

Imperial Nostalgia, Social Ghosts, and Canada's National War Memorial

Space and Culture
2016, Vol. 19(2) 177–191
© The Author(s) 2016
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1206331215623220
sac.sagepub.com


Tonya Davidson¹

Abstract

The National War Memorial in Ottawa, Canada, occupies a central ceremonial square in the capital city. Placed in 1939 to commemorate Canada's involvement in World War I, the monument is the featured element of the national Remembrance Day services, and it is often visited by dignitaries and bestowed wreaths. In this article, I suggest that beyond offering mere instruction in the history of Canada's World War I involvement, the National War Memorial produces potent lessons in how to feel about being Canadian, and how to mourn as a Canadian. In particular, the National War Memorial has become a conduit for articulations of imperial nostalgia; it compels persuasive, ritual allegiance to Canada's imperial White settler past. These affective relationships are produced with such success that other identifications—or the proposal of alternative meanings of the monument—are understood as acts of deviance.

Keywords

National War Memorial, Ottawa, social memory, nostalgia, World War I, ritual, remembrance

On August 15, 1945, Canadians celebrated V-J Day: Victory in Japan Day and the end of World War II. Newspaper coverage showed a photograph of the National War Memorial (NWM) as the focal point of the Ottawa celebrations. In an archival newspaper image, children sit on the shoulders of the bronze, monumental soldiers, making silly faces at the camera. Decades later, in 2000, visitors solemnly laid lapel poppies on the newly interred Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. On October 22, 2014, Nathan Cirillo, a reservist, was shot and killed while standing guard at the NWM in Ottawa. This event and the responses to it contributed to producing the NWM and its home, Confederation Square, as sites that have increasingly accrued national and sacred significance.

In this article, I argue that the NWM operates as an object and site of ghostly properties that while partially inherent in the monument's birth have expanded over time. The placement of the NWM in the heart of Canada's capital city places war memories and national mourning as central to the experiences of feeling Canadian. In particular, I argue that certain moments in the life of the NWM have produced it as a site for the expression of imperial nostalgia. While normative frames of collective remembrance are largely reinforced, the monument is also a site for the evocation of social hauntings. These rare moments, treated as anomalous deviant acts, demonstrate the monument's potential to embody multiple sets of memories.

¹Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Corresponding Author:

Tonya Davidson, Sociology Department, Ryerson University, 350 Victoria Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5B 2K3.
Email: Tonya.davidson@ryerson.ca

I demonstrate how social ghosts are produced at the NWM, actualizing both the virtualities of patriotism and possibilities for remembrance. First, I argue that monuments can be sites of social haunting, making them dynamic rather than static urban objects. These hauntings articulate certain virtualities. In the case of the NWM, the virtualities of patriotism—the felt but unsaid ways in which citizens and visitors connect to ideas of nationhood—are produced. I detail how various moments of official ritual and unofficial interventions highlight the monument's capacity to evoke social ghosts, both stabilizing and upsetting normative affective attachments to Canadian-ness. I offer two moments in the life of the NWM that demonstrate this process of securing meaning, conjuring ghosts and producing an affectively charged site largely in the service of dominant nationalist narratives. These moments are the ritual laying of wreaths and poppies and the placement of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in 2000.

Virtualities, Social Ghosts, and Imperial Nostalgia

Many scholars have analyzed how sites like monuments and museums actively produce collective and national memories (Anderson, 1983; Foote, 2003; Levinson, 1998; Nora, 1989; Young, 1993). For Pierre Nora (1989), monuments are “lieux de mémoire” or sites of memory that do memory work so that people are allowed to forget. Similarly, Huyssen (2003) and Young (1993), following Robert Musil's understanding of the banal invisibility of monuments, suggest that monuments indicate a certain modernity wed to rigid conceptions of art, nationalisms, and popular politics; monuments “tend to concretize particular historical interpretations” (Young, 1993, p. 2). I am interested in how monuments work as affectively charged urban sites, beginning with the premise that while monuments often offer and persuade specific ideological perspectives, this labor is both discursive and affective, making monuments dynamic and unstable.

The conceptual language of the virtual (Shields, 2003) and social ghosts (Bell, 1997; Gordon, 1997; Hetherington, 2001) provides a way to understand how the monument produces certain structures of feeling. My understanding of the virtual is informed by Rob Shields (2003), who follows Marcel Proust's definition of the virtual as “real without being actual, ideal without being abstract” (p. 2). Virtualities are immaterial things that move us to act. Shields offers dreams, ghosts, and angels among his examples. He argues that the virtual is known or identified through its actualizations: “The virtual is fully real but can be actualized as the concrete” (p. 30). Actualizations can include concrete objects, words, and practices. I argue here that the rituals and activities at the NWM are actualizations of multiple virtual patriotisms—relationships to ideas about the nation that while not concrete are very much real.

Michael Bell (1997) understands social ghosts “in the broader sense of a felt *presence*—an *anima*, *geist*, or *genius*—that possesses and gives a sense of social aliveness to a place” (p. 815). He also recognizes the presence of ghosts that can be alternatively welcomed or exorcised:

Ghosts in this broader sense may be unsettled and scary, but they can also be rooted, friendly, and affirming—and they are never dead, although they may be of the dead, as well as of the living. The ghosts of place may seem uncanny at times, but they are nevertheless a familiar and often homey part of our lives. (Bell, 1997, p. 816)

For Bell (1997), objects and places can be haunted by social ghosts. Bell understands social ghosts as analogous to Walter Benjamin's definition of aura.

