a way that rendered it more palatable.

While information is not available about who produced the ads, (a military team? Contracted out to a Canadian or American production studio?) we do know that they involved both highly-skilled creative workers with the talent and the budget to produce Hollywood-style action (not co-incidentally, the ads also ran as previews in Canadian movie theatres) and intensive audience reception research.
According to news reports, “Decima tested five scenarios for TV ads and three print ads with 10 focus groups across Canada…to determine which were most effective” (“Canadian Forces Ads combining Action”). The public reception of the ads has been mixed. Younger and male (target) audiences tend to respond positively to the sense of adventure and advanced technology (allaying policy makers’ fears about the perception of out-moded equipment), while older viewers expressed concerns the ads were “warmongering,” “militaristic” and did not reflect the peacekeeping attitude they expect from the Canadian military (“Canadian Forces Ads Zoom In”, “Canadian Forces Ads Combining Action”). NDP MP and Defense Critic Dawn Black called the ads “rambo-like” and the Canadian Islamic Congress reportedly expressed concerns about the “fighting” language and around a particular scene in which soldiers kick in an Afghan family’s door (“Canadian Forces Ads Combining Action”).

In terms of production values, these ads are uncharacteristically refined for Canadian television. Mobilizing the latest production techniques and aesthetic conventions of Hollywood war films, these ads appear almost unique in the Canadian media landscape, which, with a few exceptions, typically cannot afford such high-budget effects: the raw, grainy, hand-held camera effect, for instance, is actually very expensive to produce well. Within a neoliberal moment of cuts to Canadian arts and cinema, the new Canadian Forces ads, with their aesthetic and emotive polish, contrast with the widely held belief that Canadian televiusal content is a government charity case, unable to survive on the free market and
forever inferior to its American competition. The “quality” of the ads subtly reinforces the notion that Canadian identity is at its clearest and proudest when expressed by and for the military.

In addition, in 2006 when the ads first played, they showcased the “New Canadian Military” and its work to a public that was thirsting for information about the war. Readers will recall that the previous Chrétien administration had been eager to downplay Canada’s combat operations in favour of vague reassurances about the mission as a continuation of the nation’s peacekeeping traditions. This ad-campaign was government and military strategists’ intervention to popularize the war effort with youth and make war “cool” again. As I write, in 2011, information about the Canadian campaign in Afghanistan is much more readily available. There has been a proliferation of military “new media” ephemera: YouTube compilations (spliced footage from military and news sources set to music), international documentaries available online, blogs, facebook groups, and online tributes to soldiers. While anti-war activists, conscientious journalists and outraged citizens have made use of new technologies to share and reveal information that might otherwise have remained hidden or buried, many have complained that, amidst the relentless wash of information the revelatory power of new technology (from caustic Facebook commentary to the Wikileaks scandal) has done surprisingly little to quicken popular resistance to militarization. Indeed, it would seem that these new media sources have far and away been mobilized to articulate pro-soldiering and pro-war
“support the troops” positions, ranging from those that posit military sacrifice as heroic and all the more poignant in these conflicted and regrettable times, to those explicitly cultivating a chauvinistic, militarized, patriotic nationalism. Yet information management regarding the Canadian Forces’ operations in Afghanistan has been extremely tightly controlled through the use of embedded reporters and direct government/military media releases (see Taylor, *Unembedded*). Indeed, the pageantry accompanying the more recent casualties, complete with ramp ceremonies and soldiers’ families being brought to Afghanistan in order to make public declarations supporting the war and arguing that Canada needs to “stay and finish the job” so their loved ones “didn’t die in vain,” all seems tragically, transparently, designed specifically for the media (“Families of Fallen Soldiers”).

When the activities of any military are represented as strictly altruistic, it should be cause for alarm. That the activities of the Canadian military are represented altruistically, whether that altruism is expressed as ‘helping’ work or as actually blowing things up, is a feature of the complex kind of “New Canadian Exceptionalism” that I argue is here emerging, and which I elaborate in the conclusion of this project. The very language of peacekeeping and multiculturalism that so effectively fashioned Canadian national identity after the expiration of the language of loyalty to ‘the old U. E.’ has since been re-fashioned into the basis of a culture of national superiority in which Canada, enlightened and civil, creates a military role for itself as moral authority and enforcer and
arbiter of democracy. This new exceptionalism bears a resemblance to old-fashioned manifest destiny, in which the incivility of colonial violence and usurpation is legitimated in the name of a superior civility rooted in the British legal system. Now, however, the superior civility of Canadian liberal capitalist democracy becomes a useful rationale and key legitimation in the ongoing project of primitive accumulation around the globe.

**CBC Radio’s Afghanada**

Like the CF recruiting ads, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s serialized radio drama *Afghanada* both draws on key aspects of Canadian identity and transforms them as part of a shift towards militarization. In order to contextualize *Afghanada*, we need to first note the singular history of the CBC as a publically funded broadcaster and media institution. Following the recommendations of the Aird Commission in 1929, which advised the establishment of a national public broadcaster, the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission was established in 1932, and gained its present name in 1936. Much has been written on the CBC as a foundational cultural institution of Canadian nation-building that has held education to be a primary goal, particularly against the onslaught of private and profit-driven entertainment-based content south of the border (Edwardson). The CBC has been long revered as an authoritative voice on Canadian culture, free from the sullying influences of corporate media profit-
motives and sensationalism. Indeed, the CBC remains the authoritative voice of radio and television (and, arguably, online) news in Canada. With successive generations, the CBC has updated its sound and its image in attempts to captivate younger audiences who tend to continue to prefer (American) entertainment media.

At least since the Reform Party came to dominate politics in the West in the late 1980’s, criticism from the New Right has accused the CBC of being a liberal (and Liberal) propaganda machine, balking at what they perceive to be support for an “Eastern,” liberal arts and culture community with their tax-payer dollars (Morrison). After several waves of budget cuts from the 1990’s onward, the CBC’s ability to command investigative journalism, to produce features, even to seek alternative viewpoints and fact-check has been diminished (Edwardson). More recent criticism of the CBC, especially after their consistent failure to provide critical investigative journalistic coverage of the war in Afghanistan and to re-broadcast reports from dubious journalists “embedded” with the military, has led critics on the left to question the network’s credibility and political orientation (Winter). All this is to say, the CBC as a venerable institution and ideological battleground stills commands considerable cultural authority, making it a prime asset in an intensifying culture war, a precarious situation felt only too keenly by those still making a living there after successive waves of layoffs and cuts.

The increasingly corporatized climate of the public broadcaster, driven by
the need to demonstrate its worth to neoliberal policy makers, brings shows like *Afghanada* to the air. While the bulk of my critique will focus on the way the program reinforces what I am calling the “New Canadian Exceptionalism” and its neoliberal logic, it is important to note at the outset that *Afghanada* is not simply a straightforward propaganda piece authored by Conservative party ideologues. The production team, including writers Greg Nelson, Jason Sherman, Adam Pettle, and Andrew Moodie, and producers James Roy, Bev Cooper, and Gregory J. Sinclair, hail from cosmopolitan cities like Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and Ottawa, and most have attended such bastions of the liberal arts as York University (Roy, Sherman) and the acclaimed National Theatre School in Montreal (Pettle). Greg Nelson also writes for the controversial CBC TV show, *The Border*, a frenetic, if suitably morally ambiguous, dramatic portrayal of Canada’s border security police. In addition, this crew includes at least one vocal (Jewish) critic of the policies of the state of Israel, Jason Sherman, whose 1995 play “Reading Hebron” dealt with the psychological weight of the Hebron massacre and political responsibilities bearing on Jews in the diaspora—not a politically shy or naïve playwright. Another of the writers, Andrew Moodie, is known for his politically engaged theatre and his work promoting diversity in the arts. He articulates a pedagogical role for the arts in a review of his work:

> We now live in an age where political theatre can become a phenomena, a meme, through which the lines between artist and audience are blurred. I do not want to create a static piece of theatre that is observed, I want to
start a dialogue, a real, substantive dialogue, that can include citizens and policy makers. I don’t believe that theatre can change the world, but I believe that a play can create a conversation that resonates within a community, and that community can create change, if they choose to. If we choose to.

The personal histories of these cultural producers, then, attest to the fact that the relationship between political leadership at the national level, cultural movements, and individuals is here a complex one, not a case of conservative state propagandists invading the radio studios and television stations. That these artistic, creative producers possess liberal pedigrees encompassing some of the most important arts and culture venues in Canada, and yet still find their way into such militarizing cultural work is of interest here. We may wonder whether such people are cynically producing what the market and the times demand, or whether these immaterial labourers actually believe that Afghanada is the kind of cultural text with the ability to provoke “a real substantive dialogue” (Moodie). No doubt, there is tension within the writing, editing and production process, and writers and producers would point to the many places where their storylines implicitly question or critique the politics of the mission while at the same time celebrating the bravery, resilience and perseverance of Canadian soldiers who are, after all, “just following orders” given to them by politicians. This ostensibly critical, reflexive, ambivalent depiction, however, is in actual fact a prevailing mode of representation characteristic of the contemporary war-film genre and, as I shall
argue, of the militarization of Canadian culture more generally. Such representations normalize an idea of soldiers as \textit{a priori} virtuous, heroic, and “unpolitical,” even in their flawed humanity, while at the same time valorizing the military as an institution and enabling its encroachment into everyday life.

Currently in its sixth season, the description of the series provided by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s website provides a useful introduction to the discourse of the show:

Four Canadian soldiers ship out to Afghanistan. They are immediately sent deep into the heart of the conflict: Kandahar Province, where the Taliban insurgency is fiercest. \textit{Afghanada} gives us a grunts’-eye-view of the conflict. Every day, these Canadian soldiers on the ground confront the chaos and violence of life "outside the wire". They don’t have the big picture; they’re not interested in the policy. They’re just trying to help the people, protect each other...and survive.

\textit{Afghanada}’s sound is edgy and gritty, the impact immediate, pushing the listener into an auditory journey that is impossible to escape. It is a reflection of the very real situation Canadian soldiers are facing every day in Afghanistan.

The award winning series, now in its (sic) third season, has garnered critical and public praise and is proving hugely popular with listeners\textsuperscript{12}. This introductory blub has recently been updated:

Afghanada gives us a grunts-eye perspective of the war in Afghanistan.
Bravo is a Canadian Forces light infantry section fighting with NATO forces deep in the heart of the conflict. Every day, Sgt. Pat Kinsella (Jenny Young), Private Dean Donaldson (Paul Fauteux) and Private Lucas Manson (Billy Maclellan), confront the chaos and violence of life "outside the wire."

*Based on actual events on the ground in Kandahar,* each week's episode takes the listener on an intense and compelling auditory journey, *an unadorned reflection of the very real life and death situations Canadian soldiers face every day* in Afghanistan (italics mine).

Afghanada's claims to offer a “realistic” vision of the conflict in 30-minute episodes is emphasized by its production techniques. Free of both theme-song and musical soundtrack, except for some very understated yet somber and menacing synthesized orchestral string music played over the show’s introduction and credits, the show’s austere audio climate in many ways echoes the grim intensity of the Canadian Forces Recruiting Ads mentioned above. Indeed, each episode is introduced by a severe male announcer who advises listeners that the program is based on the real-life experiences of Canadian Forces personnel serving in Afghanistan and who warns of disturbing content and harsh language to come. Once the audience is thus prepared, the narrative advances through journal-like monologues by main characters, punctuated by dramatic dialogues between characters. Voice actors portray a variety of regional Canadian accents, though most of the voices sound tired and embittered as they relate their battlefield
experiences in the present tense. The accompanying soundtrack is minimalist, typically just indicating the location of the scene - in the mess hall (plates clattering), on the highway looking out for improvised explosive devices (the hum of engines), or in an Afghan village or school (incomprehensible foreign nattering). In almost every episode there is an obligatory climactic firefight featuring a cacophony of gunshots and shouting, vividly portraying the noise, chaos and camaraderie of combat. In terms of narrative intensity and production values, the sum result is a unique radio production, unlike any other program on Canadian airwaves, even the CBC’s other (more formal) radio dramas. There is an air of ritual surrounding the broadcasts of *Afghanada*, which, as the only current serialized radio play and certainly the longest-running, keeps listeners tuning in week after week.

In a sense, the actual content of the show, which draws on the established clichés of “the war story” in fiction and film, is less innovative than its context. The experience of war has long been represented as a national bildungsroman, a crucible in which multicultural, regional characters allegorically represent the diversity of a nation, and the fraternity and common experience of suffering and sacrifice on the battlefield forge a new, unified identity out of those diverse parts and turns boys into men. *Afghanada*’s uniqueness is that it is Canadian, about Canadians, doing something traditionally thought of as “important.” It effectively claims a degree of verisimilitude to the war that we have reason to find highly problematic.
If narratives of exalted Canadian heroes who are just trying to “help the people” by imposing their will at gunpoint were in any context unobjectionable, in this context the drama fictionally reflects and interprets real events, temporally keeping pace with news headlines on a week-by-week basis for audiences thirsting for information and for moral assurances. Producers claim, as mentioned above, that their scripts are “based on actual events on the ground in Kandahar,” providing “an unadorned reflection of the very real life and death situations Canadian soldiers face every day”. Thus, Afghanada the series becomes a kind of pedagogical truth-claim about the nature of the war: what it is like, what it is about, what is important about it. It teaches listeners that in war, the most true and most important perspective, perhaps the only perspective that can be relied upon, is that of the soldier, who is by all accounts “not interested in the policy” and who “doesn’t have the big picture”. This confluence between the real news and the editorial, the real events of the war and the fictionalization of those events which attribute pure and altruistic motives, if not to those in charge, than to those executing the war, demonstrates the way even ostensibly “liberal” cultural production still draws on and reinforces the militarized tropes of the “New Canadian Exceptionalism,” despite and in fact because of its embrace of (as I argue, an already militarized) ambiguity and ambivalence.

_Afghanada_ follows the lives of Sgt. Pat Kinsella, Private Dean Donaldson, and Private Lucas Manson of 3-1 Bravo light infantry section through eighty-four episodes (at the time of this analysis), so I will offer a strategic and focused
analysis here. First, it is important to note something about the form and medium of *Afghanada*. The narrative advances largely through first-person past- and present-tense monologues of its main characters, interspersed with segments of dialogue between characters. Certain scenes are vividly dramatized, including the sounds of firefights (gunshots, screams, heavy breathing) and most scenes are complimented by topical soundscape (the hubbub of the mess hall, the sound of wind, the rumble of the Armoured Personnel Carrier, or the distant play of Afghan voices). Despite these auditory supplements, the focus of the 30-minute drama is the confessional voice of the week’s narrator who shares his or her experiences, impressions and intimate feelings with the audience. *Afghanada* appears at a time when the CBC has dropped most of its radio drama programming, so the program’s intense and highly-produced auditory landscape interrupts the typical stream of news and current affairs, airing just before the noon hour on Thursdays and repeated again later that night.

