

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

No Country for Old Myths

Reconstructing Canadian Identity through the War of 1812

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Abstract

Commemorating historical events is an intimately political phenomenon. What nations choose to commemorate or not, is indicative of a nation's collective memory. Reconstructing collective memory allows governments to influence a nation's ethos, which in turn, creates a symbiosis between governmental and popular conceptions of identity and political values. This paper examines the role of the Canadian federal government in shaping collective memory through its efforts to commemorate the War of 1812. I suggest that these efforts are part of a larger project of reshaping Canadian identity away from the Liberal Party's conception, towards a more conservative orientation. In this measure, I examine how and why collective memory becomes institutionalized, and discuss what these efforts reveal about the connection between Canadian identity and federal institutions. Additionally, I analyze whether these attempts are effective through content analysis. I look particularly at the content of government websites as well as newspapers and magazines with significant readerships. This elucidates different perspectives on the war, and helps gauge the public's receptiveness to governmental narratives. This process revealed that there is no singular perspective on the war, suggesting that the government's attempts to alter national ethos through commemoration, has as of yet, been ineffectual. Furthermore, the conception of Canadian identity suggested by governmental narratives may not resonate with a large portion of the population, and may have the effect (intended or otherwise) of alienating these groups. I conclude that the government should consider these alternative views in its framing of history, as they form an integral and important component of Canadian identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Reconstructing the Past	4-5
i. <i>A View from Somewhere</i>	6
Historiography, Mythology, and Collective Memory	7
i. <i>Historiography</i>	8
ii. <i>Mythology</i>	8-11
iii. <i>Collective Memory</i>	11-13
Methodology	13-15
The War of 1812	15-16
The Politics of Commemoration	16-19
i. <i>The War of 1812 and the Rebranding of Canadian Identity</i>	19-21
ii. <i>The World According to Harper</i>	22-25
iii. <i>Canadian Heroes</i>	25-28
But to What Ends?	29
i. <i>Forget me not: Aboriginal and French Canadians</i>	29-31
ii. <i>Thought control or clever marketing?</i>	32
iii. <i>Per Nuntium Ad Victoriam</i>	32-33
iv. <i>A Modest Proposal</i>	33-34
How institutionalized are governmental narratives?	34-40
Conclusion	40-41
Works Cited	42-45

“Canada, like other nation-states, suffers from a contradiction between its public mythologies and its reality. Perhaps we suffer more than most. Perhaps the explanation is that, while all countries are complex, the central characteristic of the Canadian state is complexity. Mythology often turns into a denial of complexity. That can become its purpose.”¹

–John Ralston Saul

Reconstructing the Past

National monuments and commemorations do not sit idly as anachronistic decorative objects. They are constructed deliberately, and function to recreate and interpret historical events. Their meanings, intentions, usages, and constructions form a relational link between the past, present, and future. As such, they are important objects of study. Through them, one can deconstruct national, international, intranational, and cultural narratives. Doing so facilitates the contextualization and formation of broad identities, shaped by a singular set of events.²

This paper examines the Canadian federal government’s efforts to commemorate the War of 1812. The war involved several peoples, and can be viewed from a multitude of perspectives. It shaped the histories of French-Canadians, British peoples, immigrants, and Aboriginal communities differently. Despite this, the federal government has gone to great lengths to institutionalize the War of 1812 as an event of profound etiological³ importance for Canadians writ large. I analyze these measures with the hope of elucidating why the federal government

¹ John Ralston Saul, *Reflections of a Siamese Twin*. (Toronto: Penguin Group, 1997). P 3.

² Rogers Brubaker and Margit Feischmidt, “1848 in 1998: The Politics of Commemoration in Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia,” *Comparative Study in Society and History* 44:4 (2002), 700-744.

³ I use the term “etiology” synonymously with “origination.” In this respect, I suggest that the War of 1812 is alleged to be the founding event of Canada, in terms of a national historical narrative.

chose to commemorate the war, and examine what these efforts say about the relationship between governments and national historical narratives in Canada.

I argue that the federal government is attempting to control collective memory by monopolizing historical narratives. Through proliferating particular accounts of the war, it is able to proffer its own conception of Canadian identity. This helps build a consensus on values, creating a symbiosis between popular and governmental ethos, the centralized societal beliefs that provide a particular dominant orientation to a society.⁴ In the case of the War of 1812, there has been an overlap between governmental and mainstream narratives, suggesting that the etiological myth of the war has already been institutionalized for a large portion of the public, particularly, Anglo-Canadians. This overlap is worth studying, as governmental narratives and more critical scholarship on the war offer very different perspectives. I argue that the commemorations are part of broader Conservative agenda to reorient political and social values rightward.

Furthermore, I suggest that the project of creating a singular identity through the war will ultimately fail. The identity offered by the Conservative government in its literature on the war is incoherent, and fails to give a unitary account of who Canadians are. I suggest that the complexity of Canadian identity cannot be encapsulated by a singular narrative or a particular historical event. Thus, this project is ineffectual. A genuine effort to describe Canadian identity must abandon attempts at creating a monolithic identity and embrace a plurality of views.

⁴ Daniel Bar-Tal and Gavriel Salomon, "Israeli-Jewish Narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Evolutions, Contents, Functions, and Consequences." *History's Double Helix*. Rotberg, R. (ed.) (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006). P 25.

A View from Somewhere

From comparing different narratives on the War of 1812, it is clear that there is no singular, overarching perspective from which one can understand the conflict. Each point of view contains its own biases, political orientations and frameworks for understanding the events. As such, I am acutely aware of how my own background and biases colour my analysis and observations, and must preface the reader with some biographical information so that they may understand my point of view.

I am a twenty-four year old male from San Diego, California, of French, Ecuadorian, and Central and Eastern European ancestry. For the last four generations, no member of my family has stayed in their country of origin. My family's migration patterns were the result of ethno-nationalistic sentiments directed against Jewish populations in Europe. This history has made me sensitive to nationalism, and has provided me with an impetus for studying its origins and ramifications. It has also coloured my view of this phenomenon, and shaped my preference for counter-hegemonic perspectives.

Perhaps more importantly, I am an American living in Canada. This influences my understanding of the War of 1812, Canadian politics and identity. Many of the conclusions that I draw, are the result of my concerted effort to understand Canadian identity. My status as a foreigner limits my ability to understand how Canadians view themselves. Conversely, it provides me with the insight of an observer, as I have not been exposed to Canadian narratives on the war before moving to Ottawa.⁵

⁵ Sarah Wall, "Easier Said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography." *Creative Commons*, 2008.

Historiography, Mythology, and Collective Memory

It is difficult to gauge the political goals of rebranding Canadian identity, and even harder to estimate its ramifications. If collective memory is successfully reconstructed, commemoration becomes a powerful tool of manipulation. However, the motivations and nuances of the government's commemorative agenda are difficult to discern. This analysis not only offers plausible causes, but examines the possible effects, intended or not, of controlling collective memory in Canada. In their thorough analysis of commemoration efforts, Rogers Brubaker and Margit Feischmidt note:

The past is constructed and reconstructed to suit the needs and purposes of each succeeding generation; that even personal memory is a thoroughly social and cultural construct; that collective or social memory is not only constructed but chronically contested, the 'search for a usable past' involves not only highly selective memory and a good deal of forgetting but even outright 'invention'; that the politics of the present therefore not only shapes the representation, but often entails the misrepresentation, of the past-these have emerged as consensual, and richly explored, themes in the study of memory and commemoration.⁶

I argue that one should view the government's efforts to commemorate the war as an attempt to suit a "usable past" to their present intentions. This process involves narratives, mythology, and collective memory, which intertwine to form national histories.

⁶ Brubaker and Feischmidt. P 700.