In his discussion of art, Walter Benjamin (1969) identifies that something is lost when art is reproduced mechanically, namely, the work's “aura.” He identifies the aura as the feeling of the work's

presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. . . . The history to which it was subject throughout its existence. This includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership. (p. 220)

An artwork's aura emerges through its birth and life, and through being situated within structures of tradition. Compelling for the purposes of this article, Benjamin's (1969) example of an artwork imbued with an aura of authenticity is an ancient statue in Venice, an object both celebrated as an "object of veneration" (223), and understood to be an "ominous idol" (p. 223). Its power is conferred through practices of ritual. The aura of the NWM can be felt as the monument's ghostly and virtual properties, produced through ritual and material engagements. I refer to the monument's aura as a halo when these properties reinforce the monument's original meaning, casting an expanded sense of reverence around the monument. In other instances, the it-ness, the "unique existence" (Benjamin, 1969, p. 221), of the NWM allows the monument to function as a site for alternative conjurings.

At the NWM, rituals secure not only the commemorative meanings of the monument but also particular relationships between Canada and its imperial heritage. Celebrating this relationship is a tradition with a long history. Canada's entry into World War I was as an extension of the British Empire (see Hayes, Iarocci, & Bechthold, 2007; McKay & Swift, 2012; Vance, 1997). At the NWM, a particular form of imperial nostalgia is articulated in many ways: through the obligatory and central presence of the Governor General (the Queen's representative) and members of the Royal family at Remembrance Day and Vimy Ridge Memorial Day services, through singing "God Save the Queen," through occasionally flying the Red Ensign (a previous Canadian flag that included the British Union Jack), and through mandating that only Canadians and members of the Commonwealth may be mourned there. If the NWM is a site for producing particular meanings of what it means to be Canadian, these meanings often include continued allegiance to and affection for British imperialism.

I call this nostalgia—and not just articulations of specific continuing ties with the imperial heartland—because, following Eric Hobsbawm (1983), I understand many of the practices that take place at the NWM as "invented traditions," "practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (p. 1). These traditions are both political and nostalgic; they aim to produce specific values tied with Canada's origins as a White settler colonial nation rather than to affirm Canada's present possibilities as a multicultural nation created through the intersection of multiple diasporic mobilities and the displacement of indigenous people. The semicom-pulsory affection for Canada's imperial past and present produces a site in Ottawa's urban heart that disallows engagement with racial and political difference.

David Cannadine's (1983) historical analysis of the rise of Royal ritual in Britain from 1820 to 1977 argues that the pomp and grandeur of Royal ritual (coronations, weddings, etc.) rose in direct proportion to the actual declining influence of the Royal family. In the Victorian era, rituals were rather haphazard, ending often in "farce or fiasco" (p. 117). In the contemporary era, since the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II,

The ritual of monarchy was of importance in legitimating the novelty of formal empire and in giving an impression of stability at a time of international bewilderment, so in the post-war world it has provided a comfortable palliative to the loss of world-power status. (Cannadine, 1983, p. 157)

Royal ritual itself, the ceremonies on which Canadian rituals are usually based, is inherently nostalgic, attempting to recall a former more glorious era of regal power. While produced to present an ancient tradition of royal splendor, Cannadine suggests that these productions were

inspired by actual anxiety about the future of imperial might. Royal ritual can be understood as an anxious attempt to remember and reproduce imperial power.

Phillip Buckner (2006) argues that the study of popular royalism has been neglected in Canadian history because historians have focused instead of assumptions about Canada's move away from British ties. In his study of two Royal Tours in Canada (Edward VII in 1860 and King George V in 1901), Buckner argues that colonial governments (like Wilfrid Laurier's) pressured the Royals to visit in order to please the public. Buckner states that while some aspects of the tours were direct imports from Europe—the construction of celebratory arches, for example, the Royal tours were also moments for the emergence of distinctly Canadian traditions. The arches were proudly made from local materials, and the public began the practice of wearing maple leaves. The Royal tours were not a reflection of simple imperial affection but an articulation of Canadian values as specifically and virtuously imperial: “What the British immigrants and their descendants, who formed the majority of the population of Canada is both 1860 and 1901, sought to create was not merely a neo-Britain but a better Britain” (p. 32).

We should understand, first, repetitive use of certain symbols, insignia, songs as asserting not just an imperial presence but an anxiety about Canada's imperial origins slipping away—or, more specifically, Canada's Whiteness slipping away. Second, we should understand how this imperial nostalgia is specifically Canadian. By invoking imperial symbols, ideals, and so on as Canadian, Canadians are interpolated into a specific relationship with the logic of imperialism as a mode of patriotism. Third, we should understand (and I will demonstrate) that imperial nostalgia is an affective relationship. Buckner argues that the success of the Royal tours in 1860 and 1901 could not have been so popular as the mere result of state manipulation; people were drawn to the Royals affectively. In a similar vein, the employment of imperial and Canadian-imperial “invented traditions” compel affective responses of love, belonging, and patriotism, or alternatively, alienation and disgust. These traditions contribute to the aura that has been emerging around the NWM since its birth and early life when children were climbing on to the soldiers' shoulders.

