

Chapter 4

Globalization and History Education: The United States and Canada

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4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how the use of historical narratives positions the nation in an imagined global order, focusing on the cases of the United States and Canada. These findings have ramifications for our understanding of how national and global citizenship are normalized.

Globalization has profound implications for history education. The state-controlled school curriculum has long been an important means by which modern nation-states create a loyal citizenry compliant with the goals of the state (Gellner, 1983). Historical narratives play an important role in the creation of the nation as an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991). Yet processes commonly referred to as “globalization” have destabilized the taken-for-granted notions of the nation as sovereign, autonomous, and culturally cohesive. In the contemporary moment, when the very nature of nationhood is in question, the history classroom serves as one site for constituting and/or contesting the nation as imagined community.

By lifting barriers to the movement of people, capital, and information, global transformations have posed new challenges to the authority of nation-states. On the other hand, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) assert that these same transformations have reinvigorated many states because “national policy authority is indispensable in coordinating and controlling global mobility, interactions and institutions” (p. 29). Similarly, Kennedy (2010) suggests:

Not only is it necessary to accept that nation-states are the inevitable brokers of citizenship in the twenty-first century, but there is now evidence they are growing even stronger. It could well be argued that we are now witnessing a neo-statism, even in liberal democracies, where only the state can respond to the problems of our times. (Kennedy, 2010, p. 225)

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While history education in the modern nation-state has long been concerned with fostering the loyalty of its citizenry to the state, the globalized nation-state must now incur loyal citizenship within a *global* imaginary. I refer to Rizvi and Lingard's (2010) globalized approach to education policy, which uses the concept of the "social imaginary" to describe how "policies direct or steer practice towards a particular normative state of affairs" (p. 8). Given that "a social imaginary is . . . carried in images, myths, parables, stories, legends, and other narratives" (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 34), mandatory history classes are a venue in which social imaginaries are shaped. I seek to explore how the narratives in history classrooms place the nation – in this case the United States or Canada – in a global order. What are the normative messages for what constitutes ethical action within the community of nations, and what are the implications for the agency of the individual citizen?

The United States and Canada both benefit from tremendous wealth and privilege within the global order. The United States has been the dominant economic and military power in the world for more than half a century. Canada is a middle power that has played a key role in the development of internationalist institutions, such as the United Nations Human Rights Tribunal and the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces. These two nation-states retain a high degree of autonomy at a time when the growth of supranational organizations such as the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development challenges the sovereignty of many nation-states. In other words, these two nation-states have considerably more agency than most in the creation and maintenance of the institutions that oversee globalization policies. Yet, in spite of their relatively secure positions, fears and insecurity are omnipresent in the policy debates of these nations (Larsen, 2008).

Threats posed by terrorist organizations, economic crisis, and looming environmental challenges are daily reminders that their wealth and privilege are far from secure. Hence, the task of this chapter is to parse out how these nations represent themselves in a global order that is undergoing profound transformations. First I present an overview of the discourses of national identity in the United States and Canada, in order to introduce the established tensions with regard to nationhood in each location. I summarize the ways in which previous research has addressed the role of secondary history education in the process of imagining the nation. Then I discuss how narrative theory in the form of Wertsch's (2002) approach to historical narrative templates provides a useful lens for deconstructing state-sponsored history curricula. Finally, I present findings from my own research on history education in the United States and Canada and discuss the implications for how these nations are positioned in the global order.

4.2 Context: Discourses of National Identity in the United States and Canada

In comparing the civic cultures of the United States and Canada, it is easy to draw broad contrasts that imply a false dichotomy, and so it is important to remember that it is the combination of similarities and differences that present the two countries as

a natural choice for comparative study. These two nations are neighbors sharing the longest international border in the world. They are both participatory democracies with culturally diverse populations and a history of British colonial rule. In spite of their many commonalities, each has civil cultures and discourses of national identity that are uniquely their own. I will provide an introduction to the foundational myths for each nation, keeping in mind that these are *myths* – not truths – that stand at the center of a *contested* discourse of nationhood. As such, they are the touchstones by which we make sense of each nation’s history.