The main characters combine key stock characters from the war-fiction genre with archetypes of moral Canadianess. These “good” moral characters are shown in order to legitimate their (our) involvement in the war, while at the same time revealing that very “goodness” (specifically the ghost of peacekeeping past) to be insufficient to the task at hand. Sgt. Pat Kinsella is an accomplished on-the-ground leader who cares about her men, who has to make the “hard decisions,” and who, privately, routinely doubts her own leadership capacity and her role in the mission when plans go awry. This doubting and questioning invites the
audience to active participation with the text, to engage in speculating and
debating what they themselves would do in her position. As what Eisenstein
would call a “gender decoy,” Kinsella’s leadership position and personal authority
attracts the audience’s attention as transgressive or liberatory, especially when
contrasted to the patriarchal oppression of Afghan women that attracted so little
attention prior to 9/11 and so much attention afterward. While in Canadian
society, merely being a woman in a position of power and authority does not
typically qualify as “resistance” any longer, this trope of female leadership in a
man’s world and its personal costs, so titillating to audiences of the post-war
generation, is rehearsed here in the most masculine of military professions, the
infantry.

In contrast to the good hearted but firm Sergeant, there is Master Corporal
Jakes, described in the show as having a “cucumber-up-his-butt”, who
emblemizes the by-the-book junior leadership and the dedication to following
the rules and bureaucratic encumbrance that is the new hallmark of military
incompetence. Jakes, as a minor antagonist in relation to other characters,
suggests the effeminate attachment to antiquated rules and codes (like human
rights and the Geneva convention) that other, more seasoned soldiers chafe
against, though this is ambient rather than explicit. It is also contested elsewhere
in the text by the alignment of all of our Canadian troops with human rights and
the rule of law against both the Taliban and the almost equally brutal and
uncivilized Afghan National Army.
“Hannah the Healer” is a medic whose humanitarian principles and devotion to helping Afghan civilians come into conflict with her duties as a soldier. Hannah’s idealism jeopardizes military objectives, carrying one thread in this tapestry of moral ambiguities. Though a more minor character, Hannah carries a major tendency in the justification of the war at home, particularly selling the war to women: that medical treatment is made available to civilians and even to the enemy is the go-to position for defending the intervention itself and for defending the project of Canadian civility. Never mind that according to international law, medics are obligated to treat all wounded, Canadians love to portray the delivery of superior technology and humanitarian services as exceptional, and as an outgrowth of Canadian moral character. In fact, the medical treatment of “enemy combatants” (not prisoners of war, who are less-ambiguously entitled to legal protections) has long served as a justification of imperial and neo-colonial missions and as a distraction from the causes and politics of war (MacLeod and Lewis).

Indeed, Donna Palmateer Pennee, has provocatively charged us with considering what literary analysis can gain from attending to “the comparative study of state policy and on the ground cultural and critical practices” (93), as, she argues, “policy offers a space different from the literary, but one that nevertheless also seeks to articulate “culture” with “the world” (84). Regarding the trope of Canadian “helping,” she writes,

Canada’s readability as a colony and as a post-colony depends on
its being in a progressive relation to the chronology of modernity, a chronology that sutures cultural expression and cultural projection to operations of development, independence, and “mature” relations with other nation-states in the world. Thus, it is not an accident that the policy and pedagogical need for a story of Canada’s maturity of cultural expression coincides with Canada’s maturity as a state expressed in the country’s role in two “world” wars. The engine of cultural legitimacy for Canada as a colony was (and still is) fuelled by external recognition of Canada’s legitimacy as an independent state capable of contributing to the restoration and maintenance of world security” (87).

Development aid and “helping” other countries becomes a key sign of this maturity, which in turn “facilitates Canada’s self-identification between centre and periphery in external affairs, as well as… minimizing modernity’s inequities within the domestic sphere” (91).

Afghanada’s dramatic tension revolves around the moral ambiguities and tensions faced by its characters as they grapple with the difficulties of carrying out their “helping” objectives and personal impulses. In the very first episode, for instance, the soldiers leave Kandahar with their translator to deliver supplies to a local school and establish contact with the village, but they are interrupted by Taliban who steal the school supplies. There are basically three episode models. In the “surprise firefight” model, Canadian soldiers are “just doing their job,” whether that job is clearing a village of suspect Taliban or delivering aid or
security, and – surprise!-- a firefight breaks out with the sneaky and concealed enemy that leaves our protagonists fighting for their lives. The “just being soldiers” model showcases the everyday lives of soldiers and their tensions, relationships, rivalries, and the trials of soldiery, such as physical and psychological wounds, relationship break-downs with spouses, and the difficulties of relating and re-integrating to civil life “back home”. In the “you can’t save them all” episode model, one or another of our characters develops an attachment to an Afghan civilian, a school, a project, an injured child, and faces difficult decisions to act in an unauthorized way, implicitly or explicitly against orders, to try and help. These noble intentions have unforeseen consequences (that continue to be unforeseen five years into the show) such as drawing the wrath of the Taliban on the very people they are trying to “save” and inflaming inscrutable ancient tribal rivalries. In each, however, the heroic intentions of the Canadian soldiers are thwarted by forces beyond their comprehension or control that ultimately serve to depict Afghanistan as the new “heart of darkness” and the antithesis of Canada.

Key themes include tensions between the Canadians and the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP), who are portrayed as vengeful and corrupt (the foil to “our” rule of law) and whom they neither like nor trust. Episodes that see Kinsella pondering whether torture is ever justified aired just after the prisoner-torture scandal made airwaves in Canada in 2008. Torture is posited here as the vengeful desire of the ANA rooted in atavistic tribalism, and in
episode 50 the ANA abandons—or perhaps betrays—the Canadian unit. Likewise, the fraught collaborations between Canadians and other locals, chiefly former warlords who now occupy legitimate positions of power, women who work in the “good” schools (enlightening civil education counterposed to the “bad” pedagogy of “Madrassa training camps”) and translators in their employ. Where one translator was found to be traitorous and cowardly, another, Nazim, is portrayed as a “modern” and “bright young man” who speaks three languages, has a blog, and is universally popular with the Canadians. The Canadians therefore expend much effort trying to move him to a safer position after he is recognized by one of their prisoners, but to no avail when retribution strikes Nazim’s sister’s school.

The pervasive emphasis on attempting to deliver extremely limited medical care and secure education for a savage population incapable of gratitude replicates the national discourse about soldier-heroes, the mission, and why the mission is proceeding with less success than the military would like. For example, Prime Minister Stephen Harper characteristically announces more money for health and education-related aid with sentiments that extol the virtues of the mission: “From the very first day of the Afghan mission the men and women of the Canadian Forces and civilian officials, have served courageously and selflessly to help the people of Afghanistan build a better future” (“Prime Minister Stephen Harper”; see also Gordon 358-361). Public healthcare and education are two of the most revered institutions of Canadian civility, so their
prominence here is no coincidence. Indeed, Canadian Press correspondent Murray Brewster points out in his book, *Savage Wars*, that although actual Afghan priorities for development were identified as jobs, electricity, and security, the construction of schools and clinics were prioritized because they were more palatable projects in Canada (248). As the war draws to a close (no one speaks of “winning”) the “helping” rhetoric that has worn a rut in Canadian discourse about the war characterizes Afghans as incapable of accepting our civilizing gifts, and instead insist on being backward and savage despite our best efforts to “fast-forward” them into modernity.

The sense of futility that soldiers must combat is also featured. For instance, in episode 60-61, our protagonists revisit a school built by a Canadian reconstruction team a year previous, only to find it in ruins, the caretaker hanging from a tree and the school-marm fearing for her life. Kinsella of course tries to find her a way out of the country. The pattern that emerges is the containment of the broader moral question of the war itself by the focus on the soldier’s minor—and costly—gesture of humanity in inhuman circumstances.

In mirroring the actual events of the war, *Afghanada* provides a crucial pedagogical service for the mission by humanizing the soldiers and framing the question as one of individual choice and moral decisions. In episode 62-63, for instance, a Taliban sniper has been fatally wounded and begs for a Canadian soldier to deliver death. What follows is ambiguous, two shots are heard, but what actually happened is left to the imagination of other characters. This sequence
plays out for an eager public a fictionalized version of the high-profile case of Capt. Robert Semrau, a major event in the Canadian press. On October 19, 2008, while on patrol in the volatile Helmand Province along with a company of ANA soldiers who were being mentored, Semrau and his troop came across a mortally wounded insurgent. While the ANA officer suggested leaving the dying man, Semrau took it upon himself to conduct what he called a “mercy kill.” Initially court marshaled for charges of second degree murder, he was eventually found guilty of “disgraceful conduct,” demoted and dismissed from the Canadian Forces in October of 2010 but not before attracting a huge amount of sympathy from the Canadian public and fellow military service people (Friscolanti). The telling of this story, both in Afghanada and in real life, drew scorn and ridicule upon those who would uphold the macerated rules of engagement, and mobilized sympathy for the soldier who, allegedly, was moved by compassion to “do the right thing” even though it was against the rules (see Warington).

The valourization of the “realistic” and “warts-and-all” soldier permeates even more recent episodes that introduce the possibility of defeat, like episode 74, that does so gingerly, making sure the word “defeat” is never mentioned. Rather, the failure to achieve objectives is due to unreliable information generated by the army brass against the superior knowledge and skill of our “grunts” on the ground. The idea that soldiers with “boots on the ground” know better or are inspired by truer information and virtues than the military or civilian bureaucracy is a theme that resonates with the populist, anti-government conservatism Mackey
associates with the construction of “ordinary Canadians” and which I have linked to the presentation of soldiers above. The struggle of army grunts against inept officers and craven politicos has a long and storied history, both in Canada and elsewhere, and certainly a noble career in American culture (see, for instance, my analysis of the struggles of the John Wayne character in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, in Chapter One). Rather than a criticism of the precepts of war, however, the deployment of this theme today does a different cultural work, serving the ends of neoliberal militarization by contributing to the distrust of “big government” and valourizing the militarized individual as the locus of decisive and even humanitarian action. That is, bumbling bureaucrats are no longer enough to critique war itself, but a familiarized feature of its landscape.

In framing the major questions of the war as questions of moral character and individual, privatized decision-making, *Afghanada* expels politics from public discourse in favour of this neoliberal, privatized and individualized as well as voyeuristic speculation. It posits Canadian civility as a balm that cannot salve savage Afghanistan and the people who live there, who are not just in need of civilizing but beyond its capabilities, the heart of darkness in which civility is an impossible goal without sacrificing the civility of our soldier-selves.

What makes *Afghanada* “work” is its production of ambivalence. It is a challenging text to grapple with because the writers and producers have, in many ways, anticipated and sought to pre-empt criticism: both criticism from the left and from the right. But this is what makes it such an excellent and telling
example of the culture of contemporary Canadian militarization and what I am calling the New Canadian Exceptionalism. The drama invites Canadian audiences into a self-affirming space of ambivalence, self-questioning and moral doubt, but does so in a way which attributes these values to the Canadian military itself, and so justifies and supports that military in an extremely effective way. The result is a containing and even depoliticizing rather than generative ambivalence that offers the public the sensation of having made a moral and political contribution to the (largely occluded) debate about the war, while having actually done nothing of the sort.

As noted earlier, while the CBC remains a formally independent and autonomous crown corporation, the Conservative Party’s open distrust and antipathy of the public broadcaster (and the more regretful budgetary neglect by previous Liberal administrations) has forced the network to often over-conspicuously prove itself relevant to contemporary audiences (Morrison). This new imperative to populism coexists with an older prerogative to provide content that would encourage national cohesion and moral and intellectual uplift.

_Afghanada_ can be read as the product of this very tension. On the one hand, it is a showpiece to convince federal policy-makers that the network is committed to populist programming that stresses “the issues Canadians care about.”

On the other hand, its carefully crafted mood of moral ambivalence maintains and extends the legacy of a public broadcaster committed to providing intelligent, “middle brow” programming. _Afghanada’s_ (ostensibly) critical and conflicted
look at the Afghan mission in some ways invites audiences into a community of consumers that implicitly defines itself against an imagined media landscape saturated by unapologetically jingoistic militarism on one hand, a dismissive anti-military skepticism on the other, and vast public ignorance or apathy taking care of the rest. By inviting its audience into a fictitious ideological “middle,” *Afghanada*, and by extension the CBC, offer themselves as resources for the cultivation of a particular sort of Canadian subject that believes itself to be outside of or savvy to the ideological question of the war’s legitimacy and politics. But I would argue that *Afghanada* and its careful staging of ambivalence and moral confusion is in many ways the face of Canadian cultural militarization. The problem is that the “middle ground” that is cultivated in and through *Afghanada* does not actually map onto the political spectrum: the militarization of Canadian society and culture, I am arguing, is advancing not merely through bombastic war-like chauvinism, but through a much more subtle mobilization of liberal tropes of responsibility, regret, duty and disenchantment. In effect, like the ambiguity of the Yellow Ribbons, the position of ambivalence offered by *Afghanada* is already within the scope of Canadian militarization.

Conventions that explain Afghanistan and the conflict in familiar terms may help to assuage audience anxiety and moral qualms about Canada’s participation in the mission. Its well-worn stereotypes of conflicted local commanders, impossibly benevolent agendas, untrustworthy native informants, bungling bureaucrats and hostile terrain are familiar indeed. Almost all of these
appear in almost every classic and contemporary war film, from *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* to *Black Hawk Down*. So how is it that Canadian military intervention in the twenty-first century is made to make sense, and is made sense of, according to this kind of antiquated, high-imperial racial narrative that, it seems, has persisted beyond (or is being re-called from) its time, and in this particular national cultural unconscious?