Introducing the National War Memorial

At its birth in 1939, the NWM was already harnessed with national commemorative responsibilities (Figure 1). After World War I, the Canadian federal government fielded a bombardment of demand across the country to support building various local war memorials. In response, Member of Parliament Major-General Sir Sam Hughes suggested that the government fund the production of identical war memorials of various sizes. These would be distributed across the country, the size of each monument proportionate to how much of that city or town's population had been lost (Shiple, 1987). Hughes's suggestion was rejected by Major-General S. C. Mewburn, the Minister of the Militia, who decided that each city and town should have a unique monument. Mewburn also decided that communities would value their monuments more if they solicited their own funds. As a result, the government offered no financial support for the building of community war memorials (Shiple, 1987). In the post-World War I period, community groups, school groups, and individuals in countless towns and cities procured their own funds and produced a vast army of soldier statues representing a variety of aesthetic and monumentalizing intents (Gordon & Osborne, 2004; Shiple, 1987; Vance, 1997).

As a result of the federal government's policy, at the time of its eventual unveiling the NWM represented one of only a few war memorials funded and placed by the federal government¹ and the only federally funded war memorial in Canada. In 1925, the federal government opened up a competition within the Commonwealth and Allied nations to design the NWM. Of the 127 entries, Vernon March's design titled “The Great Response of Canada” won the design competition (Gardam, 1982, p. 5). The memorial measures 21 meters tall and features 22 bronze figures

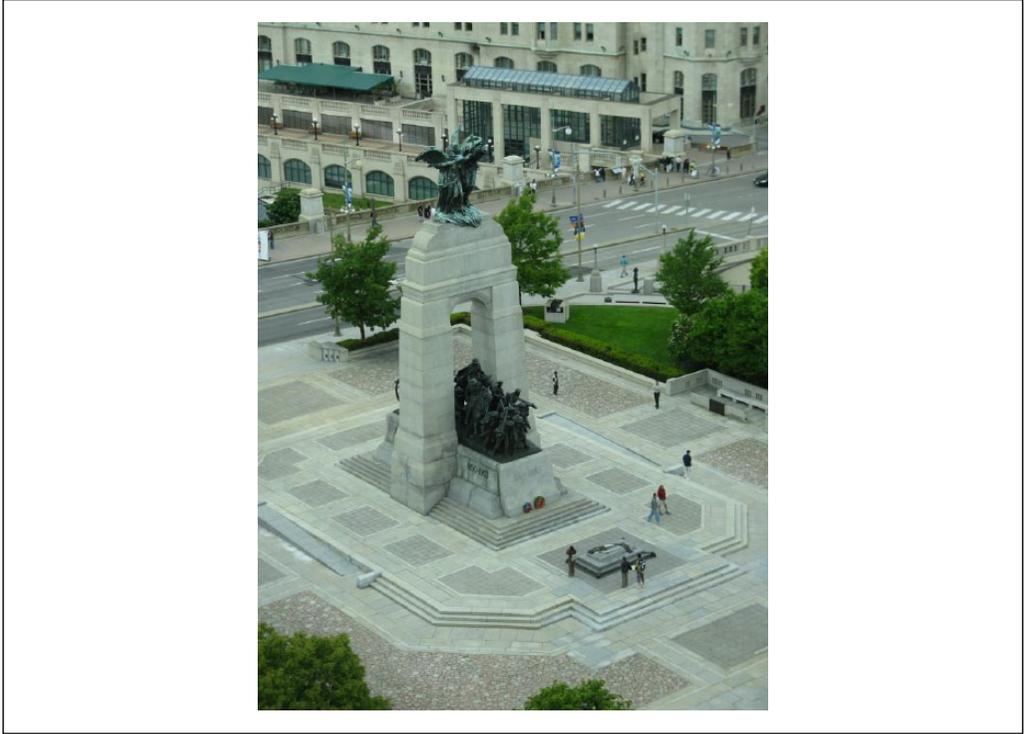


Figure 1. The National War Memorial, 2009.

Source: Author.

charging through a granite archway topped with two angel figures. The 22 figures represent the different segments of the Canadian Armed Forces involved in World War I, including infantrymen, sailors, an air mechanic, a pilot, and, at the rear of the charge, two female nurses. Vernon March stated that his design intent was “to perpetuate in this bronze group the people of Canada who went Overseas to the Great War, and to represent them, as we of today saw them, as a record for future generations” (as cited in Gardam, 1982, p. 5). The monument’s focus on the “citizen-soldier,” as opposed a celebration of certain individual heroes, corresponded with a common trope that had developed with World War I commemorations (Hucker, 2009; Vance, 1997).

The NWM was unveiled by King George VI on Sunday, May 21, 1939. It was a highlight in King George VI and Queen Elizabeth I’s royal tour of Canada (Gardam, 1982). A booklet detailing the unveiling ceremonies outlined a program of typical royal pomp involving sounding trumpets, singing “God Save the King” and, for the first time, singing “O Canada” as the national anthem.² With the presence of the British Royals and the inauguration of “O Canada,” the birth of the monument was immediately wed to other key elements of Canadian nationhood. The unveiling ceremonies set the standard for how to engage officially with the NWM. Mourning as a Canadian was to be wed explicitly to Canada’s British imperial origins.

Rituals such as wreath-laying secure the monument to a certain mode of remembrance. Rituals actualize memory (in itself virtual) into material practice, so that it can be engaged somatically as something concrete rather than as an abstract story or epic myth. Shields (2003) suggests that rituals are moments that create liminal, in-between zones. In the life of the NWM, rituals such as the monument’s unveiling and annual Remembrance Day rituals serve as actualizations of the NWM’s virtual properties. These rituals produce a community of remembrance, saturated in specific understandings of Canadian patriotism and public citizenship; the affective ties to the

imaginary community that is the Canadian nation are both produced and renewed through engagement in these liminal, transformative rituals.

