Review Essay: *Masculinity, Militarism and the Hegemonic Norm in Canadian Social Institutions*

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Book Under Review:

Taber, N. (2015) (Editor). *Gendered Militarism in Canada: Learning Conformity and Resistance.* Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press.

Each chapter highlights how gendered militarism proliferated within social structures, institutions and practices in Canada. The volume discourses on the interspersion of the concepts of the gender, militarism and learning (xi, xxi) and further chapters discuss how the social categories of race and ethnicity, culture, class and ability/disability are conceptualized within intersections stimulated by militarism.

In the beginning of the book, Taber defines "gender as a societal construct; militarism as a belief system that positions violence or conflict, connected to but not limitedly confined with war and the militaries; and learning…(as that) includes compulsory education and a variety of contexts addressed in adult education" (xi-xii). By intertwining these three concepts, Taber finds it imperative to discuss the relations among them that shape everyday aspects of the Canadian life.

Taber begins with her own narrative and reflection, having been raised in a military family and later on, serving the institution as a military officer. While she mentions that she initially enjoyed her work in serving the Canadian Forces, as she has immersed herself to the male dominated military culture and way of life, she began to reflect and question her positionality and her experiences as a woman in a male dominated institution (p. xvi). Conceivably, this is the initial intersection in which Taber finds it significant to perceive the impact of gendered practices in the military and beyond and its enactment in the social norms. Gendered militarism may have positive effects to one gender, i.e. the male or masculine and adverse effects to other, i.e. female and feminine within the heteronormative framework, and gender identities beyond this framework. The edited volume initially argues that the gendering processes preserve the hegemonic norms.

Gendering Processes and the Hegemonic Norms

Most of the chapters in this edited work utilize the framework of Enloe (2000) in interrogating

gendered militarism and in finding the ways in which it can be appropriated to social structures and practices. Enloe espouses on the concepts of militarism and militarization that is beyond the aspects of military life. She claims:

> Thinking about militarization allows us to chart silences. It enables us to see what is not challenged for…what is not made problematic: elevating a good soldier to the status of a good citizen…The silence surrounding militarization is broken when military assumptions, and military dependence on gender are pushed up to the surface (of) public discussion (32).

In this framework, Enloe challenges the militarized masculinity that has been deeply ingrained in our social practices. As a backbone unto which the veneration of male subjects, soldiers and military men are often exalted as prototype, "good" citizens, opposed to other kinds of citizen-subjects. In connection, in the Chapter Four of this volume, Taber argues that the framing of Canadian citizenship has promoted the privileging of men, militaries, militarism and masculinity through the materials she has surveyed. This practice defies the fact that Canadian ideals are plural and multicultural—it stands beyond the privileging of a particular gender, race and social category of identity. Similarly, Hanson (2015) and Fournier (2015), in their respective discussions in this volume, raise how gender training and gendering processes have ensured the dominance of the male and the masculine subjects. Hanson notes that while peace-building processes have well tried to ensure that structural inequities are resolved by placing some well-balanced gender training programs, the lack of structure to promote education and opportunities for girls and women challenge such aim (129). Most often, the male identity and masculinity are still implanted in many gender training pursuits (Hanson, 142). The lack of problematizing and interrogation of these concepts not only promotes the hegemonic norm, but further instigates violence against women.

To particularly highlight the gendering process, Fournier (2015) exemplifies the case of cyber-technology users as acting in highly militarized spaces (177). In this space, interlocutors engage in some forms of stereotypical constructions of girls and women, and utilize these as significant platforms and springboard to bully girls and women in the cyberspace. In the online virtual ethno drama presented by Fournier, she manifests how girls are identified to be initially feeble (182-197), however, the course of the dialogue presents that these actors can actually exhibit agency and resistance by challenging norms. This means that while the gendering processes in the militarized spaces embrace the hegemonic norm, girls' and women's identities are achieved through some forms of opposition.