Razack’s *Dark Threats, White Knights* de-codes the racial, imperial logic that suffused Canadian peacekeeping in the 1990’s in the wake of the Somalia Inquiry. In contrast to Canada’s preferred narrative of Peacekeeping as a universal act of humanistic care that knows no borders, Razack argues that peacekeeping must be understood to fundamentally be ‘about’ race, and the violence of peacekeepers largely “erased and de-raced” (7). Peacekeeping, she argues, is premised on an imperial logic in which power over others and the making of the self cannot be separated. While on one level, participants in peacekeeping, as well as the general public, have understood Peacekeeping missions as noble and sober non-interventionist attempts to “keep the peace,” soldiers simultaneously understand peacekeeping in the framework of “civilizing missions” in which their role is to ‘teach the natives a lesson’ through means that have routinely included rape, torture, and humiliation. The serialized banality, the everydayness of such violence, she argues, repeats colonial patterns of violence, and supports underlying dynamics of white and Western supremacism, colonialism, and misogyny in which peacekeeping missions become a “proving ground for national
manhood” (61; see also Must Boys be Boys?). Further, when tales of the atrocities of so-called peacekeepers against men, women and children can no longer be ignored, as in the case of the Canadian Airborne Regiment, the discourse deployed in popular media accounts has relied on familiar rationalizations about a “few bad apples” who momentarily “lost control” amidst the supposed “heart of darkness” and thus failed the nation. Further, in the moral universe of imperialism, the supposedly innocent and benevolent nation (Canada) becomes the “real victim” of the soldiers’ crimes, which neatly erases the nation’s own brutally violent colonial heritage by decrying the violation of national “innocence.” Indeed, not incidentally, one of the chief metaphors used by Canadian soldiers in Somalia likened Somalia to “the wild west” or “Indian country”.

The Somalia scandal was inflamed when videos were released revealing the Airborne Regiment’s brutal hazing rituals, including racialized recruits being forced to perform humiliating stunts for their superiors. Several members of the Regiment were also discovered to be avowed white supremacists. In response, the Canadian Military (grudgingly) disbanded the Regiment and implemented a variety of “anti-discrimination” initiatives both within the organization of the Canadian Forces and in the training of officers and personnel, in order to seemingly “realign” the military with what were understood to be “Canadian Values” of diversity and multiculturalism (Dark Threats 135-151). But Razack argues that real decolonization, not merely deploying soldiers of colour, or “racial
sensitivity training” which is generally resisted and resented, is needed, as “any peacekeepers who go on their missions imbued with the sense of a civilizing mission will soon find themselves knee-deep in colonial fantasies, and will soon resort to the violence that convinces colonizers that they are whole” (164).

As the Harper government has not tired of explaining, the Canadian mission in Afghanistan is not a peacekeeping mission, but an (insufficiently-legitimated) military intervention organized by NATO with the belated blessing of the United Nations. Rhetoric has shifted through fear mongering tactics that extend the terrorist threat to Canada, in speeches like this one to rally flagging Australian support: “The buildings may have been American, but the targets were every one of us: Every country and every person who chooses tolerance over hatred, pluralism over extremism, democracy over tyranny” (MacCharles). In this new terror-stricken climate the *mere memory* of peacekeeping (increasingly distant) serves to provide soldiers with a justification for any action they deem necessary. Against the “few bad apples” narrative that was proffered by spokesmen and pundits to explain peacekeepers’ violence in Somalia, the Canadian public has come to accept a “no bad apples” narrative regarding the present mission: Canadian soldiers have become infallible and heroic, and yet at the same time may very well be involved in acts Canadians profess to find morally reprehensible, such as knowingly handing over prisoners to Afghan authorities who would almost certainly torture them (Ling).

Another example of this “no bad apples” premise is the community
response to the accusations of serial rape and murder against Russell Williams, the commander of CFB Trenton, one of the largest military bases in Canada. The initial community response was to host a rally, not for his female victims, but in support of the troops, refusing to consider Williams’ position of power and authority in his military career as related to his crimes. Indeed, the efforts of patriotic troop-supporters from above and below ensured that anyone who posited a connection between militarism and violence against women be met with the utmost hostility and disdain (“Forces In Shock”; Menzies). Indeed, the mere thought that anti-military sentiment might arise from the scandal provoked Chief of Defence Staff Walter Natynczyk and three area mayors to visit the base and surrounding community in a highly publicized tour (“Anti-military backlash feared”). Indeed, like the Somalia Affair, the dominant media rhetoric surrounding this case implied that the rank-and-file military were the true victims of Williams’ heinous crimes and that they had, in the words of Stephen Harper, “been betrayed” and suffered a terrible blow to the cohesion of their community (“Williams to lose medals, pay”). Williams later pled guilty and was convicted and sentenced to two counts of first-degree murder, two counts of forcible confinement, two counts of breaking and entering, two counts of sexual assault, and eighty-two other charges. It is not coincidental that the fervour to extirpate all remaining proofs of Williams’ celebrated and successful military career has resulted in the military taking the unprecedented step of destroying his uniform by fire, along with the similar destruction of his other clothing, SUV and military
medals, and the hundreds of items of neatly catalogued underwear he stole from his victims (women and girls as young as nine) by fire, crushing, and cutting into tiny pieces (“Russell Williams Links With Forces Being Cut”).

These narratives of the military and the nation as victims of an unscrupulous leader reinforce the pedagogical effect of Afghanada: to assure the audience that regret, ambiguity, ambivalence and, ultimately, sympathy with soldiers is the most humane and thoughtful approach to the war. Presented with evidence of the barbarism of our “enemy” and the quandary of soldiers “just trying to do the right thing,” we are invited to feel at once like we have a grasp on the “complexities” of the conflict and at the same time like we lack moral clarity ourselves. By occluding the overall politics of the war, and its place in contemporary geopolitics, we are left with the impression that, while we (both the soldiers and “ordinary Canadians”) would like to be noble peacekeepers, the world has failed us, that it is our good intentions that have been betrayed and taken for granted. In this way, Afghanada advances militarization by normalizing and contextualizing the war by reference to yesterday’s national ideals deemed no longer sufficient for the present world.

There is a leap in logic I am attempting to describe here, in which cultural producers like the makers of Afghanada understand themselves as contributing to a debate, rather than driving forward a militarizing agenda, by providing what they understand to be “realistic” or “nuanced” or “ambivalent” depictions of the Canadian military to the public sphere they imagine to exist. But this content
naturalizes militarism, even as it expresses-- in order to contain-- moral qualms about the war. That is, cultural productions like *Afghanada* normalize an idea that war is inevitable and that the appropriate moral stance is one of concern, ambivalence and regret, rather than active opposition. More broadly, the debate in which the program’s creators believe their work to be intervening has already been purposefully circumvented in mainstream media channels. In the absence of media that pay substantive attention to anti-war voices, the production of ambivalence, concern, and equivocation has come to stand in for the (practically non-existent) pole of public debate which opposes militarization, but it does not in fact do so. As it turns out, there is practically nothing about *Afghanada* that challenges the militarist agenda. Yet in order for *Afghanada* to work, it invites us to imagine a public sphere in which it occupies some sort of enlightened, reasonable middle ground. In reality, this public sphere has already been compromised and rendered all but defunct, in part because of the same media institutions that continue to uncritically celebrate (and fund, and produce) “contributions” like *Afghanada* (Nichols and McChesney 37-87, Winter179-225).

**Passchendaele**

A Paul Gross production, starring, written and directed by, and music written by Paul Gross, the 2008 film *Passchendaele* re-tells a portion of Canada’s involvement in the First World War through the major battle of Passchendaele, or
the Third Battle of Ypres. The film sets out to reclaim from the dustbin of history a moment of great Canadian military accomplishment and sacrifice through the narratives of one Calgary family: Paul Gross’s character, Sgt. Michael Dunne, who has been sent home from the war on account of neurasthenia or “shell shock,” his love interest, Sarah, and Sarah’s younger brother, the asthmatic David. Sarah and David are orphaned second-generation Bavarian immigrants, whose father left Canada to fight for the German side and was killed early in the war, establishing both militarism and multiculturalism as areas in which the film intervenes.

*Passchendaele* boasts awkward and elaborate plot contrivances, negligible character development, anachronistic dialogue, and a singular fascination with Paul Gross. The film’s quirky timing and gross over-simplification of complex history is characteristic of pastoral melodrama and farce. It is, in short, “bad.” In the words of *Guardian* film reviewer Andrew Pulver, “Director-star Paul Gross may have noble intentions, but his film is plodding, to put it kindly: filled with over-scrubbed sets, glutinous tinkling music, and desperately pedestrian dialogue exchanges… there's a Ferrero-Rocher style stiffness about pretty much everything; when they get down to the fighting, there's an impressive amount of blood, guts and mud - but little of the visceral impact that Gross is clearly striving for.”

And yet, the film won top honours at the Genie Awards from the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television, including Best Motion Picture, The Golden
Reel (top grossing), Best Achievement in Art Direction/Production Design, Best Achievement in Costume Design, Best Achievement in Overall Sound, Best Achievement in Sound Editing, and Best Picture (and was nominated for Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role), as well as a Governor General’s National Arts Centre Award for Exceptional Achievement over the Past Performance Year, an NBC-Universal Canada Award of Distinction, a Directors Guild of Canada Team Feature Film award, and the National History Society’s Pierre Berton Award. Adjudicators, we may surmise, understood that the subject matter and unprecedented budget of this film required patriotic accolades, even if the merits of the film itself were, at best, questionable.

The most expensive Canadian film of all time, with a budget estimated at 20 million dollars, *Passchendaele* appeared to buck the trend of Canadian cinema which, overwhelmed by big-budget blockbusters from south of the border, have tended to make do with small budgets and embrace more mature, multicultural and experimental themes and techniques, at the expense of being effectively excluded from the majority of block-buster-revenue-seeking Canadian movie theatres. Successive waves of cutbacks to independent Canadian film-making, combined with a gradual erosion of the nation’s ability to “protect” its English-language film sector from foreign (American) competition due to free trade and “globalization,” have led to a situation where a film like *Passchendaele* is singular in both its robust budget and its embrace of the cinematic and narrative (high-melodramatic) conventions of mainstream Hollywood. Paul Gross’s self-
conscious strategy of adapting the popular American film formula to Canadian themes (and funding protocols) had previously proved successful with films like *Men With Brooms* (2002).¹⁴

Indeed, *Passchendaele* not only bucked the trend of declining arts funding in Canada, it pioneered a new, neoliberal “option” in cultural financing. The film received “a surprising $5.5-million kick-start from former Alberta premier Ralph Klein during Alberta's 2005 centennial celebrations, stunning the province's film community long accustomed to applying for limited film grants through the province's bureaucracy” (Burroughs). Evidently, *Passchendaele*’s rewriting of Canada’s “coming of age” satisfied the tastes of the longest-sitting and most conservative provincial government in Canada, whose “Minister of Culture and Community Spirit” was to shock the Canadian arts world in 2009 by publically declaring the bulk of its efforts “shit” and “crap” (“Alberta Minister Urged to Quit”). Not to be outdone, the film received an additional $3.5 million from the federal government (Burroughs).

The remaining $11 million, more than half of the movie's budget, was “acquired through private donators, investors and corporate sponsorship” and was hailed in the press as “a new way of doing business in Canadian film,” attributed to Paul Gross’s “innate Albertan ingenuity” in “going outside standard guidelines for funding” (Burroughs). Like in the case of the CF recruitment ads discussed above, this speaks to the economics of cultural production in an age of neoliberal austerity: arts funding (deemed “subsidies”) distributed through established
boards and processes has been drastically cut, most immediately by $45 million, with Prime Minister Stephen Harper notably pronouncing that Canadians don’t want to see their tax dollars wasted on arts galas (“Ordinary Folks Don’t care About Arts”; “Stephen Harper Skewers Arts Gala”). This kind of vilification of the arts and the assumed artistic community of left-wing intellectuals and homosexuals, promotes a “culture war” mentality at the same time as it obscures the ability of “patriotically correct” (in John Wilson’s phrase) militarism to command as much public and private funding as could be desired. The popular discourse Passchendaele generated figured the film as real art belonging to real “ordinary Canadians” (in Mackey’s sense) and the proper subject for government arts funding and national celebration, against a notion of artistic endeavour as the especial preserve of a minority and suspect artistic, intellectual, urban class.

For example, in a feature article in Maclean’s magazine, “The Making of Passchendaele,” Brian D. Johnson argues

Canadian cinema is virtually devoid of war movies. That's partly because they're costly to make. But it's also because Canadians are nervous about the very notion of war heroes. "We seem constitutionally indisposed to mythologizing," says Gross. "And there remains this terrible post-Vietnam fashion, where to teach military history is conflated with being militarist."

The First World War is especially neglected, he adds. "We come out of this horrible crucible of the Western Front, yet most of us don't even know about it."
I offer this brief excerpt here because it is characteristic of the film’s “buzz”, that claims Canadians are, in Gross’s words, “constitutionally indisposed to mythologizing,” and in the same breath uses that very mythology of humility to fuel indignation at the neglect of Canadian war history – an indignation which ought not, it is argued, be considered militarist. Johnson’s unqualified celebration concludes with the admonishment “as Gross struggles to drag his national heritage out of the mud, the valour of the character and of the filmmaker become synonymous” (B. Johnson). Thus, we see the “salvaging” of dominant national heritage from the “mud” (what or who comprises this oppositional “mud” is here inferred but unspecified) become a task worthy of exaltation, and Gross himself attributed militarist “valour” and other accolades for his cultural work. That Johnson uses this “mud” metaphor as shorthand for the perils of politically correct, multiculturalist and gender-inclusive practices in culture and education, a shorthand that is taken-for-granted, that doesn’t require justification, quite aptly demonstrates the power of the conservative logic at work, that pits effeminate “special interest groups” and their derided cultural clutter against Great Men Doing Important Things. Special interest groups, feminists, and progressives become the “mud” under the soldier’s boots, both ground under foot, and at the same time an enemy of “our troops” that gets in the way of (and maybe sabotages) their fighting.

Canadian Forces personnel were employed as extras in the film, including current Brigadier General Gregory Gillespie as Lieutenant General Arthur Currie,
and their role was widely celebrated, adding another layer of cachet and military authenticity. Gross, however, distances himself from “political” questions about the current war, claiming repeatedly that there is no intended comment on the current war in Afghanistan. He characteristically falls back into a safe, defensive position on the support of troops and honouring their sacrifices, in order to advance again on the ground gained through this ostensible neutrality toward the imperative for greater military appreciation. When asked about troops on the set, Gross recounts this story:

When I was at the premiere in Ottawa, Lt.-Gen. Andrew Leslie, the chief of land staff, who I have come to know fairly well over the years, pulled me over and said, ‘I just want you to know that some of the boys in your show are currently in a firefight in Afghanistan.’ When they were with us on the set they could just slide away into make-believe, but having real soldiers there really grounded everyone involved with it.

According to Gross, having the soldiers participate in the film, and by extension, the film itself, “made it extremely clear that there is a direct line from the men and women in the sands of Afghanistan today that goes all the way back to the Korean War and the two world wars, in that we as a nation are still asking our fellow citizens to go out and die for a cause we have agreed upon” (Caddell). This statement draws an uninterrupted lineage that homogenizes very different moments in the life of the Canadian military, and displaces responsibility for the controversial mission in Afghanistan from particular governments and individual
politicians onto “we as a nation”. The majority of this dubiously constructed “we,” however, did not agree upon this cause, and demonstrated in our millions. As noted elsewhere, a slim majority of public opinion has maintained opposition to the war since it began, but even supposing public support reached 51%, this would remain a sign of a deep division in the population, rather than an adequate criterion upon which to devote Canadian lives and resources to war-making\textsuperscript{15}.