Throughout its life, various moments have worked to both expand and contract the monument's commemorative meanings. In 1982, the dates 1939-1945 and 1950-1953 were added to the monument's base to allow the monument to commemorate the 45,000 Canadian casualties of World War II and 516 Canadian casualties of the Korean War ("Editorial," 1982, p. 1). On Remembrance Day, 2014, the dates of the South African War (1899-1902) and the dates of the Afghanistan mission were added to the monument (Campion-Smith, 2014, n.p.). However, other moments have worked to reinforce the monument's role in commemorating World War I. I will now turn to ritual behaviors that engage with the materiality of the NWM as means for amplifying the monument's connection to World War I, and which in effect disallow other sets of memories and expand the monument's aura as a halo of meaning.

The Offering of Wreaths and Poppies

In their uniformity, solemnity, and propriety, wreaths and poppies are reverent offerings to the welcomed ghosts of the NWM. However, when officials bar specific groups from laying wreaths at the Memorial, and when unofficial offerings are made, other social ghosts are conjured. In particular, I argue that ritual laying of wreaths and poppies allows for the production of the NWM as a site that produces specific understandings of public Canadian citizenship—understandings both gendered and racialized. Likewise, laying wreaths and poppies can upset these dominant animations of the monument.

The most celebrated and significant annual day in the life of the NWM is Remembrance Day. Every November 11, thousands of Ottawa citizens and visitors to the capital gather at the square, brave the cold, and collectively take part in a half-hour ceremony of pomp, prayer, and wreath-laying that concludes with a parade of uniformed soldiers and veterans. In Canada, Remembrance Day began as Armistice Day in 1919 and became an official holiday in 1921 when the Armistice Day bill passed (Vance, 1997). The services associated with Armistice Day became an official routine in 1928 when the Armistice Ceremonial Committee of Canada was formed with the explicit purpose of designing a national remembrance service. At this time, Armistice Day was on Thanksgiving Day, a conflation protested by the Legion. The date of Thanksgiving was changed and Remembrance Day was born with a passing of legislation in June 1931 (Vance, 1997). The national Remembrance Day service at the NWM has followed a standard program for many years.

On Remembrance Day, 2008, with thousands of other citizens and visitors to the capital city, I visited the NWM for the annual Remembrance Day service. After the service, I surveyed the monument. Three sides of the base were covered in wreaths three or four layers deep. The Royal Canadian Air Forces Prisoners of War Association had laid a wreath, as had the Sir Arthur Pearson Association of the War Blinded, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans Association, The League of Merchant Mariners Veterans of Canada, and so on. The wreaths were all standard-issue, green plastic with a white diagonal ribbon stating the name of the sponsoring organization. The Mothers of Canada had placed a wreath in a prominent position at the front of the monument, beside the Government of Canada and the Youth of Canada. The Fathers of Canada had also placed a wreath one side of the monument, in the company of the wreath of the Engineers' Wives Association. At the back of the monument were only three wreaths, a standard wreath from the Ottawa Children's Choir, a personalized wreath dedicated to one fallen soldier, and a large white poppy wreath. The white poppy wreath was not standard issue. It was larger than the others, made of white and green felt, homemade. The diagonal banner read "Peace." The Peace wreath and the laying of the wreath by the Silver Cross mother speak quite poignantly to who is encouraged to remember or belong at the monument (Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2. The back of the National War Memorial, Remembrance Day, 2008.
Source: Author.



Figure 3. Wreaths, National War Memorial, Remembrance Day, 2008.
Source: Author.

The white poppy as a totem of peace dates back to 1933, when it was first designed and produced by the Women's Co-operative Guild in the United Kingdom ("White Poppies", n.d.). In Canada, white poppies reemerged as a popular memorial object in 2006, when some stores began selling the white poppy around Remembrance Day. In Edmonton, members of the Royal Canadian Legion threatened to sue the stores selling the white poppies for copyright infringement. One veteran, Robert Torrie, argued that "the use of the poppy in any other colour other than in blood red is a disservice and dishonour to all our fallen dead, the past and our latest veterans" (as quoted in "White Poppy Emblems Anger," 2006, para. 5). While they cited copyright infringement, the Legion members also considered the white poppy an affront to the traditional red poppy and remembrance of their sacrifices. In its singular presence, the white poppy wreath disrupts the normative, highly structured, ritual, and celebrated forms of remembrance represented by all of the sanctioned wreaths. Its placement, unauthorized, at the back of the monument continues to suggest that peace somehow challenges the integrity of this monument. The wreath also acts as a conjuring of sorts. White poppies emerged as a symbol of peace in the interwar years when memorial practices were also not homogenous. In fact, in the decades (from the late 1920s to mid-1930s) immediately following the war, a pacifist movement threatened to delegitimize the seemingly uncomplicated celebration of Canadian war victory (McKay & Swift, 2012; Vance, 1997). In the early 1930s, during a debate over how to recognize Remembrance Day, these same pacifist groups suggested the abolition of the day all together, arguing that the day "perpetuated militarism" (Vance, 1997, p. 214).