Through these various forms of gendering process, the public is challenged to take pedagogical and reflective steps, to the point of learning and advocating counter-movements. This is to break the silence that causes militarism to proliferate in our everyday social practices. This process has implications to challenging gendered, and to a large extent, violent and oppressive practices, within Canadian social institutions. It is at this juncture that Taber invokes that, citizens and educators have this social responsibility to challenge forms of militaristic thinking (xxii). Some other chapters in this compendium centre on these aims and advocacies, in order to promote pedagogical moments that make us reflect about militarism and its impact in our society.

The other chapters in the edited work can be further reviewed based on the two other significant themes: (1) cyber world, technology and entertainment; and (2) education. These themes are significant aspects of everyday life, and in the authors' respective discussions, militarism has stimulated these social structures and institutions, to the point of disadvantage of some vulnerable groups.

Cyber world, technology and entertainment

In the first chapter of the text, Magnusson and Mojab (2015) discuss the visibility of militarism as connected with racialized and genderized patriarchal capitalism (1). These authors widened the conception of militarism in the form of rigidity and hierarchy, and how violence and oppression are manifested by supporting these. The initial chapter focuses on the discussion of the virtual game, *Urgent Evoke*, an online alternative gaming reality platform developed by the World Bank Institute (WBI). Magnusson and Mojab claim that this gamified learning environment has important implications for learning gendered militarism in Canada (2, 4) and the rest of the world. Originally developed to empower gamers and young people as they take part in resolving the deeply entrenched world problems (4), the solutions

posed by this learning environment, as Magnusson and Mojab claim, are embracing the monolithic dominance of the western political economy of capitalism. While the project virtually allows gamers to exercise many forms of virtual agency and power, the authors argue that *Urgent Evoke* is a vehicle to learn gendered and market-based militarism (7). In the game, WBI simplistically conceptualizes equality based on economic terms and the road to freedom is limited to the financial realm. The game situates African youth, people of colour and Muslim women as marginalized identities because of their economic condition, race, gender and religion. *Urgent Evoke* follows the western political economy of capitalism, to claim that these subjects can resolve their challenges by embracing the heternormative, usurping colonialist practices and participating in the patriarchal capitalist world. However, this mechanism resounds a very simplistic understanding of the plights of these marginalized subjects. The game and the rationale behind it, limitedly portray the issues at hand, as one that can only be resolved merely through economic means. It devalues the consideration for unjust socio-historical conditions that must be made perceptible to understand that social positions of these subjects. In utilizing a simplistic lens, it sets the stakeholders to be vulnerable to limitedly be susceptible to a binary and duality, a hierarchy and a clinch towards the restrictions of militarism.

In connection with the first chapter, in the second chapter, Lane (2015) argues that the modern tools and devices such as Social Networking Sites (SNS) or particularly Facebook, give this opportunity for liberatory knowledge production; however, through a similar simplistic lens, SNS also leave stakeholders the possibility of reproducing social norms (25). Lane exemplifies how online social media platforms such as Facebook are streamlined with conceptions of militarism and gender. This streamlining manifests how deeply ingrained yet invisible regulations are, despite the possibility of resistance (28). Specifically, Lane presents how the Canadian Army Facebook conveys, "reproduce(s) and reinforce(s) dominant discourses of masculinity and femininity through predominant representations of men as strong protectors and women as caregivers and homemakers" (32). To counter such online movement of promoting militarized masculinity, Lane demonstrates how soft anti-militarism is manifested in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Facebook, where many of the insights shown are "women's experiences as central to war and peace" (32) and the possibility of a dialogue between men and women to promote peace. The presence of resistance despite the strong militarization amid SNS proves that, as Lane argues, there is a transgressive and transformative potential (35) to break the imposed binary and duality, the hierarchy and a clinch towards militarism.

Apart from the heteronormative hierarchy, in the third chapter of the volume, Haddow (2015) presents the phenomenon of a cultural hierarchy as supported by militarism and militaristic culture in entertainment. Haddow argues that in terms of these aspects, there is a very strong influence of the American culture in the Canadian imaginary (44). Canadian media consumption is so much saturated with American media. As Haddow claims, this phenomenon has effects on nationhood, culture and the Canadian identity (45-46). And with American popular culture being so much permeated by militaristic thinking and militarism (49), Canadian viewers and patrons, deliberately or insentiently, are being influenced by such American patriarchal militarism.

