

Killing in Her Name: On White Womanhood and Canada's Military Occupation of Iraq

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Abstract

Throughout this thesis, I explore how the construction of white womanhood in Canada has influenced the state's military expansion in Iraq post-9/11. Using a feminist discourse analysis of media representations and policy documents, I argue that white women are integral to the (re)production of imperial power by weaponizing feminist rhetoric to justify military interventions. In examining four national news agencies, I reveal that portrayals of Canadian womanhood center exclusively on whiteness, erasing intersectional experiences and marginalizing racialized identities. Moreover, my analysis of Canadian policy documents surrounding Operation IMPACT further demonstrates how feminist language is co-opted to frame militarization as a humanitarian duty, thereby obscuring the inherent violence of state interventions. Within this research, I challenge dominant narratives that depict feminist foreign policy as progressive, revealing instead how it upholds white supremacy and systemic violence. By re-centering the role of white women in these processes, I call for a critical reexamination of the intersection between gender, race, and militarism in contemporary Canadian state-building mechanisms.

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Glossary

CAF: Canadian Armed Forces

Capacity-building: “[...] process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world”¹

Daesh: Arabic acronym for a jihadist militant group, also commonly known as ISIS, declared as a terrorist collective by many countries²

FIAP: Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy³

Girlboss: Popular word used to refer to, typically white, businesswomen who are painted as feminist icons for their job positions, yet only reinforce systems of oppression⁴

Jihadist: Within Islam, “jihad” refers to the struggle against obstacles that stand in the way of good. Yet, within the whitestream, “jihadist” is used to talk about a person or a group who fights against the enemies of Islam⁵

Liberal feminism: Feminist movement advocating for gender equality through political and legal reforms while maintaining the current system in order to establish equal rights for men and women⁶

Necropolitics: Selective production of death within the nation-state—how states decide who must die, and how, and who may live⁷

Operation IMPACT: “[...] part of Canada’s whole-of-government approach to the Middle East. The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) mission to build the military capabilities of Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon”⁸

Securo-feminism: Concept that critiques how feminist discourse is co-opted to justify securitization, militarization, and state violence⁹

TERF: Trans-exclusionary Radical Feminist, meaning radical feminists who are openly transphobic and do not include trans folks in their understanding of liberation¹⁰

¹ United Nations, “Capacity building.”

² al-Khateeb, “Daesh’s Intellectual Origins.”

³ Government of Canada, “Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy.”

⁴ Abad-Santos, “The death of the girlboss.”

⁵ Interfaith Alliance, *What Is The Truth About American Muslim?*

⁶ Russell, Oswald, and Cotter, “What Makes a Liberal Feminist?”

⁷ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*.

⁸ Government of Canada, “Operation IMPACT.”

⁹ Abu-Lughod, “Securofeminism: Embracing a Phantom.”

¹⁰ Lewis and Reynolds, “Happy Pride. Don’t be a TERF.”

Introduction

It is worth reminding ourselves why we step up—why we devote time and resources to foreign policy, trade, defence and development: Canadians are safer and more prosperous when more of the world shares our values.

— The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs¹¹

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, then President of the United States George W. Bush claimed that Saddam Hussein, then President of Iraq, possessed weapons of mass destruction—a claim since proven false—and supported al-Qaeda. Nearly two years later, in March 2003, the U.S. demanded the departure of Hussein and his two sons from Iraq within 48 hours, as U.S. armed forces prepared for a military operation to capture Hussein and disarm the country. On March 20th, a few hours after the deadline expired, U.S. troops invaded Iraq in an operation that did not last more than six weeks. Yet, U.S. forces occupied the territory until December 2011, long after Hussein’s capture and trial, exacerbating the growing anti-Western hatred on which al-Qaeda thrived.¹²

Canada, though initially distancing itself from the invasion, later aligned itself with U.S. military interests through its participation in anti-ISIS coalitions. The Canadian government first began sending military supplies to Iraq in 2014, but its involvement in the war escalated quickly. Under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) were deployed to fight alongside other coalition members, focusing mostly on airstrikes. Then, when Justin Trudeau became Prime Minister in 2015, Canada’s operations in Iraq aligned themselves with a renewed focus on training and humanitarian aid.¹³ This shift

¹¹ Government of Canada, “Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy.” i.

¹² Al Jazeera, “What Happened When Iraq Was Invaded 20 Years Ago?,” March 23, 2023.

¹³ CBC, “Chronology: Canada’s Involvement in the Fight Against ISIS.”

from combat to capacity-building under Trudeau was framed as a more sustainable and ethical approach to conflict resolution, aligning with Canada's image as a peacekeeping nation.¹⁴

Rhetorics of feminist foreign policy and humanitarian intervention are central to justifying continued military presence in Iraq. The government invokes feminist principles, such as protecting women's rights and combating gender-based violence, to explain the CAF's presence in the region. Often presented as altruistic and progressive, these narratives rely on deeply ingrained constructs of Iraqi womanhood as submissive and oppressed. Simultaneously, white women are depicted as symbols of freedom and agency. This framing not only shapes public perception of Canada's role in the conflict but also strengthens the state's broader military objectives. In this case, the use of feminist language in foreign policy discourse highlights how white womanhood is mobilized to sustain military expansion, a subject I seek to critically examine throughout this thesis.

By exploring the intersections of race, gender, and nationalism, I aim to define how white womanhood is constructed within a Canadian context and the meanings white womanhood takes on. Throughout this project, I look to understand how the collective understanding of white womanhood justifies the state's military invasion of Iraq. I thus strive to uncover how racial and gender identities have been mobilized to support the CAF's presence in the region.

¹⁴ It is important to note that the Canadian government has admitted to the CAF being involved in on-the-ground fights even after the announced changes regarding the state's approach to the war.

Literature review

The state apparatus has expanded rapidly and powerfully through the militarisation of gender, race, and nationalism. Many scholars show how identity categories are mobilized to construct national understandings and justify geopolitical actions. Here, whiteness, specifically white womanhood, is used to simultaneously symbolize the nation's moral superiority and its need for protection. Precisely, in the post-9/11 era, language surrounding human rights and liberal feminism is applied to justify military interventions in countries like Iraq.

The construction of nationalism is inherently tied to both processes of inclusion and exclusion, wherein race and gender play pivotal roles. In his book *Imagined Communities*, political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson explores how nations are socially constructed through shared symbols, narratives, and ideologies, often privileging whiteness and masculinity.¹⁵ Similarly, according to sociologist Michael Billig's theory of nation-building, states (re)produce their national identity through social, political, cultural, and economic means within and beyond their borders, usually through the repetitive association of white masculinity with the nation.¹⁶

In settler-colonial contexts like Canada, this rhetoric relies on nation-building's core tenet: division. Political Science educator Willow Samara Allen argues that whiteness¹⁷ is continuously constructed through a process that requires participation and adherence to racial norms, solidifying settlers' sense of belonging in this imagined collective.¹⁸ Additionally,

¹⁵ Anderson, *Imagined communities*.

¹⁶ Billig, *Banal nationalism*.

¹⁷ While whiteness is not the only factor influencing one's belonging to the settler state, it is nonetheless a defining one. Because this research focuses specifically on the gendered aspect of race, class will not be analyzed within this thesis.

¹⁸ Allen, "Learning to become white girls."

Politics Professor Sedef Arat-Koc considers how the 9/11 events have fueled white right-wing nationalism and “re-whitened” notions of national belonging.¹⁹ This marks how white people comply with concepts of racial boundaries and hierarchy to side with the state, specifically in moments of intense fear and chaos, which not only legitimizes state violence but also reaffirms their position within the national body as both protectors and beneficiaries of the state’s imperial and militarized projects.