Historiography

There are no vantage points from which one can objectively describe historical events.⁷ Although quantitative figures can be assessed and inculcated into research, one cannot view history as a meaningless trove of data. To provide context to events, one must choose a historiographical method. National (or nationalistic) histories use a narrative-based approach. In this sense, they often recount a story of the people living within a political or territorial community. As such, the narrations are loosely correlated with falsifiable claims.⁸ Like any narrative, national histories have a beginning (etiological foundation), middle (present), and end (ethos).⁹

Mythology

National identity formation is a process that integrates myths, personalities, and institutions.¹⁰ Through this process, certain figures and events often emerge to serve as important constituent elements of a nation's founding. In the case of the War of 1812, these personas and events take the form a myth, which purports to embody nationhood through relational links between the past, present, and future. In Canada, different figures and events contribute to the creation of national myths; however, they often do so by strengthening the constituent "nations" of Canada, in lieu of a singular identity.¹¹ By construing the War of 1812 as a great collaborative effort, historians help build upon the idea of unity in Canadian society. As Federal Heritage Minister James Moore notes:

⁷ Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁸ Joseph Morgan Kousser, "The Revivalism of Narrative: A Response to Recent Criticisms of Quantitative History," *Social Science History* vol 8, no. 2 (Spring 1984).

⁹ Jorn Rusen, "Historical Narration: Foundation, Types, Reason," *History and Theory*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Dec., 1987), P 87-97 ; Bar-Tal and Salomon.

¹⁰ Brubaker and Feischmidt. P 700.

¹¹ Ralston Saul. P 139-145.

The Prime Minister is personally very involved in this because he recognizes that, unlike a lot of other countries where you sort of have a singular watershed moment – or a Gettysburg address – we have not as many of these moments which are Pan-Canadian in consequence in terms of the development of the country.¹²

Mythology is an important element of nationality. Through myths, links are forged between governmental institutions, history and territory. They have played a role in forming the world we know today, and have led to both the creation and fracturing of nation-states.¹³ As such, they are invaluable resources for political authority. Notably, mythology comes from a variety of sources. In the case of ethno-national revolutions, they often legitimize change from the bottom up, as marginalized peoples confront state hegemonies, basing their claims on elements of shared identity. Conversely, mythology can be created from the top-down, as hegemonic structures legitimize their primacy by constructing a national origin or identity.¹⁴ In the latter case, historians and governmental institutions can work concomitantly to construct this identity.¹⁵ Describing his work as a historian, E.J. Hobsbawm commented:

Historians are to nationalism what poppy-growers in Pakistan are to the heroin-addicts: we supply the essential raw material for the market. Nations without a past are contradictions in terms. What makes a nation is the past, what justifies one nation against

¹² Steven Chase, "Ottawa to tread carefully in War of 1812 commemorations." *Globe and Mail*. Sep. 12, 2011.

¹³ Brubaker and Feischmidt. P 700-744.

¹⁴ Gerard Delanty and Krishan Kumar (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Nations and Nationalism*. (London: Sage Publications, 2006).

¹⁵ E. J. Hobsbawm, "Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today" *Anthropology Today* 8(1) 1992. & Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd. ed. (London: Verso, 1991). P 3.

others is the past, and historians are the people who produce it. So my profession, which has always been mixed up in politics, becomes an essential component of nationalism.¹⁶

The difficulty of articulating a Canadian identity stems largely from the multitude of competing national narratives. French-Canadians, Anglo-Canadians, and Aboriginal groups view their connection to the territory (partial or whole) of Canada differently.¹⁷ In this context, the challenges of creating a Pan-Canadian identity are formidable, as the historical roots of these nations are disparate. Furthermore, the founding narratives of their respective nationalities are institutionalized in a variety of ways. For example, Quebec nationalism was fomented from the bottom up, but has been institutionalized and nurtured through provincial governance.¹⁸

According to the government's narrative, the War of 1812 is the beginning of the story.¹⁹ Although immigration, migration, and land settlement describe the early history of non-indigenous Canada, the war is alleged to be the first significant event that was Pan-Canadian in scope.²⁰ As such, it is cast as the primary etiological event of Canadian mythology. Although history necessarily describes the past, its interpretations are remarkably flexible and diverse. Too often, it is manipulated in order to describe or justify political or social aspirations. For example, the origination of the Jewish people in Israel, is part of an etiological narrative on Jewish nationhood, and is used to justify the *aliyah*. Although the primary source of ancient

¹⁶ Hobsbawm. P 3-8.

¹⁷ Ralston Saul. P 81-101.

¹⁸ Fabrice Rivault & Hervé Rivet, "The Quebec Nation: From Informal Recognition to Enshrinement in the Constitution" in *Reconquering Canada: Quebec Federalists Speak Up for Change*, Edited by André Pratte, (Douglas & McIntyre, Toronto, 2008).P 273-296.

¹⁹ Government of Canada. Department of Canadian Heritage. *War of 1812*. 2011.

<<http://www.1812.gc.ca/eng/1305658803194/1317921921396>>. Retrieved: Feb. 1, 2012 .

²⁰ Steven Chase, "Ottawa to tread carefully in War of 1812 commemorations." *Globe and Mail*. Sep. 12, 2011. <<http://m.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics>>. Retrieved: Feb. 16, 2012 .

Jewish history is the Old Testament,²¹ the belief in the narrative is strong enough to continue settlement in the face of immense hostility from other groups that claim aboriginality.²² This example demonstrates the power of nationalistic narratives, as well as their loose affiliation with falsifiable claims. Although the stakes are higher in Israel than in Canada, it is important to critically evaluate both national histories because both narratives have the emotive capacity to shape and mobilize nations.²³

Collective Memory

National historical narratives form part of the collective memory of a nation. Collective memory refers to the shared pool of information held in the memories of two or more members of a group.²⁴ This has several characteristics. Firstly, it does not seek to tell a true story but rather describes a past that is useful for a group to function or exist. Secondly, it is shared by group members, and is treated by many as truthful accounts of the past, and a valid history of the group. Thirdly, it appears to both entail memories of past and recent events.²⁵ The last characteristic plays an important role in the politicization of history. By linking the past with present, governments are able justify political decisions on the basis of perceived continuity.

Collective memory narratives also touch on a number of themes. They present a positive image of one's group, and purport to characterize the acts, traits, values, or skills of a society. They also delegitimize the opponent to whom it tends to attribute all responsibility for the outbreak or continuation of conflicts. Lastly, they construe of one's group as a victim, and

²¹ I chose to discuss the Old Testament as an example because it provides a narrative history of what would eventually become a nation-state. I suggest that that this history is not based on empirical evidence, but storytelling.

²² Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, (Malden, MA; Polity Press, 2nd revised edition 2008). P 21-44.

²³ Neil Caplan, *The Israeli-Palestine Conflict: Contested Histories*, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). P 29-30.

²⁴ Maurice Halbwachs, *On collective memory*, (Chicago (IL), The University of Chicago Press, 1992). P 50-87.

²⁵ Bar-Tal and Salomon. P 23-25.

legitimize its actions as a just response to those of the opponent.²⁶ These themes are deeply embedded in the governmental narrative on the War of 1812. The governmental sources that I examine, describe the war in terms that both personify and exalt Pan-Canadian values. More importantly, they purport to describe what these values are. They also consistently describe the war as the product of American animosity and belligerence. This ignores the complicated and convoluted origins of the conflict, rooted in mutual misunderstanding and poor judgement on both sides.²⁷ Within this context, the narrative of victimhood is stressed, as the battles come to represent a Pan-Canadian coalescence, rooted in the mutual goal of repelling American forces.

The collective memory of a nation is represented in part by the memorials it chooses to erect.²⁸ Public memory is enshrined in memorials from the Friends of Tecumseh Monument, to the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Whatever a nation chooses to commemorate, or perhaps more significantly, what not to, is an indicator of its collective memory.²⁹ The politicization of history is part of the project of constructing national identity by controlling collective memory. If this project is successful, then the nation effectively creates a shared ethos.³⁰ Through commemorating the war, the government is engaged in an effort to shape Canadian identity, and in turn, political values.