The three pillars of US national identity are American exceptionalism, individual freedom, and equality. As expressed in John Winthrop’s “A Model of Christian Charity” (1630), American exceptionalism rests on the belief that the United States was formed to serve as a model of virtue for the world: “For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.” In the centuries since, claims to exceptionalism have focused on the American institutions devoted to individual rights and civil liberties, most notably the US Constitution and Bill of Rights and the tradition of case law interpreting those documents. In addition, many would identify as “American” cultural traditions – such as literature, music, and visual arts – that reflect the pursuit of free expression, individualism, and innovation. However, this dominant discourse of US nationhood is deeply contested. Many critics point out that enduring structural inequality belies the promises of freedom and equality for all. The recognition of civil liberties for new constituencies has been notable for the strong resistance that it has met from powerful elites from the earliest days of the nation’s history. On the topic of the liberal democratic tradition with its heavy emphasis on individual rights, political theorists such as Barber (1984) and Glendon (1991) argue that American political rhetoric and social norms have embraced individualism at great expense to the responsibility of the individual to the collective. In the realm of international relations, exceptionalist rhetoric has been used in recent years to justify the United States’ troubling unilateral military actions and questionable interpretations of international standards for human rights.

Highly politicized public debates over history education have focused on which sets of narratives are certified as “true” in state history curriculum standards,¹ history textbooks, and history classrooms. Different national narratives are used to promote different versions of national identity. Historical narratives have political implications, as they are used in the classroom to develop students’ understanding of the nation and its history. On the one hand, the traditional approach to telling the story of the nation in the United States is the story of powerful men with an emphasis on political nation building, economic growth, and military conquest (VanSledright, 2008). This version of history is a story of continual progress, leaving little room for critique of the nation. Traditional history is well represented in textbooks and

¹Although curriculum standards are controlled at the state level in the United States and at the provincial level in Canada, both countries are home to vigorous national debates over how schoolchildren should learn history. Those familiar with so-called “history wars” in other nations will likely find familiar themes in these debates.

in state curriculum frameworks. On the other hand, alternative (sometimes called “revisionist”) approaches to American history focus on “ordinary people,” telling stories of middle and working classes, nonwhites, and women. Alternative versions of the nation’s history include critiques of powerful figures and institutions. The past several decades have seen the growth of histories that question the monolithic narrative of the nation, and while these histories are marginalized in high school textbooks, they are widely available in popular books (e.g., Loewen, 1995; Zinn, 1980). In other words, in the historiography of the United States, there are a multitude of texts available to support teachers in differing approaches to teaching the history of the nation.

Existing empirical research suggests that the focus of history education in the United States is to transmit the traditional narrative of national development and progress but that students and teachers alike demonstrate discomfort with this narrative. When asked to tell the story of their nation, American college students tend to offer a story of ever-expanding freedoms, which Wertsch and O’Connor (1994) identify as the “quest for freedom” narrative. Wertsch and O’Connor document the different rhetorical strategies that students used to resolve contradictions imposed by the presence of indigenous peoples and enslaved peoples. Epstein (2009) documents the counternarratives of injustice and discrimination in US history that are prevalent within the African-American community. She argues that African-American students subscribe to an alternate metanarrative of US history, one that is not promoted within the public schools in her study. Cornbleth (1998) and Hahn (2002) have documented ambivalence towards the triumphal national narrative on the part of history teachers. Cornbleth found that there were multiple, fragmented depictions of the United States in the classrooms that she observed, but the most frequent was America as the “imperfect but best” country characterized with a “mix of acceptance and dissent” (p. 641). Hahn (2002) noted:

There seems to be a mixed amount of criticism or skepticism with respect to national leaders. On the one hand, students are told that leaders are not infallible or above criticism; on the other, there seems to be little critical assessment of contemporary leaders and issues. (p. 79)

Canada’s discourse of national identity revolves around the themes of multiculturalism, peacekeeping, and communitarianism (Hardwick, Marcus, & Isaak, 2010; Lipset, 1990, 1996). This discourse provides a sharp contrast to that of the United States – or for that matter to any nation that claims to have a culturally unified history. Canada’s claims to nationhood rest upon a fragile union among the former British colonies, collectively known as English Canada, with the former French colony Québec and a number of Aboriginal nations. Britain consolidated its claim to Canadian territory with military victory over New France in 1759; but it maintained control through a series of compromises that conceded substantial political and cultural independence to French and Native communities (Kaufman, 2009).

