Remembering Forced Forgetting: The Politics of Remembrance Day Ceremonies in Canadian Schools

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Abstract

In this essay, we argue that Remembrance Day ceremonies in schools promote an inadequate conception of Canadian national identity by overlooking how Indigenous experiences reside in national remembrance. We argue that Remembrance Day observances convey the notion that war happened outside of North America, while overlooking the extent to which war and genocide occurred on this very continent and in this country as part of colonization. Our concern is that the essence of Canadian national identity is reflected in the bravery of soldiers who fought a foreign enemy, while the abuse that occurred in residential schools is often construed as an anomaly, not the 'real' Canada, not reflective of what it means to be Canadian. Recent discoveries of Indigenous children buried in unmarked graves at residential schools point to another example of the deaths that happened as part of colonization. This essay concludes by exploring how education may contribute to a more robust form of remembrance in which Indigenous perspectives and experiences are present.

Keywords: Remembrance Day, memorialization in schools, peace education, nationalism, Canadian national identity

Remembering Forced Forgetting: The Politics of Remembrance Day Ceremonies in Canadian Schools

In this essay, we argue that Remembrance Day ceremonies in schools promote an inadequate conception of Canadian national identity by overlooking how Indigenous experiences reside in national remembrance. We undertake a conceptual/philosophical analysis, backed up with references to existing policies. In exploring the importance of a critical survey of history and its influence upon how we reflect through remembrance, we seek to question key assumptions about the role of such commemorations as Remembrance Day, as well as the representation of Canada's role in foreign military conflicts as it relates to the history of colonial conflict on this continent and in this country. There are two central arguments in this paper: 1) a critique of the ways schools tend to remember and teach about wars through Remembrance Day activities that promote a specific form of national identity, and 2) the ways these practices erase Canada's violent colonial conflict with Indigenous peoples that occurred on their own territories.

We argue that Remembrance Day discourses reflect a widespread understanding of war, conflict, and the Canadian experience that is increasingly outdated. We argue that the contemporary attention to the 'Indian Residential School' (IRS) System and the related evidence of mass graves is helping Canadian society remember what has been forcefully forgotten, and, thus, revealing the anachronistic nature of contemporary Remembrance Day. By engaging with questions about Remembrance Day, this essay aims to contribute to discussions about the significance of history education in Canada, perceptions of our history within the larger culture, and the role of memory and memorialization in schools, insofar as they are often aligned with citizenship building and the history of Indigenous groups in Canada (Deer & Trickey, 2020; Osborne, 2000, 2003).

To support a reading of this essay, we note that the first author is a white non-Indigenous male settler scholar and the second author is a male Indigenous scholar from Kahnawake, Quebec. Both scholars teach in Canadian faculties of education and have expertise in education and teacher education in Canada, particularly regarding teaching controversial issues, history education, and memorialization. While both scholars come from different backgrounds, a shared concern motivates them to engage in this critical inquiry to promote a deeper understanding not only of the details of colonization in Canada but also to problematize what is deemed as legitimate to be included in Remembrance Day in schools. Students in both K–12 and teacher education contexts are exposed to Canadian history in a variety of contexts: museum visits, social media, history courses, family stories, and, most relevant to this essay, Remembrance Day ceremonies. Our main argument is that Remembrance Day ceremonies convey the notion that war happened elsewhere, while overlooking the extent to which war occurred on this very continent as a part of colonization. Recent discoveries of Indigenous children buried in unmarked graves at residential schools, first in Kamloops, in 2021 (Government of Canada, 2021), have brought considerable attention to this aspect of Canada's past, explored by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) reports (2015). Some news outlets responded quickly, calling it a 'mass grave hoax' (Southern, 2021) and a 'fake news story' (Glavin, 2022), while academics have responded with a more nuanced clarification of misrepresentations of coverage of the topic (Gerbrant & Carleton, 2023). We emphasize that the family separations and deaths that happened as a part of colonization are as central to Canadian identity as wars overseas. If Canada was born in war and death, as Stephen Harper notes happened at Vimy Ridge, it's important to address this rhetoric by emphasizing the role of deaths here on this soil (Crawford, 2014; Government of Canada, 2007). This essay

concludes with an exploration of how education may contribute to a more robust form of remembrance in which Indigenous perspectives and experiences are present.

Scholars of nationalism and national memory debate the extent to which a nation can bear its unpleasant truths (Anderson, 1983; Carr, 2003). Engagement with this topic demonstrates the strengths and value of a liberal democracy and its freedoms. Authoritarian regimes do not allow such critical investigations. We want to emphasize that our comments are not intended to minimize the contributions the military has made, nor to express any ingratitude towards individual military personnel. Our hybrid approach emphasizes the inseparable nature of the different forms of loss that shaped Canada's formation; those who fought and died in Europe, and those who lost their lives as a part of colonization within Canada.