Rogers Brubaker and Margit Feischmidt note that “literature on commemoration may risk overstating the salience and centrality of historical memory-or at least certain modalities of historical memory-to ordinary people.”³¹ By focusing too much on the construction, rather than

²⁶ Ibid.P 24-25.

²⁷ David and Jeanne Heidler, *The War of 1812*. (Westport; London: Greenwood Press, 2002). P 1-17.

²⁸ Brubaker and Feischmidt. P. 700.

²⁹ Zahara Azizi, “Memory: Collective v. Individual Narratives.” *Studies in Temporal Urbanism: The Urbantick Experiment*. Neuhaus, F. (ed.) (London, UK: Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis, Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg, 2011).

³⁰ Bar-Tal and Salomon. P 25-26.

³¹ Brubaker and Feischmidt. P. 700.

the reception of memory, one risks overestimating its actual resonance with the public. In order to measure the degree of institutionalization of particular narratives, I use the framework of Daniel Bar-Tal and Gavriel Salomon.³² They suggest that one can assess the primacy of a particular narrative when the following features are present: extensiveness,³³ wide application,³⁴ expression in cultural products,³⁵ and appearance in educational materials.³⁶

Methodology

I use content analysis in order to understand competing narratives on the war, in the context of collective memory and identity formation. In this measure, I compare governmental, mainstream, and educational material. Doing so helps elucidate the degree to which governmental narratives are institutionalized in Canadian society. I use the term “mainstream” to connote mass readership. I do not suggest that there is a singular mainstream narrative on the war, and examine what different popular publications say about commemoration efforts and the conflict. Like all sources, mainstream publications contain biases, as rhetoric does not exist in a vacuum. These sources tend to reinforce popular narratives, and often try not to offend the readers with statements that they may construe as offensive. Nevertheless, analyzing these publications provides insight into the rhetoric that many Canadians are exposed to and are valuable sources of information. These publications also have diverse political orientations,

³² Bar-Tal and Salomon. P 33-34.

³³ The beliefs of the narrative are widely held by society members, who acquire and store this repertoire as part of their socialization from an early age.

³⁴ Institutionalization means that society members not only believe in the narratives but also put them into active use. They surface in daily conversations, are referred to by leaders, and are employed in societal channels of mass communication.

³⁵ Institutionalization of the narrative is also expressed in cultural products such as films, TV programs, books, theatrical plays, and so on. They are part of a society’s cultural repertoire, relaying societal views and shaping attitudes. Through these channels such beliefs are broadly disseminated, reaching every public sector.

³⁶ Narratives beliefs are included in the textbooks used for school socialization.

which colour their perception of the war. In order to gauge these orientations, I use Srdjan Vucetic's map of Canada-US media systems.³⁷ Notably, I do not look at marginal publications, meaning those with very limited readership or an explicitly liberal or conservative orientation. As my goal is to understand the degree to which governmental narratives are institutionalized, I am less concerned with material that few Canadians read.

My sources of content are government websites, textbooks (Quebec and Ontario), magazine and newspaper articles. My main source for governmental accounts is federal websites dedicated to commemorating the war. These sites offer a particular view on the events and are rife with rhetoric. They therefore serve as a valuable tool for assessing the hegemonic narrative. Many of the popular publications that I review offer different accounts of the War of 1812, and often criticize the commemoration efforts as well as the government's conception of Canadian identity. I use some of these accounts in my own assessment of the government's efforts, as they provide a counter-hegemonic narrative despite their popularity. I analyze the content of textbooks in Ontario and Quebec, as the two provinces have differing conceptions of Canadian history, and therefore, offer competing narratives.³⁸ Textbooks are also an important tool for socializing society's members into a particular view, and have a large viewership as many students are required to learn their content.³⁹

Although my research elucidates the connection between the Canadian federal government and the control of historical memory and identity, I do not provide an in depth

³⁷ Srdjan Vucetic, "Mapping Can-US Media System." (Working paper).

³⁸ J. Lebrun, Lenoir, Y., Laforest, M., Larose, F., Roy, G.-R., Spallanzani, C. and Pearson, M. (2002), Past and Current Trends in the Analysis of Textbooks in a Quebec Context. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 32: 51–83.

³⁹ Daniel Bar-On and Sami Adwan, "The Psychology of Better Dialogue Between Two Separate but Interdependent Narratives." *History's Double Helix*. Rotberg, R. (ed.) (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006). P 206-207.

analysis of the government's explicit intentions. I suggest that controlling historical memory can be a poignant tool for political control, but I do not elaborate on which policies derive from this practice. A relational study between the conception of Canadian identity proffered by the Conservative government and its policies would be an excellent avenue for future research. The goal of this paper is to provide the theoretical framework for this endeavour.

Another limitation of my analysis is that I do not have a systematic method for comparing narratives. Although my research focuses on how and why governments attempt to control collective memory, I have few tools for gauging its effectiveness. One way to do so would be to perform a large, comparative media analysis on War of 1812 literature. This would enable one to gauge the consistency of narratives. However, such a study could not measure whether Canadians actually care about the war, or whether the rhetoric could inspire a change of ethos. In reality, the intentions of governments and their ability to effect change are often disparately related. In effect, it is impossible to measure whether the government's efforts to commemorate the war will achieve its desired results. This can only be answered retrospectively.

The War of 1812

Several ambiguities surround the War of 1812. Chief among them, is the unanswerable question of who won? The war ostensibly ended with the signing of Treaty of Ghent on December 24, 1814, that left both the British and American territorial claims unaltered by the conflict. Although historians continue to debate which nation won the war, there is little doubt that aboriginal North Americans lost massively as a result of the conflict. The Treaty of Ghent

did not include the Indian “neutral,” or buffer zone that the British promised to Tecumseh to his followers, suggesting that the aboriginal communities that fought alongside the British were misled.⁴⁰

Although the war concluded in a stalemate, it played an important role in the formation of Canadian mythology. Despite its nebulous outcome, the belief that Canada was victorious still occupies popular discourse.⁴¹ From government websites, textbooks and magazines, the War of 1812 has become immortalized as a defining moment for Canadian history and identity, with the victory over the United States emphasized with great hubris. On the eve of the War’s 200th anniversary, its canonization into the annals of history has never been so forcefully exaggerated.

The Politics of Commemoration

Governmental bodies play an explicit role in institutionalizing collective memory. From educational departments to heritage organizations, governments’ monopoly over the sites of collective memory provides them with the structural capacity to influence a nation’s ethos. This power is particularly transparent in the case of governmental heritage organizations, and other branches that participate in the process of commemoration.⁴²

Administratively, the Canadian federal government’s commemoration efforts begin with the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC). The members are appointed by Order-in-Council to represent both regional and national interests. The board makes its selections based on the submissions of each member in addition to local community leaders.⁴³

⁴⁰ Heidler and Heidler. P 127-139.

⁴¹ Randy Boswell, "Who won War of 1812 baffles poll respondents," *CanWest News Service*, Dec. 9, 2009.

⁴² Brubaker and Feischmidt. P 700-744.

⁴³ Historic Sites and Monuments Act (R.S.C., 1985, c. H-4).

Given the profound sociological implications of deeming sites historical, or worthy of commemoration, it is important to discuss the organization's role in fomenting Canada's historical narrative.