Feminist scholars expand on these theories to examine how gender operates within nationalist projects. Indigenous researcher Sydney Rae Krill explores the relationship between white womanhood and nation-building by depicting the historical role white women have played in Canada’s social and political construction. For them, white womanhood is used as a political tool in nation-building processes to ultimately serve the interests of heteronormative white men. In Canada’s case, white women ensure a significant aspect of colonization: assimilation through Western moral standards.²⁰ Furthermore, Alainna Liloia, a researcher specializing in human rights and women’s issues in the Arab world, writes about the use of womanhood by the state as a simultaneous symbol of traditional preservation and modernity. This recent genre of nation-building, wherein states are juggling between their cultural heritage and their move towards so-called gender equality, situates women front and center: they are, now more than ever, crucial to nation-building and play a significant role in the way a state is perceived on the international stage.²¹ Women’s rights and empowerment within a state now dictate its level of “development.”

¹⁹ Arat-Koc, “The Disciplinary Boundaries of Canadian Identity.”

²⁰ Krill, “The Settler State is a White Woman.”

²¹ Liloia, “Gender and nation building in Qatar.”

White womanhood is constructed as both a moral compass for the nation and a symbol of its civility and progressiveness. For Women's Studies Professor Nancy Jabbra, this is partly explained by the persistent contrast between Southwestern Asian women, depicted as inherently oppressed, and American women, portrayed as liberated.²² Feminist political geographer Jennifer Greenburg reiterates this in her interviews with servicewomen serving in Afghanistan, in which participants understood themselves as models of liberated womanhood for Afghan women. There, Greenburg showcases the paternalistic undertones of the military as it imagines the Other as in perpetual need of saving, modernization, and assistance.²³ Media coverage of post-9/11 events frequently positions white women as victims of global terrorism, reinforcing their symbolic importance to the nation. Simultaneously, the image of the empowered, rights-bearing white woman is weaponized to legitimize Western military interventions abroad, particularly in Muslim-majority regions like Iraq. These frameworks provide the theoretical backbone for understanding how white womanhood has functioned within the Canadian context.

The mobilization of racial and gender identities repeatedly serves to justify military actions, both historically and in contemporary contexts. In *Dark Threats and White Knights*, Gender Studies scholar Sherene Razack highlights the role traditional masculine behaviours, such as aggression and violence, play in the deployment of armed forces. Soldiers are expected to protect the nation's "manhood" and racial domination, and are enabled to use violence to secure these goals. By doing so, soldiers and citizens are reminded of their moral superiority as global defenders of liberalism and democracy.²⁴ Under the guise of protecting

²² Jabbra, "Women, Words and War."

²³ Greenburg, *At War With Women*.

²⁴ Razack, *Dark Threats and White Knights*.

the nation's women, military interventions are encouraged to safeguard them from potential "foreign" threats like terrorism.

As aforementioned, in the post-9/11 era, the image of the oppressed Muslim woman has become a central trope in Western media and political discourse, used to frame military interventions in Southwest Asia as moral obligations. The rescue narrative, as analyzed by Gender Studies scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty, casts the West as the liberator of women, reinforcing racial hierarchies and masking the violence of imperialism.²⁵ For anthropologists Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood, this very rescue narrative justifies militarism: any attempt to go beyond militarism is labelled as unethical to Southwestern Asian women: if not militarization, then what can "save" these women?²⁶

Canada's *Feminist International Assistance Policy* (FIAP), commitments to the UN's and its own Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agendas, and Trudeau's engagement with liberal feminist discourses have positioned Canada as a global leader in advancing gender equality. Nonetheless, feminist scholars critically examine how feminist rhetoric can be instrumentalized to serve imperialist goals. For example, Razack argues that feminist foreign policy often masks the neo-imperialist nature of military interventions, framing them as humanitarian efforts to liberate oppressed women abroad;²⁷ Arat-Koc stresses this by affirming that the West defines itself using concepts of democracy, liberation, and freedom.²⁸ Similarly, anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod's framework of securo-feminism explains that concern for women's issues is co-opted into political and military strategies. It relies heavily on the idea that all extremists are perpetrators of gendered violence, which results in the overt

²⁵ Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes."; Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?"

²⁶ Hirschkind & Mahmood, "Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency."

²⁷ Razack, *Dark Threats and White Knights*.

²⁸ Arat-Koc, "The Disciplinary Boundaries of Canadian Identity."

use of the state apparatus to fight back against said violence.²⁹ By linking feminist ideals to military agendas, Canada legitimizes its interventions under the guise of progressivism while ignoring the critiques of its complicity in imperialist projects.

Whereas there is extensive scholarship on the intersection of race, gender, and nationalism, as well as the use of feminist rhetoric to justify militarism, a critical gap remains in examining how white womanhood is specifically constructed and mobilized within the Canadian context to support military interventions, particularly in Iraq post-9/11. Indeed, current scholarship tends to focus on the United States' role in the military invasion of the region, as Canada's presence is often rendered invisible. Additionally, research on the use of feminist international policies often overlooks how the contemporary construction of white womanhood influences those very policies. There is little to no research on white women's role regarding the legitimization of militarism in our contemporary world, meaning the present scholarship is not painting a full picture. I wish to address these gaps by highlighting how white womanhood is nationalized to serve Canada's geopolitical interests. Through this lens, I aim to explore how Canadian white womanhood has been constructed in the post-9/11 era, particularly within the military, to support settler colonial narratives and military expansion.

Methodology

To create a clear frame for my research, I must first state that this project is guided by abolitionist feminism and categorically rejects the existence of a militarized entity, whatever its goals may be. In their recent article *Towards an Abolitionist Feminist Peace: State*

²⁹ Abu-Lughod, "Securofeminism: Embracing a Phantom."

Violence, Anti-Militarism, & the WPS Agenda, abolitionist scholars Hannah Wright and Columba Achilleos-Sarll highlight how enslavement, colonialism, and imperialism have evolved and transformed into violent state institutions such as the carceral system and armed forces. Following Wright and Achilleos-Sarll's abolitionist standpoint, this research project "reject[s] the commonplace assumption that the primary function of state security institutions, such as criminal justice systems and borders, is to keep 'us' safe—where 'us' comprises the majority, including the poor and marginalized."³⁰ While the main objective of this research is not necessarily to explore abolitionist narratives within Canada, it remains heavily informed by critiques of dominant discourses on security, the state's monopoly of violence, war-making, and peace. By highlighting the role that gender and race construction play within Canada's military expansion, I understand that the state's military project is rooted in white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. Therefore, showcasing the conditions that make the existence of armed forces appear inevitable and necessary is a way to challenge the very existence of the militarized state.³¹ This project critically engages with abolitionist feminist perspectives to question the assumed inevitability of militarized state structures, exposing how these institutions are deeply intertwined with systems of oppression.

Moreover, any attempt to conduct a research project that critiques Canada's imperialist agenda must be fundamentally grounded in postcolonial feminist theory. Thus, I wish to analyze the relationship between the socio-political construction of gender and the state's colonial expansion. In *Feminism and Postcolonialism: (En)gendering Encounters*, Peace and Development Professor Swati Parashar writes about how feminism and postcolonialism theories can influence each other positively by bringing to light the

³⁰ Wright & Achilleos-Sarll, "Towards an abolitionist feminist peace," 6.

³¹ Wright & Achilleos-Sarll, "Towards an abolitionist feminist peace."

interconnectedness of gender and nation-building.³² Here, Parashar refers to the feminist view of the state as a patriarchal entity that sustains itself through gendered political violence, alongside the postcolonial perspective of the state as inherently violent and exclusionary. Given this, my research cannot limit itself to a general critique of the military; it must also critically understand the nation-state's existence. Parashar claims that the liberal state's national identity is showcased in its desire to assert superiority regarding its democratic values, especially when situated against previously colonized countries' stricter laws on gender equality.³³ Similarly, international law scholar Ruth Gordon affirms that "all nations bring their national ideology to the international arena."³⁴ While Canada's national ideology will be examined further throughout this research project, Gordon explains that all white/Western states' national ideology is rooted in white supremacy.³⁵ This research employs a postcolonial feminist lens to dissect the relationship between gender, nation-building, and Canada's imperialist agenda, recognizing that the state's identity and international role are shaped by white hegemony and patriarchal dominance.