Unlike the white poppy wreath, the Mothers of Canada wreath is an expected and prominent aspect of the Remembrance Day ritual. In the order of the placement of wreaths, the Silver Cross Mother lays her wreath second, only after the Governor General. She lays her wreath before the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Senate, and the Minister of Veterans Affairs. The placement of this wreath within the Remembrance Day ritual seems entirely uninteresting; the wreath does not shock or provoke, rather it soothes and reassures. Vance explains that soldiers' mothers have always played a central role in the creation of the "myth of the war" that emerged after World War I, and war mothers have always had front-row seating at memorial services (Vance, 1997). Vance (1997) suggests that the mother figure was potent because she is

the personification of traditional, even immutable, values, her strength and constancy lending a sense of continuity to events. As the progenitor of the next generation of Canadians, the mother affirms the logical progression of history. She is at once the symbol of the past and the creator of the future. (p. 150)

The Silver Cross Mother is herself a memorial; she remembers and mourns the past, but also suggests possible futures through her demonstrated fertility. The laying of the Mothers' wreath produces the monument as a specifically gendered site. While one could easily suggest that war memorials reinforce the exultation of a specific form of heroic masculinity, we cannot ignore that these same sites produce a specific form of domestic femininity. The Silver Cross Mother receives prominence over other women who may mourn their sisters, lovers, friends, or military colleagues.

Vance further suggests that the qualities of a symbolic mother figure are paralleled by national characteristics—Canada was a young country with eternal devotion to Mother Britain, a motif produced through songs, music, patriotic cartoons. Vance explains (1997),

The elements are always the same. The children of Mother Britain have been scattered around the globe yet remain tied to England by bonds stronger than steel. When the call goes out in August 1914, they all answer "Ready, aye, ready," and come running to the aid of Mother Britain. (p. 150)

The centrality of the Silver Cross Mother operates within these broader discursive frameworks of imperialism. Through the Silver Cross Mother, the monument is allowed to simultaneously

express domestic, familial, personal memories, and national memories. Her participation in Remembrance Day services contributes to the discursive and affective qualities of the monument.

Ordering commemorative meanings through ceremonial placement of wreaths at the NWM has a long history. Meanings of nation are produced through the laying of wreaths not only through discourses of gender but also more explicitly through discourses of national inclusion and exclusion based on ethnicity. In 1955, a government committee named the “Committee on the use of Parliament Hill and the National War Memorial” determined who had the authority to hold ceremonies on Parliament Hill and at the NWM. The resulting specific policy determined who could lay wreaths at the NWM. The policy granted permission for wreath-laying to those who intended to honor the memory and service of the Canadian armed forces “in keeping with the dignity and national character of the Memorial” (Stein, 1955). The policy also allowed wreath-laying by visiting heads of state and high-ranking Generals from historic allies of Canada.

Also in 1955, the Association of Baltic Canadians in Ottawa began what would become a 7-year application process to receive permission to lay a wreath at the NWM in honor of the thousands of Estonians deported to Russia on June 14, 1941. After deliberation of the first application, “The Committee decided that permission should be refused because the proposed ceremony was obviously not intended at all to honour the memory and service of members of the Canadian armed forces” (June 2, 1955). In contrast, the Anzac Day ceremony was allowed to proceed as the Australian and New Zealanders intended to include in their tributes references to Canadian armed forces, the wreaths cards included, “and our Canadian brothers in arms.” Two years later, in 1957, the Baltic Canadians again applied to lay a wreath in commemoration of June 14, this time “in commemoration of Canadians as well as Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians who lost their lives during the First and Second World Wars” (Measures, 1957). The application had been nuanced in hopes of conforming to the Committee’s regulations. The Chairperson of the Committee summed up the reasons for the Committee’s continued denial of permission:

It is of interest that though the wording of the applications for permission has changed from “in commemoration of the mass deportation” used in 1952, and “in commemoration of those who lost their lives in the First and Second World Wars” used in 1953 and 1955, to the wording in the enclosed 1957 application, i.e. “in commemoration of Canadians as well as Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians who lost their lives during the First and Second Wars”, the date of the ceremony—June 14—is the anniversary on which these Baltic organizations commemorate a deportation to the Soviet Union of former citizens of these Baltic states in the year 1941. (Measures, 1957)

Their application was again denied. This statement of rejection understands the Baltic Canadians’ attempt to commemorate a date of mass execution of victims of war as a subversive attempt to challenge or undermine the official meanings of the NWM.

A similar incident occurred in 1989 when the Canadian Polish Congress, the Polish Combatants’ Association, and the Canadian Federation of Polish Women attempted to lay a wreath at the monument to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland. Veterans Affairs Canada intervened stating that the monument was only to commemorate Canadian war losses. Spokesman for the Canadian Polish Congress, “Peter Staniszczis said his organization believes the Soviet invasion of Poland, which occurred seven days after Canada entered the war on Sept. 10, 1939, indirectly led to deaths of Canadians and others during the remaining war years” (“Polish Groups Not Allowed to Lay Wreaths,” 1989, p. A.6).

The wreath-laying issue of the 1950s and 1980s of the Baltic-Canadian and Polish-Canadian Associations highlights how particular ritual animations of the NWM have been constantly and vigilantly circumscribed. The Committee not only produced a monument that was particularly Canadian, but produced a “Canadian-ness” of white-settler “Canadian-Canadians” (Mackey,

2002), suspicious of the commemoration of the great loss of life of “other” people. A wreath laid for the Baltic people would have seen the site appropriated simultaneously as the State’s site of remembrance and as the diasporic community’s site of remembrance.

In these moments of ritual, the virtualities felt as reverence for the dead are actualized both in words and in objects. The Remembrance Day service conjures specific deaths by means of specific liturgies of remembrance. The laying of wreaths and poppies both confirms and disrupts which visitors and which ghosts belong at and to the Memorial. These affective attachments to the monument serve to reaffirm public citizenship as gendered and racialized in specific ways. In particular, young men of largely White, English origins are valorized as nation-makers, and White women are idealized as mothers of the nation. Remembrance of World War I casualties and veterans is also employed to problematically disallow other forms of remembrance. The monument is sutured to a specific, narrow range of meanings that limit understandings of Canadian belonging, highlighted by the placement of the out-of-bounds wreaths.