To turn our attention to the film itself, \textit{Passchendaele} opens with the following caption sequence to acclimatize us to the situation:

\begin{quote}
\textit{In 1917 Canada was a young nation of less than eight million people. The First World War had been raging for three years and Canadian troops were mired in combat. As the war claimed unprecedented numbers of men, recruitment efforts at home accelerated. Over 600,000 Canadians entered the inferno. One in ten never came home.}
\end{quote}

In the film’s opening scenes, the cause of the main character, Sgt. Michael Dunne’s, neurasthenia is established. After his entire platoon is slaughtered by German machine gun fire in the ruins of an “old world” village (with the exception of his Native friend Highway), Dunne charges the gunner, who seems to be the last remaining active combatant on the opposing side. Even though the young soldier surrenders and pleads for his life, Dunne bayonets the young soldier in the forehead. The firefight in village the village culminates in the skeleton of a bombed-out church, completing an unsubtle symbolism that suggests that Canada’s heroism and place in the world emerges from the ruins of the “old
world” and in the ruins of established morals and culture. This scene, shot in a gritty, hyper-realistic fashion reminiscent of recent Hollywood war films like *Black Hawk Down* or *Saving Private Ryan* (including slow motion “bullet shots,” shaky, overexposed camerawork and visceral “realistic” blood and gore), was based on the actual experiences of Gross’s grandfather, by whom the film was inspired. Why Dunne kills the boy (the casting and makeup stress his young age) is not fully explained, but we are to gather that it is at least partly out of grief for the deaths of his comrades, and blind rage at his own inability to prevent their deaths. Regardless, this causes our hero such intense psychological distress that he is hospitalized.

After being discharged, the neurasthenic Dunne is assigned to a Calgary recruiting office to encourage young Canadians to enlist. While in Calgary, he develops a romantic interest in Sarah, who supports herself and her younger brother David by working as a military nurse. Sarah has become the head of her household after her mother’s early death and her father’s decision to join up and fight for “the other side,” his loyalty to his old Bavarian homeland taking precedence over loyalty to his new identity as a Canadian immigrant. The trope of the “bad immigrant” who cannot leave his “old world issues” at the border sets up the plot for David and Sarah to reconcile their father’s “failed” immigration. Inevitably, Dunne and Sarah develop a fraught romantic relationship through which Sarah is cured of her addiction to morpheme and Dunne is overcomes his neurasthenia. David, meanwhile, is courting the daughter of the local doctor, a
class-transgressive relationship the doctor attempts to quash by writing the severely asthmatic David a clean bill of health so that he may enlist, at David’s own request: he has been influenced by Dunne’s propaganda and the omnipresent pressure to “serve his country,” including pressure from his potential father-in-law and anti-German attacks on David and Sarah’s home. Fearful that he is in part responsible for the boy’s decision to go to war, Dunne claims a false identity so he can re-enlist and get back to the front in an effort to protect David, for David’s own sake and for the love of his concerned sister Sarah. Low and behold, Sarah has meanwhile been dispatched to a field hospital in the very area where Dunne and David are stationed, enabling a muddy and impassioned tryst between Dunne and Sarah before the film’s end. Under heavy enemy fire, the young and bookish David panics and throws himself into a German trench, using his broken Bavarian father-tongue to plead for surrender. Instead, the sadistic German troops crucify David and raise his cross above their trench to sew fear in the hearts of their enemies. In the sequence that follows, Sgt. Dunne braves enemy fire to retrieve David and carries the cross on his back through the mud to the safety of the Canadian side. Though a spontaneous ceasefire temporarily occurs out of mutual respect for Dunne’s magnificent bravery and sacrifice, in undertaking this suicide mission he sustains mortal wounds and dies in Sarah arms on the hospital table. In the film’s epilogue, we see the “widowed” Sarah, the disabled David, his wife (the doctor’s daughter, won through valour), Highway and several of Dunne’s comrades laying his memory to rest on his Alberta farmstead, the province’s wide
vistas symbolizing the peace and opportunity open to the characters and their nation.

That these melodramatic themes are expressed through the fratricidal narrative of one (broken) domestic family uncannily echoes a theme key to early Canadian literary culture, as Daniel Coleman has illustrated in his book *White Civility: The Literary Project of Early Canada*. Coleman demonstrates how Canadian culture has been obsessed with the project of its own civility as a means of reckoning the problem of its foundational colonial violence. White civility becomes the organizing logic as well as the pedagogical project by which a hegemonic Canadian “Britishness” coheres. Coleman traces the development of this pan-British white ethnicity through key literary archetypes in Canadian popular culture: the Loyalist Brother, the Enterprising Scottish Orphan, the Muscular Christian, and the Maturing Colonial Son. The figure of the Loyalist Brother, and the challenge to civility represented by the fratricide inherent in Canada’s myth of origins in United Empire Loyalism, according to Coleman, “demanded an account of the moment when the supposed bearers of British civility, the settlers of British North America, went for each other’s throats, first in the revolutionary war and later in the war of 1812” (27). If colonial legitimacy was based largely in the idea of the impartial application of a superior British common law, understood as the pinnacle of the imperial progress narrative, then suspicions of baser motives behind settler politics, like control of land and resources, needed to be allayed for colonial legitimacy to hold. As Coleman
writes, under these circumstances, “the Loyalist cause must prove its unblemished virtue in comparison to the rebel cause, and so it employs the code of military honour and self-sacrifice to counteract any suspicion of less admirable motives that the Loyalists may have had” (47). The military code of honour “serves to ennoble the story of original violence,” the fratricidal violence between settlers, “by portraying it as the loyalists’ defence of common justice” and establishes Loyalist values, then, as civil, honourable, and invested in higher moral or spiritual notions of the collective, against the individualist values of the rebels which are presented as crass, self-serving, and untempered in their pursuit of profit (47). Further, Coleman elaborates, the superior virtue of British civility is demonstrated in texts sympathetic to the loyalist cause, by “aligning themselves with vulnerable non-Whites” (47).

_Passchendaele_ mounts a national allegory of fraternity that uncannily inherits, mirrors and renews these same conventions, in keeping with my overall thesis that the post-9/11 Canadian militarization advances through the retooling of older myths. Coleman writes, “While the allegory of fraternity explicitly addresses the conflict between loyal and rebel British subjects in America, its unofficial curriculum assumes and promotes an image of the two North American nations as born out of an exclusively White, male conflict” (52). _Passchendaele’s_ cultural pedagogy (as opposed to its official accompanying school curriculum, discussed shortly) likewise promotes an image of Canada’s national maturity, and by extension the re-configuration of European politics after the First World War,
as having been borne of militarism and white male sacrifice. If, as Coleman says, “allegory is a literary trope deeply invested in the management of cultural anxiety or instability,” a “tense rhetorical form because it compresses powerful and often contentious ideologies into a dense bundle,”(40) we can identify the specific cultural anxieties at play in the present around militarism, morally questionable wars, multiculturalism, and the moral foundations of the contemporary national project which Passchendaele’s fraternal allegory seeks to manage. Where early Canadian texts are engaged in the project of articulating a notion of white civility as the cultural basis of the nation, we may here interrogate the fraternity of a pan-European whiteness in crisis and the fratricide and filicide of the First World War.

Against the moral bankruptcy of the civility of European and imperialist societies which the First World War rendered evident, the sacrifice of Dunne purchases the possibility of a multicultural domestic space. David, as a second-generation immigrant, owes his life to Dunne, a truly Canadian soldier, and lives in that debt. Dunne’s sacrifice renders David’s life and the future of the nation possible, at the same time as it attempts to exonerate Canada and the British Empire through the demonstration of the higher moral code characteristic of the “brotherhood of officers”. We see this “brotherhood of officers” demonstrated by the spontaneous cease-fire that arises in response to Dunne’s bravery as he strides across the perilous no-man’s-land to retrieve the crucified David. The commanding officers on the German side, with a masculine respect in their faces that acknowledges the demonstration of higher moral purpose that transcends
nationality, wave off their subordinates and cease the firing. (This, in contrast to
the depiction of racialized “savage” enemies, incapable of respect for the
“gentlemanly” aspect of war presented in Canadian productions like Shake Hands
With the Devil, but also more generally such as in Black Hawk Down.)

Dunne is the whitest character in the film, with the notable exception of
Major Randolph Dobson-Hughes, the British recruiting officer. Dobson-Hughes is
immediately skeptical of Dunne’s neurasthenia, presuming it to merely be
cowardice. But it is revealed that Dobson-Hughes is himself “soft” and merely a
jingoistic opportunist whose battlefield experience is minimal. He thus reveals
himself to be unworthy and is symbolically expelled from the brotherhood of
officers. With a cowardice that eagerly sends other, younger men to their deaths,
hypocritical Dobson-Hughes embodies the old-world effete mannerisms and
aristocratic moral laxity, complete with clipped British accent and stiff-upper-lip
mustache. His frequent references to his experience in the Boer War associates
him with a crasser, more suspect moment of British imperialism. As an audience
we are led to revel in his comeuppance when his self-indulgence and cowardice
eventually get him killed. Physically overweight as well as self-indulgent, he
replays for us the idea of old-world masculinity in need of smelting, testing, and
proving through physical exertion in the rugged Canadian wilderness.

Other supporting characters are one-dimensional regional stereotypes,
from the trench soldiers with grossly exaggerated Atlantic and Quebecois accents,
to the “soft” Ontarian the others like to rib, to Dunne’s friend Royster, the
lumberjack, whose class occupation and the loss of his arm physically mark him and prohibit him from being the appropriate subject of national destiny. As a white man of ambiguous class location, possessed of the rank but not the risible affectations of an officer, and, importantly, associated with rurality through the possession of land, Dunne is the ultimate “ordinary” Canadian. Whiteness, in the figure of Dunne, is possessed of both historical agency and self-reflexivity in the dawning appreciation of the limits of white civility that is the cause of his neurasthenia. Haunted by the realization of his own capacity for brutality in the fratricide of the young German boy (a brother within the scope of a pan-European whiteness) Dunne is damaged through this trauma of violence and “knowing”. In this classic Canadian theme (familiar to us from Razack’s reading of The Somalia Affair and my earlier reading of Afghanada), Dunne, the preferred national subject, becomes a victim of circumstances beyond his control; further, he shoulders for the nation the burden of reckoning with the great abyss of uncertainty that lies beyond the Eurocentric thought-world of imperialism.

David on the other hand, as the allegorical representation of the future, however, may be physically maimed and plagued by his own cowardice and treason, failing to live up to the virtues his nation expects of him, but in comparison to Dunne, his continued ability to believe in and aspire to a civil goal are what make him the fit subject of national futurity. We might read David as the slain German boy’s double for Dunne. David also re-doubles the fratricide in the narrative, as the unwilling agent of Dunne’s heroic death. These two fratricidal
deaths, the German boy’s and Dunne’s, draw to the fore the fraternity of
whiteness that is here articulated.

To explicate this fraternity and personification in national narratives I will
quote Coleman at length here, including his reading of the work of Jonathan
Kertzer:

Anthropomorphism functions as a common trope in national narratives
because this personifying representation fuses the organic image of
romantic nationalism, which figures the nation as a natural growth out of a
native soil, with the biological narrative of the maturation of an
individual’s (most often a male’s) character. ‘Personification conveniently
assimilates the diversity of historical experience and civil discord in to a
single figure,’ Kertzer writes. Then it elevates that figure in to a hero in
quest of self-fulfillment…If Canadian history is not an epic, it is at least a
Bildungsroman’ (*Worrying* 43, 33.) Such anthropomorphic tropes for the
nation function strategically under the civil ethos of liberal modernity to
fuse the codes of personal morality, usually figured as the development of
admirable character, with the codes for public citizenship. According to
this narrative figuration, a civil nation is composed of citizens of ‘good’
character (38-39).

The national spirit is clearly presented in *Passchendaele* as a natural
outgrowth of the pristine Alberta soil, and a diversity of historical experience and
discord assimilated into the figure of Dunne, who is then elevated into a hero
through his trials in combat. But Dunne’s quest is not for self-fulfillment, but for moral absolution. His admirable personal qualities and personification of militarized codes for public citizenship meet with a world unworthy of them, and by extension, an unworthy of Canada, a world in which right moral action has become impossible. Moral absolution (or perhaps transcendence) is a fitting quest for the hero of the colonial-settler narrative; Dunne achieves it in his sacrifice for David, the double of the German boy he killed. So the colonial settler state truly emerges into independent national manhood through the sacrifice of the soldier, a sacrifice intended to demonstrate once and for all that his (and Canada’s) civic and civil virtues were indeed honourable enough to purchase a right to the land on the strength of moral character that his character has derived from it.

If, in Loyalist fratricidal narratives, blood sacrifice purchases a right to Canadian land, however, in *Passchendaele* this theme is abstracted, fictionalized at an additional remove, for unlike the conflict of the American Revolutionary War, the Third Battle of Ypres did not involve contest over Canadian soil. Here, loyalty, responding to the call of duty to defend the British Empire far afield in Europe, demonstrates Canada’s maturation from a colony to an independent and responsible nation. It also demonstrates, via Canada’s ability to train and send troops, both the economic base from which to raise an army, and the “settling” of any lingering doubts about Canada’s ability to manage its domestic (Indian) problems. This performance of self-sacrifice, maturity and honour for the sake of duty on a foreign battlefield helps to cement Canada’s entitlement to national
independence and settlers’ right to the land at home based on this maturity and allegorical moral character. Indeed, while fictionalized here, this language of colonial maturity was used historically and, according to the web-based information intended to supplement Passchendaele’s pedagogical experience, it was Canada’s participation in the Great War that purchased it a seat in the League of Nations.\textsuperscript{16}

As the narrative unfolds, Dunne becomes (and perhaps always was) a kind of messianic mythic figure, culminating in his bearing the cross through the mud as an act of redemption, forgiveness and transcendence. The presentation of Dunne’s bravery in extremely heavy-handed Christian imagery (the bearing of the cross, the blood sacrifice for sin) is no accident and recalls Coleman’s discussion of the “muscular Christian” central to the production of white civility as a national trope.\textsuperscript{17} In this scene, the climax of the film, Dunne’s body becomes that of a giant, fearless as he, enraged at both the German brutality and his own failure to protect David, charges across no-mans-land, retrieves David’s body and its cross, and bears them back to the safety of Canada (or its trench). While previously the filming techniques used to present the battle stressed the darkness, confusion and uncertainty of war, the lighting here shifts: Dunne’s final journey “home” is bathed in a halo of light, shot at times in slow motion, and rather than displaying the frenetic confusion of battle, these ultimate scenes focus squarely on Dunne’s face and body (the sweat, the working muscles, the grimace of determination), the rest of the war out of focus and muted. Here, white civility finds its earthly avatar
in the hard-working masculine body purified of sin and emblematic of national
virtue. That this soldiering body is itself sacrificed, broken on the cross(ing),
reinforces the pedagogical work of the film and its place in the new Canadian
militarism: soldiers represent the climax of Canadian identity and virtue, and their
sacrifice is the guarantee of the freedoms we cherish.