Building on this perspective, Critical Race Theory (CRT) also serves as a vital theoretical framework for this research to analyze how race and power intersect to reinforce racial hierarchies, specifically on the international level. International Development Professor Roozbeh Shirazi uses CRT to assess the global scene and to "critically explore how [we] know what [we] have come to know, and to critically query what seems common sense or normative."³⁶ By grounding this project in CRT, I wish to deconstruct dominant narratives regarding Canada's position as an international peacemaker and instead highlight the

³² Parashar, "Feminism and Postcolonialism."

³³ Parashar, "Feminism and Postcolonialism."

³⁴ Gordon, "Critical Race Theory and International Law," 263.

³⁵ Gordon, "Critical Race Theory and International Law."

³⁶ Shirazi, "Why do we need to know about this?," 407.

pervasiveness of white epistemic authority in the construction of white womanhood, of Canada's status, and of military interventions.³⁷ Through this lens, this research is building on Gordon's perspective on the ways in which race and the construction of racial identities shape Canada's national ideology, policies, and international role.³⁸ By critically engaging with these frameworks, I aim to reveal the racial and gendered underpinnings of Canada's military expansion and its use of feminist foreign policy to justify such actions.

Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that I am a white person socialized as a woman, born and raised in French Canada, meaning my positionality inevitably shapes how I interpret and analyze the construction of white womanhood within the context of my research.³⁹ I have never stepped foot in Iraq, nor any neighbouring countries, which significantly limits my understanding of the region and its dynamics. My knowledge of the invasion of Iraq is restricted to what has been made accessible to me through media, academic literature, and political documents. Recognizing these limitations, I approach this research with a commitment to remain critically aware of how my positionality influences the questions I ask, the sources I engage with, and the conclusions I draw. While my analysis focuses on the Canadian context and its implications, I acknowledge the partiality of my perspective and the need to amplify voices from Iraq to challenge and deepen my interpretations.

Additionally, throughout this research, I focus exclusively on the binary categories of 'woman' and 'man.' Considering the limited scope of this thesis, I wish to direct my attention towards cisgender identities to better understand the role cis white women play in the

³⁷ Shirazi, "Why do we need to know about this?"

³⁸ Gordon, "Critical Race Theory and International Law."

³⁹ Harding, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*.

(re)production of white supremacy. Nonetheless, I recognize that the gender binary and mainstream frameworks of sexualities are imposed by the West on previously colonized communities⁴⁰ and heavily taint how we understand non-Western conceptions of gender. Therefore, my decision to not analyze trans identities is a conscious one, made to give space to white cis womanhood to better criticize their participation in the militarization of Canada.

Methods

To understand how the construction of white womanhood within a Canadian context influences the state's military actions in Iraq, I drew on linguist Michelle Lazar's feminist critical discourse analysis, understood as a "political perspective on gender, concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power, and ideology in discourse, [...]".⁴¹ Therefore, I investigated various forms of dominant discourse by examining words, sentences, and expressions and relating them to themes relevant to my research. A feminist critical discourse analysis allowed me to uncover the hidden meanings and gendered assumptions within dominant narratives regarding white womanhood, and expose how these narratives justify imperialist and militarized actions. By exploring discourses around white womanhood, state violence, and national identity, I wish to deconstruct how these narratives perpetuate racial hierarchies, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy, revealing the underlying power dynamics that sustain the militarized state.

To do this work, I divided my research project into three sections, each of which answered a different question: (1) what are the meanings of white womanhood within a

⁴⁰ Gayed, "Islamicate Sexualities."

⁴¹ Lazar, "Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis," 144.

Canadian context post-9/11, (2) what are the CAF's activities in Iraq post-9/11 and how are these actions shaped by Canada's feminist foreign policy, and (3) what is the relationship between Canadian white womanhood and military expansion? To answer the first question, I assessed fifteen selected national media pieces (newspaper articles, social media posts, live news broadcasts) published in Canada post-9/11 that represented or spoke of white womanhood. These pieces were selected from influential national news agencies such as the Globe & Mail, CBC News, Global News, and CTV Television Network by typing the word 'women' into their websites and then discarding articles focusing on non-Canadian women or on sports teams.⁴² Each piece was examined for recurring themes, ideologies, language, and visual imagery using a structured annotative table (see Appendix I). For question 2, I conducted a policy analysis of 12 official CAF documents, parliamentary records, and state-issued speeches that detailed Canada's military activities in Iraq and outlined feminist foreign policy initiatives. These sources were reviewed for language on security, democracy, and women's empowerment to assess how these narratives support Canada's military involvement in Iraq. Finally, using findings from each section, I assessed how the construction of white womanhood was/is embedded in Canada's military operations and nation-building efforts, with attention to how these factors mutually reinforce a Canadian national identity shaped by race, gender, and imperialist ideology.

⁴² Although sports are a crucial aspect of nation-building, because I conducted this research during and shortly after the 2024 Paris Olympics, all articles that appeared in my search were about sports. Since I did not want to only feature such articles, nor have to select specific ones, I decided to disregard them completely.

Organization of Thesis

The next chapter explores the fluid meanings of white Canadian womanhood in the post-9/11 era as it analyzes media portrayal and construction of such racial and gendered identities. When looking at how white women are portrayed within media discourses, I demonstrate that Canada uses their empowerment as a way to present itself as a feminist nation. Chapter 3 analyzes Canada's FIAP to better understand how the state mobilizes "feminist" language and themes. Stating the CAF's activities—whether military or not—in Iraq since their arrival in 2014, I highlight the discrepancy between Canada's stated military objectives and on-the-ground realities of militarization, occupation, and state-building efforts. Chapter 4 delves into the relationship between the construction of white womanhood, military activities and nation-building. By critically examining the role of white women in the (re)production of white supremacy, I question how concepts like empowerment and liberation are co-opted by the state to reinforce its authority. The chapter explores how racial and gendered identities are leveraged to justify and sustain Canada's military presence and broader nation-building projects. My conclusion speaks to the findings of this thesis but also the possibilities of a feminist utopia. Fundamentally, I argue that the construction of white womanhood within the Canadian context influences the state's military expansion in Iraq post-9/11 as it encourages the use of so-called feminist foreign policy.

Chapter 2 – *Who Are We Defending?: White Canadian Womanhood and Media Narratives Post-9/11*

Canada's promise is one of guaranteed freedom, safety and opportunity for all, regardless of gender or origin.

– Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, in his statement on the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women⁴³

The events of September 11, 2001, marked a seismic shift not only in global geopolitics but also in cultural narratives, media portrayals, and state rhetoric in Western countries. I selected this timeframe, from the attacks onward, because 9/11 catalyzed a significant reconfiguration of national identities and the discursive frameworks surrounding gender, race, and security. Media representations of whiteness transformed and aligned with the emerging “War on Terror” ideology, positioning white women as symbolic guardians of Western liberal values and agents of liberation.

White women have been depicted as symbols of respectability and moral superiority as a state-building process for centuries now.⁴⁴ However, after 9/11, media representations increasingly positioned white women as empowered actors who stood for democracy, freedom, and feminist ideals that Western nations claimed to promote both domestically and abroad.⁴⁵ These depictions are instrumental in crafting a narrative that justifies the West’s involvement in military interventions in Iraq,⁴⁶ by framing such actions as efforts to “save” Muslim women and uphold feminist values. The construction of white womanhood as empowered and liberated is not merely a reflection of changing gender roles but a strategic

⁴³ Paton, “Statement From Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre.”

⁴⁴ Syed and Ali, “The White Woman’s Burden.”

⁴⁵ Jabbra, “Women, Words and War.”

⁴⁶ Hatef and Luqiu, “Media and Intervention.”

element of nation-building and international legitimation.⁴⁷ Understanding this shift is essential to critically analyzing how white womanhood has been mobilized to support Canada's feminist foreign policy and military endeavours post-9/11.



Image 1: Los Angeles Times' advertisement, April 15, 2000⁴⁸

An “oppressed” Arab woman wearing a black burqa is positioned next to a “liberated”⁴⁹ American girl (see *Image 1*): that is the narrative most national newspapers, such as the *LA Times*, were promoting during the invasion of Iraq.⁵⁰ Yet, when looking

⁴⁷ Jabbra, “Women, Words and War.”