Before examining how Remembrance Day has shaped and is shaping national identity in schools, it is important to first understand that these ceremonies have never been without controversy. The complex nature of commemoration and remembrance has been evident since their inception, raising important questions about who and what we choose to remember.

Controversies of Remembrance

A vast majority of educational resources for Remembrance Day are provided by Veterans Affairs Canada (Veterans Affairs, n.d.). Some of these resources aim to personalize the war by encouraging students to investigate the daily life of soldiers, get to know an individual soldier by listening to interviews with veterans, or research particular battles where many Canadians lost their lives. These are intended to make war more real and personal. For example, the Borrow a Boot campaign (Veterans Affairs Canada, 2022) sends K–12 classes a pair of modern combat boots similar to those worn by Canadians who fought in WWI at Vimy Ridge, in France. As government-approved learning resources, they are likely to be used widely without engaging larger questions about violence and colonialism. Furthermore, the vast majority of teachers in Canada are predominantly of Euro-Western culture and have had less experience with Indigenous history and perspectives (McKenna, 2023; Tessaro et al., 2021).

First adopted in 1921, red poppies were first worn in Canada shortly after the First World War. The Royal Canadian Legion has a copyright on the red poppy and uses it to raise organizational funds. Other organizations associated with military presence participate in Remembrance Day events in schools. For example, the Canadian Forces Memory Project (https://www.thememoryproject.com/), an initiative of Historica Canada, receives funds from Veteran Affairs, Canadian Heritage, and the Department of National Defence and has reached more than 1.5 million Canadian students. The Canadian Foreign Policy Institute notes that Historica Canada promotes the idea "that citizenship is constructed primarily through experiencing Canada's military past" and has "helped rewrite the citizenship study guide for new immigrants" (Canadian Foreign Policy Institute, n.d., para. 2).

From their inception, Remembrance Day ceremonies have not been without controversy. For example, many pacifists, conscientious objectors (Wallis, 2014), and war resisters were often court-martialled and died in prison (British Online Archives, n.d.); while others, despite their opposition, were forced to go overseas, where they were often shot by their own country for refusing to fight (IWM: Imperial War Museum, n.d.). Many French soldiers suspected of self-injury, with the intention to evade further military service, were shot to 'set an example' (Brorder, 2022). This common event is memorialized in the novel *Flowers of the Field*, in which a young British soldier dies in prison as punishment for refusing to return to the front line in the First World

War (Harrison, 1980) and explores the question of whether soldiers who were killed by their own armies should be included in remembrance ceremonies. These are all significant questions in the context of war remembrance, especially in educational environments.

The contentious nature of Remembrance Day observances reflects broader tensions in how Canada remembers and commemorates its past. White poppies, also called peace poppies, were introduced in Britain in 1933 by the No More War Movement, with the intention of including a broader group, one not directly associated with any military organization, by commemorating "all victims of war, civilian and military, while challenging the beliefs, values, and institutions that make war seem inevitable" (https://peacepoppies.ca/). The Peace Poppies organization notes:

> While respecting and honouring the sacrifice of soldiers, mixed poppy wreaths like those on the left also recognize the huge shift towards higher civilian casualties in recent conflicts. Civilian victims (including many children) now make up more than 90% of the total war dead. [...] By exploring the broader impacts of war, and better reflecting the experience of recent immigrants, teachers at all grade levels can help keep Remembrance Day relevant to students' lives and interests. (White Poppies, n.d., para. 5)

Whereas red poppies are all too vulnerable to appropriation for militarism, white poppies are overtly pacifist and aimed at a wider group, including civilians. The No More War Movements lists those affected by war, including:

- Children killed, injured, or orphaned by war
- Conscientious objectors and war resisters
- Medical and aid workers killed while helping others
- Child soldiers
- Refugees fleeing conflict
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder sufferers (civilian and military)
- Women raped and victimized in wartime

Indigenous artists are also reclaiming poppies through beaded artwork instead of the Legion's version (Szeto, 2021).

These historical and ongoing controversies surrounding Remembrance Day observances reveal deeper questions about how national identity itself is constructed and maintained through acts of commemoration of military members. To understand how such ceremonies influence perceptions of colonization and national identity in schools, we must first examine how Canadian national identity itself is formed and sustained.