After Dunne’s sacrifice, the national allegory carries on in David. David’s
blithe, boy-like innocence allows us to imagine the nation as inherently fair-
minded and unprejudiced. David, for instance, doesn’t understand class, he
doesn’t understand that he is too poor to date the doctor’s daughter, or that the
doctor might have class antagonism as a motive for signing the false clean bill of
health that allowed him to go to war and prove his manhood, which he believes he
must do to impress the doctor himself. David is still able to believe in Dunne’s
heroism and manifestation of civic virtues, even when Dunne himself is not. The
model for public codes of citizenship as expressed through David, then, are
having at best a fuzzy understanding of class relations, an idealism that transcends
innocence, and the imperative of penitence and gratitude for his unworthiness of
the nation and his indebtedness to his soldier-brother. It is also notable that by the
end of the film, David is maimed, as though his debt to Canada will necessarily
hold him back from full participation, but he does “get the girl,” implying that he
has earned the right to fraternity and to the nation’s reproductive future.

Dunne’s aboriginal best mate, Highway, also makes it to the final scene.
Highway’s character development is quite thin (though this is also true of the
other characters in the film) and he appears at the end of the film as he did in the beginning, his indigenous presence on the land both incorporated into the story and perhaps exceeding it, and the filmmakers’ intentions. We might be tempted to read this character as nothing more than an assimilation and containment strategy of a conservative project of national memory that has always “loved Indians” in its fervour to consume and devour indigeneity as part of its own self-making (see Kulchyski). We might look at the problematically unproblematic portrayal of the comradeship between Highway, Dunne, and the one-armed lumberjack back home in Calgary. Certainly, this depiction fits with the paradigm of securing the loyalty of the “noble savage” Indigenous character that Coleman shows has been a staple in Canadian literature, frequently as one-dimensional “moral barometers,” in order to demonstrate the moral integrity of heroic white masculinity (70-73). Though Highway is given very little history or character development of his own, there is one scene of soldierly banter in which Highway pokes fun at another soldier who is from Sudbury. Disparaging Sudbury, and asked how he knows anything about it, Highway retorts, “I’m a ‘skin, ‘skins just know.” In response to this playful assertion of his identity, the Sudbury soldier retorts, “Fuck you and the stolen horse you rode in on,” rendering this potentially dangerous mention of race humorous, comradely, and a marker of indelicate working-class male friendship. This depiction of the military as a space in which “race doesn’t matter” and is “no big deal” once again glorifies masculine military culture, and, as mentioned earlier in the discussion of the CF recruiting ads, insinuates that the
military is the truest site of multiculturalism, interpreted as the erasure of
difference. In reality, indigenous people’s contributions to Canada’s military
efforts especially in the First and Second World Wars have been consistently
downplayed and, until recently, indigenous veterans were not afforded pensions
like their non-native counterparts. As Fred Graffen notes, beyond the huge
numbers of allied indigenous soldiers that fought with the British in the American
War of Independence, the War of 1812, and, of course, the Seven Years War
(known in the United States as the “French and Indian War”), native soldiers
enlisted in both World Wars in proportionately large numbers. The failure of the
Canadian government to appreciate these veterans, (and indeed, adding insult to
injury by offering them Reserve lands as land grants) was among the grievances
that led to the foundation of the League of Indians of Canada in 1919, a precursor
of today’s Assembly of First Nations, whose organizers included veterans like
Mohawk Lt. Fredrick O. Loft of Six Nations (Miller, Skyscrapers 318-320).

There is a discrepancy here between the inter-racial comradeship on the
screen and the different historical realities of the early twentieth-century. It is
probable that we could sustain a rich conversation about the “disappearing
Indian” who Coleman notes is mourned in the works of Charles Mair and other
Canadian writers at the very same time the effort to “make the Indian disappear”
is underway. Just as the nobility of Charles Mair’s Tecumseh “can be read as a
foil for the treachery of Riel, as a demonstration of how a ‘good Indian’ should
behave” (59), Gross’s character Highway, who displays an “unpolitical” courage
and loyalty but neither cultural difference nor any kind of aboriginal futurity (say, family or community) can be read as a foil for “political” Native veterans like Loft, or perhaps for contemporary audiences, for disruptive anti-colonial insurgents like Shawn Brant from Tyendinaga whose highly publicized activist work with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, as well as his leadership of highway, bridge and rail line blockades in Southern Ontario, brought him national notoriety and the personal antipathy of then Ontario Provincial Police Commissioner (now Associate Minister of Defence in the Conservative Government) Julian Fantino who has been accused of circumventing proper police procedure to instigate wiretaps on Brant and other indigenous activists (“Ontario Police Avoided Judge in Wiretaps”)^{18}.

Canadian audiences love the figure of the Native warrior sidekick, who always fights for justice and is always on their side and always fits neatly into a narrative of disappearing Indians with their disappearing older ways of knowing, that may be romanticized and admired so long as they are presented as non-threatening. Real-life Native warriors are more problematic for Canadian audiences, as settler reactions to Native activism at Oka, Ipperwash and Caledonia have shown. Indeed, Lt. Loft’s efforts to ground his claims for justice in his identity as a veteran were deemed threatening enough to attract the attention and strenuous opposition of then deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott (Titeley 103-107).

The demonstration of loyalty, sacrifice and allegiance to the nation and to
the British Empire displayed by the estimated 4,000 First Nations soldiers who served in the First World War is recuperable by a patriarchal militarizing agenda in the present. Indigenous allegiance to the British Crown, represented in the film by Highway and throughout its supplementary web-based teaching materials, works to obscure the fact that military alliances and treaty relations between First Nations and the government of Canada were anything but straightforward during this time period.

Were we completely credulous about the promises of liberal inclusion, we might celebrate the mere presence of Highway in the film as an indication of the filmmakers’ inclusiveness. There is of course a credible argument that First Nations soldiers ought to be shown to Indigenous and settler audiences and to have a place in the official history here, especially as the working-class and under-privileged Native youth the army is currently trying to recruit need to have role models, to see themselves and their stories represented in mainstream culture. We could also discuss the importance of roles and work for indigenous artists and actors like Michael Greyeyes, the actor who plays Highway.

I am not dismissing these things: representation matters. But it is not enough. As Eva Mackey, Daniel Coleman and others have noted, the point here is that in the historical context of the cultural project of white civility in Canada, Native characters have been managed, controlled, and represented in settler Canadian fantasies in ways that feed the shifting needs of a colonial project that replaces Original peoples with multicultural others in a framework of racial
hierarchy according to the principles of first British colonialism and then neoliberal capitalism, and not in ways that they themselves control or that might threaten to destabilize current techniques of racial management. In this case, racial management includes the attempted re-definition of First Nations into a minority Canadian constituency, subsumable under multiculturalism and colour-blind neoliberalism, as discussed in the preceding discussion of military multiculturalism in the CF recruiting ads. Within this paradigm, Indigenous claims to land would be stripped of their foundation in collective sovereignty and exit the realm of nation-to-nation negotiations and, instead, become individual legal cases to be pled before the Canadian court system. On a cultural level, the subsumption of Indigenous identity within the multicultural umbrella would suggest that Indigeneity was merely a matter of cultural preference or racial choice and that all treaty rights and other “preferential treatment” would not only be unfair to “other Canadians” but ruinous to the free market. Indeed, governments have attempted to extinguish indigenous title by offering one-time pay-outs to individual community members in lieu of honouring, settling, or re-negotiating treaties (Alfred). These efforts attempt to render indigenous people individualized subjects under the liberal equality of the free market and, as various commentators note, they don’t produce the higher standards of living and sustainable cultural equanimity they ostensibly aim to achieve for indigenous people (Rowinski). The already-prevalent (indeed, almost universal) idea that native people are Canadian “citizens plus” who mobilize historical guilt to receive
unjust subsidies from a beleaguered nation has led to among the most violent and vitriolic spectacles of racism in recent Canadian history, borne of sentiments that both draw on and feed into the culture of colour-blind neoliberalism.

As both an artifact and an articulation of the neoliberal militarization of Canada, then, *Passchendaele* is extremely effective. Despite its relative lack of narrative or conceptual sophistication, it succeeds in rehearsing key, deeply rooted themes of Canadian identity, framing them within the heroic actions of soldiers during Canada’s coming of age in the trenches of Europe, and doing so all within a present day cultural market eager for representations of Canadian military identity in order to make sense of Canada’s changing place in the world.

**Writing War**

It is not coincidental that the themes of fratricide, uneasy brotherhood and problematic patriarchal responsibility, so germane to literatures of colonialism, are found also in the literary and cultural representations of the First World War. While *Passchendaele* proceeds with the attention to historical accuracy that is the special preserve of military historians, as pertains to buttons and battle movements, the larger story of the Great War, what it means in the history of its many belligerents, is a story that can be told many ways, not all of them equally robust. The British writer Pat Barker, for instance, also set out to write a “definitive” narrative about her country’s involvement in the First World War, partly against the triumphant “Rule Britannia” rhetoric and culture of Thatcherite
Britain. Barker’s trilogy, *Regeneration*, which was made into a film by the same name, deals extensively with masculinities and fraternity and presents a much richer representation of class, gender and sexual politics. Barker deliberately highlights the militarization and mobilization of the institutions of science and medicine in the service of the war. It had not been so many years, after all, since the popularity of such emergent scientific discourses as phrenology, mesmerism and clairvoyance, among which the emergence of psychoanalysis might have been numbered, and the experimental nature of treatments for neurasthenia, from which several of her characters suffer, is often highlighted in Barker’s text.

Fussell writes further of the way the Great War had been pre-figured in the literary imagination, and Barker also presents to us the way texts had influenced the expectations and value judgements of its participants: hence one of the greater ironies of the Great War—young men schooled on ‘adventure stories’ and the heroism and nobility of war were trotted off to a war in which neither swashbuckling heroes nor nobility were possible. Fussell speaks to the now imperative analysis that the operations of the Great War were informed by class prejudice and antagonism (Norris). For example, the “physical configurations of crowded, filthy polluted trenches were easily figured in the public imagination as industrial slums”(36). Barker’s character, Billy Prior, who is from a lower–class background but made an officer due to his elite education, always feels dislocated, “neither fish nor fowl,” Prior says to his therapist, “Do you know, for the first time I realized that somewhere at the back of their…tiny tiny minds they really do
believe the whole thing’s going to end in one big cavalry charge. ‘Stormed at with shot and shell,/ Boldly they rode and well,/ Into the jaws of death,/ Into the mouth of hell…’” When the therapist interrogates his cynical rehearsal of Tennyson’s high-nationalist Charge of the Light Brigade (which would have been memorized by all educated children at the time) he admits, “Oh all right, I was in love with it once” (66). This is also an example of how Barker presents characters from a number of different class locations as possessed of superior insight and vehement critique of their “betters” in the elite chambers of government and military command. It also subtly portrays Prior’s disenchantment with the promises of class mobility afforded by education.

Barker has one of her characters, who is experiencing a crisis of conscience, utter the following passage describing his visit to the Solomon Islands some years earlier:

I suddenly saw that their reactions to my society were neither more nor less valid than mine to theirs. And do you know that was a moment of the most amazing freedom… It was… the Great White God dethroned, I supposed. Because we did, we quite unselfconsciously assumed we were the measure of all things. That was how we approached them. And suddenly I saw not only that we weren’t the measure of all things, but that there was no measure (242).

We see the progress narrative, and by extension positivism, undone in this passage, and we feel the effects of that shift in consciousness reverberate
throughout the lives of her characters. In Passchendaele, in contrast, Dunne
cannot be reckoning the same crisis of consciousness, or if so he does it privately,
in such a way that leaves the Great White God on the throne, to receive David’s
future offerings. We may be forgiven for suspecting that Dunne cannot recognize
the abyss, though he is thwarted by it, because Gross cannot.

Though criticism that merely weighs a text against its absences falls short
of the goals of literary criticism, my brief discussion of Pat Barker’s work is not
gratuitously offered here as a cheap gesture. Rather, I use her work, with its
topical similarities to Passchendaele, to demonstrate some of the themes essential
to a substantive and complete fictionalization of the story of the Great War and
the way in which a skilled craftsperson may weave those themes together without
sacrificing popular appeal. Barker’s critical depiction, perhaps ironically, leaves
readers with a greater understanding of the social context and the costs of the
Great War, including a somber respect for its casualties. The effects of patriotism,
romantic nationalism, and militarism are interrogated, offering a cultural
representation and a history that are actually much more sensitive to and
respectful of veterans and others touched by the war. In comparison, the
inadequacy of Passchendaele’s triteness and easy, sloganeering quality becomes
apparent. While both Barker and Gross are involved in self-consciously crafting
national mythologies, Barker’s is a self-aware, self-reflexive project, while
Gross’s version of self-awareness and reflexivity, in affirming celebrating itself,
becomes the kind of nationalist project that the ironic genre of the Great War
itself critiques. To clarify, I mean that Gross offers just enough reflexivity to sate ostensibly critical contemporary Canadian audiences while justifying the further celebration of military values. At a time when the political right in Canada has claimed the ground of political neutrality through the racial fiction of “ordinary Canadians,” it is of the utmost importance to recognize that *Passchendaele*’s pedagogical project intervenes in public memory with a political agenda. That political agenda is unquestionably shaped by the needs of the present; that is, while *Passchendaele* is “about” the Great War, its unofficial curriculum is invested in Afghanistan, and in offering narratives that naturalize Canadian identity fashioned through militarism.