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

When the “Tomb of the Unknown Soldier” (henceforth the Tomb) was unveiled in 2000, *Ottawa Citizen* writer Graham Green (2000) suggested,

We buried more than just our Unknown Soldier at Sunday’s emotional ceremony at the National War Memorial. We also buried our indifference to the sacrifices the men and women of Canada’s Armed Forces have made—and continue to make—on our behalf. (p. A.17)

The Tomb stylistically and figuratively works in concert with the commemorative aesthetic of the NWM’s 1939 design.

On May 25, 2000, in the presence of a crowd of veterans, government officials, and thousands of Canadian citizens, the Tomb was unveiled at the foot of the NWM. Interring the remains of the Unknown Soldier, actual physical human remains, promised an invocation of the ghostly by recasting Confederation Square as a burial plot, which in turn materially and affectively expands the halo of reverence felt at the NWM.

The haunting of the Tomb takes on a specifically emblematic form as it represents the 28,000 Canadians who died in conflicts and have no known graves (“Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: Project History,” 2001, p. 1). The NWM already in its name offers the juxtaposition of two concepts: nationhood, and grief and mourning. These concepts are naturally wed when soldiers fight for their country; their deaths already demand national grief. Tombs of unknown soldiers do not mark individuals but situate bodies as metonyms for the social body of an imagined community or nation. The soldier interred is produced, mourned, and remembered as a Canadian. Benedict Anderson (1983) has declared that “no more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers” (p. 9). For Anderson, tombs of unknown soldiers are “saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings” (p. 9). They are effective because nationalism is intimately connected to death and ideas of mortality and immortality. With what he understands as the waning of “religious modes of thought” (p. 11), the nation has become the idea of continuity to which individuals can attach themselves. Anderson is clear that nationalism has not become or replaced religion, but rather aligns with the cultural systems of religious thought as opposed to with simply-held political ideologies. This idea is echoed repeatedly in the form of national monuments which utilize religious tropes of resurrection as parallel to tropes of national birth and rebirth (see Vance, 1997). Interring remains of an “unknown soldier” to stand in for collective, national loss has become a common memorial strategy for many countries (Anderson, 1983; Shipley, 1987).

Repatriating the remains of an unknown soldier and interring them in a sarcophagus at the head of the NWM was a millennium project of the Royal Canadian Legion ("Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: Project History," 2001). When designing the Tomb, the Committee decided to place a sarcophagus over the steps at the front of the NWM, a design preferred because it would stylistically match the Memorial, and provide an ideal site for wreath-laying ceremonies. The Tomb tightly corresponds with the initial commemorative meanings and aesthetic styling of the NWM. The altar was modeled after the altar at the Vimy Ridge memorial. The sarcophagus was built with granite from the La Riviere Pierre quarry, the same quarry from which the granite for the NWM was sourced ("Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: Project History," 2001). Many aspects of sculptor Mary Ann Liu's sculpture sutured the Tomb directly into classical motifs for World War I commemorations. The sculpture includes a helmet, a large sword, scarred by battle, maple leaves for Canada, and laurel leaves for both victory and death (*Sculpting Canada's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier*, 2003). The corner pieces of the tomb, installed to both anchor the piece visually and prevent skateboarders, also represent the medals given to the families of the fallen and depict the three sovereigns under whom Canadians have fought: King George V, King George VI, and Queen Elizabeth II (*Sculpting Canada's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier*, 2003). These pieces expand the Tomb's commemorative breadth to include war losses incurred after World War I (and the reign of King George V).

The Unknown Soldier's remains were exhumed and repatriated to Canada, and the Tomb was unveiled following Legion protocol. Every moment in the process produced the soldier as Canadian in a mode suitable to what had become reified within public performances of Canadian memory and belonging. In France, a stone was placed at the grave stating, "The former grave of an unknown Canadian soldier of the first world war. His remains were removed on 25 May 2000 and now lie interred at the National War Memorial in Ottawa Canada" ("Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: Project History," 2001, p. 34). While we know little about the Unknown Soldier, we do know that he was a casualty of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Originally it was suggested that the remains of a Boer War soldier be interred, because the Boer War was the first conflict in which Canada fought as a nation. Senator Romeo Dallaire suggested the interment of a Vimy Ridge casualty, suggesting, as is repeatedly argued, that Vimy Ridge was a key moment marking Canada's emergence as a nation, and that the Battle at Vimy Ridge had a significant number of Canadian casualties.

When the remains of the Unknown Soldier were exhumed, they found a number of small objects including: "2 buttons, 2 boot soles, 2 gas mask eye pieces, and . . . one bullet" ("Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: Project History," 2001, p. 33). While the Unknown Soldier is minimally material—buttons, boot soles, ashes—his virtual reach is expansive. In her address at the committal service, Governor General Adrienne Clarkson begins this work of imaging the immense unknowns:

We do not know his name. We do not know if he was a MacPherson or a Chartrand. He could have been a Kaminski or a Swiftarrow. We do not know whether he was a father himself. . . . We do not know whether he had begun truly to live his life as a truck driver or a scientist, a minor or a teacher, a farmer or a student. . . . Was he someone who saw the whales at the mouth of the Saguenay? Was he someone who hiked in the Rockies or sailed in the Atlantic or the gulf islands? . . . Did he get into fights? Did he have freckles? Did he think nobody understood him? Did he just want to go out and have a good time with the boys? We will never know the answers to these questions. . . . In honouring this unknown soldier today, through this funeral and through this burial, we are embracing the fact of the anonymity and saying that because we do not know him and we do not know what he could have become, he has become more than one body, more than one grave. He is an ideal. He is a symbol of all sacrifice. He is every soldier in all our wars. (as cited in "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: Project History," 2001, pp. 100-101)



Figure 4. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Remembrance Day, 2008.