⁴⁸ Los Angeles Times, “Connecting us to the Times,” advertisement, 38.

⁴⁹ Here, it is assumed that because a woman is supposedly allowed to wear what she wants, she is considered liberated. It is also assumed that women do not choose to wear hijabs or burqas, and that women always choose to wear bikinis.

⁵⁰ Terman, “Islamophobia and Media Portrayals of Muslim Women.”

exclusively at media portrayals of white womanhood in comparison to that of Iraqi women, we fail to grasp white women's complicity within colonial and imperial mechanisms, as they are depicted as beneficiaries of a system that supposedly oppresses them rather than as enforcers of its power.

Using Lazar's feminist critical discourse analysis, I examine fifteen news segments and articles published post-9/11 from various Canadian news agencies (see Appendix II). By interrogating the assumptions embedded within these texts and the omissions that shape their narratives (see Appendix III), I reveal how representations of womanhood perpetuate racial hierarchies and justify state-sanctioned violence. These media portrayals construct a selective narrative that aligns with Canada's broader geopolitical objectives, centering white womanhood in national identity and moral superiority.

This chapter then looks at the construction of white femininity post-9/11 within national media. I explore the fluid meanings of Canadian womanhood, which oscillate between portraying women as victims/survivors of gendered oppression and as symbols of liberation and progress. However, these constructions remain firmly anchored in white supremacy, prioritizing upper-middle-class experiences and concerns while rendering racialized and marginalized women invisible. Consequently, white womanhood is positioned as the only womanhood worthy of recognition and defence, reinforcing exclusionary hierarchies within the nation's "feminist" militaristic discourses. In turn, it allows the Canadian state to "export" its liberal feminist agenda to the global periphery by claiming expertise over the subject.

The Meanings of White Womanhood

The meanings of white womanhood are remarkably fluid, adapting to serve the state's political and cultural agendas in different contexts. At times, white women are positioned as symbols of ultimate liberation, embodying the freedoms and opportunities that Western democracies claim to offer. This is evident in media depictions of Canadian women breaking barriers in science, politics, and corporate leadership,⁵¹ reinforcing the narrative that Canada has achieved gender equality.

Yet, in other contexts, white women are cast as victims of systemic inequities, such as the apparent focus on the motherhood penalty or the wage gap throughout the selected articles,⁵² framing their struggles as emblematic of the ongoing “universal” fight for progress. These portrayals strategically shift depending on the state's needs, allowing white womanhood to be both a marker of national success and a justification for further state intervention, whether through domestic policy reforms or international military campaigns. This fluidity ensures that white womanhood remains central to the narrative of Canadian exceptionalism, capable of representing both progress and the need for continued action while obscuring the systemic forces that perpetuate inequality. By taking on any form required, white womanhood serves as a flexible yet powerful tool to uphold the state's liberal and imperial ambitions.

⁵¹Amanat, “Reality Gap.”; Brady *et al.*, “Have We Achieved Gender Equality?”; CBC, “Looking Back on 50 Years.”; De Boer, “New Study Finds Canadian Women.”; CBC, “What International Women's Day Means.”; ; Fitzpatrick, “‘We've Kept the Ball Rolling’.”; McTeer, & Clark, “Is The Work of Feminism Finished?”; Roche & Dasgupta, “How One Company's Push.”; Sibbet, “New Lethbridge Military Museum Tour.”; Stechyson, “Despite Gains, Women Still Do Most of the Housework.”; Stechyson, “More Women Are the Breadwinners.”

⁵²Amanat, “Reality Gap.”; Brady *et al.*, “Have We Achieved Gender Equality?”; CBC, “What International Women's Day Means.”; CBC, “Looking Back on 50 Years.”; Forrest, “Quebec Aims to Increase Access to Abortion Pills.”; McTeer, & Clark, “Is The Work of Feminism Finished?”; Reuters, “Canada Slips 4 Places.”; Reuters, “Women Inch Towards Equal Legal Rights.”; Stechyson, “More Women Are the Breadwinners.”; Stechyson, “Despite Gains, Women Still Do Most of the Housework.”

White Womanhood as the *Only* Womanhood

The Canadian state enacts nation-building by perpetuating a curated image of womanhood: a white one. In mainstream media representations, when talking about women, or womanhood, there are little to no mentions of Indigenous peoples', racialized people', queer and trans folks', and people forced into financial precarity' experiences. For example, across the fifteen analyzed news articles, only one mentions "women of colour [...], women arriving as refugees [...], the LGBTQ community"⁵³ and that mention was added in a small callout box titled "The caveat." Not a single article even uses the words "Indigenous," "working-class," "Black," or "trans." This invisibilization creates a story about womanhood: it is by default white, middle-class, cisgender, straight, educated, married, and maternal. When entire groups are erased from the narrative, whiteness becomes the norm, the assumed, the standard,⁵⁴ marginalizing and demonizing womanhoods/personhoods that defy such norms. The absence of discussions about issues faced by marginalized groups suggests that white, cisgender women's experiences are the most urgent and worthy of societal concern.

The present construction of white womanhood in Canadian media not only centers white women as the primary agents and beneficiaries of feminist progress but also paints them as the bearers of success and the embodiment of an idealized vision of gender equality. The fifteen selected articles depict Canadian women as inevitably white, cis, straight, married, house-owners, in mid-level jobs, and mothers considering the issues focused on. By prioritizing the experiences and concerns of such women while rendering invisible the realities of racialized, Indigenous, queer, trans, and working-class women, the media reinforces the idea that white womanhood is the only form of womanhood worthy of

⁵³ CBC, "Looking Back on 50 Years."

⁵⁴ DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*.

recognition and defence. This belief is in turn embodied by foreign policies and approaches adopted by the Canadian government.

Additionally, the idealized vision of a white, professional woman who can “have it all” reflects the liberal feminist emphasis on success within existing structures, such as the corporate world or professional fields. Issues such as the wage gap, the motherhood penalty, and underrepresentation in leadership are presented as challenges to be overcome through policy reforms rather than as symptoms of intersecting systems of oppression. This framing strengthens the neoliberal ideal that individual success—often embodied by white women breaking political and professional barriers—is the solution to inequality, deflecting attention from the systemic forces of capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. By reinforcing the notion that gender equality is about achieving parity with men, the media does not question whether the structures themselves are equitable, inclusive, or even necessary. For example, focusing solely on equal pay means there is no critique of the capitalist system that even makes payment a thing in the first place! Ultimately, this construction of liberal feminism as the ideal of gender equality creates a superficial narrative that glosses over systemic inequalities and reinforces existing power dynamics.

Liberal feminism continuously disregards the ways in which race, gender, class, sexual identity, and a multitude of other factors influence one another to create unique forms of oppression. It does so by promoting ideas of meritocracy, equal chances, and individual choice, obscuring how oppressive structures function to make marginalized people’s success within the capitalist system impossible.⁵⁵ When articles discuss the wage gap or the motherhood penalty but fail to highlight how these issues specifically impact women of

⁵⁵ hooks, *Where We Stand: Class Matters*.

colour or trans folks, they make it clear that the only womanhood that matters for their audience is a cis-gendered white one. Furthermore, the fact that these are the only issues brought up across fifteen news segments shows that media portrayal of womanhood is completely disconnected from on-the-ground realities of Indigenous women and women of colour. Instead, injustices are compartmentalized, painted as belonging to only one category at a time.⁵⁶ In that sense, our collective understanding of socio-political inequities is limited as it does not account for the interplay of different oppressions.

It is not only identities that are being excluded, but precisely the relationship between distinct yet common authority systems. There are different models of decolonial, intersectional and abolitionist feminisms; according to jineologî, a Kurdish movement and ideology that draws upon feminism, social ecology and libertarian municipality to transcend the state,⁵⁷ there must be an understanding of the links between capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, military power, and state-building processes to fully address social issues at hand.⁵⁸ In that regard, these systems mutually reinforce one another, meaning that rather than white liberal feminism's propositions, a more inclusive and radical form of feminism must recognize that addressing one form of oppression inevitably means confronting all other forms. Therefore, one cannot fully seize the oppressor and the mechanisms it uses by continuing to compartmentalize oppressive structures. Certainly, isolating these systems and their interconnectedness leads to superficial freedom, a liberation which only benefits people already in positions of power.⁵⁹ When gender is looked at without consideration for its intersections with race, class, colonialism, and economic exploitation, the very structures that

⁵⁶ Sam, "Another Reason People Can't Admit White Supremacy Is a Crisis."