Remembrance and National Identity

To understand how Remembrance Day ceremonies shape perceptions of colonization and national identity in schools, we must first examine how Canadian national identity itself is constructed and maintained. Remembering our past as a way of understanding and even celebrating a national identity has taken a number of forms. A ubiquitous type of remembrance among many nation-states (including Canada) focuses on contributions to armed conflict. In the case of Western military powers such as Canada and the United States, this form of remembrance tends to

emphasize foreign victories that involve struggle and loss, contrasted by eventual victory against ostensibly nefarious foreign powers.

National identity is sustained through various means: sport, cultural, and religious observances, and evolving understandings of diversity, people, and communities; all of which contribute to shaping what it means to be Canadian. Although some may readily buy into the simplicity of Pierre Berton's idea that to be Canadian is to know how to make love in a canoe (Doyle, 2015), the truth is that a national ethos is the outworking of a complex co-existence and intermingling of experiences, world views, innovations, and histories (Beiner, 1999). If national identity is something from which a citizenry may draw pride, then how we make sense of our shared history becomes a crucial exercise.

So strong are the historical narratives associated with remembrance of military activities to condition understandings of national identity that they exist in the public consciousness at the expense of other overlooked yet significant aspects of our shared history. This history features many undesirables but real aspects that involve the traumatic experiences of Indigenous peoples—experiences that emerge from the colonial project of Canada.

In the ceremonial contexts of remembrance, crucial questions often remain unasked. What exactly are we remembering or honouring (Aldridge, 2014)? What are we leaving out? What sense of Canadian identity is developed and served through Remembrance Day?

Our concern is that a perceived 'essence' of Canadian identity is reflected in the bravery of soldiers who fought a foreign enemy, while the abuse that occurred in residential schools is often construed as an anomaly, not the 'real' Canada, nor reflective of what it 'truly' means to be Canadian. Questions about colonialism are easily put in brackets on Remembrance Day while the country remembers the heroic efforts of soldiers overseas. But we argue that Canada cannot have heroes and heroism without acknowledging the injustice and genocide that constitute very real aspects of our history; the brave soldier fighting in a distant war is just as central to the Canadian national identity as those children buried in unmarked graves.

Even as soldiers fought in the name of freedom, Indigenous children were being torn from their families, abused, and buried in unmarked graves. Investigations at several sites of former residential schools, following the discoveries of hundreds of children buried across Canada (Government of Canada, 2024), many are concerned with a remembrance of a different sort—one that is not about celebration or honour but rather focuses upon the genocidal dimensions of the residential school system. These include deaths that were a key element of the "nation-building" project of Canada.

Scrutiny of Canada's past may help develop a richer, more expansive understanding of Canadians and Canadian history, and who and what we are as a nation. Critical examinations of remembrance—centred on Indigenous peoples' experiences—broaden the focus and illuminate the presence of other historical and contemporary issues surrounding Remembrance Day. Specifically, it could be argued that the deaths that occurred here were a more central part of the creation—and continuation—of Canada than the loss of soldiers who died in the trenches defending the British Empire against the Central Powers. There is growing recognition of Indigenous soldiers who lost their lives fighting overseas. But what about those who died as part of the creation of Canada? Treaty obligations that led us to fight against the Austro-Hungarian Empire were considered more worthy than those signed on this continent.

It could be argued that Indigenous children's separation from their families and their deaths were also central to the establishment of Canada and the loss of soldiers in the trenches defending the British Empire. How is a soldier who fought the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Central Powers more important to Canadian identity than innocent children who died here? We aim to advocate for a more mature, realistic, and integrated vision of Canada. We also hope to ensure that the significant progress made in recent years to uncover abuse at residential schools and other atrocities against Indigenous groups is not construed as an anomaly or a minor, inconsequential episode to be obscured by heroic war efforts in Europe.

These theoretical considerations about national identity and remembrance manifest in concrete ways within Canadian schools. For example, when we examine how Remembrance Day is actually observed and taught in educational settings, several specific concerns emerge.

Remembrance Day and National Identity in Schools

War Happened Elsewhere

One of our main concerns with Remembrance Day ceremonies in schools is that they convey the notion that wars happen elsewhere. Remembrance Day ceremonies can allow settler Canadians to overlook that war took place here on this continent, too. We argue that the 'hidden curriculum' of Remembrance Day obscures the extent to which invasion and violent colonization form part of Canada's founding and continuance. We argue that those who died here as a result of historical and ongoing colonialism are as integral to the creation and continuity of Canada as those who fought in foreign wars, and therefore, they should be recognized on Remembrance Day.