The HSMBC was created in 1919, in the midst of a Canadian identity crises brought to light by World War I. Britain's entry into the war made Canada's involvement obligatory. At the time, Anglo-Canadians largely supported military involvement, while most French-Canadians opposed it. The obstinacy of many Québécois resulted in forced conscription through the Military Service Act, which led to a series of riots and protests in what came to be known as the Conscription Crises of 1917. Under the leadership of Henri Bourassa, the seeds of Quebec nationalism were sewn, leading to a great schism in Canadian identity between Loyalists and French-Canadians.⁴⁴ The creation of the HSMBC and similar heritage organizations has been intimately tied to the project of forming a Canadian identity writ large. These organizations have sought to construct nationality through commemorating the War of 1812.⁴⁵ As a result, the war has been viewed as a foundational component of Canadian history, and continues to be construed as such.

Although 1867(Confederation) is often cited as the year Canada was founded, in 1917, it was still largely under the political auspices of Britain. Within this context, it is important to recognize the distinctly British character of governance, policies, and official conceptions of history. At the time, immigration and citizenship were largely contingent on race, with explicit preference given to British subjects.⁴⁶ In 1917, there were several independent organizations

⁴⁴ J.M. Bumsted, *The Peoples of Canada, A Post-Confederation History*, 2nd ed . Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2004. P. 141-160.

⁴⁵ Yves Yvon Pelletier, "The Politics of Selection: The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and the Imperial Commemoration of Canadian History, 1919-1950." *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*. 17.1, 2006.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

dedicated to preserving Canadian heritage through monuments and commemorations, but the HSMBC was the first bureaucracy to institutionalize these practices at the federal level.⁴⁷ As such, it serves as the first link between Canada's commemoration efforts and its federal government. Unsurprisingly, all eight original members of the HSMBC were white, Anglo-Canadians, more than half of which were from Ontario.⁴⁸

Given the role that the members played in forging a Canadian national identity through commemoration, it is unsurprising that the War of 1812 is so prominent. As a war between the British and Americans, commemoration was surely seen as a nod to Canada's British imperial founding, as evidenced by the exclusively Loyalist and Anglophone composition of the board.⁴⁹ Through their work as the primary architects of Canadian national history, the designation of commemorative sites elucidates how the War of 1812 became mythologized in the Canadian national narrative. Although the actors involved in the committee were instrumental in shaping a particular view, the selection of an exclusively white Anglophone committee shows the bidirectional relationship between government and historian.

Furthermore, the small size of the board, and the large influence they exercise over historical site designations, meant that the prevailing members' interests figured largely in the construction of Canadian history. In the context of the War of 1812, one cannot separate the interests of the board's members from the designation of commemorative sites. As of 2005, the board has designated 63 sites relating to the War of 1812, 81 percent of which were approved under the chairmanship of Ernest Alexander Cruikshank, a brigadier general and military

⁴⁷ C.J. Taylor, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada's National Historic Parks and Sites*. 2nd. (London, Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990). P 3-24.

⁴⁸ Ibid. Preface.

⁴⁹ Pelletier.

historian who wrote extensively on the war. This makes it the most commemorated event in Canadian history.⁵⁰

The War of 1812 and the Rebranding of Canadian Identity

The question of who Canadians are has captivated the popular imagination and has become an integral part of public policy and ironically, Canadian identity. For a country that invests so much in preserving and cultivating its heritage, it is not surprising that the question of identity is so complex and difficult to articulate. John Ralston Saul suggests that the crisis of identity stems from a desire to have a monolithic mythological founding, vis-à-vis the majority of Western nation-states. This desire has manifested in several attempts to define Canada singularly, a project that has largely failed due to the disjunction between a singular national narrative, and the complexity of Canadian reality.⁵¹

Since the founding of the HSMBC, the government has played an instrumental role in defining Canada through the official sanctioning of historic sites. Almost one hundred years later, governmental involvement continues unencumbered. Under the Conservative Party, the government has invested in a four year project at an estimated cost of 30 million dollars to celebrate its bicentennial. The project includes:

- A Pan-Canadian educational campaign focused on the importance of the War of 1812 to Canada's history
- Support for up to 100 historical re-enactments, commemorations, and local events
- A dedicated War of 1812 Monument in Canada's National Capital Region
- Interactive tours, exhibits, and improvements to national historic sites across the country
- Investments in infrastructure at key 1812 battle sites, such as Fort Mississauga and Fort York, Ontario, and celebrating and honouring the links that many of our current militia regiments in Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada have to the War of 1812⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid. P 7-9.

⁵¹ Ralston Saul. P 81-101.

⁵² Commemoration Website.

The government has promoted the war as a defining event for Canadian identity. On the government's website for the commemoration, 32 percent of the written content under the section "About the Commemoration," is dedicated to its role in fomenting a national identity. Through analyzing this discourse, one can gain insight into the official government narrative on Canadian identity, and its relation to the war. The following claims are extracts from the website:

1. Had the war ended differently, Quebec's French-speaking identity would not exist, and the history of Canada's Aboriginal peoples would have been profoundly altered.
2. The war, which saw militias in Upper and Lower Canada as well as from the Atlantic region fighting together in a common cause, was instrumental in creating Canada's military; some of our current reserve regiments in Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada trace their origins back to this time.
3. It took the combined efforts of the British army and navy, English- and French-speaking militia volunteers, and First Nations allies to succeed in defeating the American invasion.
4. These heroic efforts tell the story of the origins of the Canada we know today: an independent and free country united under the Crown with a strong respect for diversity. The signing of the Treaty of Ghent and other treaties that followed confirmed the border between Canada and the United States, which is now the world's longest undefended border, providing an example of nations coexisting peacefully side by side.⁵³

Strikingly, almost all of the information linking the War of 1812 to Canadian identity is historically controversial. Point one suggests that the integrity of the French language and identity was compromised by the invasion. In fact, there is no historical basis for this claim. Although a defeat may have led to annexation of what are now Canadian territories, the United States has historically had amicable relations with its French communities. Louisiana, like Quebec, has enjoyed the right to exercise French civil law alongside common law, and has had a

⁵³ Ibid.

strong francophone presence, mostly constituted of Acadian refugees of British Canada.⁵⁴ The United States has also served as the primary destination of French-Canadian émigrés. There are still large communities in Maine, Massachusetts and Vermont. As many Québécois would point out, the majority of threats to French-Canadian culture have come from the British, who for example, tried to eliminate French from governmental institutions with the British North America Act of 1840.⁵⁵

Point one also suggests that the fate of aboriginal communities would have been different had the British lost the war. The aboriginal component of the government's 1812 narrative is quite interesting, but at times, ambiguous and misleading. On governmental websites that discuss the war efforts, there is a large emphasis on aboriginal involvement, with a particular focus on the alliance between the British and Tecumseh's confederated militia. Although this is accurate, it omits the fact that Aboriginals fought with the British under the false hope of an Indian buffer state between the United States and British North America. With North American relations restored after the Treaty of Ghent, Tecumseh's promised state never came into existence.⁵⁶

Although points two and three are relatively uncontroversial, they are important as they demonstrate what the War of 1812 is alleged to mean for Canadians, and elucidate many components of Canadian identity vis-à-vis the official narrative. These points characterize Canada as the product of the cooperative efforts of First Nations, French-Canadians, and Anglo-Canadians. Although this characterization is a fair description of national aspirations, it is historically misleading. It ignores the next two hundred years of history fraught with linguistic and ethnic tensions. It also omits the role of immigrants in forming Canadian national identity,

⁵⁴ Dean Jobb, *The Acadians: A people's story of exile and triumph*. (Mississauga (Ont.): John Wiley & Sons Canada, 2005). P 296.

⁵⁵ Ralston Saul. P 97.