As Canada increasingly asserted its independence from Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, accommodating diversity was a precondition for holding the French-English confederation together. In recent decades, Canada’s

relatively open immigration policy has resulted in a population that is among the most ethnically, religiously, and linguistically diverse in the world. In its legal and political institutions, Canada has a long tradition of accommodating and protecting its “deep diversity,” and the discourse of Canadian national identity celebrates multiculturalism as a central value (Joshee & Winton, 2007; Sears, 2010). However, as with many contemporary societies, Canada’s structural inequalities suggest that the manifestation of multiculturalism has been “iconic rather than a deep pluralism” (Peck, Thompson, Chareka, Joshee, & Sears, 2010, p. 67).

In addition to multiculturalism, another legacy of Canada’s history of accommodation and compromise is that Canadians tend to see themselves as peacekeepers and “good citizens of the world.” Kymlicka (2003) both describes this phenomenon and debunks it, writing, “. . . This is seen as a national character trait, part of the national identity, and as an obligation of national citizenship In Canada, to be indifferent to our obligations as citizens of the world is seen as ‘unCanadian.’” (p. 358); yet Kymlicka points out that Canadian contributions to international aid efforts are low in comparison to Western European nations, and Canada has not taken a leadership role in international efforts to promote sustainable environmental policies. Thus, Canada’s discourse of national identity revolves around myths that promote a desired vision of Canada rather than a material reality.

Debates within Canada over history education play upon fears that the very concept of Canadian nationhood as contested and multicultural is too fragile to foster social cohesion. Supported by the work of the Dominion Institute, a conservative think tank, and the publication of Granatstein’s (1998) *Who Killed Canadian History?*, traditionalists argue that movements to emphasize themes of multiculturalism and social justice in Canadian history have obscured the important role of British culture in the development of Canadian institutions. Of particular concern for these traditionalists is the declining prominence of Canadian military history. In fact, one outcome of the Canadian national history debates was the funding of a new Canadian War Museum, which opened in Ottawa in 2005 (Sarty, 2007). In contrast, progressive history educators have argued for history curricula that are more inclusive of Canada’s diverse communities and present historical narratives as cultural artifacts that are open to critique (Seixas, 2010).

Empirical research of history and social studies education in Canada supports the view of Canadian national identity as fragmented. In a comparative case study of citizenship education in British Columbia and Québec, Lévesque (2003) found that secondary students in each location described their attitudes towards citizenship in similar ways, emphasizing political and social rights, multiculturalism, and patriotism. The one difference that Lévesque documented was that the French Canadian students saw themselves as citizens of the nation of *Québec* first and foremost, whereas the English Canadian students, including those who were immigrants, identified as *Canadian*. Létourneau and Moison’s (2004) study of young people’s knowledge of Québec history is frequently cited to demonstrate the sharp divide between Francophone and Anglophone versions of national identity. Using similar methods to Wertsch and O’Connor (1994), Létourneau and Moison found that 403 Québec secondary, college, and university students asked to write a short essay on

the history of Québec produced a narrative marked by “a melancholy, nostalgic awareness centering on the idea, the concept, of a conquered, reclusive people, abused by others and always fearful of reclaiming their destiny” (p. 117). Peck (2010) investigated how culturally diverse secondary students in British Columbia used a picture selection task to tell the story of Canada. Peck theorized that students used public history and their own cultural identities dialogically to develop stories that fit into one of three narrative templates: the Founding of the Nation, Diverse and Harmonious Canada, and Diverse but Conflicted Canada.