Nationalism, Memory, and the 'History Wars'

The notion that Canadian identity was forged on European battlefields and that war and the military are essential to nation-building, that war builds nations through 'iron and blood,' is an old but persistent one: In the lead-up to German unification, in 1862 chancellor Otto von Bismarck gave a speech calling for the use of war to advance unification; he asserted that decisions to accomplish this goal must be based on 'iron and blood' (Bismarck, 1924–1935; see also Brooks, 2023). Bismarck believed that the only way to build a common national identity was through war, but history shows that founding a nation based on war can have problematic consequences for generations.

The 19th-century French historian Ernest Renan (1882/1992) claimed that forgetting is the founding act of a nation: "Forgetting, I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation" (p. 3). However, the essence of a nation lies in the fact that its members share not only common traits and experiences, but also that they have 'forgotten' much. Renan later says that what defines a nation is "having common glories in the past and a will to continue them in the present; having made great things together and wishing to make them again" (p. 10). What citizens share in common is remembering and forgetting. The myth of Canada all too often serves to forget and ignore Indigenous experiences in society and in the curriculum (Donald, 2009). A broader view of what is considered worth remembering could redefine what it means to be Canadian—that a nation's strength is evident in its capacity to remember both good and bad. Education, after all, is both forward and backward looking; it is as much about preserving and remembering as about projecting into the future.

Historical memory is an essential part of national identity (DiPaolantonio, 2015), and history education is inseparable from efforts to articulate and elaborate narratives of nation-building

(Clark et al., 2015; Russel, 2018). Nations are not monolithic, though there may be considerable efforts to constitute a coherent, unified narrative. As a socially, politically, and legally constituted community, a nation is an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) that gives bearing and identity to its citizens that it both shapes and is shaped by. As a collective set of customs, norms, language, and religious and territorial relations, national identity provides a sense of continuity. Philosopher of education Sigal Ben-Porath (2011, 2012) describes the 'shared fate' that shapes those who live within a nation's borders and who participate in deliberation and cultural expressions, and is built on the oneness of geography, history, and religion. Sarah Desroches (2018) notes that while fate may be "shared," it is also multiple: She advocates for an "education of shared fates in which students are invited to view histories as a complex web of power relations in which we are all intertwined with one another and in which historical constructions of identity and nationhood make it so that our fate cannot be viewed as singular" (p. 484). The preservation of alterity and difference is no easy task, and this has led to what scholars of history education call 'the history wars.' History is never a settled fact. It is contested, interrogated, and debated as views change, as new evidence becomes apparent, and as its meaning changes and different interests seek identity through it (MacDonald, 2015; Seixas, 2004).

Remembrance Day as Nation-Building

In Canada, Remembrance Day has been observed for more than a century. While public education falls under provincial jurisdiction, Remembrance Day ceremonies are associated with a national observance that has been marked by its own statutory holiday, which is understood to have served a larger nation-building project (Clark et al., 2015). We emphasize the need to develop a critical dialogue about the grand narratives that go into nation-building, in particular, the portrayal of Canada in Remembrance Day ceremonies. These are doubly important in the face of growing political apathy in our media-saturated, consumer-oriented culture (Norris, 2011, 2020; Harvey, 1992) and a narcissistic self-orientation (Lasch, 1979). This cultural, public, and pedagogical use of the past is intended to ensure that the past does not disappear, and to promote a particular vision of Canada that includes an ethos of heroism as well as the country's status as an international leader.

However, this too easily allows Remembrance Day to convey the notion that serious trauma and conflict associated with war only occur outside of Canada. Through elevated observances such as Remembrance Day, the reference to sanguinary conflicts such as the First World War can have far-reaching consequences for how we apprehend trauma and conflict within Canada: First, it can affect the public consciousness in a way that prioritizes war as the forum where trauma and conflict occur; and, second, it can elevate Canada's status as a fair government whose actions are informed by justice and human rights.

Given that Remembrance Day may be regarded as foundational to the long-term nation-building project of Canada, and growing recognition of trauma and conflict within and perpetrated by Canada against Indigenous peoples, an opportunity lies before Canadians to reimagine what is remembered on this annual statutory holiday and the aspects of Canadian history that inform what is important to remember (Deer & Trickey, 2020) The opportunities for students in primary and secondary schools who are learning about our shared histories, which will inform their journey toward moral truth, are crucial here. If Remembrance Day is to remain part of the school ethos, then these ceremonies should provide opportunities for critical reflection about Canadian national identity.

We also argue that any school-based commemoration should involve some form of critical engagement to promote learning and deepen student engagement with the topic of remembrance, which will help develop engaged citizens capable of discussing and reflecting on sensitive social and political issues in a thoughtful manner. Given that students and the broader public are faced with questions about what Remembrance Day celebrates, a critical examination of what is left out will offer a richer, more expansive understanding of ourselves, our past, and what we are capable of as a nation-state.