Indeed, though a comprehensive analysis must be beyond scope of this dissertation, *Passchendaele* marks a distinct departure from recent critical and reflexive Canadian cultural representations of the War. As I alluded to earlier, *Passchendaele* is unique in its medium for being a big-budget Canadian film conspicuously modeled on the Hollywood war film genre and bearing all its hallmarks. As a result, it is in a league of its own: it would appear that the vast majority of other Canadian televisual representations of war are documentary, or feature war as only a small part of a larger narrative.21 22

*Passchendaele* mobilizes its cultural weight to return Canadian representations of the First World War to an earlier, more celebratory mode. As Dagmar Novak notes in her book-length treatment of the Canadian war novel from 1910-1977 (surprisingly, one of the few in Canadian literary criticism),
Canadian novels about the first world war published during and shortly after the war are almost universally in the imperial romantic mode, glorifying the spiritual uplift of war, the nobility of self-sacrifice, and the inherent goodness of the nation (7-21). As I have illustrated, these themes are conspicuous in *Passchendaele*, especially when contrasted with other recent Canadian literary and cultural representations of war. Novak goes on to document the increasingly skeptical, tragic, ironic and critical tone embraced by Canadian war novelists from the inter-war period to the present day. She concludes with a lengthy reading of Timothy Findley’s Governor General’s Award winning 1977 novel *The Wars* which she understands to be playing with the romantic tradition of war novels in order to open up a sophisticated set of associations and references that work to undermine the triumphalist narrative of Canada’s participation in the war (138-147).

Through a variety of interwoven narrative techniques, Findley’s novel reconstructs Second Lieutenant Robert Ross’s journey from suburban Toronto to the trenches of war-ravaged Europe. We follow Ross as his comrades go insane or commit suicide – Ross himself refuses to follow orders, deserts, and kills his fellow soldiers, but he is a sympathetic character and his actions are rendered understandable. Novak contrasts Findley’s harrowing but still subtle description of the hell of the trenches to his depiction of the jingoistic rhetoric of those “back home” influenced by the triumphalism war romances of the day (140). Novak also elaborates how Findley works carefully to untangle, display and problematize the associations of war, warriors, masculinity, militarism, violence, sexuality and the
state (144-154).

For Novak, the deeply literary, introspective and sociological approach to war fiction emblematized by *The Wars* is characteristic of a growing tendency in Canadian war writing in the post-war period. Certainly recent popular novels including Joseph Boyden’s award-winning and best-selling *Three Day Road* and Johanna Skibsrud’s Giller-winning *The Sentimentalists* focus on the emotional and psychological life of characters amidst war, or in its aftermath. Both do so in ways deeply critical of war itself, self-consciously drawing attention to the war novel genre, its conventions, and the way it has, in the past, served militarist agendas. Indeed, it would appear that the critical war novel is emerging as something of a Canadian idiom, if recent sales figures and awards are any indication. I suspect that this popularity is itself symptomatic of both the militarization of Canadian society under the War on Terror and contestation of the same.

It is perhaps surprising, then, that Gross’s film should stray so very far from this critical tendency. While his film does show the First World War as a hell, he presents the War as the foundational moment of Canadian nationhood and rehearses the anachronistic conventions of the Canadian war romance in ways that dovetail with the melodrama of the American war film genre. For Gross, war is not itself a heroic thing, but Canadians are heroic in war and the Canada that emerges, phoenix-like, from the ashes of *Passchendaele* is one where soldiers’ noble sacrifice opens up the possibility of national reproduction and cohesion.
Like the other examples of “support our troops” culture I have discussed, the romanticization of the soldier in spite of the mission does the crucial cultural work of allowing audiences to import and project military values into civilian lives and society, and is the key means by which our present-day neoliberal militarization is advanced.

Though representation of women in *Passchendaele* is not my focus, I would be remiss not to mention women at all, particularly as recuperating a militarized role for women and women’s labour is among the film’s major themes. As Lynne Hanley observes in *Writing War: Fiction Gender and Memory*, despite the proliferation of works documenting an enormous volume and range of women’s writing about World War I, (Gilbert, Calder) we still define war literature as “by and about men at the front” (5). Hanley explains that “since soldiers write our story of war, theirs is the perspective that prevails” and “since women are presumed to be absent from war, they are presumed to have no story to tell” (6). “Over and over again,” she argues, “we hear the story of the white English or American soldier, as though his was the only real human presence on the fields of war. And this story is almost always told by the soldier himself, and thus tends to plead his case” (6-7).

In *Passchendaele*, feminist criticisms such as these have been partially incorporated into the plot through Sarah’s work as a nurse, and to an even greater extent in the film’s online supplementary materials offered for school curricula.
Like with the representation of Aboriginality in the character of Highway, we may approach the fact that women are represented as having had an important role to play in the First World War as contributing to women’s equality and liberal inclusion. A more thorough analysis, however, would view this inclusion skeptically. For one thing, women’s importance continues to be represented as contingent upon their status as lovers and/or caregivers to men, a trope particularly difficult for women to escape in war writing. Even if Sarah avoids the conflation of women with “home” and territory in need of defending by venturing to the Front herself, her story remains one of waiting and mourning for men. Though Passchendaele offers a depiction of Sarah that seems to value women’s militarized labour, Sarah suffers from an opium addiction which is only cured through Dunne’s strong embrace: this is a minor point in the story, well nigh irrelevant save for the work her addiction does in ensuring her dependence on Dunne and positioning her femininity as in need of repair. Sarah even says, at one point, “something inside of me is broken”. We suspect that this “something” is her capacity to carry out the reproduction of the nation as a dutiful and attendant female, a brokenness that is “fixed” through the love and inspirational example of a good soldier. Moreover, the ostensibly inclusive depiction of Sarah’s militarized physical and emotional labour serves to announce itself to audiences, demonstrating a kind of representational “generosity”. With a wry knowingness, we are invited to share in what we already know to be an anachronistically “generous” portrayal of women, “Indians,” and multiculturalism in the national
myth. We sort of “already know” that this is an act of self-reflexive “charity” to “special interest groups” whose inclusion seems to also be about reaffirming the exalted subject and the cultural dominant and as an audience we are invited into a relationship where we become knowingly in cahoots with the film makers in indulging “the little people.” While the various motivations here may range from the sickeningly earnest to the despicably cynical, the cultural dominant that is here emerging, which I name as a new Canadian Exceptionalism, is one which has already addressed and incorporated feminist and anti-racist critique, slantwise and on the cheap, which already includes a version of self-reflexivity and awareness: a bad-faith politically-correct reckoning of the surface of these issues precisely in order to ignore, trivialize and foreclose on their legacies — a wade through the “mud” in order to “get to the good stuff”.

**Pedagogy**

In actual fact, over four thousand Native men fought in the First World War, an extremely high percentage of eligible men who were supported by the women in their communities, and, despite the paternalistic attitude of white government and military officials like Duncan Campbell Scott, achieved many battle honours and performed exceptional roles for the military (Gaffen). The website does a reasonable job of covering this history, but, as might be expected, does not pursue questions about the treaty relationships and historical alliances that First Nations men were honoring, so their service is cast as somewhat naïve
allegiance and patriotism. In this story, Canada’s military becomes the forge of proto-multiculturalism, understood as the product of white benevolence and care. This gesture of “inclusion” in the present not only eliminates indigenous sovereignty and specificity and strongly implies that they are “just like everyone else” in the Canadian mosaic, it does so in ways that appear to close the question. This minimal inclusion of First Nations history effectively delimits what might be learned or understood about settler-state-Indigenous relations in Canada at that time, before and after (see for instance Miller, *Compact, Contract, Covenant*), effectively freezing out an account of the colonial violence that might disrupt the narrative of white benevolence, brotherhood in arms, and masculine heroism.

Second, in contrast to the bad-faith “inclusion” of indigenous participation in the Great War, there is a complete exclusion of Black Canadians and the Number Two Construction Battalion from both the film and its broader supplemental materials. A significant body of information on this segregated battalion exists, though the struggle for public recognition of these Black soldiers, many of whom hailed from Nova Scotia, continues. Perhaps it is the very unsuitable nature of this history of persistent and pernicious racism that renders it so difficult to include in official national mythology. Briefly, like much in the history of Canada’s treatment of Blacks, there was no formal or institutional policy of discrimination against enlisting soldiers of colour, but enlistment was up to the discretion of local commanders. Some numbers of Black recruits were thus able to enlist with regular units, often, it is supposed, if their recruiting officers
did not discriminate against them or possibly if they were fair-skinned and “passed.” More commonly, the discretion of racist commanding officers meant that Blacks were categorically refused, despite the lack of an explicit policy against it, and told versions of the sentiment which greeted would-be soldiers in Sydney, NS, “this is a white man’s war” (Ruck; Winks 318-320). After many unsuccessful attempts and lobbying by the Black community, the No. 2 Construction Battalion was formed, a unit devised to perform hard labour for which its members were deemed “fit.” The real fear, it seems, in the minds of the white commanding officers, was groups of Black men with guns, as the members of the No. 2 were issued shovels instead of weapons and made to serve by performing back-breaking labour logging in the mountains of France, far from the possibilities of glory and adventure that so tragically motivated recruits across colour lines.

The absence of Black history from both the website and the film represents not only a glaring historical omission but one which may reveal a great deal about the cultural politics behind these pedagogical resources. Indigenous presence can be glossed, so long as it follows the sorts of carefully groomed narratives outlined above, because of the centrality of the mythological Indian for Canadian civility and identity-making. But to admit Blackness here would be to “admit” to a racial history less recuperable for the present, a less-suitable past that undermines the project of white civility as it undermines the proffered trope of militarism as prefiguring multicultural equality through fraternity.
Finally, the website presents the story, told slant-wise, of how women “won the vote” through participation in the fields, factories and farms in the War effort. I quote from the section under the heading “Homefront”:

It is important to remember that when war was declared women did not have the vote in Canada. While many feminist and suffragette movements were vocally anti-war prior to Canada’s involvement in the conflict, once Canada entered the fray most changed their stance to patriotic support. That didn't mean, however, that the goal of gaining the vote and other rights for women was forgotten. In fact, the shortage of male labour made it possible for women to demonstrate their value and equality as never before … By the end of the war, Canadian women had won the right to vote.\(^{24}\)

A few turns of phrase are of note here, notably the way the passage still frames women’s suffrage as a privilege granted to women by male power-holders after the former “demonstrate[d] their value and equality.” It also neatly erases the continuation of suffragist and feminist opposition to the war long after it had begun and implies that, like their forbears, today’s critics ought to mute their critiques now that the field of battle has been entered. The history of women gaining the vote in Canada was complex and manipulative, and this over-simplification argues for a meritocratic past and present, where women (like First Nations) were able to “prove” their worth to the white men who held power Canadian government, and thus to emerge as equals. Indeed, Sir Robert Borden’s
War Time Election Act of 1917, which preceded the broader enfranchisement of women in Canada, afforded only women in the military and the wives of mothers of enlisted men the right to vote, largely because Borden (rightly) thought it would help him win reelection.

My aim in noting these three cases is not (merely) to cry foul over historical inaccuracies or absences but to demonstrate the ways Passchendaele’s associated pedagogical materials, which are likely to become definitive texts of popular Canadian history, as indeed they were designed to be, work at the intersection of neoliberalism, militarism, patriarchy, race and public memory. Passchendaele does pedagogical work in two modes: it offers direct pedagogical resources to schools, teachers and students, and it does a broader work of what Henry Giroux (Terror 105-124), as discussed above, calls “public pedagogy.” In the first case, it promises not only to be an authoritative set of texts for future learning and teaching, it also promises to attract the fickle attentions of youth fed on a hyper-militaristic media culture towards an interest, a passion even, for the otherwise seemingly dry and boring history of Canada. At the same time, Passchendaele engages a strong and multi-layered public pedagogy with a variety of different lessons which I have elaborated here: an understanding of Canadian identity as forged in battle, an implicit argument about what Canadian film is and could and should be, a relationship to land, gender roles, and more.

Though at a further remove than the other cases I examine, Passchendaele provides a fascinating contribution to this study precisely because it showcases
how cultural militarization is malleable and diffuse and animates both entertainment and popular historical memory. *Passchendaele* retrospectively reads the catalyst of the First World War and specifically the trenches of Passchendaele as the foundation of the nation. This search for a moment of national origins is repeated almost compulsively in the upsurge in commemorations of military anniversaries-- in fact recycling the “birth of a nation” slogan from one battle memorial to the next. The film demonstrates beyond argument how cultural production *not specifically about the war in Afghanistan* can nonetheless be animated by militarizing imperatives and contribute to a militarizing agenda, refracted in this case through military and national history, in the service of constructing a particular kind of lineage and militarized present.

As a final note, I want to observe a shift in cultural values I see happening here. “Again and again,” notes Coleman, in the fraternal allegory of Loyalist Canadian narratives, “the treacherous brother puts personal, material ambition over natural family loyalty, law and order, and spiritual-communal values” (53). In contemporary and historical Americana, however, the roles are reversed: the greedy, no-good brother is the one who respects authority and follows command, while the selfless and noble brother is the one who ignores the rules of the inevitably stifling military and political bureaucracies and goes it alone. In *Passchendaele* as well as other contemporary Canadian productions, I hazard to suggest, this kind of distinction is no longer possible— a sign that American
cultural values have triumphed. For instance, despite mimicking the earlier Loyalist Brother narrative with uncanny regularity, Dunne instantiates the myth of the liberal individual hero in breaking the rules to do the right thing, re-enlisting under a false name despite the fact that he has been deemed unfit for active duty, in order to follow his heart. Under the aegis of neoliberalism, the collective is no longer prioritized by national discourse and strategies of public memory in twenty-first century Canada the way Coleman describes in the nineteenth.

**Conclusions**

The three cultural texts I have discussed here are each important examples of the complex ways a particularly Canadian brand of neoliberal militarism is being advanced in the post-9/11 era as Canada and Canadians struggle to define and explain their place in Empire. The range of media genres demonstrates the way militarization is a broad and diffuse cultural shift. In the case of the recruiting ads, we can see how militarization operates in a culture saturated with marketing and advertising, contributing to the ubiquity of branding and neoliberalism’s “new normal” that renders all spaces, from the living room to the school to the bus to the workplace, open for free market transaction. The ads participate in a media culture that increasingly relies on images, impressions, emotions and frenetic pacing in order to develop a cultural product that packs a dense array of cultural lessons and meanings into an extremely short time frame.

By contrast, the radio-drama *Afghanada* offers up a vision of Canada’s
military that actively invites, indeed conscripts, audience’s critical and compassionate faculties. *Afghanada* operates within the CBC’s tradition of cultural production committed to national cultural and intellectual uplift, and also mobilizes the techniques and conventions of the war film to create something totally unlike anything on radio (CBC or otherwise) both past and present. The overall result is a highly unique cultural product that advances militarization in ways that might appeal to CBC’s listenership, who tend to be older, more highly educated and are generally more inclined to “liberal” political opinions (Dunfield; *Radio Listening*) – a key demographic in Canadian politics.