In the three chapters mentioned above, it is no doubt the hierarchal militarism is in place in theory and practice and it has affects not only to gender, but also to popular culture and social life.

Militarism, Learning and Education
The second theme that can be highlighted from this compendium is how militarism has affected the educational and formal learning systems in Canada. Castrodale, Saul, Mizzi and Ratkovic, respectively illustrate diverse social conditions where educational practices and systems embrace gendered militarism and standardized militarism, in general. In Chapter Five, Castrodale (2015) demonstrates that the framing of exceptionality as disability that has become a hegemonic norm to support ableist and militaristic discourses and practices in education. The notion of prototypes, standardized and ideal bodies thrive in the practice of education, and they become the favoured subjects, seen and considered to be the worthy persons to learn. However, bodies that are "labelled disabled" are at a disadvantage. They are often not given the opportunity

to access education and methods of learning that are suitable for them to thrive. With such disparity in practice, students and persons with disability are further marginalized, while others, who are seemingly able because they fit the militarized standard, are given more opportunities.

While Castrodale speaks about ableism in macro-contexts, Saul (2015) presents militarism in education and sports, and challenges the militarization in school sports. Boys and male students are often encouraged if not forced to participate in sports that promote full-bodied masculinity (215) and the gender order (210), where the masculine is on the top of the hierarchy. Male students manifest their deep ability and maintain their superiority if they engage in and consequently win in competitive and combative sports. This sporting culture promotes militarism that may limitedly frame the conceptualization of maleness and masculine. It also apparently places some boys and males who do not engage in such sporting culture because of various reasons, to be fragile and therefore has failed the test of masculinity.

Apart from ableism and masculinity in school sports culture, another author, Mizzi (2015) explores the situation of other kinds of genders – those beyond the heternormative and how negative social constructions against these gender identities place them in the absent centre. Mizzi raises his own experience when he was discriminated against when he applied to the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). Because his mannerisms were considered too effeminate (108), he was automatically disqualified from the position. Mizzi asserts that hegemonic masculinity and the clinch towards the heteronormative sexes and genders (male and female, masculine and feminine) bars opportunities from identities within the LGBTQ umbrella. The exclusion of these identities in the CAF is a noticeable way of supporting gendered militarism. To challenge these unfair practices, Mizzi calls for a "rainbow audit" in order to reflect and examine the current practices in the CAF that has visible and invisible relegations against LGBTQ identities.

Interconnected with ableism and gender, Ratkovic (2015) also raises how women of economic, social and political class, such as refugee and migrant women teachers are also challenged by militarism. The imposition of preference and hierarchy in the workplace, particularly in the teaching professions, positions the women migrant and refugee teachers into a social positioning, where the social constructions against their identities adversely affect their capacity to contribute in a highly militarized society. Citing the stories of refugee women from war-torn Eastern Europe, i.e. Yugoslavia, Ratkovic presents the narratives of women refugee teachers who constantly experience discrimination and "othering" because of the social ascriptions against their identities. These are formed by militarism against women in general and cultural militarism against women from war-torn countries, in particular. These women refugee teachers experience many forms of discrimination and challenges as they navigate to access employment spaces in Canada, and as they resist the social constructions of their identities.

Conclusion

The collection raises various themes to reflect on how standardized forms of militarism proliferate in the everyday lives of Canadians. From the particular examples and experiences cited by the authors in this volume, it can be reflected how militarism creases in, in the intersections of the social categories of identities, i.e. sex and gender, race and ethnicity, political status and economic class, ability/disability and culture. These are the intersections that are significant to create a pedagogy of learning and understanding on how the Canadian society and nation is visibly or invisibly supported by militarism in so many ways. The most significant value that this volume brings to us is the possibility of resistance, an epistemology and strategy that is consciously or unconsciously used as a platform for agency amid learning conformity.

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References

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