Veterans Affairs Canada says Remembrance Day is about helping Canadians "understand the price of freedom," claiming that "the important thing for all of us to remember is that they [soldiers] fought to preserve a way of life, Canadian values, and the freedom we enjoy today and often take for granted. We remember these brave men and women for their courage and their devotion to ideals" (Veterans Affairs Canada, 2019, para. 10). However, much of this description of bravery and devotion could also apply to Indigenous peoples who died here as part of the creation and continuation of Canada, who are as worthy of commemoration as soldiers who died in wars overseas.

Contemporary Enactments that Remember Forced Forgetting

Remembering The IRS System

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) provide an extensive investigation from the testimony of many survivors (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015), and an ongoing opportunity for involvement under the 'Share Your Experience' initiative (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, n.d.). The increased attention since the TRC's evidence gathering and final reports in 2015 has been instrumental in national remembering of Indigenous peoples' experiences in Canada. By targeting the most vulnerable of any population, young children, the system devised a way for the nation-state to, as Deputy Superintendent of the Department of Affairs D. C. Scott said, "get rid of the Indian problem" (McDougall, para. 22, 2018). In time, many students would lose their language, their culture, and, in many cases, their lives (Daschuk, 2013).

The purpose of the residential school system was to establish sovereignty in the Dominion of Canada through the removal of Indigenous children from their families through forced assimilation, which historian James Daschuk (2013) referred to as 'clearing the plains' in his book by that title.[1] However, developments during the 1970s and 1980s, particularly the "Red Paper" (Bradburn, 2023), a First Nations' response to the Government of Canada's White Paper, (Lagace, & Sinclair, 2020), helped inform the conversations on Indigenous peoples' well-being and rights, and the justice necessary for a process that would eventually be known as reconciliation.

A statement of apology to former students of residential schools was presented in the House of Commons by then Prime Minister Stephen Harper on June 11, 2008: "On behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this Chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to Aboriginal peoples for Canada's role in the Indian residential schools system" (para. 7). While the residential school system was sanctioned and approved by the government, through the Indian Act, many of these schools were run by various Churches

[1] Most of the deaths and unmarked graves are associated with Residential schools, and it would be a larger project to differentiate Day Schools from Residential schools regarding impacts and deaths, and what we are advocating should be included in memorialization.

(https://www.anishinabek.ca). In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission called for an apology in Call number 58 of the 94 Calls to Action. The discovery of unmarked graves seems to have brought about the Pope's apology—though only after immense pressure (CBC News, 2022).

On April 1, 2022, Metis, Inuit, and First Nations delegations travelled to Rome and spoke with Pope Francis about the devastating legacy of the schools. The Pope apologized for the abuse perpetuated by many Catholics, including priests and nuns. In his own words: "For the deplorable conduct of those members of the Catholic Church, I ask for God's forgiveness, and I want to say to you with all my heart: I am very sorry… I feel shame—sorrow and shame—for the role that several Catholics, particularly those with educational responsibilities, have had and all these things that wounded you, in the abuses you suffered, and in the lack of respect shown for your identity, your culture, and even your spiritual values" (CBC News, 2022).

In July 2022, Pope Francis travelled to Canada and visited gravesites at several residential schools, where he issued an apology and asked for forgiveness, even using the word 'genocide.' In Maskwacis, Alberta, he said, "I have come to your native lands to tell you in person of my sorrow, to implore God's forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation" (Maskwacis, 2022). Likewise, the Archbishop of Canterbury travelled to Canada and apologized for the Anglican Church's role: "For building hell and putting children into it and staffing it, I am more sorry than I could ever, ever begin to express" (Cryderman et al., 2022).

Such apologies are an encouraging example of increasing awareness and recognition of this part of the Canadian past, issued at the highest levels. The adoption of an Indigenous Veterans Day (November 8) and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (September 30) (Government of Canada, n.d.) are significant and positive developments. However, Remembrance Day in Canada do not acknowledge the colonial genocide of Indigenous peoples and merely conveys the notion that Canada is formed by conflict elsewhere.