Source: Author.

By attempting to depict many “Canadians,” Clarkson animated the monument to its broadest and most “Canadian” registers, a register that endorses contemporary conceptions of Canadian liberal inclusion. In her remarks, Clarkson placed the soldier in a very specific ontological place. The soldier is actual; actual remains are interred. However, he is also ideal. The soldier draws attention and evokes emotions through its idealizations. Despite what is concrete about the soldier, he moves us through the virtualities that circulate with him. The buttons, bullet, ashes are concretizations of the virtualities of the ideal. Canadian citizenry—bravery, loyalty, possibly all those ideas described by Clarkson: a prairie boy, a fighter, a boy with freckles.

Following the 2008 Remembrance Day service, I noticed that the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier had become quickly blanketed in lapel poppies. Seemingly spontaneous and organic, the blanket of red poppies is a complicated moment of ritual and remembering at the NWM. In contrast to the rigid policies surrounding the sanctioned laying of wreaths, the poppy-laying tradition offers a memorial practice for all visitors and mourners. The laying of poppies at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was born as a tradition on the first Remembrance Day following the Tomb’s placement, November 11, 2000. The practice could be understood as an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm, 1983). Invented traditions are fundamental to the generation of affective, virtual relationships to a nation or imagined community. The content of these new traditions, as Hobsbawm (1983) explains, is less relevant than their affects. Laying lapel poppies on the Tomb is only a significant practice in that it sutures the new monument to old meanings of nationalism, sacrifice, and reverence (Figure 4).

The provenance of the tradition can be understood to have two lineages. First, the laying of offerings at a tomb has a near-timeless quality. The second lineage is the more specific history of lapel poppies. The poppy is a symbol central to Canadian Remembrance Day practices, the symbol anchoring one of the bronze corner pieces of the Tomb. The poppy was officially adopted as a Remembrance symbol in 1921, six years after Canadian poet John McCrae wrote his iconic poem, “In Flanders Fields” (Shipley, 1987, p. 144). The tradition of laying poppies on the Tomb offers a connective tissue between everyday passersby and traditional commemorative practices. The poppy-laying tradition was officially born or invented in 2000 with historic roots in both timeless, ancient practices and historically and nationally specific history of poppies growing at

Flander's Fields. In keeping with Hobsbawm's articulation of invented traditions, the laying of poppies has not been officially endorsed; however, the implications of the practice are profound. To lay a poppy at the Tomb is to engage in collective, national grief. To be Canadian in this moment is to mourn and to remember—specifically, to mourn and remember through the images of Vimy Ridge, Flander's Fields, and specifically Canadian losses.

Interred at the NWM, the Unknown Soldier has been produced as an eternal public citizen. He is meant to embody almost all of what a Canadian could have been and could be in the future. Through these virtual potentialities the Tomb broadens the scope and register of the NWM. The corner pieces that represent other eras of Canadian military activity suggest that, while we know in fact that the soldier died at Vimy Ridge, he is supposed to represent other past and future losses. The Tomb also works to reinforce the nation-building ability of the NWM. The design of the Tomb, the ceremonies that marked its presence, and the remains themselves all speak explicitly to the NWM's original World War I commemorative meanings. The interment of the Unknown Soldier has produced a specific, ghostly aura at the NWM of welcomed, conjured ghosts from a celebrated past.

Conclusion

The constant re-inscriptions of meaning at the NWM continue to suture a particular type of public citizenship to this central site in the capital city. These effects I have referred to as the monument's halo, a pulsing aura of significance at the site that dictates a prescribed set of behaviors and attitudes. The Remembrance Day rituals are performances of a particular public citizenship. In these rituals of citizenship, Canadians are compelled to identify with distant Canadian war losses understood to have ushered in the birth of the nation. These affective connections are produced so consistently and with such success that other identifications—or the proposal of alternative meanings for the monument—are understood as defacing acts (for example to lay a Peace wreath, or wreath to Polish war losses).

Acts of collective remembrance often can cause ethical and political dilemmas, as they are necessarily moments of forgetting and exclusion (see Gross, 2000; Irwin-Zarecka, 1994; Sturken, 1997). As I am interpolated into the normative structures of national remembrance, I am simultaneously compelled to resist, or to pause to acknowledge the limits of this interpolation. Dominant modes of remembrance are successful because of how they are consistently and persuasively produced and reproduced. Dominant modes of remembrance are also exclusive. When I mourn the Canadian Vimy Ridge soldiers I actively do not remember war resisters, French Canadians, and farmers who challenged Canada's engagement in this imperial struggle. However, it must be possible to hold these two responses simultaneously, to be both drawn in and critical, to engage in a critical mourning. The NWM is where the "myth of the war" (Vance, 1997) is actively reinscribed. However, it is also a site to challenge that myth, to expand what it means to mourn as Canadians. Here we can ask: Is it possible to sincerely mourn and acknowledge the Canadian Vimy Ridge casualties *and* the Baltians who were exiled and persecuted in the 1950s? Can we mourn Canadians of largely British origins who died in the early 20th century in a way that does not produce visions of a contemporary Canada weighed down by imperial nostalgia?