⁵⁷ Neven and Schäfers, "Jineology: From Women's Struggles to Social Liberation."

⁵⁸ Applied sociology, "Dilar Dirik About Women, Autonomy and Emancipation."

⁵⁹ Al-Ali and Käser, "Beyond Feminism? Jineolojî and the Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement."

produce inequality are inadvertently upheld. As jineologî asserts, oppressive systems are interwoven—to isolate one is to misunderstand all.⁶⁰ This compartmentalized framing within media narratives solidifies a singular, monolithic portrayal of womanhood as a universal representation of feminist struggles. This image not only erases the experiences of marginalized women, but also upholds a sanitized and decontextualized image of empowerment that aligns with capitalist narratives.

Canada's Biggest Exports: White Feminism and Oil

Central to the construction of white womanhood is its alignment with Canada's self-proclaimed moral superiority on the global stage, a theme I will explore more thoroughly in Chapter 4. Media depictions of white women thriving or even *allowed* to contest injustices are not merely stories of individual empowerment, but statements about the state's identity as a feminist and progressive nation. These narratives present white women as change-makers and moral leaders advocating for justice, equality, and human rights. The implication is that if women are visible, empowered, and able to challenge injustices, which the state is deemed “nice” enough to allow, then the state itself must inevitably be a space where gender equality and justice are prioritized.⁶¹ Such portrayals suggest that Canadian society has achieved gender equality, and white women serve as evidence of this success.

In addition, white womanhood is offered as a model of feminism that is then exportable elsewhere. White women, positioned as empowered agents of change, represent a successful feminist project that other countries, especially those in the global periphery,

⁶⁰ Applied sociology, “Dilar Dirik About Women, Autonomy and Emancipation.”

⁶¹ McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*.

should emulate.⁶² This narrative not only reinforces Canada's self-perception as a feminist and progressive state, but also obscures its racist structures and the ways in which its interventions perpetuate colonial and imperial logic. The underlying assumption is that countries deemed "backward" can achieve gender equality by adopting Western feminist models exemplified by the figure of the empowered white Canadian woman. Such representations conveniently ignore the systemic barriers and racialized hierarchies within Canada itself that continue to marginalize Indigenous and racialized people.⁶³ In all selected articles, there is not one mention of the government's role in (re)producing such issues. Men are asked to check on their mothers, women are encouraged to talk louder, and companies are pushed to formalize inclusive policies. These stories then erase the fundamental oppressive structure of the state while casting non-Western nations as inherently patriarchal.⁶⁴ The effect is a dichotomy wherein Canadian society is seen as a beacon of progress and non-Western societies are depicted as places where women are abused. In both scenarios, the culprit walks free: no one discusses the state structure itself.

The depiction of the Canadian state as a benevolent one is also fueled by its relationship with the oil industry. According to climate justice researcher Sheena Wilson, the petroindustry and white feminism are inextricably linked, resulting in what she titles "petrofeminism." Oil, its production, and its consumption shape Western women's lives, considering autonomy is continuously to automobility (let us remember the Canadian outrage regarding laws preventing Saudi Arabian women from driving). Here, the colonial Canadian Dream relies extensively on production of petrol and extractivist activities of stolen

⁶² Zakaria, *Against White Feminism*.

⁶³ Rosamond, Cheung, and De Leeuw, "Caring Feminist States?"

⁶⁴ Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

resources, and white women are not exempt from either.⁶⁵ Considering how crucial oil is to Canada, it is important to note that oil revenue directly impacts a state's military power—the more a country produces and exports oil, the more money it spends on its military⁶⁶—and the invasion of Iraq has proven just that. For the past 22 years, Canada and the United States of America both ensured that laws allowing the privatization of oil were passed in Iraq,⁶⁷ all while the country's civilians were fighting to survive under Western bombs. These laws secured Western oil companies' interests in the region; Canada imports 8% of its consumed oil from Iraq.⁶⁸ Yet, as Chapter 3 will prove, the Canadian state depicts Iraq as a “women-hating” country who desperately needs Western intervention to ensure gender equality. In that sense, the issues Iraqi women are forced to face are enough to justify military intervention costing the Canadian population billions of dollars, but not enough to impose an economic boycott on Iraqi oil. This is the hypocrisy of Canadian feminism.

In essence, I have demonstrated that the construction of white womanhood in the post-9/11 era is not static but fluid, taking on various meanings to serve the Canadian state's political and ideological goals. Through an analysis of these fifteen news articles, it is evident that white women have been framed alternately as symbols of liberation, markers of national progress, and voices demanding more rights. These shifting narratives ensure that white womanhood can align seamlessly with the state's agenda, whether to bolster claims of gender equality (for white women exclusively) at home or to justify interventionist policies abroad. This flexibility enables white womanhood to act as both a reflection of Canada's so-called

⁶⁵ Wilson, “Trafficking in Petronormativities.”

⁶⁶ Kim, “CRUDE POWER.”

⁶⁷ Forsyth and Kerr, “The Toxic Relationship between Oil and the Military.”

⁶⁸ Government of Canada, “Oil Supply and Demand.”

success in achieving gender equity and as a rationale for state-led actions framed as benevolent, whether through feminist reforms or military campaigns.

The absence of racialized, Indigenous, queer, trans, and working-class voices within discussions of womanhood suggests that white, cisgender, upper-middle class, women's issues are seen as the most urgent. This limited portrayal aligns with the Canadian state's broader goals of promoting a sanitized vision of gender equality, one that fits neatly within capitalist, neoliberal, and imperialist structures. By focusing solely on the successes of white women within these existing systems, the narrative diverts attention away from the broader systemic inequalities that perpetuate marginalization and exclusion.

I have highlighted how white women's visibility as empowered individuals has upheld narratives of Western superiority and moral authority. These depictions not only simplify complex global power relations but also enable the Canadian state to position itself as a crucial and necessary feminist actor, a leader even, promoting democracy and liberal values abroad. This discussion paves the way for the subsequent chapter, in which I will analyze Canada's feminist foreign policy and military expansion in Iraq. By examining the state's use of feminist rhetoric in policy documents and speeches, I interrogate how the ideals of liberation and empowerment attached to white womanhood are mobilized to legitimize militarization and state-building efforts.

Chapter 3 – *Feminism in Uniform: Framing Liberation Through Violence*

“Canada has a proud tradition of helping the world’s poorest and most vulnerable.”

— Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in his speech on Canada’s new approach to the crisis in Iraq⁶⁹

Canada’s military activities in Iraq and neighbouring countries often receive little to no public attention, hiding behind the state’s image of progressiveness and dedication to a so-called feminist foreign policy. Through Operation IMPACT and its resulting initiatives, the CAF has established itself as a liberation lighthouse in the fog of oppressive governments, as Western democracies cheer on. Indeed, as of 2018, Canada now leads the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)’s mission in Iraq⁷⁰ and champions the Gender Advisor department for the region.⁷¹ Canada has found feminism and now wishes to preach the good news!

By 2023, Canada had developed numerous official documents detailing its international relations agenda in Southwest Asia. For this research, I focus on twelve records that outline Canada’s work and strategies for the region (see Appendix IV). These include the FIAP, the *2023–2029 National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security* (WPS), the *Middle East Engagement Strategy*, and the *2017 Defence Policy*. Through a policy analysis of these documents, I evaluate the language and discourse surrounding gender equality, empowerment, security, and capacity-building to reveal how liberal feminist ideals are instrumentalized to support Canada’s military involvement in Iraq.

⁶⁹ Trudeau, “Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s statement.”

⁷⁰ Government of Canada, “CAF operations and activities.”

⁷¹ Government of Canada, “Canada’s strategy for Iraq.”