To sum up this section, nations are “imagined communities,” which rely upon social processes for their invention and maintenance, and the way that they are imagined is deeply contested, as is evidenced by the passions aroused in debates over history education. These “history wars” in the United States and Canada have focused on which narratives should dominate the story of the nation as it is represented in history classrooms. The ways in which teachers engage with these master narratives create and maintain the notion of nationhood for the next generation of citizens, yet studies of how and which historical narratives are presented in the classroom are rare (Hawkey, 2007; Levstik, 2008). In the next section, I will discuss how Wertsch’s (2002) synthesis of narrative theories can help us to “read” the stories of the nation as they are presented in the history classroom.

4.3 Understanding Narrative

The organization of information into narratives is a fundamental characteristic of human thought (e.g., Bruner, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1988). Working with a sociocultural perspective on cognition, Wertsch (2002, 2008) describes narratives as “cultural tools,” meaning that they belong to the culture at large and that as individuals we draw upon them to make sense of the world. Wertsch (2002) argues that narratives provide a way of “grasping together” information by combining actors and events into a plot, or a series of events that are linked together (p. 57). Because the act of selecting people and events to make a narrative involves selecting some pieces of information and leaving others out, narratives invest history with value judgments. In his research on Russian collective memory, Wertsch is particularly concerned with the question of who are the protagonists, agents, and heroes of the narratives used in the classroom. The placement of particular figures, institutions, or movements in the central role of a heroic narrative is one way in which narratives are inscribed with value judgments. White (1981) asserts, “Story forms not only permit us to judge the moral significance of human projects, they also provide the means by which to judge them, even while we pretend to be merely describing them” (p. 253, quoted in Wertsch, 2002, p. 124).

Central to Wertsch’s (2002) understanding of narratives as cultural tools is the dialogical nature of narratives. He cites Bakhtin’s (1981) contention that any speech act is the product of three “voices” coming together: (1) the actual speaker’s intentions, (2) the language and stories that the speaker uses, and (3) the intended

audience's expectations. Wertsch uses his research on historical narratives used in Soviet era history classes and in post-Soviet Russia to demonstrate areas of change and continuity that reflected both the ideological and political changes from one era to another and the cultural continuity. Key to Wertsch's narrative dialogicality is the idea that narratives do not exist in isolation from each other. Within a given culture or a textual community, narratives speak to each other and exert force on one another:

As such, the key to understanding the meaning and form of one narrative is how it provides a dialogic response to previous narratives or anticipates subsequent ones. And the nature of the response can range from hostile retort to friendly elaboration, from a studied attempt to ignore another narrative to its celebration (60).

Narrative dialogicality is relevant to understanding the ways that narratives speak to each other in the history classroom. For example, how does the use of certain narratives, such as one teacher's assertion

U.S. military intelligence estimated that an invasion of Japan in 1945 would have resulted in over one million Allied casualties.

pave the way for other narratives, such as the claim *the use of atomic weapons on Japan saved American lives*, and discourage the use of other narratives, such as stories that call into question Allied decisions to bomb civilian population centers in Japan and Germany? Clearly the use of these narratives has important implications for the depiction of the nation and its citizens.

Arguably, Wertsch's (2002, 2008) most significant contribution to the field of collective remembering is the development of the concept of the *schematic narrative template*, which is a basic story that is repeated frequently within a narrative tradition. Key characteristics of schematic narrative templates are that they belong to a specific cultural tradition and they are so commonly held that they are invisible to those who use them. Wertsch documents the uses of the "triumph-over-alien-forces" narrative template in Russia to tell the story of Russia during the Civil War of 1918–1919 and World War II. He describes the basic plot of this template in four steps:

1. An "initial situation" (Propp 1968) in which the Russian people are living in a peaceful setting where they are no threat to others is disrupted by
2. The initiation of trouble or aggression by an alien force, or agent, which leads to
3. A time of crisis and great suffering, which is
4. Overcome by the triumph over the alien force by the Russian people, acting heroically and alone (p. 93)

Wertsch uses textbooks from different eras in Soviet and post-Soviet history to document how the officially sanctioned history of the Civil War of 1918–1919 and World War II changed from the 1940s to the 1990s. Throughout this period, however, Wertsch demonstrates that the "triumph-over-alien-forces" narrative template continued to shape the telling of Russian history, even as the dominant ideology changed. Wertsch's work provides a framework for uncovering the templates that exert hidden control upon the stories of the nation.