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Rob Shields, Ondine Park, and Carolina Cambre for commenting on earlier drafts of this article. The author would also like to thank Naomi K. Lewis for copyediting this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was conducted with funding from the Queen Elizabeth II Doctoral Graduate Scholarship.

Notes

1. The other few include the works of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, The Vimy Ridge Memorial in France, a mourning soldier statue at St. Julien in Belgium, and the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill (Shipley, 1987).
2. "For the first time in the Dominion's history 'O Canada' will be played and sung as a national anthem with state approval at the unveiling of the National War Memorial, the program of massed bands rehearsing at Connaught Square revealed Monday night. Although 'O Canada' was played as a national anthem with King Edward VIII's approval at Vimy Ridge in 1936, it will be the first occasion on which this has been done in Canada" ("King George to Unveil National Memorial Sunday Morning", p. 13).

References

- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London, England: Verso.
- Bell, M. (1997). The ghosts of place. *Theory and Society*, 26, 813-836.
- Benjamin, W. (1969). The work of age in the age of mechanical reproduction. In H. Arendt (Ed.), *Illuminations* (pp. 217-252). New York, NY: Schocken Books.
- Buckner, P. (2006). The invention of tradition? The Royal Tours of 1860 and 1901 to Canada. In C. Coates (Ed.), *Majesty in Canada: Essays on the roles of royalty* (pp. 18-43). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: The Dundurn Group.
- Campion-Smith, B. (2014, November 11). War memorial changes stir controversy. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/11/11/war_memorial_changes_stir_controversy.html
- Cannadine, D. (1983). The context, performance and meaning of ritual: The British monarchy and the "Invention of Tradition," c. 1820-1977. In E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (Eds.), *The invention of tradition* (pp. 101-164). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Editorial. (1982, May 29). *The Ottawa Citizen*. Retrieved from <http://ottawacitizen.com/news/politics/editorial-tim-hudaks-math-problem>
- Foote, K. (2003). *Shadowed ground: America's landscapes of violence and tragedy*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Gardam, C. J. (1982). *The National War Memorial*. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Veterans Affairs Canada.
- Gordon, A. (1997). *Ghostly matters: Haunting and the sociological imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gordon, D., & Osborne, B. (2004). Constructing national identity in Canada's capital, 1900-2000: Confederation square and the national war memorial. *Journal of Historical Geography*, 30, 618-642.
- Green, G. (2000, May 30). The unspoken message of the Unknown Soldier. *Ottawa Citizen*, p. A.17.
- Gross, D. (2000). *Lost time: On remembering and forgetting in late modern culture*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Hayes, G., Iarocci, A., & Bechthold, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian reassessment*. Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Hetherington, K. (2001). Phantasmagoria/phantasm agora: Materialities, specialities, and ghosts. *Space and Culture*, (11/12), 24-41.
- Hobsbawm, E. (1983). Introduction: Inventing traditions. In E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (Eds.), *The invention of tradition* (pp. 1-14). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hucker, J. (2009). "Battle and burial": Recapturing the cultural meaning of Canada's National Memorial on Vimy Ridge. *The Public Historian*, 31, 89-109.
- Huyssen, A. (2003). *Present pasts: Urban palimpsests and the politics of memory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

- Irwin-Zarecka, I. (1994). *Frames of remembrance: The dynamics of collective memory*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- “King George to Unveil National Memorial Sunday Morning.” (1939, May 16). *Ottawa Citizen*, p. 13.
- Levinson, S. (1998). *Written in stone: Public monuments in changing societies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mackey, E. (2002). *The house of difference: Cultural politics and national identity in Canada*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- McKay, I., & Swift, J. (2012). *Warrior nation: Rebranding Canada in an age of anxiety*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Between the Lines.
- Measures. (1957, May 28). *Letter to T. A. Johnston* (File: Use of Parliament Hill and the National War Memorial; RG 24-B-2, Box 6559, File C-2-60-10). Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: National Archives.
- Nora, P. (1989). Between memory and history: Les Lieux de Memoire. *Representations*, 26, 7-25.
- “Polish groups not allowed to lay wreath.” (1989, September 18). *The Ottawa Citizen*, p. A.6.
- Sculpting Canada's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier*. (2003). Oakville, Ontario, Canada: Monte Vista Enterprises Ltd.
- Shields, R. (2003). *The virtual*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Shipley, R. (1987). *To mark our place: A history of Canadian war memorials*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: NCP Press.
- Stein, C. (1955, July 26). *Memo to all federal departments* (File: Use of Parliament Hill and the National War Memorial; RG 24-B-2, Box 6559, File C-2-60-10). Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: National Archives.
- Sturken, M. (1997). *Tangled memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS epidemic, and the politics of remembering*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: Project History. (2001, April). Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Vista Knowledge Services.
- Vance, J. F. (1997). *Death so noble: Memory, meaning, and the First World War*. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada: University of British Columbia Press.
- White Poppies. (n.d.). *White Poppies for a culture of peace*. Retrieved from <http://www.ppu.org.uk/whitepoppy/white-news.html>
- White poppy emblems anger Edmonton veterans. (2006, November 8). *CBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/edmonton/story/2006/11/08/white-poppy.html>
- Young, J. E. (1993). *The texture of memory*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Author Biography

Tonya Davidson teaches sociology at Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada. Her research focuses on nostalgia, the built environment, and popular culture.