⁵⁶ Heidler and Heidler. P 127-138.

as well as their efforts in the war. Although a militia played a role in the war, it was composed not only of native-born Canadians, but also a large contingent of American defectors and settlers.⁵⁷ Lastly, the points describe the war as the beginning of the long lasting and peaceful cohabitation of Americans and Canadians in North America. Although the two countries have enjoyed good relations since the war ended, it is notable that a conflict fought between the two nations has come to symbolize friendship.⁵⁸ As Michigan's governor Rick Snyder opines, "I've never heard of two countries trying to figure out how to have a party over a war."⁵⁹

The World According to Harper

Governmental efforts to construct national narratives through historical memory provide insight into the dominant power's conception of identity. In Canada, official accounts of identity have changed over time, as idealized historical narratives have shifted in order to include or exclude the nation's constituent groups.⁶⁰ Presently, the government's conception of Canadian identity is postulated in various statements that link the War of 1812 to the founding of a nation. The war commemoration website describes Canada as an "independent and free country united under the Crown with a strong respect for diversity."⁶¹ Furthermore, Stephen Harper has stated:

The war helped establish our path toward becoming an independent and free country, united under the Crown with a respect for linguistic and ethnic diversity. The heroic efforts of Canadians then helped define who we are today, what side of the border we live on, and which flag we salute.⁶²

⁵⁷ Erik Kauffman, "Condemned to Rootlessness: The Loyalist Origins of Canada's Identity Crisis". *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 3 (1): 110–135, 1997. P 110-135.

⁵⁸ John Allemang, "The myth of 1812: How Canadians see the war we want to see." *The Globe and Mail*, Mar. 12, 2012.

⁵⁹ "The 1812 overture: Making the most of a forgotten war." *The Economist*. July 12, 2011.

⁶⁰ Ralston Saul. P 121-154.

⁶¹ Commemoration Website.

⁶² Ibid.

The statements by the Prime Minister suggest an interesting identity for Canadians. A nation that is both independent and united under the crown is both contradictory and at odds with how many Canadians feel about their connection to Britain.⁶³ Although Queen Elizabeth II is the head of state, a poll conducted in December 2009 indicates that only 24% of Canadians are aware of this fact. The same article claims:

The polls have suggested a drift towards republicanism in recent years: a survey of 1,000 people in June by the Strategic Counsel, a pollster, found that 65% thought Canada should cut its ties to the monarchy after the end of Elizabeth's reign, whereas only 35% wanted her successor to rule their country.⁶⁴

Since the Conservative Party came to power, the British connection has been stressed and institutionalized in a number of ways. Notably, the word "Royal" has been reinstated before the titles of the Canadian air force and navy. The government has also ordered that all embassies, consulates, and missions abroad hang portraits of Queen Elizabeth II in a peculiar homage to Anglo-Canada's founding. These are two of numerous examples of the Conservative government's efforts to rebrand Canada through the vestiges of its British past.⁶⁵

The Economist notes:

There is more to Mr. Harper's move than nostalgia, though the switch will delight veterans. They hated the merger by a Liberal government of the three forces, which gave them all green uniforms as bland as their names. It was part of an otherwise successful Liberal attempt to forge new national symbols divorced from colonial ties—they also

⁶³ "Canada and the Monarchy: Heir not so Apparent," *The Economist*. Ottawa. Oct. 29, 2009.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Sarah Boeshveld, "Canada's Royal Rebrand." *National Post*, Oct. 9, 2011.

<<http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/09/10/canada's-royal-rebrand/>>. Retrieved: Feb. 8, 2012.

introduced the maple-leaf flag, and promoted peacekeeping and multiculturalism—and to make them synonymous in the public mind with the party.⁶⁶

By promoting Canada's British heritage, the Conservative government is attempting to rebrand Canadian identity by forging its own set of national symbols. Through these efforts, the government is able to form a link between its party and a particular conception of Canadian identity. This could serve to displace the ideologies, symbols, and ethos that the Liberal Party has enshrined in Canada's social memory throughout its lengthy tenure. There is, however, a significant divergence of attitudes about the monarchy. Polls show that one third of Canadians want to retain their connection to the Crown, one third would like to abolish it, and one third does not care either way. Given the large degree of ambivalence toward the monarchy, it is very plausible that these efforts will not succeed.⁶⁷

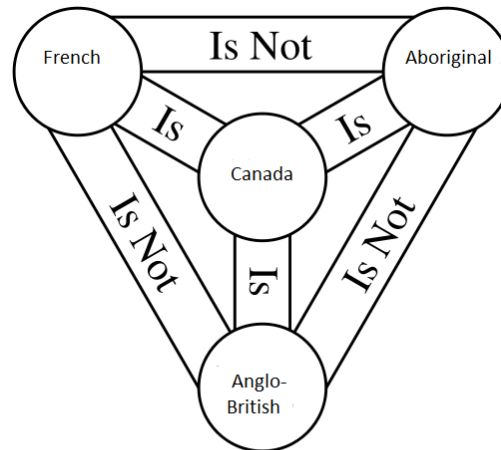
In a unique twist, the government's rebranding of national identity occurs simultaneously with the recognition of Québécois nationalism and First Nations' contributions to Canadian history. Notably, Stephen Harper passed a motion that states that Québécois form a nation within a united Canada.⁶⁸ The establishment of Aboriginal nationhood is already enshrined, as implied by the official moniker, "First Nations." As such, it may be misleading to construe the Conservative Party's historical narrative as being strictly British. In the context of identity formation, it seems that the government conceives of Canada as a national trinity, held together by Anglo and British traditions, as well as military accomplishments. Much like the Holy

⁶⁶ *The Economist*, "Heir..."

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ CBC News, "House passes motion recognizing Québécois as nation." *CBC News* Dec. 27, 2011. <<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2006/11/27/nation-vote.html>>. Retrieved: Feb. 19, 2012.

Trinity of Catholic theology, Canadian singularity is difficult to comprehend, and requires considerable faith.



The Scutum Fidei of Canadian identity

Canadian Heroes

Through the process of nationalizing history, figures emerge who ostensibly serve as engines for the development of national identity. The narratives that justify the edification of these personas are often distantly related to any historical truths. Nonetheless, their inclusions into the annals of history elucidate how nations view themselves and their histories.⁶⁹ As integrals of national myths, their actions, motivations, and traits become distorted and retroactively modified to cohere to a particular narrative. The architects of this process are inexorably linked to nation-building through popular views, established governments, or separatist movements.

⁶⁹ Thomas Carlyle, *Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1869). P 4-7.

In Canada, different constituent nations have their own heroes and mythological foundations.⁷⁰ This is not to say that there is no overlap or mutual admiration of certain figures. Simply put, it is very unlikely that the city of Toronto would agree to name a metro stop after Henri Bourassa or Lionel Groulx, two heroes of Quebec nationalism. Through the act of commemorating particular historical figures, Québécois have formed distinct national narratives composed of heroes that fortify the insularity of their identity.⁷¹

John Ralston Saul suggests that Canada writ large has an aversion to hero-worship à la most nation-states. His reasoning is not difficult to appreciate. As a country without a coherent monolithic origin, many heroes lack a broader national appeal, and can be more divisive than inclusionary. In 2004, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation tried to determine who “The Greatest Canadian” was through a voting process, leading to series of programs on these individuals. Télévision de Radio-Canada, the CBC’s French language branch, was not involved in the process, which likely limited the participation of French-Canadians.⁷² The program, which was aired in English, listed the following people as the ten greatest Canadians:⁷³

1. Tommy Douglas
2. Terry Fox
3. Pierre Trudeau
4. Sir Frederick Banting
5. David Suzuki
6. Lester B. Pearson
7. Don Cherry

⁷⁰ J. P. Richert, “The Impact of Ethnicity on the Perceptions of Heroes and Historical Symbols” *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, 11:2 (1974), P 156–163.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² CBC (a), “MISE EN CANDIDATURE DE PLUS DE 10 000 GRANDES PERSONNALITÉS.” *CBC.ca*. *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, 2012. <<http://www.cbc.ca/grandscanadiens/about/>>. Retrieved: Feb. 5, 2012.

⁷³ CBC (b), “Who is The Greatest Canadian? CBC viewers respond.” *The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*. 2010. <<http://www.filibustercartoons.com/greatest%20Canadians.htm>> Retrieved: Feb. 5, 2012.