4.4 Historical Narratives of the United States and Canada in Wartime

The study of World War II has particular salience for the project of understanding how history education positions the nation in the global order because World War II is often portrayed as a just war, and as such it is a common point of reference for those looking to celebrate military action (Zajda, 2012). My research documented how teachers in one school district in Maryland, USA, and one school board in Ontario, Canada, taught about the national experience of World War II in their required secondary history courses. Utilizing a comparative case study design, (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005), I observed three US and two Canadian teachers.² Participants were recommended by their principals, department chairs, or district social studies curriculum coordinators as examples of “wise practice” (Davis, 1997; Grant, 2005). I observed the teachers for 2–3 weeks while they taught the World War II unit of their required national history course (10th grade Canadian history since World War I or 9th grade United States history from 1876 to the present). Observation sites were selected to include schools serving culturally and socioeconomically diverse populations. In order to have as complete a record as possible, I sought to collect all of the materials that the students received during their study of World War II, including textbooks, supplemental texts, homework and other assignments, and tests and quizzes.

Following Wertsch’s (2002) model for looking at how narratives are used to construct the nation, the identification of the protagonists and agents in the story of the nation takes on particular importance. Thus, in analyzing the field data, I sought to identify the types of narratives that were used in each setting. I categorized narratives as representing political, military, or social history. Of course, there are stories that straddle categories, so at times I had to either assign a narrative to more than one category or make fine distinctions using subtle cues as related to the narrative’s emphasis.

The way that class time is apportioned among the different types of narratives implies attention to different types of agency. While the percentages varied from teacher to teacher, for all of the US teachers observed, the largest amount of class time was devoted to political narratives, followed by military narratives, with the smallest portion of time devoted to social history narratives. For the two Canadian teachers observed, the largest portion of class time was devoted to military narratives while the smaller portions of time were devoted to political narratives and social history narratives. While the chart below might suggest that military narratives were featured with similar frequency in the US and Canadian classes, this suggestion is misleading. In fact, many of the Canadian classes were devoted exclusively to military narratives, whereas many of the US classes presented military narratives in

²For details about research methods, findings, and extended discussion of data, see Faden (2014).

Table 4.1 Percentage of classes observed featuring different types of historical narratives

	US classes (%)	Canadian classes (%)
Political narratives	73	38
Military narratives	59	63
Social history narratives	14	38

Because each class can include multiple types of narratives, the percentages total more than 100

Table 4.2 Unit test item analysis by teacher

	US teachers 1 and 2 ^a (%)	US teacher 3 (%)	CDN teacher 1 (%)	CDN teacher 2 (%)
Political	48	40	19	27
Military	35	42	62	50
Social	12	11	19	14
Economic	4	7		9

^aThese teachers taught at the same school and used the same unit test

order to contextualize or explain changes in US policy or to illustrate the pressures on US political leaders (Table 4.1).

Because the constraints of collecting data at multiple sites prevented me from observing every class that the five teachers dedicated to World War II, I did a similar analysis of each teacher's World War II unit exam. The results were generally consistent with my observations that class time was devoted primarily to political narratives in the US classes and military narratives in the Canadian classes (Table 4.2).

This quantitative data is merely a blunt instrument for measuring the emphasis on different types of narratives in history classrooms. However, the data reveals consistent differences between the types of narratives that dominate in the US and Canadian history classrooms, and these differences have significance for the construction of national identity and citizenship.