Remembering Indigenous Soldiers

Growing recognition of the vital role played by Indigenous soldiers led to the unveiling in 2001 of the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument in Ottawa, although monuments to Indigenous soldiers had existed across Canada since 1927 (Mowat, 2013; Sheffield & Gallant, 2022). These soldiers defended a nation-state that was founded on their own territories, fighting in regions from which their colonizers came. It was fought in defence of foreign treaties, even as treaty agreements here were broken. From the Kanienkeha'ka men who joined British forces in Egypt in the late 19th century to the Onkwehón: we who were conscripted for home and overseas service in the 1940s, the contributions of Indigenous military personnel have been a vital but relatively unrecognized aspect of Canada's military history (Veterans Affairs, 2021, 2022). However, many were mistreated upon their return, and they were not even allowed to vote until 1960 (Elections Canada, n.d.; Gibbons, 2013; Leslie, 2022).

For example, Ojibwa soldier Francis Pegahmagabow was born in 1891 on the Shawanaga First Nations Reserve in northern Ontario and served in the First World War, where he became a highly decorated scout and sniper and sustained several injuries. He was awarded several medals, including the Military Medal, the British War Medal, and the Victory Medal, making him the most decorated Indigenous soldier in Canadian history. "Although he was considered a war hero, Francis returned home only to face the same persecution and poverty that he had experienced before the war. Francis found his life regulated by powerful local Indian agents, who even

controlled his pension" (Koennecke, 2020, p. 42). Francis went on to advocate for Indigenous rights and was considered to be featured on the new five-dollar bill (McFadden, 2020).

One of the better-known stories of Indigenous service in the Canadian Armed Forces is that of Anishinaabe soldier Tommy Prince, who had ancestral ties to Peguis First Nation in Manitoba and attended the Elkhorn residential school. Renowned for his service during the Second World War and the Korean War, for which he received such awards as the British Military Medal and the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal, Prince reached the rank of sergeant in the Canadian Army and became the most decorated Indigenous serviceman in the Canadian military. After his service, he experienced great difficulty in accessing social welfare supports that were available to other servicemen and Canadian citizens (Binkowski, para. 14).

Faced with racism and societal mores that privileged others, Prince was forced into homelessness and suffered from alcohol addiction, similar to many other IRS survivors and died in poverty in 1977. His story has at least two branches that have received different kinds of recognition. For his meritorious contributions, which are lauded alongside the gallant activities of Allied forces during two major wars, he is broadly honoured as a soldier. But regarding his traumatic experiences as an Indigenous man who faced a lack of access and opportunities as well as governmental and societal racism, this branch of Prince's story is frequently overlooked (Binkowski, para. 15).

Remembrance and Recruitment

Recruiting youth as soldiers is often a central part of national identity building, and many countries actively target schools for military recruitment (Harrison, 2012). Though certainly far less indoctrinary than in many authoritarian countries (Roth, 2022), events in Canada, such as Remembrance Day ceremonies and Armed Forces Day, often serve as opportunities for military recruitment. Historian Ted Harrison argues that Remembrance Day commemorations may "inadvertently provide armed conflict with a cloak of respectability" (p. 42). Perhaps indicating a greater militarization of culture in general, there are more prevalent recruitment strategies in the US, which could serve as a warning; while not prevalent in Canada, they can serve as a warning for how remembering soldiers can be used to recruit new ones. The American Institute for Defense Analysis notes that access to schools is one of the most effective predictors of enlistment (Goldberg et al., 2018). American high schools host the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC), a high school elective program "whose mission is to teach students citizenship, leadership, character and community service" (www.veteran.com, 2022). During recruitment drives, the U.S. military administers tests such as the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Test (ASVAB) in schools (www.military.com, n.d.). The Supreme Court of the United States (2005) upheld a law that schools cannot prevent the military from accessing schools or they will lose federal funding, called the Solomon Amendment. Section 9528 of *No Child Left Behind* states that high schools that receive funds from the state must also allow recruiters the same access to students as employers and colleges (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), and it allows the Department of Defense to compile information about high school students for military recruitment as part of its Future Soldiers Training program (Rob, 2020).

There is a tension between recruitment in schools and how wars and soldiers are portrayed. One could rightly ask why the military is involved in teaching militaristic values rather than the schools themselves (Hagopian & Barker, 2011). In other words, the same educational institutions that celebrate Remembrance Day are used as locations for recruitment. The "International Network

for Opposing the Militarization of Youth" criticizes the inroads made by recruiters into school environments, noting that "the most aggressive outside effort to use the school system to teach an ideology with ominous long-term implications for society comes from the military establishment" (NNOMY: A National Call, n.d.).

Our aim in this paper is not to advocate for the importance of remembering Indigenous Soldiers, as important steps have been taken in this direction, as noted above. Instead, we aim to emphasize a more holistic and less binary representation of remembrance by including the history of colonialism and the IRS system.