Finally, *Passchendaele* relies heavily on its ability to mobilize the plot devices and cinematic conventions of the Hollywood blockbuster to present a highly produced and “professional” product that, by virtue of its unprecedented budget, overabundance of accolades, and direct partnership with two strata of government and some of Canada’s preeminent cultural and historical institutions, claims to be the decisive cultural text not only on the Battle of *Passchendaele*, but on Canada’s “coming of age.” Canada’s “first” big budget blockbuster promoted itself in much the same way it promoted its subject: the emergence of Canada as a nation-unto-itself on the world stage.

Key to my understanding of the cultural production of militarization today across these distinct texts and genres is that all three blur the lines between cultural and creative independence and autonomy and direct government oversight and participation. The CF recruiting ads, while they are directly paid
for and vetted by the Canadian military (and, we can almost be sure, the
Conservative Prime Minister’s Office, which has taken an unprecedented interest
in all aspects of government public relations), were crafted to fit into a previously
existing media landscape. The unnamed advertising agency that produced the ads
was not merely responding to the demands of their clients at the Department of
National Defence, they were hired to merge these demands with market dictates
for a cultural product that would “sell,” framing the Canadian Military as dynamic
and appealing and yet in keeping with what viewers imagined Canada to be. In
this sense, the ads were the highly creative mediation of state and market
directives, emblematic of the way neoliberal militarization in general negotiates
and mobilizes this tension.

In the case of *Afghanada* liberal cultural producers are employed by an
embattled public broadcaster to create the definitive radio drama about Canada’s
war in Afghanistan. While, as mentioned, it is difficult to speculate on what sorts
of pressures writers and producers encountered in their work on *Afghanada* I have
suggested that this complex field of creative production ultimately produces a
very clever artifact of militarization which, while not blatant propaganda (which
would be too conspicuous and wouldn’t “work” in this context), reinforces
identification with the plight of the “ordinary” soldiers. As I have argued, this
identification is entirely in keeping with the broader culture of post-9/11 Canadian
militarization. Consequently, *Afghanada* does the work of militarization through
the schematic of ambivalence, despite the likely ambivalent intentions of its
creators.

Passchendaele too blurs these lines. On one hand, the multiple roles of Paul Gross (producer, director, writer, star, composer, etc.) signal the film as the work of an auteur, a self-styled creative genius who controls every aspect of the film to see through his creative vision. On the other hand, the film was made before it was even shot. While (some) Canadian media feted Gross as a visionary Canadian film-maker, in many ways he was merely an engineer, dutifully constructing a film according to a non-existent but no-less real “kit”. This kit included “blockbuster” cinematic and narrative conventions, Gross’s own memorializing pro-military sentiment, uncanny archetypes of Canadian identity that elaborate a moral character for the nation, and the normative expectations of the film’s sponsors.

All of this points to a larger issue: militarization is not simply a particular set of values or the bombastic glorification of the militarism, but a dense cultural fog that has descended over the national imaginary, one that seeps into cultural production in complicated ways that blur the lines between structure and agency, jingoism and ambivalence, power and autonomy, and state, market and citizenry. It fundamentally relies on and makes use of tenacious traditions of oppression and exploitation along colonial, racial, gender and class lines, and, at the same time, masks and distracts from these continuing legacies.

Bernays is widely credited with transforming techniques of propaganda
developed during the First World War into the field of public relations. One of his earliest and most well known successes was conducted for the American Tobacco Company: high society ladies were convinced to smoke cigarettes in the 1929 Easter Parade under the guise of demonstrating women’s equality and independence, thus breaking the social taboo against women smoking and doubling the potential market for cigarettes (Stauber and Rampton *Toxic Sludge* 22-30).

2 Canadianally.com/ca


4 This citizenship document, available at www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/pub/discover.pdf, is a fascinating study on its own and I am resisting the urge to tangentially engage it here.

5 I don’t mean to suggest that peacekeeping and the new “helping-fighting” are synonymous—far from it. Rather, the “soft” values expressed through peacekeeping are being tapped into via the “helping” work depicted here, even as that helping work is reclaimed and re-purposed by the “fighting” language. This is an important—key—distinction in the post 9/11 context I am describing. I only mean that both peacekeeping and the kind of helping suggested by the ads—and excluding the Orwellian “helping the people of Afghanistan” sort of “helping”—are negligible in terms of material support and allocation of resources.

6 Indeed, Harper was criticized for withdrawing Canadian troops from flood-ravaged Quebec, which was in need of intensive clean-up operations, possibly because the Canadian Forces were overcommitted thanks to the Afghanistan mission (Rakobowchuk).

7 For a detailed discussion of how the military itself has been a key part of the (neo)colonial expropriation of “Canadian” land, see Lackenbauer.

8 For an excellent analysis of the use of Statistics Canada for exactly this purpose, and a clear demonstration of the sort of research the Conservatives sought to foreclose, see Grace-Edward Galabuzzi’s book *Canada’s Economic Apartheid*.

9 Sites include Married to the Canadian Forces (http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2298973173), Red Friday Foundation (http://www.redfridays.ca), Small Dead Animals (http://www.smalldeadanimals.com), Support our Canadian Troops (http://www.facebook.com/SupportOurCanadianTroops), Thanks a Soldier
Indeed, many commentators have noted the convenience that social media connectivities offer to police and security officers seeking to understand and observe the actions of anti-war activists and “suspicious” (i.e. Arab and Muslim) populations in Canada.

Recall here the attempts of the Harper Conservatives to instigate a new publically-funded “fox-news North”. The public outcry around this proposal has postponed it, for now, but saturation of the airwaves with a hard-right perspective remains one of the conservative goals for Canadian discourse.

In an interview with Brian D. Johnson, Gross, who has been a vocal Canadian Content advocate and national icon for his role as the comically naïve Canadian Mountie “Dudley Do-Right” in the popular television series Due South, elaborates on the problem of a predominantly art-house film industry without an audience: “English Canadian cinema is wedded to an auteur model based on the early festival breakthroughs of some really terrific filmmakers like Atom Egoyan…It's been stuck in that mode for a while. Festivals are composed of audiences that you never see replicated in a normal theatre. We've hidden behind this intellectual rampart. And we end up in this perverse situation where we assign to any failed film a great deal of intellectual integrity." (Johnson, MacLeans, “The Lost Picture Show,” April 14 2006).

The discourse around public opinion polls seems to me to muddy the waters around what constitutes grounds for military intervention. “Popularity” and “democracy” are not, in fact, interchangeable; while popularity is not a legal criteria for war, majority opposition ought to be considered at least a deterrent.

I’m invoking muscular Christianity in a much more limited sense than Coleman develops, stressing merely the way Dunne’s physical as well as moral stature comes to be rendered synonymous with the preferred national imaginary.

See also http://www.ocap.ca/supporttmt/
Recent publications would appear to challenge this trend, including Joseph Boyden’s best-selling and award-winning novel *Three Day Road* which places indigenous soldiers at the centre of the narrative and highlights the tensions inherent in serving an oppressive nation.

The only exception I could find was the CBC miniseries *Dieppe* which I have not been able to obtain but which focuses on the tragic bloodbath that was the Canadian Armed Forces’ Second World War raid on the eponymous French town.

For a relatively reliable list, compiled by war media aficionados, see http://wwii.ca/film-books/. There was also a film adaptation of Timothy Findley’s *The Wars*, but I have not yet been able to access a copy.

For instance, Jeremiah Jones of Truro NS, celebrated (but not officially recognized until after his death) for his heroism in capturing an enemy machine gun nest, and my great-great-uncle Ralph Stoutley who served in the same unit and was killed in France.

http://www.passchendaelethemovie.com/Canada_In_The_Great_War/notable_women5.html

Which battle is it? Passchendale? Vimy? Queenston Heights? The Plains of Abraham? All have been proposed in turn.
The New Canadian Exceptionalism

This thesis has analyzed the cultural production of militarization in the present moment, and surveyed some of the discourses deployed to further the social transformation of Canadian society toward ever-greater neoliberal and neoconservative tendencies. The War on Terror has provided a convenient excuse for the building up of the Canadian military to pre-Trudeau-era heights and the neoliberal redistribution of wealth from social welfare programs into an unprecedented military budget, estimated at $23 billion for fiscal year 2010-2011, the highest since the end of the Second World War, and climbing (Robinson).

I have focused on the transformation of Canadian culture, but it is easy to get caught up in the more abstract and cultural aspects of the war: it is key to keep the actual war in focus. After the extensions of the Afghan mission in 2006 and 2008, the end of the war approaches at the end of 2011 with the establishment of a transitional and much smaller training mission of approximately three hundred Canadian personnel. While, to date, 158 Canadian soldiers have been killed, reliable figures simply don’t exist on Afghan civilian and military casualties. One (very) conservative estimate is that 8,832 civilians were killed between 2007 and 2010 (“Afghanistan: Annual Report”) but this is only a partial and limited account. The accomplishments, heroic, nefarious and otherwise, of the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan may come to light in the days ahead: there have already been court proceedings against American soldiers in Afghanistan (“kill teams”)
engaging in sport killing and taking pictures and body parts of their victims as “trophies” (Joya)—such conduct among Canadian soldiers should not be unanticipated. Neither, though, should revelations of such heinous abuse and desecration subsume entirely the first and major crime, and the one that must be understood to encompass all the others—the fact of the war itself—beneath sensationalist pornography of violence, and gratuitous speculation on the individualized psychological “costs” of war and imperialism borne by its agents.

In the meantime, the militarization of Canadian society has advanced apace. The “proroguing,” or closure, of parliament has been used to quell debate and protect the governing party from the public revelations of the open secret of detainee torture (Ling; McQuaig, “Proroguing”) and was publically justified with reference to the fact that such accusations might demoralize and thus endanger the troops (“Tories Fire Back”). Muslim men, “racially profiled” and deemed suspicious, have been imprisoned (and in some cases, deported) through security certificates instigated by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) based on secret evidence, in which the accused are denied access to the charges against them (“Security Certificates and Secret Evidence”; Razack, Casting Out). That these security certificates have been deemed, in retrospect, unconstitutional, largely because of the efforts of a small but persistent public opposition, is small comfort to those whose rights and lives have been suspended (“Top Court Rules Against Security Certificates”). The Canadian government continues to refuse to fulfill its obligations to act on behalf of a Canadian child held in a foreign military
prison as an enemy combatant (Cotler). That the foreign military prison in question happens to be the United States’ Guantanamo Bay, and that child’s name happens to be Omar Khadr (young son of the so called “al-Qaeda Khadrs,” Canadian citizens known to have participated in al-Qaeda in Afghanistan) has been sufficient reason for his own government to contravene their responsibilities and leave him to languish, despite the body of international law designed to protect the rights of children and child soldiers. Further, details are now emerging that the deportation and torture of Canadian citizen Maher Arar in 2002, which subsequently gained notoriety in the press, was based on Omar Khadr’s testimony (“Khadr Identified”). At the time, in October of 2002, Khadr was a severely wounded fourteen-year-old boy who was losing his sight in one eye and had been two months subjected to life in a military prison. Khadr initially didn’t recognize Arar and only after subsequent torture decided he might look familiar. Make no mistake, stripped of its pathos and glory and the humanitarian rhetoric that shines as brightly as the arsenal of new weaponry, this is the nature of the game the Canada is playing; this is what “national security” looks like: a fourteen-year-old boy half alive and weeping in a cell, covered in his own urine.²

The increasingly ubiquitous suffusion of militaristic values throughout the cultural field calls less attention to itself than incidents like these, even as it unites seemingly disparate phenomena and exacts a profound impact on public discourse. Peacekeeping and multiculturalism, now re-tooled and assimilated into the present order, were once articulated as part of a contrary social vision and
compromise, one built upon a welfare state supported by a Keynesian economic system—a vision now relegated to nostalgic regret. But their continued currency does the important pedagogical work of furnishing the current Conservative-led militarization with an alibi of social credibility. Just as these older myths both grew out of and contested an older moment of Keynesian capitalist governance, so too is the new Canadian militarism intimately connected to what we once called the neoliberal revolution and we today call the “age of austerity” (Haiven).

The universal insistence in the cultural texts and practices I have discussed in this dissertation that we ought to thank soldiers for our freedoms (including multiculturalism) undermines other possible narratives. The national debt to soldiers for something called “our way of life” roots all the good privileges of civility (human rights, freedom from violence, habeas corpus) in militarism rather than in a civic ethos or collective thinking or social struggle. So the gains achieved by the labour movement over centuries, for which people fought against soldiers and police and were sometimes killed, in Canada as elsewhere, become integrated into and read as things soldiers and the state they serve have done for civilian citizens, for which gratitude is in order. For instance, in the present situation the status of women is used as a bargaining chip in imperial warfare in which women are of great concern to none of the parties (Eisenstein 165-168; Joya). At the same time, the formal equality enjoyed by women also becomes the property of the state. Rights discourse is used as justification for the obliteration of rights, and at the same time the global war profiteers, oil executives and
religious fundamentalist backers of Stephen Harper and George W. Bush work to quickly excise those same rights and privileges for women, minorities and the working class that they posit as the crucial difference between themselves and the Taliban (Ali; Hedges, *American Fascists*). Indeed, as Susan Searls Giroux explicates,

[r]ecent intellectual exercises in distinguishing between just war and terrorism based on levels of cruelty inflicted or even the threat posed to entire ways of life have foundered on a review of historical evidence that favors neither and reveals that it is quite often the alleged “civilizational status” of the actors involved that proves decisive in the designation of legality and thus legitimacy” (27-28).

Further, Searls Giroux argues via Lewis Gordon and Walter Benjamin that “liberal modernity’s assumption of equivalence between law and justice has proven as troubled as the presumed distance between its structures of legality and its recourse to coercive force and brutality,” a fitting diagnosis of the quandary underlying the new Canadian militarism, which the proliferation of new forms of cultural militarization attempt frantically to negotiate (165).

To conclude, then, I want to identify ours as a moment animated by what I call “The New Canadian Exceptionalism”: an emerging cultural and political idiom that defines and represents Canada (both to itself and to the world) as unique and particularly well-suited to find its way in the “post 9/11” global
landscape by drawing on a perceived history of peacekeeping and multiculturalism to justify and legitimate neo-imperialism and racialized policing at home and abroad.