4.4.1 Narratives of the United States in World War II

As is evident in the figures above, political narratives dominated in the US history classrooms. Protagonists in these narratives were usually identified as national leaders, most often President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the nations involved in the war. Military narratives were also referenced in a majority of the classes observed. However, military narratives tended to play a *supporting* role for the political narratives. The emphasis in these narratives was on the big picture – war strategy and the sequences of territory won or lost – and how it affected political events. Throughout the narratives, one prominent theme was the evolving justifications for US involvement in the war. Significant class time was devoted to US policies

in the period before the United States entered the war (e.g., Neutrality Acts, the Atlantic Charter) and to the events surrounding the end of the war, specifically the development of the atomic bomb and the decision to use atomic weapons against Japan. In short, the World War II narratives, taken as a whole, worked to justify US military involvement in the war. To this point I would add that the justification of the use of atomic weapons against Japan is very important to the metanarrative, as it was the United States' nuclear advantage that ensured it considerable leverage in the postwar era. Thus, one of the dialogical functions of these narratives (Wertsch, 2002) is to establish the United States as the benevolent superpower of the Cold War era.

The story of the World War II as a fundamentally political narrative suggests an underlying narrative in which politics, rather than military or economic actions, are the driving force in history. Using Wertsch's (2002) concept of the schematic narrative template, I have named the US template "The Reluctant Hegemon" (Faden, 2014). Many of the narratives serve to show that the United States had no choice but to enter into World War II, either to combat fascist Germany or to defend itself following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The template presupposes that the United States had no imperialist designs in going to war, and thus the economic and political advantages that followed were simply the natural consequences of taking on a leadership role in international affairs. The dialogical function of the template also makes it difficult to include the role of dissenters who criticized the war effort. One of the distinctive features of World War II was the large-scale use of civilian targets by all parties, and this troubling aspect of the war received little attention in the observed classes.

In the case of US historical narratives, dominant World War II narratives position the United States as the exceptional nation and a promoter of freedom and equality. At least in theory, in a democracy citizens are responsible for the actions of the nation and its government. In framing US military action as justified by its enemies' aggression, these narratives avoid discussion of the ethical limits of military action in the context of a just war. The implications of civilian casualties and the use of new technology in warfare are issues that are as relevant to twenty-first century war as to World War II. Furthermore, the construction of the United States as "Reluctant Hegemon" is a simple resolution to the conflict between the United States' commitment to democratic freedom – the quality which is supposed to set it apart as an "exceptional" nation – and the fact that the nation owes its privileged position in the global order to its military power. It is not a stretch, either, to point out how comforting it is to imagine that US military power has been and continues to be fully responsive to democratic process, when in recent times the nation's executive has been quick to go to war and slow to find its way out.

4.4.2 Narratives of Canada in World War II

Canadian narratives paint an entirely different view of the war. Not only do military narratives dominate the narrative landscape, but the narratives attend in detail to

the material experiences of ordinary soldiers. A majority of the Canadian history classes observed devoted much or all of the class to military narratives, with more emphasis on battles, tactics, and the use of military technologies. Protagonists in the historical narratives in the Canadian classes included the nations involved in the war, leaders of foreign nations, and citizens who contributed to the war effort in both military and nonmilitary capacities. There were strikingly few references to Canadian leaders, including Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, his cabinet, and generals or other high-ranking military figures. Detailed narratives about the war effort described the valuable efforts that Canadians made collectively. The overall impression is that Canadians participated in the war heroically, but they were not responsible for the conduct of the war. Because political leaders, generals, and policymakers are not presented as agents in this narrative landscape, no one is responsible for the troubling aspects of the war, such as unequal treatment of women and ethnic minorities, military failures, or the civilian casualties that resulted from allied airstrikes.

The focus on the personal experience of war is consonant with the important role that the two world wars play in Canada's grand nation-building narrative. The wars are most often represented as the test by which Canada proved itself as an independent nation rather than a junior partner in the British Commonwealth. The assertion that Canada "came of age" at the Battle of Vimy Ridge in World War I can be found in virtually every contemporary Canadian history textbook. In his treatise on the construction of Canada's national myths, Francis (1997) wrote:

The master narrative presents both world wars as heroic struggles to preserve a way of life from enemies who would overwhelm it. According to the master narrative, the sacrifice of all those young lives was valorous and meaningful. War is horrible, but its horror is redeemed by noble sacrifice. (p. 126)

This approach reflects a schematic narrative template in Canadian historiography that I call "Canada Proves Itself on the World Stage" (Faden, 2014). It reveals a pattern in which historical narratives from all eras of Canadian history are shaped to demonstrate that Canada deserves recognition as a member of the international community. This template reflects the central concern in the Canadian discourse with the fragility of Canada's claim to nationhood. These narratives work together to claim Canadian nationhood as a *collective* achievement for the Canadian people; and in doing so they direct attention away from questions about who bears the cost of war, who enjoys the benefits, and what are the ethical responsibilities of the nation and the citizen in wartime.