The Critical Function of Schools

Schools are sites for critical thinking, active inquiry, and reflection, all essential to the development of engaged and committed citizens (Freire, 1970). If Remembrance Day ceremonies are going to be held in schools, they should involve active inquiry and critical engagement with difficult questions that students might not otherwise encounter. There are significant pedagogical reasons for introducing students to difficult social and political issues, even if it results in discomfort (Boler, 1999; Jonas, 2010; Mintz, 2012). Any event or organization that gains access to schools must further such educational aims. If schools hold Remembrance Day ceremonies, then schools should independently determine how it will be discussed in classrooms. (Aldridge, 2014) Although much about schools is ritualized and procedural, any formalized, state-approved, mandatory events must meet high pedagogical standards and promote critical thinking. In other words, such events should be opportunities for reflection about what Canada stands for, and schools are one of the only places in the culture where such conversations can occur.

This commitment to critical thinking in schools inevitably raises questions about the political nature of commemoration itself. While some might argue that schools should maintain political neutrality in their observance of Remembrance Day, closer examination reveals the inherent political dimensions of all acts of remembrance.

Remembrance Day is Never Neutral

One could assert that it is crucial to keep politics out of Remembrance Day. But we hold that Remembrance Day is already politicized; memorialization is never neutral (Aldridge, 2014). In addition to the issue of schools used for recruitment, our concern is that Remembrance Day ceremonies are used to promote a particular vision of Canada.

Furthermore, even in liberal democracies, memorialization is often used to prevent dissent. T-shirts and bumper stickers demand support for the military in a rather threatening manner: "If you don't stand behind our troops, then stand in front of them."[2] During the U.S. invasion of Iraq, tremendous efforts were deployed to restrict freedom of speech in schools. A 16-year-old student who wore a T-shirt with the words 'International Terrorist' beside a picture of President Bush was sent home (Lewin, 2003).

While it might seem that this pushes the intended meaning of Remembrance Day, it does not push it as far as the actions of those who distort the meaning to promote militarism and who attempt to draw in recruits. Expanding Remembrance Day to include the Indigenous children who died as

[2] See for example: https://www.ebay.com/itm/If-You-Dont-Stand-Behind-Our-Troops-Stand-In-Front-Of-Them-Patch-/142930996126?_ul=IL

part of the creation and continuation of Canada may be one way to make it more difficult to promote militarism around Remembrance Day.

Historian J. L. Granatstein (2018) expressed alarm about "the lamentable failure of our schools," because they do not adequately help Canadians "remember important war victories" or celebrate "the pride that Canadians should feel about their very substantial role in the war" (p. 48). In speaking of soldiers, Granatstein says: "Do not forget what they did for your country. Remember that you are free because of them" (2018, p. 46). In his Remembrance Day speech in 2014, Stephen Harper mentioned the contribution from Indigenous soldiers who fought against the Americans in the War of 1812, but he overlooked those who died in residential schools as part of the creation of Canada.

New Approaches to Remembrance Day: Cultural Clash vs. Sanitized Nation

In teacher education courses, the authors include readings that explore justifications for the inclusion of Remembrance Day ceremonies in schools. In the preceding week, we read literature about what constitutes a controversial issue, the pedagogical and political benefits of such discourse, and what leeway teachers should be afforded in discussing remembrance (Hess, 2004, 2011; Kelly, 2012), then explore the extent to which parents or administrators should be allowed to curtail such discussions (Maxwell et al., 2018)?

We aim to advance a new hybrid approach for Remembrance Day. There is something false about separating foreign wars from those fought here, something disturbingly sanitized in promoting a view of history as divided, separate, and distinct—that wars fought (primarily) in Europe are separate and distinct from colonial wars on this continent—whereas in fact the two cultures were and are colliding. Just as Cree painter Kent Monkman's paintings make it difficult to look at Europe or Canada in the same way, we hope to encourage Canadians to think of Remembrance Day in new ways. Monkman's paintings are large-scale, monumental works that combine historical references and contemporary themes to challenge colonial narrative and confront the viewers by reframing and recentering Indigenous experience. Monkman alludes to European art history even as he subverts it by fusing Indigenous themes and images.

We are inspired by the works of Kent Monkman, whose sometimes satirical, though always overt colonial critique comes through clearly and dramatically. In his art, mythologies collide in a jarring fusion of established archetypal Canadian and European symbols and styles, demonstrating the inseparability of romance and horror, pastoralism and violence. Sometimes, these are historically accurate confrontations, such as gut-wrenching paintings of RCMP officers and Catholic priests ripping Indigenous children from their screaming parents' arms. But more often, the scenes emphasize confusing and arresting images of cultural fusion and incongruity, such as a hunter in a long headdress sitting astride a motorcycle after felling a bison drawn in European cubist style. What seems to be a jarring incongruity is in fact reflective of the lived realities of colonizer and colonized, an arresting hybridity that speaks a truth of bound and fused historical events and experiences.