8. Sir John A. MacDonald
9. Alexander Graham Bell
10. Wayne Gretzky

The exclusion of French-Canadians from the process was unlikely an attempt at alienation, although it may have had that effect. Regardless of the reasoning behind this decision, it is symptomatic of the difficulties of forging a Pan-Canadian historical narrative replete with national heroes. Notably, the people chosen are mostly apolitical, and can appeal to a broader set of Canadian interests, such as a shared love of hockey, pride in the country's health care system, and a burgeoning environmental consciousness. The poll elucidates how many Anglo-Canadians feel about their identity. Noticeably, there is marked difference between these conceptions and governmental narratives on the War of 1812. Although the war is being construed as a great event in Canadian unity, the program demonstrates that Canadians identify greatness in less militaristic terms. The figures chosen by the audience are not monarchs or generals, but individuals with a broad, yet benign appeal.

This is not to suggest that Canadians do not feel that the War of 1812 is of historical importance. An Ipsos Reid poll conducted for the Historica Dominion Institute for the bicentennial of the war, found that 25 percent of Canadians felt the war was the most important component of Canadian identity, second only universal health care out of the available options. Nonetheless, the majority of these respondents felt that the importance of the war was that it resulted in a distinct political system, and cited pride in the differences between American and Canadian policies.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ John Ward, "Poll: War of 1812 saved us from U.S. politics." *Chronicle Herald*, Ottawa. Feb. 14, 2012.

On the War of 1812 commemoration site, the government has a list of war heroes accompanied by biographical information. The list taxonomizes the heroes into the following sections: British Regulars, First Nations, Women, Naval/Maritime, African-Canadian, and Upper Canadians. Interestingly, there is no section for Lower Canadians (present-day Quebec). Instead, heroes of French-Canadian origin are placed into the British Regulars section. Although French-Canadians fought as British regulars, it is peculiar that other groups were given a distinct status, while French-Canadians, the largest minority group and a purported “nation,” have been deemphasised. The taxonomy becomes more vexing when one considers that Upper Canadians have their own distinct section.⁷⁵

Within the context of nation-building, one should deduce that the government’s selection of national heroes embodies a particular view on Canadian history. Although the CBC poll was relatively undemocratic, the government’s selection is anything but. This does not diminish the importance of the figures’ roles in Canadian history, but it does elucidate the asymmetry between official and popular narratives. The authority of the government to choose these heroes is indicative of the politicisation of their memory. As such, one must assume that the selection is politically motivated. In this sense, Tecumseh, General Brock, Laura Secord, and other heroes, become tools of institutionalized propaganda. If the propaganda is effective, then the line between heroes of official and popular narratives becomes blurred. Through the commemoration of these figures, one can see the ongoing process of nation building vis-à-vis the organs of government. While this is no way unique to Canada, the architects of history may encounter a very Canadian problem. How does one form a single national narrative for a country with disparate and complex identities?

⁷⁵ Commemoration Website

But to What Ends?

Forget me not: Aboriginal and French Canadians

The war is alleged to be the first great event of Pan-Canadian significance. As such, the government commemorates its memory as it a usable past. In the context of identity formation, a usable past is any that coalesces distinct identities into a monolithic framework. This process inherently entails forgetting.⁷⁶ In the governmental narrative, the aboriginal component is misrepresented in order to bring these groups into the fold of a unitary Canadian identity. Although aboriginal Canadians contributed significantly to the war effort, they did so in order secure their own state. This facet is forgotten as the narrative seeks to include Aboriginals, while simultaneously omitting the more painful attributes of Canadian history.

The federal government has chosen to glorify the military contribution of Tecumseh and his confederated militia while ignoring or neglecting particular needs of First Nation's communities. Recently, the government has promised to invest more money into the Friends of Tecumseh Monument in Morpeth, Ontario.⁷⁷ The Canadian Heritage's website discusses this gesture, and frames it within the context of the War of 1812. In fact, the content is nearly identical to the aforementioned discourse on Canadian identity found on the commemoration site. The page reads:

The Harper Government today announced support for the Friends of the Tecumseh Monument in commemoration of the War of 1812. This War helped establish our path

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Government of Canada. Canadian Heritage. *Harper Government Invests in Friends of the Tecumseh Monument to Commemorate the 200th Anniversary of the War of 1812*. Morpeth, Ontario. 2011. <<http://www.pch.gc.ca/eng/1318613667665>>. Retrieved: Jan. 10, 2012.

toward becoming an independent and free country, united under the Crown with a respect for linguistic and ethnic diversity.⁷⁸

Notably, the latter part of this quote is found on the Conservative Party's website, with the addition: "Against great odds, it took the combined efforts of Canadians of all ancestries to repel the American invasion and defend Canada in a time of crisis."⁷⁹ From analyzing this transparent and repetitious statement, it appears as though the government is attempting to link Aboriginal history with the Party's conception of a Canadian unitary identity.

By deemphasizing the groups' distinctness, there is less incentive to provide additional resources and recognition to these communities. Even if these aims may not figure into the Conservative Party's broader agenda, controlling historical memory provides an impetus and rationale for such neglect. The ramifications of proffering collective memory in Canada may not be presently understood or appreciated; only future generations will have insight to determine the relatedness of these processes. Nevertheless, the official version of Canadian history does displace alternative, often legitimate views. Although subjective, these histories help elucidate pressing issues that these communities face. In this sense, there is a connection between the marginalization of narratives and peoples.

Notably, Canada was one of only four nations to oppose the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, citing it as "fundamentally incompatible with Canada's constitutional framework,"⁸⁰ and "unworkable in a Western democracy under a constitutional

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Conservative Party of Canada. *Commemorating Canadian History: The War of 1812*. 2011. Web. http://www.conservative.ca/press/news_releases/commemorating_canadian_history__the_war_of_1812> Retrieved: Mar. 1, 2012.

⁸⁰ "Indigenous rights outlined by UN." *BBC*, Sep. 13, 2007. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/6993776.stm>. Retrieved: Mar. 10, 2012.

government."⁸¹ After three years of tense negotiations and considerable political pressure from First Nations groups, the government ratified the resolution. This endorsement came with the caveat:

Although the Declaration is a non-legally binding document that does not reflect customary international law nor change Canadian laws, our endorsement gives us the opportunity to reiterate our commitment to continue working in partnership with Aboriginal peoples in creating a better Canada.⁸²

Although I do not believe that the government's intentions are *ipso facto* insidious, I suggest that one must consider the possible ramifications of forging particular historical narratives. Monolithic histories can serve to discredit other narratives as radical, rendering them vulnerable to mainstream and institutionalized prejudice. As such, they must be constructed with great care and deliberation in order to avoid alienating groups with legitimate concerns.

Another example of forgetting is inherent in the aforementioned taxonomy of heroes. The taxonomy is peculiar to those familiar with Canadian history and political dynamics. Through viewing these classifications in the context of forgetting, one can theorize about its intent. One could surmise that Québécois distinctiveness is deliberately forgotten in a subtle effort to dissolve the barriers between English- and French-Canada. In the context of forming a singular identity, the most glaring contradiction is the friction between these two groups. By forgetting Québécois heroes, one can frame Canadian history in a particular fashion.

⁸¹ "Native rights declaration inconsistent with legal tradition: Strahl." *CanWest News Service*, Sep. 13, 2007 <<http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/news/story.html?id=23df9769-3423-4f43-b828-a755725c2719&k=23677>> Retrieved: Mar. 10, 2012.

⁸² Government of Canada. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. *Canada's Statement of Support on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. 2010. <<http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1309374239861>>. Retrieved: Mar. 10, 2012.

Thought control or clever marketing?