The celebration of Canadian participation in international wars as evidence of nation building evades questions about how Canada's efforts have contributed to British or US imperialism. The lack of attention to political developments in the history of World War II, for example, prevents us from asking who was responsible for the tragedies of the war. When the war is celebrated as a collective achievement, it is difficult to interrogate the power dynamics behind the war. Did Canada go to war as an independent and democratic nation, or did it participate reluctantly as an obedient junior member of the British Commonwealth? Without exploring the

political history, it is impossible to answer these questions, just as it is impossible to critically assess the workings of Canadian democracy. I suspect, however, that the most taboo question of all is about the extent to which Canada is complicit in US imperialism, both in its active diplomatic and military partnerships with the United States and in the ways in which it passively benefits from the wealth and relative economic stability of its largest trading partner.

4.5 Conclusion

Because we are constantly drawing upon narratives to make sense of our world, their role in shaping our social imaginary goes largely unnoticed. McLaren (1995) argues:

Contained in all cultural narratives is a preferred way of reading them. We don't only live particular narratives but we inhabit them (as they inhabit us). The degree to which we resist certain narratives depends upon how we are able to read them and rewrite them. (p. 98)

It is only through the systematic observation of the uses of historical narratives that we can understand and challenge them. I propose that inquiry into the use of history education in the project of contemporary nation building must work to document the narratives that are used to produce the nation as imagined community (Zajda, 2012; Zajda, Daun, & Saha, 2009). Wertsch's (2002) narrative dialogicality is a way of theorizing this process and naming the silences that are produced. In particular, I am concerned about the way these narratives provide a means for evading questions about the ethical responsibilities of the nation and, by extension, the citizen. What is at stake is the possibility of understanding how historical narratives normalize each nation's place in the world order and its relations with the community of nations (Zajda, 2010). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) write, "We use the notion of 'social imaginary' to suggest that policies are not only located within discourses, but also in imaginaries that shape "thinking about how things might be 'otherwise' – different from the way they are now" (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 8). My argument is that the stories of the nation discussed in this chapter primarily function to close off the possibility of "thinking about how things might be 'otherwise'".

The schematic narrative templates identified with each nation – "The Reluctant Hegemon" and "Canada Proves Itself on the World Stage" – at their heart are about that nation's place in the global order. One striking feature of these templates is the way that they construct the nation as passive in the face of larger forces of history. The Reluctant Hegemon goes to war and assumes the role of hegemon due to circumstances putatively beyond its control. It is ironic to the point of perversity to write the story of the mightiest economic and military power in modern history as one of unwitting inheritor; but this writing conveniently makes it possible for the citizen of the hegemon to avoid claiming responsibility for the global inequality, poverty, and injustices that result from its policies. As for the Canada Proves Itself

on the World Stage, this story may at first appear to be an innocent coming-of-age story, but in truth it draws attention away from questions of Canada's complicity in British and American hegemony. In this narrative, Canada becomes a nation through its contribution to British and American campaigns, and thus its citizens appear not to have the standing to critique the global order that they participate in creating. The failure to attend to political narratives renders questions about democratic process irrelevant and therefore invests the citizen with no agency with which to work for social justice.

The stories of nationhood discussed in this chapter rest on the presumption that the United States and Canada have earned their wealth and privileged place in the community of nations through the exercise of leadership and selfless contributions. When one reads the narratives closely, though, we can see that they address the insecurities that each nation has about its place in the global order. In this way, mandatory secondary history classes contribute to a social imaginary in which global asymmetries of power are not subject to critique.

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