Canada has a deep and abiding need for a story of origins, a narrative of national self based on something other than the dark reality of settler colonialism and its “failed” and “successful” genocides (Thobani 33-64; Wright). In various past moments that desperate need has been met through the narrative of loyalty to the British Empire (persisting long after the eclipse of the Empire itself,) through an early and optimistic “Canadian Imperialism” (Leacock – see Coleman 26) and more recently through idealistic narratives of peacekeeping, multiculturalism and civility. Such narratives that offer to explain history and define a national character are not divorced from but grounded in the material, economic, political, sociological conditions of their various presents. In this post-9/11 era that need for a suitable story of origins is being met through a discourse of Canadian “exceptionalism”: we were peacekeepers, so now we are fit to overthrow other people’s governments; we embraced diversity through multiculturalism, so now we appropriate the ability to decide who may be included in the global demos and who will remain unassimilable, beyond the borders of civility; we were skeptical and derisive of the bombastic nationalism of our neighbours, so we increasingly gloat about the humility that makes us different.

I tentatively articulate the “new Canadian Exceptionalism” here. First, it connotes the sea-change in the Canadian cultural and political landscape that I
argue has been accomplished through re-distributive militarization under the convenient excuse provided by the War on Terror. The particular zeal with which the Conservative Party pursues this ideological program should not lull us into a false sense that neoliberalism is their project alone: there is considerable diversity and discord, not to mention internal inconsistency, among the supporters of the neoliberal agenda. However, the self-styling of Prime Minister Steven Harper’s “New Conservative Government” intends to mark an explicit break with previous forms of Canadian statecraft. There has been a proliferation of associated military terminology: the “new Canadian Forces,” “today’s Canadian Forces,” (in the new recruiting ads) “a modern, first-class military for the twenty-first century” (a government catch-phrase used in the Canada First Defence Strategy). This rhetoric has been successfully taken up by political pundits, notably “the New Canadian Army,” of Christie Blatchford’s book, Fifteen Days: Stories of Bravery, Friendship Life and Death from Inside the New Canadian Army. So my “new” Canadian exceptionalism is a tongue-in-cheek reflection of this “newness,” which is both new and not new at all (see, for instance Gordon’s discussion of the “Empire at Home” 66-133).

Second, the term “exceptionalism” glosses a history of American-empire-in-crisis (Chomsky 104-106). The term originates in the supposed exceptionalism of the promise of democracy in the United States by writers such as Thomas Paine and Alexis de Tocqueville, who saw the United States as freed from European traditions of feudalism, landed aristocracy, and political repression (Pease 98-
“Exceptionalism” also came to connote the “pioneering spirit” of frontiersmanship that guaranteed to the United States a rugged virility, as well as the “promised land for a chosen people” narrative of the influential early puritan religious culture (Pease 165-175). Later, American communists would speculate that due to its wealth and comparative social mobility, the United States was exceptional in the sense that the strength of American capitalism might have the power to forestall the socialist uprisings which communism predicted (Klehr 39-42). Exceptionalism has since become a wry or knowing expression, that connotes both the history of liberal individual capitalism and its democratic promise, and its glaring failures. Importantly, this includes the failure of this narrative to account for the history of colonial theft and exploitation of indigenous lands and resources, which, along with slavery, formed the basis of early American wealth. These are the founding atrocities essential to the possibility of the American dream (Churchill 1-12). After the presidency of George W. Bush and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the cynical usage of “exceptionalism” has become standard, connoting the folly of American hubris and the widespread understanding that the Unites States views itself as uniquely entitled to act above the law (Pease 196-203).

Exceptionalism in this sense recalls Giorgio Agamben’s “state of exception.” Where in American culture the state of exception as a mode of “biopolitical” governmentality is legitimated by arguments about the US as the only world superpower and making the world safe for capitalism, in Canada the
state of exception is enacted on the basis of Canada’s fabricated national destiny as moral arbiter and peacekeeper. For Agamben and the subsequent theorists inspired by his work, the State of Exception is not merely the last resort of an otherwise peaceful and tolerant state but at the very heart of state sovereignty itself (State of Exception 1-31). The authority of states over citizens is not based on any substantial social contract, as has been the assumption of liberal political theorists since the Enlightenment. Rather, the state’s power rests on the quiet threat of removing the veneer of civility and civil rights, and does so routinely (Homo Sacer 71-74). In fact, for Agamben, the conspicuous exclusion of certain populations from the sphere of rights, and the reduction of certain people to “bare life,” or an animalistic life without social recognition, is a critical part of all states. The “internalization” of the excluded population in spaces like camps, detention centres, prisons or special zones makes a spectacle of the state’s power and benevolence towards those who are told they “belong” (Homo Sacer 166-188). So for Agamben the “state of exception” is three things at once: it is the ontological foundation of the modern state itself, it is a term that characterizes particular moments when this ontological basis reveals itself in state policy (or the suspension of state policy), and it is the particular sites and zones of exclusion that emblematize this broader ontological and historical reality.

Much has been made of the unapologetic mobilization of the State of Exception by the American government in the post-9/11 moment with its circumvention of national and international laws and processes in its quest for
vengeance against Al Qaeda and its supposed allies (like Iraq), and its establishment of troubling new forms of investigation, enforcement and detention of suspected terrorists or terrorist sympathizers (Giroux, *Beyond the Spectacle*).

Less has been written on Canada. While many of the same processes have been at work (many of them to placate or even preempt American concerns about the security of the border and the continent as a whole), they have operated in slightly different ways. As mentioned earlier, Razack takes up this question in her reflections on the “casting out” of Arabs and Muslims in post-9/11 Canada (*Casting Out*; Hassan). For Razack, this violent, demonstrative exclusion includes both official acts (espionage against particular communities, the development of extra-juridical “security certificates,” the development of new detention centres, increased deportations, the contracting out of torture to other states, the defunding and defamation of activist organizations, and the fomenting of a culture of security and suspicion) and unofficial or cultural practices (heightened suspiciousness of people perceived to be Arab or Muslim, vigilante attacks, an intellectual crusade against the “perversion” of “Western” culture by Sharia law, or the general climate of hostility reinforced by state policy). Further, both Razack and Thobani are keen to locate the Canadian post-9/11 State of Exception as part of a history of colonial and neo-colonial state policy including the reservation system in Canada (on which other states modeled their own systems of exclusion and apartheid), the residential school policies, the internment of various populations and the ongoing incarceration and ghettoization of
racialized communities in Canada. For Thobani, an understanding of the arbitrary violence of colonialism, the constant state of exception imposed on colonial populations, is critical in order to understand the basis of the modern nation-state (which depended, then and now, on colonialism) as well as the racialized divisions and exclusions of populations within those states. Drawing on Franz Fanon and Achille Mbembe, Thobani charts the way the Canadian State of Exception was founded in the genocidal project of settlement, advanced through the racial projects of the Canadian state in order to exploit different waves of migrant labour, and, importantly, manifests today in an official state policy of “multiculturalism” which, as discussed earlier, in different ways at different times and under different governments, maintains the “exaltation” of certain preferred national subjects and continues to rest on both a past and present of state exclusion and violence (36-40). Hence the ease with which (and relative absence of public outcry when) the racialized state of exception was imposed after 9/11 in order to protect “ordinary Canadians” from the external internal menace of “homegrown” or poorly integrated terrorists (Razack, Casting Out 6).

In spite of this, in Early Canada’s founding myths of United Empire Loyalism, settlers chose adherence to mother Britannia, along with associated values of order and of cultural refinement tempering the crass and unmediated capitalist pursuit of wealth, over revolutionary allegiance. The centrality of civility and order along with a heavily qualified inclusion of black and indigenous “others” in early Canadiana promoted the cultural myth of Canada as tolerant and
inclusive (Coleman). The adoption of multiculturalism as official state policy has helped to open up civic space for forms of inclusion, but has been embraced by dominant, white Canadians largely on the basis of the toleration of otherness, the limits of which remain firmly in their grasp, and not in terms of coming to understand and incorporate that “otherness” into a sense of a genuinely pluralistic Canada. That the limits of tolerance have been and largely remain the province of the dominant groups is exemplified by the increasing hostility toward immigrants, refugees, indigenous peoples’ land and resource rights, and to women and politically progressive projects. Multiculturalism as a project of self-making, in order to reassure ourselves of our liberality and good intentions, fails to challenge the dominance of whiteness in an established structural racial hierarchy.

Consequently, because the contributions of “others” to the national project have not been sufficiently recognized, and even more so, because the foundation of the Canadian national project in colonial theft and attempted genocide as well as race- and class-based oppression has not been sufficiently recognized, the prevailing sense of a national culture of innocence and benevolence has reached the threshold of its tolerance. “White” citizens, (or, in Mackey’s work, those whose intersectional identities are privileged as “ordinary Canadians,” or in Thobani’s work, “exalted subjects”) have wearied of a culture of national self-deprecation and have now reached a turn-about. This group, characterized by the cult of persecuted white masculinity, feels they have been giving something up, and want to stop giving and gain “recognition” of their own. The growing
backlash against perceived minority gains attempts to make the argument that white people have become an oppressed minority in Canada. There is a sense of having been “too tolerant” in the past and needing to stand up and be recognized for “our” accomplishments, to solidify, define and celebrate the dominant white, British core culture in relation to which other cultures are tolerated.

This kind of backlash arises in tandem with and makes swift use of militarization. In my study of the anti-native backlash during the “Caledonia Crisis” I examined the ways the indigenous occupation of a construction site on the outskirts of the small Ontario town was framed by anti-Native organizers as an unforgivable disruption to “ordinary life” and insisted all levels of government in Canada adopt a highly militarized response (McCready). Backlash leaders like Gary McHale and Mark Vandermaas rendered explicit the connection between the perceived failure of police and politicians to “take charge” of “native lawlessness,” and an impoverished and troubled patriarchal authority. A retired UN Peacekeeper who characteristically appeared and spoke at anti-Native rallies in his military uniform, Vandermaas' description of his commitment to the “innocent victims” of Caledonia is worth sharing as one among many examples of how militarization and the War on Terror abroad are linked to this war on anti-racist activism in general and “Native lawlessness” in particular at home:

I went to the Middle East with the Canadian Forces on a UN mission to preserve peace between Egypt and Israel; how could I refuse to go to Caledonia to defend justice for children on the 6th Line who live without
policing? How can I dishonour my military brothers and sisters by putting a big screen TV ahead of the rule of law and fundamental justice here in Ontario while they face suicide and roadside bombs half a world away? … 85 Canadian soldiers have come home from Afghanistan in boxes; thousands more are buried overseas – all killed while trying to defend people they didn’t know. Many more have been maimed or scarred. The price we [he and Gary McHale and other non-resident supporters of affected non-Natives] have paid to restore justice in Ontario is nothing by comparison. 4

The militarized ideas of individual sacrifice, national innocence, benevolence, victimhood, and betrayal thus produced easily lend themselves to exclusive, race-based nationalist iterations and mobilizations. As I argue, previous idealistic versions of multiculturalism, even in their constant struggle against the more technocratic and managerial aspects of the policy, have been supplanted by a potent military multiculturalism, a model of fraternity (even when extended to female soldiers) that posits the military and its cultural uniformity and homogenization of difference as the true site of multicultural inclusion, and projects this militarized basis for social cohesion onto the social body.

The very language, then, of peacekeeping and multiculturalism that so effectively fashioned Canadian national identity after the expiration of the language of loyalty to the old United Empire has since been re-fashioned into the basis of an emerging culture of national supremacism in which Canada,
enlightened and civil, creates a military role for itself as moral authority and
enforcer and arbiter of democracy. This new exceptionalism bears a resemblance
to old-fashioned imperialism, in which the incivility of imperialist violence and
usurpation is legitimated in the name of a superior civility rooted in the British
legal system. Now, however, the superior civility of Canadian liberal capitalist
democracy becomes a useful rationale and key legitimation in the ongoing project
of neo-imperialism around the globe.

The rest of the world groans when Americans unabashedly continue to
express their dogged belief that the United States is the “best country in the
world.” We are entering a period in which Canadian belief in Canada’s tolerance,
benevolence, and moral exemption from all of the oppressions and exclusions that
are the necessary accoutrements of the modern capitalist state is held in similar
contempt. One example of this is Canada’s recent failure to win a seat on the
Security Council at the UN (Slater). Canada failed to gain the seat because of the
widespread understanding that this would be a second seat for the United States,
and for Israel (Engler, “How Pro-Israel?”). I take this as evidence that whatever
moral capital Canada had gained through peacekeeping and multiculturalism, it
has now cashed in for a chance to play on the team it thinks is winning.

Finally, this new Canadian Exceptionalism, which I use as short-hand for
complex emergent tendencies in Canadian cultural politics, at the same time
makes Canadian nationalism more “American-style,” louder, more bombastic and
self-congratulatory, less self-conscious and self-reflexive, even as it uses a
directly contrary spirit of social ideals (however inadequate, however self-serving,) to form the content of the new patriotism.

I have drawn on the work of Doug Kellner who documented the transformation of American culture during the First Gulf War through public relations coups, pro-war media saturation, and bold-faced lying politicians. The First Gulf War was a key moment in the advancement of the culture wars in the United States, and in my assessment, many of the same tendencies are in effect and gaining ground in Canada in the present. Perhaps the fact that Canada is amidst its own culture war will not be such a profound observation to kind readers of this thesis, especially given the most recent federal election’s Conservative majority (May 2nd, 2011). Indeed, the major daily newspapers, the Toronto Star (Benzie et al.) and the Globe and Mail (Silver), have been proclaiming “culture war” in their headlines for at least a year and a half now. What I mean to say here is that manifestations like the election of the extreme right conservative populist Rob Ford as mayor of Toronto, and the public acceptance of right-wing commentator and hockey guru Don Cherry’s inflammatory attacks on “bike riding pinkos” in support of Ford’s victory (Rider), would not have been possible before the cultural shift made possible by militarization.

The kind of patriotic push we are witnessing at present in Canada, a militarized patriotism in the service of neoliberal transformation, is particularly pernicious. It displaces civic values with military values, and conscripts the emotive faculties of citizens to further a specific far-right vision of Canada and of
Canadians.

1 http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/

http://www.law.utoronto.ca/faculty_content.asp?itemPath=1/3/4/0/0&contentId=1617

3 Recall here the “Bloody Saturday” of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, and also the less well-known Davis Day, which is still observed on June 11th in Cape Breton in memory of William Davis who was killed when police, private company police, and nearly 2,000 Canadian soldiers were deployed to break the coal miners’ strike of 1925. Only the Northwest Rebellion of 1885 had seen a greater consolidated use of state force domestically. Miners were attempting to reestablish the supply of power and drinking water to their homes, which had been shut off by the mining corporation, when Davis was shot.

4 This is the text of Vandermaas’s speech at a public meeting in Caledonia, titled “It WAS worth it Jack” of January 14 2007, reprinted on his website:
http://voiceofcanada.wordpress.com/2007/01/14/voc-speech-in-caledonia-it-was-worth-it-jack/
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