Building on Monkman, we are promoting a kind of cultural fusion, a bringing together of what have hitherto been construed as different cultural experiences. We advocate for the inclusion of two key Indigenous groups: those who died as part of the creation of Canada, and those who died in residential schools as part of its continuation. Such deaths are not exceptions to an otherwise innocent Canada, to be overlooked or disavowed in maintaining a pure image of a nation

that fights evil overseas. Instead, they are an inseparable part of the establishment of the nation of Canada.

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is separate and distinct from Remembrance Day, but the general reasons for observing Remembrance Day should offer further elements to this November holiday. We aim to bring the two cultures and historical experiences together, as two separate ceremonies may lead some settlers to continue their remembrance ceremonies without much reflection about the violence perpetrated here on these territories, and enable them to maintain the belief that the only conflicts Canada has been involved in were overseas.

But if we use concepts such as 'honour' or 'sacrifice' or 'for the Canadian way of life,' then those children could be included. What makes those children so worthy of remembrance is the idea that they also died 'for' Canada in the sense that Canada 'required' it; Canada could not have happened or continued without those deaths. They are not 'exceptions' about an otherwise innocent Canada that can be overlooked, put in brackets, or disavowed. They cannot be externalized to maintain a pure image of Canada; rather, they are an unavoidable part of what Canada is.

Conclusion: What Kind of Country is Canada?

It is essential to examine how war and its memory can be mobilized in ways that reflect the experience of Indigenous people in this country. Many nations are growing increasingly authoritarian as they impose monolithic and idealized depictions of their past to justify mass atrocities, crushing opposition and dissent, and a total mobilization of a society toward a war effort (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022). In such nations, schools and teachers are controlled and censored just as much as the media, which are forcefully mandated to promulgate justifications for militarization based on distorted historical narratives. Witness Russian president Vladimir Putin's aspiration to restore an imperialist Czarist Russia or a Stalinist Soviet Union, the loss of which are two of the greatest 'wrongs' the Russian peoples have endured, and to do so through historical narratives in schools (MacFarquhar & Mazaeva, 2023). As one of many examples, schools in Russia start with lessons called 'Important Conversations,' of which the minister of education Sergei Kravtsov said, "We want the current generation of schoolchildren to grow up in completely different traditions, proud of their homeland" (MacFarquhar & Mazaeva, 2023). In the U.S., Donald Trump called for a new "patriotic education" that "will state the truth in full, without apology: We declare that the United States of America is the most just and exceptional nation ever to exist on earth" (The White House, 2020). This is also evident in current efforts to prohibit the teaching of critical race theory, as it presents an imperfect vision of American history (Alexander, 2023).

These trends demonstrate the importance of promoting a national narrative that includes and gives voice to groups within that country that have been persecuted and marginalized as part of nation-building; that names those groups and those specific events that violated norms of human rights and liberal values; that includes redress toward those groups; and that shows those violations as inseparable from national identity. When national identity incorporates and addresses the horrors of its past, it can no longer be so easily idealized, romanticized, glorified, militarized, or construed as pure and innocent; those wrongs that must be redressed come not only from other nations but were perpetuated in building that nation.

Our position is that if Remembrance Day ceremonies are to be held in schools, they should be more than ceremonial and rather emphasize student involvement in active inquiry and critical

engagement with difficult questions that might not be otherwise encountered or engaged with. Our aim is also pedagogical, in the sense that we intend to raise a set of essential questions to consider: Is Canada the kind of country that cannot withstand engagement with the darker parts of its past? What exactly is a controversial issue, who decides, and how? What are the pedagogical and political benefits of such discussions? And last, what leeway should teachers be allowed when doing so? We suggest that Remembrance Day should not only recognize war efforts and losses on other continents but should also note that war and loss on this very land were part of Canada's own nation-building project.

Conventional approaches to Remembrance Day have become problematic and anachronistic due to emerging truths and increasing evidence of atrocities committed as a part of colonization. Our main aim in this paper is to advocate for a more mature, realistic, and integrated vision of Canada that draws together divergent histories, interests, and experiences to inform Canadian national identity. While progress has been made in recent years to respond to abuse at residential schools and other atrocities against Indigenous groups, it is important to ensure that these atrocities are not construed as an anomaly or a minor, inconsequential episode to be obscured by heroic war efforts in Europe.

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