Another possibility is that the War of 1812 commemorations will inevitably have more resonance with Anglo-Canadians, particularly those with a conservative bent. As the epicentre of the War of 1812, Ontario has always disproportionately commemorated the event.⁸³ Western Canada is already more receptive to Stephen Harper's policies, appealing to conservative Ontarians could increase the Conservative Party's electoral base. If one adopts this view, one could claim that the commemorations are little more than a marketing strategy, focused on an intended audience. In this measure, there is little incentive to market the war to Québécois, as their political allegiances rarely align with the Conservative Party.⁸⁴ If this is the case, one must ask oneself whether the intended audience prefers to dissolve these traditional barriers, and view French-Canadians as a less distinct group.

Per Nuntium Ad Victoriam

Many critics of the commemoration and rebranding efforts suggest that the Conservative Party is trying to redefine Canadians by using a war to define a people. In a recent article on the commemorative events, *The Economist* suggests, "Stephen Harper, Canada's Conservative prime minister, is keen to play up his country's image and past as a warrior nation. (His Liberal predecessors preferred to stress its commitment to peacekeeping)."⁸⁵ This critique mirrors concerns about a rise in Canadian military nationalism. In his assessment of the War of 1812 commemoration efforts, journalist Mathew Bondy notes:

⁸³ Pelletier. P 135.

⁸⁴ Huguette Young, "Les Québécois pessimistes face à Harper." *Canoe*, Mar. 11, 2012.

⁸⁵ "The 1812 overture: Making the most of a forgotten war." *The Economist*, Dec 7, 2011.

The resurgence of martial nationalism in Canada is undeniable. Canada has a prime minister and a cabinet unafraid to make controversial, hard-power foreign policy decisions and to call on Canada's troops to defend them — in Afghanistan, in Libya and wherever else Canadian interests and values may be threatened.⁸⁶

In the context of Brubaker and Feischmidt's analysis, the government is reconstructing collective memory in order to suit the goal of changing Canada's military orientation. Notably, the peacekeepers conception of Canadian military identity proffered by the Liberal Party is based on equally dubious historical evidence.⁸⁷ This demonstrates the relevance of Brubaker and Feischmidt's theories in the Canadian context. Successive governments seek to recast usable pasts in order to suit present needs. For the Liberals, this was peacekeeping; for the Conservatives, military might. However, this reorientation began before the Conservative government has to come to power. Increasingly, the military has become less involved in peacekeeping. According to Michael Valpy, "In 1991, Canada contributed more than 10 per cent of all peacekeeping troops to the UN. Sixteen years later, its contribution is less than 0.1 per cent."⁸⁸ This is surprising as the article notes, "70 per cent of Canadians consider military peacekeeping a defining characteristic of their country."⁸⁹

A Modest Proposal

A more plausible explanation of the government's motives is that wishes to institutionalize the Conservative Party's ethos. The discourse surrounding the war as well as the

⁸⁶ Mathew Bondy, "Harper will exploit War of 1812 bicentennial." *Guelph Mercury*, July 21, 2011. <<http://www.guelphmercury.com/opinion/columns/article/565716--harper-will-exploit-war-of-1812-bicentennial>>. Retrieved: Mar. 1, 2012.

⁸⁷ J.L. Granatstein, "Canada and Peacekeeping: Image and Reality," in *Canadian Foreign Policy: Historical Readings*, J.L. Granatstein (ed.) (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1993). P 276.

⁸⁸ Michael Valpy, "The myth of Canada as peacekeeper." *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 28, 2007. <<http://www.cigionline.org/articles/2007/02/myth-canada-peacekeeper>>. Retrieved: Mar. 18, 2012.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

conception of Canadian identity that it proffers departs from the Liberal interregnum thought to characterize the 20th century. Re-institutionalizing the Crown and the military as important components of identity, could serve to rebrand Canada in accordance with Conservative values. If successful, it could significantly shift Canada's political orientation to the right for the foreseeable future.

Although a military dimension is inherent to this view, there are also more benign political motives, such as exciting voters. Very likely, celebrating a military victory over the United States resonates well with many Canadians. Suggesting a unitary identity may also be appealing. Canadian political history has often been characterized by compromise, a necessary tool for a country with a unique dichotomy or triangulation, depending on one's view of identity. Through constructing a Pan-Canadian narrative, the Conservative Party can veer away from the Liberal deference and act more assertively. If this is the case, there may be repercussions for Quebec and Canada's aboriginal communities, who have steadily gained a voice in politics.

How institutionalized are governmental narratives?

According to Bar-Tal and Salomon's criteria, I argue that the government's narratives on the War of 1812 are at most, moderately institutionalized. In the literature that I examine, there is a degree of overlap between governmental and popular views, but they are not significant enough to conclude that the government's version of history is manifestly prevalent. There are also major differences, which suggest that popular media does not have a uniform narrative on the conflict.

The largest degree of overlap is found in a *Legion Magazine* article,⁹⁰ a publication with conservative and pro-military orientation.⁹¹ The article frames the events of the war in an almost identical fashion to the government. Its narrative describes the war as an ill-conceived and poorly implemented plan of Canada's bellicose neighbor to annex Canadian territory. What is more intriguing, is the article's explanation of the conflict's ramifications, which mirror the content of the government's statements in an almost uniform fashion. The article claims:

So, what was the outcome of this "forgotten" conflict? That is an easy question to answer. If Britain had not successfully defended her North American colonies, Canada would not exist today. The war was a defining moment in Canadian history, laying the foundation not only for Confederation but for the modern nation we live in today, independent and free, with a constitutional monarchy, the parliamentary system, and a respect for linguistic and ethnic diversity. That surely is reason enough to not only remember, but commemorate the War of 1812.⁹²

Although there is a large degree of conformity between *Legion Magazine's* narrative and the government's, this not surprising in the context of *The Economist's* criticism.⁹³ Reorienting Canadian identity towards a more militaristic conception, likely resonates with Canadian veterans and military personnel. These groups are more likely than most Canadians to read a magazine about Canada's military.

As textbooks are an important tool for socializing members of a society, it is important to study their discourse. As education is administered through the government, it is not surprising

⁹⁰ Donald Graves, "1812: The War That Saved Canada ." *Legion*, Jan. 1, 2012. <<http://www.legionmagazine.com/en/index.php/2012/01/the-war-that-saved-canada/>>. Retrieved: Mar. 18, 2012.

⁹¹ Vucetic.

⁹² Graves.

⁹³ *The Economist*, "Heir..."

that certain nationalistic overtones might be present. Interestingly, the Ontario textbook that I examine taxonomizes heroes and groups in a similar manner to the government's website. There are sections for First Nations, Women, African-Canadians, and none for French-Canadians. The most notable difference is in its treatment of First Nations' roles in the conflict, and particularly, the story of Tecumseh. In a section entitled, "Tecumseh: Warrior with a Dream,"⁹⁴ the text pays homage to his goal of securing a country for Aboriginal North Americans. Disconcertingly, the text does not acknowledge Canada's role in fracturing this dream, and notes, "When Tecumseh died, his dream died with him. American settlers moved freely into Shawnee land and, over the next 20 years were driven from Ohio."⁹⁵ This seems to imply that the United States is to blame for this result, even though it was the British who promised Tecumseh a state.

Interestingly, textbooks are also the area of greatest divergence. There is a notable absence of information on the war in Quebec textbooks. In comparative survey of Quebec and Alberta's curricula, only two out of fourteen Quebec textbooks mention the war.⁹⁶ The two that do, discuss it minimally and provide a very different view of its importance. One text suggests, "Ce conflit change peu de choses, mais c'est la première fois que les anglophones et les francophones s'unissent pour repousser un adversaire commun."⁹⁷ This implies that the ramifications of the war have only minimally altered Canadian history. The second text posits, "le conflit a permis à la population anglophone des deux Canada de se sentir de plus en plus canadienne [et que] pour la première fois, anglophones et francophones se sont unis pour

⁹⁴ Elspeth Deir (ed.), *Canada: The Story of Our Heritage*. 1st. Canada: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 2000. P 185.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Frédéric Sigouin, *L'(es) histoire(s) de la guerre de 1812*. (Working Paper).