By assessing how, when, and why feminist rhetoric is employed in international relations and military state publications, this chapter reveals how Canada's feminist rebranding post-9/11 is used to legitimize and render necessary armed interventions in Iraq. Ultimately, using post-development theories, I underscore how liberal narratives are now packed in pink feminist wrapping paper to reinforce the same mechanisms of control while masking the violent realities of military occupation.

Operation IMPACT: A Strategic Transformation in the Fight Against Daesh

In September 2014, under then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the CAF developed and initiated Operation IMPACT to support the counterterrorism coalition against Daesh⁷² in their operating regions of Iraq, Syria, and Jordan.⁷³ With a strong desire to defend their interests and freedoms, Canadian soldiers actively participated in countering the armed group's funding, resources, ideology, and information flow through the deployment of air support, military personnel, and airstrikes.⁷⁴ Effectively, from October 30, 2014, to February 15, 2016, the CAF orchestrated 246 airstrikes in Iraq, leaving no accessible official records regarding civilian deaths or damage caused.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, what first started as a combat mission to annihilate the international security threat posed by Daesh slowly shifted into a capacity-building operation, aligning itself with Canada's reformed defence and humanitarian policies. As of 2020, Operation IMPACT has been declared a non-combat mission, focusing on five new objectives: (1) committing to gender-responsive, needs-based humanitarian assistance, (2) implementing governance reforms that prioritize transparency and elevate

⁷² Daesh, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS), is currently recognized as a terrorist organization by the Canadian government.

⁷³ Government of Canada, "Operation IMPACT."

⁷⁴ Government of Canada, "CAF operations and activities."

⁷⁵ Government of Canada, "Airstrike history."

women's roles in leadership, (3) stabilizing areas liberated from Daesh, (4) training Iraqi security forces and police officers, and (5) promoting Iraq's unity, stability, cultural diversity, and democratic governance through active diplomatic efforts and advocacy.⁷⁶ With this shift in focus, the tasks accomplished by Operation IMPACT are as diverse as the objectives it now upholds, showcasing Canada's multi-dimensional approach to stabilizing the region.

As Operation IMPACT transitioned into a non-combat mission, the CAF adapted its tactics to meet the Canadian government's domestic and international interests. Although not officially on a combat mission, deployed military personnel are still expected to protect borders and regional stability by providing airlift, counterterrorism, and armed support.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the most important aspect of this mission, as stated in multiple official documents, is training Iraqi security and police forces.⁷⁸ The CAF then assists them in casualty management training and ensures their work methods respect international armed conflict and human rights laws.⁷⁹ These assigned responsibilities are coupled with humanitarian aid like food assistance, water sanitation, increased access to education, psychological support, and sexual health services for Iraqi citizens affected by the armed invasion of the region.⁸⁰

For Canada, this shift towards non-combat also means guaranteeing capacity-building by restoring essential services, rebuilding infrastructures, and fostering community reconciliation.⁸¹ Most importantly, the CAF's new approach to capacity-building places

⁷⁶ Government of Canada, "Canada's strategy for Iraq."

⁷⁷ Government of Canada, "Operation IMPACT."

⁷⁸ Government of Canada, "CAF operations and activities."; Government of Canada, "Canada's strategy for Iraq."; Government of Canada, "Operation IMPACT."; Trudeau, "Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's statement."

⁷⁹ Government of Canada, "Canada's strategy for Iraq."

⁸⁰ Government of Canada, "Canada's strategy for Iraq."

⁸¹ Government of Canada, "Canada's strategy for Iraq."

crucial emphasis on a gender-based analysis by implementing a gender perspective within its military operations. In Iraq, this gender-based analysis manifests as deployed Canadian personnel putting fundamental time and efforts into the prevention of gender-based violence, the promotion and protection of women's rights, the support of women's participation in police forces and decision-making processes, and the drafting of new gender-conscious policies.⁸² In that sense, while still essentially a counterterrorist operation, IMPACT has been reframed to fit the new Canadian vision: say hello to a feminist army!

Today, IMPACT operates under the banner of progressivism, advocating its commitment to gender equality and sustainable governance. However, beneath this rebranding lies the reality of Canada's enduring entanglement in a region shaped by Western interference. By aligning military objectives with feminist principles, Canada positions itself as a modern arbiter of peace and a new model of progress. Yet, I argue that this alignment is flawed, as military interventions and the use of organized violence directly contradict the liberation of people and, consequently, feminist values.

Canada and its Feminist Armed Forces

With the appointment of Justin Trudeau as Prime Minister of Canada in 2015, white feminism entered the (already white-dominated) Canadian mainstream, or whitestream, with a force stronger than ever before. Canada's commitment to building a liberal feminist utopia is reflected in its first-ever gender-balanced cabinet in 2015⁸³ and the appointment of its first female defence chief.⁸⁴ Central to this rebrand is a narrative that promotes gender equality,

⁸² Government of Canada, "Canada's strategy for Iraq."

⁸³ Ditchburn, "Trudeau's liberal government."

⁸⁴ CBC, "Carignan, Republican senator, women in combat."

women's empowerment, and peace-building worldwide, as Canada positions its military presence as an agent of progress and modernity. However, this discourse perpetuates the paternalistic narrative of Western superiority and promotes the deployment of armed forces while ignoring the complex, localized realities of Iraqi communities.

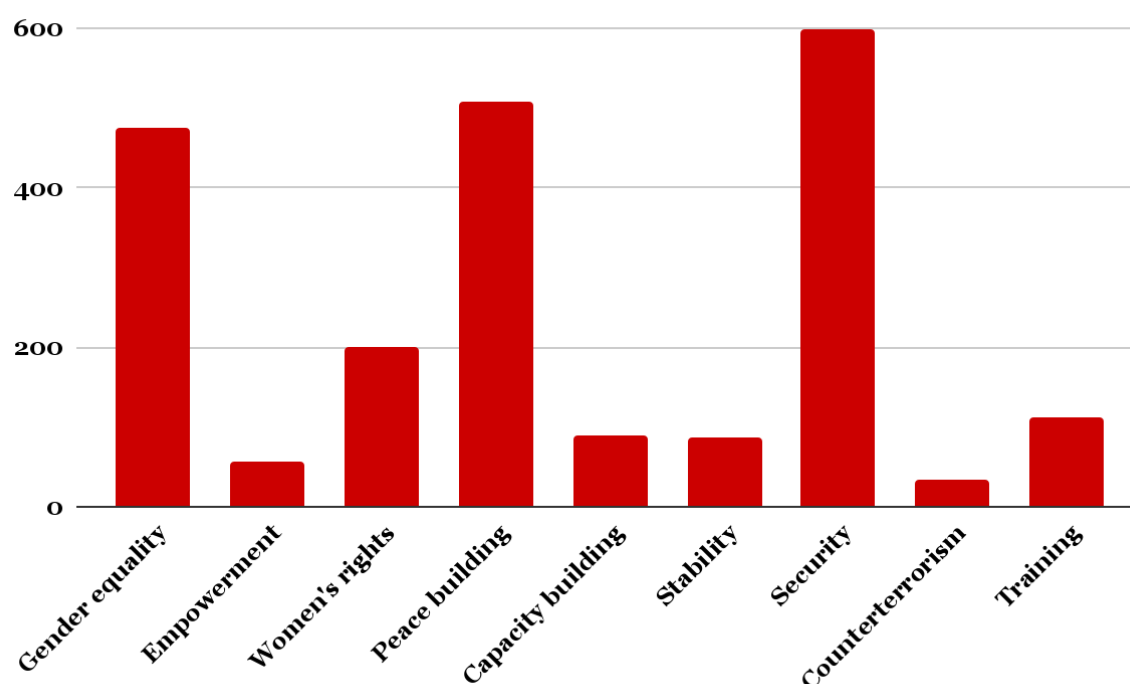


Fig. 1: Number of times each analyzed word has been used across selected documents