⁹⁷ S. Brodeur-Girard, et al ., *L'Occident en 12 événements*. Éditions Grand Duc, 2008. P 471.

repousser un envahisseur commun.”⁹⁸ Although this passage implies that the war affected Canadian identity, it suggests that this identity is rooted in not being American.

The scarcity of War of 1812 information in Quebec textbooks is matched by its scarcity in the media. Although francophone media outlets have produced articles on the war, their narrative unsurprisingly differs. In an article in *La Presse*, journalist and historian André Pratte applauds the efforts to commemorate the war, and suggests that Canadians, particularly Québécois, are ignorant about the subject. He notes :

En principe, on ne peut qu'applaudir toute initiative permettant d'améliorer la connaissance qu'ont les Canadiens de leur histoire. Un sondage mené en 2009 par Léger Marketing avait révélé que 4 Canadiens sur 10 (dont 6 Québécois sur 10) ne connaissaient pas suffisamment la guerre de 1812 pour dire qui, des États-Unis ou du Canada, l'avait emporté.⁹⁹

However, he takes issue with the Conservative Party's inculcation of Royal symbols into Canadian identity. He remarks:

Ce qui est inquiétant ici, c'est que le gouvernement Harper prenne la chose à cœur, comme il l'a fait dans le cas des symboles de la monarchie. On peut craindre que les conservateurs ne se servent d'une version caricaturale de l'histoire de la guerre de 1812 pour mousser, à leur profit, le nationalisme canadien.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ R. Bédard, R. et al., First. *Le Québec, une histoire à suivre*. Éditions Grand Duc, 2007.P. 266.

⁹⁹ Pratte, André. "Caricaturer 1812." *La Presse*, Dec. 8, 2012.

<http://www.cyberpresse.ca/debats/editorialistes/andre-pratte/201110/12/01-4456365-caricaturer-1812.php?utm_categorieinterne=traficdrivers&utm_contenuinterne=cyberpresse_vous_suggere_4455926_article_POS1>. Retrieved: Mar. 20, 2012.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Although the author has decidedly federalist perspective on Canadian governance, he clearly finds the royal rebranding efforts distasteful. This is consistent with the view of many Québécois. Agence QMI recently released a survey that indicates a large gulf between the policies of the Conservative government and the people of Quebec. Notably, only 9% of Quebec residents support the promotion of royal symbols, compared to 36% for the rest of Canada.¹⁰¹ The author also discredits the claim, ‘Had the war ended differently, Quebec’s French-speaking identity would not exist.’¹⁰² Although he suggests that Quebec’s union with the rest of Canada has helped preserve French culture, he notes that the preservation was the result of several battles and historical developments.

There are marked differences and convergences between the governmental narratives and those found in non-governmental Anglophone sources. *The Walrus* recently published a lengthy article on the war entitled, “That Time We Beat the Americans: A misunderstood moment, now 200 years old, defines us as Canadians, A Citizens’ Guide to the War of 1812.”¹⁰³ Although the moment is indeed misunderstood, *The Walrus* does not make a concerted effort correct this historical ambiguity. Instead, it claims that “no matter what military historians say, we won the War of 1812 — because we fought to be ourselves.”¹⁰⁴ The rhetoric throughout the essay is remarkable in that it does not significantly deviate from the narrative of the government, and consistently defends historically revisionist accounts. It is also dismissive of the views of social and even military historians, who refute the claim that either side won. Although the article claims a decisive victory, it fails to elucidate how fighting to be one’s self is a victory in

¹⁰¹ Young.

¹⁰² Pratte.

¹⁰³ Stephen Marche, “That Time We Beat the Americans : A misunderstood moment, now 200 years old, defines us as Canadians. A citizen’s guide to the war of 1812,” *The Walrus*, Mar. 2012.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

the traditional sense of the word. The only noteworthy difference is that it extends the official conception of Canadian triangular identity to include the premise of not-American, much like the Québécois textbook. This is confusing in its own right, as a negative feature of identity does little to describe the positive attributes of a nation.

The Globe and Mail recently published an article that is highly critical of the War of 1812 commemoration, and presents a very different narrative on the events.¹⁰⁵ The author suggests that the celebration is misplaced, as the war was fought between British and American forces, as Canadian identity did not yet exist. He suggests:

Over the next three years, the assorted battles and skirmishes and plunderings and pillagings that make up this motley counterpart to the Old World's more grandiose Napoleonic Wars will be celebrated as a leading story in Canada's creation myth.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore he recounts:

The reality [of the war] is murkier. Canadians weren't yet Canadians. The term was still applied mostly to francophones, and when Upper Canada was created in 1791 – a mere eight years after the U.S. War of Independence ended – it was designed more as a bulwark against the American expansionists than a statement of New World identity.¹⁰⁷

Although these assertions are compelling, they overlook the fact the war is construed as an etiologically defining moment for Canadian history, as most narratives do not suggest a pre-war identity. More poignant criticisms focus on the British deceit of Tecumseh and the dubious claim to victory. The author inculcates this critique into a broader analysis of the government's

¹⁰⁵ Allemang.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

intentions and narratives (many of the same that I examine). He suggests that commemoration efforts are part of a broader Conservative agenda to rebrand Canada as a nationalistic and militaristic nation. Although, I am inclined to agree with this view, I am sceptical about its ultimate effectiveness. *The Globe and Mail* article is representative of many publications that I have read, and represent a current of thinking in line with my own arguments.

This survey of texts illustrates that the discourse on the government's website is one of several narratives about the war and Canadian identity. Although historical narratives are not the most accurate measure for assessing past events, they have the ability to resonate well with many members of the public, who may be less interested in casualty tolls and the political nuances that led to the conflict. Given the murky origins and ramifications of the war, anecdotes and narratives are a poignant tool for explaining the events. Within this context, one could claim that the government's narrative is relatively valid. However, many of the sources that I have researched support the belief that no side won, and that Aboriginal communities suffered as a result of the war. Often, these critical texts cite the content on the government's websites pertaining to identity and the events of the war.

Conclusion

The Conservative Party seeks to reconstruct Canada's social memory through commemorating the War of 1812. This process is not unique to Canada, as many governments have sought to implicate usable pasts in an effort to forge a national identity. In this vein, governments attempt to build a consensus on national values, which in turn, creates a continuity and symbiosis between governmental and social ethos. In Canada, this attempt aims to

reconfigure Canadian national identity away from the Liberal conception, which characterizes Canada as a multicultural and progressive country of peacekeepers, and towards a more conservative orientation. This identity stresses military accomplishments, historical cohesion, and Canadian-British ties.

As a rare instance of Anglo/British, French-Canadian, and First Nations unity, it is easy to see why the government would choose to honour this particular event. Yet, narratives on the war have been heavily revised in a manner that distorts history and may alienate Canadians who have different conceptions of nationality. It is also unclear whether the Canadian public has accepted this narrative. Clearly, Quebec has not institutionalized the war as a moment of profound etiological importance, and continues to view its history as parallel to, but entwined with the rest of Canada, as illustrated by the omission of the war from its textbooks. Nevertheless, the process of institutionalizing collective memory takes time. Textbooks are not written annually; it will be interesting to see how future generations of textbooks describe the war and its ramifications.

Canada is a country that functions better in practice than in theory. Attempts at constructing a Pan-Canadian identity that suits a more modern, mono-nationalistic framework, may ultimately distance many Canadians from each other; history will be the sole judge of whether these nation-building efforts succeed. Canada is unique because of its composite nature, not in spite of it. This is its identity. To deny complexity, is to reduce it to something wholly un-Canadian. This is not only unpatriotic, but unrealistic.

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