Within the official documents chosen for this analysis, half of the total pages explicitly relate to militarized intervention in Iraq, while the other half are dedicated to broader feminist policies adopted to be applied throughout Canada's relations with other countries. Nevertheless, across the twelve publications, the most common terms used are "security" with 599 mentions, followed by "peace-building" with 507 mentions, and finally "gender equality"/"gender-based [...]" with 474 mentions (see *Fig. 1*). The predominance of

militarized language, like security and peace-building, even within so-called feminist policies, demonstrates the interwoven nature of liberal feminist ideals and armed occupation: one cannot exist without the other. In fact, all selected documents mention gender equality, gender-based analyses, and women's empowerment in militarized capacity-building. For example, *Canada's Middle East Engagement Strategy* declares that:

We [the CAF] are also deploying Canadian police officers within Coalition military structures to provide advice to local Iraqi security forces and training to civilian police. [...] [We] will also continue to support efforts to advise Iraqi officials in building more effective and sustainable defence and security institutions, and provide capabilities to regional forces. [...] [We aim] to assist Iraq in strengthening its military schools and institutions and advancing Security Sector Reform.⁸⁵

This excerpt coexists within the same document that also states "Providing lifesaving gender-responsive assistance to help meet basic needs," "Empowering women and girls and advancing gender equality," and "Improving the accessibility, quality and sustainability of gender-responsive social services" as three of its most important objectives.⁸⁶ Here, as the Canadian government wishes to attain gender equality by increasing the CAF's presence in the targeted region, "feminist" goals are believed to be achieved through the execution of military tasks.

An effort to assimilate gender-based discourses and narratives transpires in all selected documents. Yet, each document also recognizes the deployment/use of military personnel and resources to ensure the effort results in tangible social change. For example,

⁸⁵ Government of Canada, "Canada's Middle East engagement strategy."

⁸⁶ Government of Canada, "Canada's Middle East engagement strategy."

Canada's *2017 Defence Policy* planned the deployment of nearly 10,000 personnel and the defence budget increase to \$32.7 billion by 2026-2027 while simultaneously integrating a gender-based analysis into the planning and implementation of military operations.⁸⁷ This juxtaposition of feminist rhetoric with the expansion of military presence reveals the inherent contradictions in Canada's feminist rebranding, where the pursuit of gender equality is paradoxically tied to the mechanisms of militarization and state control, ultimately reinforcing the very power structures it claims to dismantle.

White Feminism as a Tool for Military Expansion

Because the Government of Canada has understood (rightfully so) the unique challenges gendered minorities face during armed conflicts and periods of political instability,⁸⁸ current Canadian policies employ the language of gender equality to promote the military-industrial complex. The feminist rhetoric centered in these policies encourages Western intervention and the implementation of liberal norms and values all around the globe under the guise of "development," simultaneously ignoring the critical consequences of such interventions.

The Myth of Western Superiority

To begin, all types of foreign interventions assume Western superiority over the receiving nations. As mentioned multiple times in the FIAP and the WSP agenda, it is believed that armed conflict in "less developed"⁸⁹ regions is due to their assumed lack of

⁸⁷ National Defence, "Strong, Secure, Engaged."

⁸⁸ Government of Canada, "Foundations for Peace."

⁸⁹ Regrettably, many of the official records analyzed for this thesis use terms such as "underdeveloped" or "less-developed" to describe the global periphery. While I strive to present these documents in their original form, I am deeply conscious of the loaded meanings these words carry. This thesis embraces the understanding that development and underdevelopment are inseparably linked: the advancement of some

progress,⁹⁰ which explains why current proposed solutions tend to target state-sanctioned services, like access to education and healthcare.⁹¹ This perspective, rooted in Eurocentric ideologies, suggests that instability and violence arise because a region has not yet achieved the same political, economic, or social advancements as Western nations. Then, the proposed solutions to such conflicts frequently focus on state-building efforts to stabilize the region. This approach ignores deeper structural causes of conflict, such as imperialism, resource exploitation, foreign military interventions, and global economic inequalities, which are often perpetuated by the very nations promoting these solutions. For political scientist Mark Duffield, the concern that regions marked by poverty, instability, or “insufficient development” can pose significant threats to global security has resulted in development efforts’ shift toward attempting to transform entire societies.⁹² Yet, this dichotomy between “developed” and “less/underdeveloped” states promotes interventions prioritizing Western systems and notions.

This belief results in interventions conceptualized and implemented in an overwhelmingly Western framework. Anthropologist Arturo Escobar describes development practices as a way for the West to reconstruct pre-colonized states, “to manage—and even produce—[them] politically, sociologically, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively,”⁹³ thus claiming its authority over them and their respective ways-of-life.⁹⁴ The goal of Canadian intervention then is not only to stop the present conflict or to prevent the next one,

has historically necessitated the subjugation and underdevelopment of others, as described by sociologist Andre Gunder Frank (Frank, 1966).

⁹⁰ Duffield, “Social Reconstruction and the Radicalization of Development.”

⁹¹ Government of Canada, “Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy.”; Government of Canada, “Canada’s Middle East engagement strategy.”; Government of Canada, “Canada’s strategy for Iraq.”; Government of Canada, “Foundations for Peace.”; Government of Canada, “Operation IMPACT.”; Government of Canada, “Projet profile.”; Government of Canada, “Women, peace and security.”

⁹² Duffield, “Social Reconstruction and the Radicalization of Development.”

⁹³ Escobar, “Reflections on ‘Development’,” 412.

⁹⁴ Escobar, “Reflections on ‘Development’.”

but also to exterminate the behaviour, social fabric, and cultures of the Iraqi people.⁹⁵ Indeed, because violence, whether understood as gendered or not, and conflicts are believed to be innate to the global periphery,⁹⁶ external intervention and political/cultural transformation are thought of as necessary for resolution and peace.⁹⁷ However, this approach not only imposes a one-size-fits-all solution based on Western authority but also overlooks the complexities of local and Indigenous experiences and refuses to accept the possibilities brought forth by grassroots collectives.

The Erasure of Agency and the Colonial Legacy of Feminist Narratives

Subsequently, by framing women as victims in need of rescue, these interventions homogenize their identities, stripping away the diversity of their lived realities and perpetuating a Western-centric narrative of empowerment that ignores the underlying causes of their oppression. In her renowned essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1985), feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains that women of colour, specifically women living in the global periphery, are homogenized within white feminist discourses.⁹⁸ Not only is their existence conceptualized as similar, but according to Mohanty, their experiences are thought to be that of oppression and victimization resulting from patriarchal societies and fundamentalist religious beliefs.⁹⁹ Entire Arab societies are constructed as “uncivilized” and “backwards,” leading to the portrayal of Arab women through a neo-imperial lens as perpetual victims in need of empowerment policies.¹⁰⁰ This framing inevitably results in the erasing of these women’s actual lived experiences. Additionally, because many of the official

⁹⁵ Duffield, “Social Reconstruction and the Radicalization of Development.”

⁹⁶ DaCosta, “Contextualizing liberal peacebuilding.”

⁹⁷ Duffield, “Social Reconstruction and the Radicalization of Development.”

⁹⁸ Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”

⁹⁹ Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes.”

¹⁰⁰ Crawley, “Saving Brown Women from Brown Men?”

documents selected do not only apply exclusively to Iraq, it is clear that the Canadian government refuses to acknowledge the multitude of cultural contexts present outside the state's borders. The lack of adaptation means that the CAF plans on intervening with Iraqi women the same way they do with Filipino communities for instance, without any regard for the crucial differences between those two situations.

Throughout the analyzed policies, there is an assumption that women in middle-income/"less-developed" countries are inherently oppressed, that they face more sexual violence, have less access to education, are more likely to be forced into early marriage, face more domestic responsibilities, have less access to owning property, and experience more legal barriers on their economic autonomy. Framing women solely as victims of oppression and assuming their lack of access to resources or opportunities implies that these women have no control over their circumstances.¹⁰¹ This perspective overlooks how women actively challenge or navigate oppressive structures, make decisions within limited frameworks, or even reshape their lives through collective resistance. Such reductive framing not only erases women's agency but also perpetuates homogenized narratives that fail to account for the intersecting factors shaping their experiences, like race or class.

White feminism's history of invisibilising racialized women's experiences also means that all issues faced by women are now categorized as "women's issues," meaning issues stemming from the patriarchy. In that sense, all challenges experienced by women are part of the liberal feminist struggle and can thus be solved by attaining gender equality: "Canada firmly believes that promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls is the most effective approach to achieving [the eradication of poverty]."¹⁰² However, these

¹⁰¹ Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes."

¹⁰² Government of Canada, "Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy," ii.

homogenizing assumptions completely disregard the ways in which colonization and its legacies have shaped (and continue to shape) racialized peoples' lives.¹⁰³ For Native Hawaiian scholar and activist Haunani-Kay Trask, an exclusive focus on women overlooks the historical oppression of all Indigenous peoples, mainly because it refuses to acknowledge the role colonization has played in the development of patriarchal norms in pre-colonized societies. In their words, "the answers to the specifics of our women's oppression reside in our people's collective achievement of the larger goal of [Indigenous] self-government, not in an exclusive feminist agenda. [...] Thus does a "women's issue" become a sovereignty, not a feminist, problem for us."¹⁰⁴ By homogenizing women's experiences and erasing the consequences of colonization, these policies fail to address the root causes of inequality, instead reinforcing Western dominance and silencing the diverse voices of women they claim to empower.

The Illusion of Liberation

Finally, the framing of military operations as a way of empowering women purposefully ignores militarization's structural violence and inherent brutality. At the core of military interventions lies militarism, defined by feminist theorist Cynthia Enloe as a social process that normalizes military approaches to problems and aligns such approaches with state-building mechanisms.¹⁰⁵ This process, which asserts that security and protection can only be provided through military means, is embedded in patriarchy and functions as one of its promoting institutions.¹⁰⁶ The military encourages values and norms such as hierarchy, discipline, and obedience, which render patriarchy possible in the first place. Without the

¹⁰³ Crawley, "Saving Brown Women from Brown Men?"

¹⁰⁴ Trask, "Feminism and Indigenous Hawaiian Nationalism," 910-911.

¹⁰⁵ Enloe, *Maneuvers*.

¹⁰⁶ Burke, "Women and militarism."; Enloe, *Maneuvers*.

dominant group's belief in hierarchy, imposed through violent means, inequalities would not exist.

Moreover, militarism praises traits associated with white masculinity like aggression, dominance, and assertiveness. By glorifying these characteristics and encouraging the use of brute force in the name of protection, the state reinforces male superiority¹⁰⁷ while also promoting white supremacy. Note how the characteristics mentioned above are often used to describe people of colour in a degrading and harmful way. When used against racialized people, these words presuppose their "barbarity" and "primitivity." Yet, when used to talk about deployed soldiers, they represent their bravery, strength and valour. Here, the dominant discourse renders legitimate the (white) state's use of violence, regardless of the (non-white) casualties caused. For the Canadian state, killing is fine, so long as the women and men committing these murders are wearing the flag. So long as the soldiers doing so have sworn their allegiance to the Crown. So long as the King is giving the order.

Militarism does not bring forth true socio-political transformation and neither does white feminism. If current systems are left unchecked, liberation will never happen: "[the] goal of white feminism is not to alter the systems that oppress women—patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism—but rather to succeed within them."¹⁰⁸ This is what is happening with Canada's feminist rebranding. The systems that govern us, the ones that thrive off our exploitation and demise, do not change. Instead, they are remarketed to garner more support from left centrist groups, such as TERFs and girlbosses, but they will never let go of their power. So long as institutions like the military are in place, we will not experience *true* liberation.

¹⁰⁷ Enloe, *Maneuvers*.

¹⁰⁸ Crawley, "Saving Brown Women from Brown Men?," 358.

In conclusion, this policy analysis has revealed how the Canadian government, while adopting feminist rhetoric, continues to prioritize Western norms and values under the guise of gender equality. By framing women in conflict zones as passive victims in need of rescue, these interventions perpetuate a homogenized narrative that ignores the complexity of local experiences and the ways in which colonization and imperialism continue to shape the lives of racialized people. This approach undermines the agency of the women it seeks to empower and reinforces the structures of control and dependency that maintain the global status quo. By using feminist language, these policies present military force as a tool of empowerment while obscuring the inherent violence of militarized interventions.

The instrumentalization of feminist language within foreign policy functions as part of a broader narrative that positions white women as symbols of moral authority and civilization. This narrative has historically been employed to justify and legitimize military interventions, often cloaked in the rhetoric of security and women's empowerment. The critique of white feminism's complicity in these interventions reveals how it reinforces existing power structures rather than challenges them. In the following section, I will explore how white feminism intersects with the construction of white Canadian womanhood to sustain these narratives.

Chapter 4 – *Securing Supremacy: White Womanhood, Militarization, and Nation-Building*

Dominant feminist discourses surrounding militarization and nation-building tend to present them as masculine projects. Surely, many scholars argue that war efforts are gendered, rendering a certain type of masculinity (i.e.: one that is aggressive, tough, strong, and white) central to military culture and justification for warfare.¹⁰⁹ Diving deeper, others demonstrate that “if men are encouraged to emulate the national heroes, women are invited to love them.”¹¹⁰ These scholars then highlight how women are implicated in militarization, as mothers, wives, supporters, workers, and victims.¹¹¹ While these frameworks are instrumental to understanding the gendered dimensions of militarization, they risk obscuring a crucial truth: militarization is not simply a masculine endeavour—it is also a deeply racialized one.

In concordance with Krill’s conceptualization of the settler state as a white woman, this chapter challenges the assumption that white heteropatriarchy serves only the interests of men. Instead, I argue that white women are active participants in the militarization of the Canadian state, playing an equivalent role to white men in the (re)production of white supremacy, imperial goals, and state-building. Within the historical archive, written and managed by dominant white voices, there is a tendency to position white women as victims of patriarchy, concealing their recurring role in imperialism and the institutionalization of white supremacy.¹¹² Too often, white women exclude themselves from the conversation

¹⁰⁹ Higate and Hopton, “War, Militarism, and Masculinities”; Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*; Tickner, *Gender in International Relations*.

¹¹⁰ Bilig, *Banal Nationalism*, 126.

¹¹¹ Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches & Bases*; Goldstein, *War And Gender*.

¹¹² Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property*.

surrounding racism which justifies their lack of antiracist work, as they refuse to take accountability for their role in the mechanisms of dehumanization.

White Womanhood and “Civilized Progress”

Historically, white women play a crucial role in settler state-building processes, despite the invisibilization of their participation within the archive. While dominant narratives often frame white women as passive actors or victims of patriarchal structures, certain scholars demonstrate that white women are indispensable to colonial expansion, the institutionalization of white supremacy, and the establishment of settler states.¹¹³ Their role extend beyond the domestic sphere, encompassing political, economic, and ideological functions reinforcing racial hierarchies.

Krill’s understanding of the state as a white woman further highlights the ways in which white women embody and internalize Western notions of “civilized progress.” Indeed, white women are deemed as closer to European values, ideals, and behaviours than men,¹¹⁴ specifically in the Canadian context wherein European men’s business with Indigenous peoples led to a more fluid conceptualization of culture.¹¹⁵ In that sense, the settler state, as Krill puts it:

¹¹³ Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property*; Krill, “The Settler State is a White Woman”.

¹¹⁴ Krill, “The Settler State is a White Woman”.

¹¹⁵ Canadiens, through intermarriages, worked within Indigenous kinship networks, gaining access to resources, trade routes, and political influence. Many Canadiens began to exhibit markers of a hybrid identity—dressing, eating, and living in ways that reflected their Indigenous affiliations. This métissage not only blurred racial and cultural boundaries but also allowed some to navigate both European and Indigenous worlds, giving rise to a distinct Métis identity. Nonetheless, white supremacy, enslavement and racism were still very present for Black and Indigenous peoples in Canada (see Berthelette, *Heirs of an Ambivalent Empire*).

[...] critically depended on white women because of their ability to effect permanence within the settlement, promote civilization and domesticity, reform men into proper settlers, exercise moral authority, encourage agricultural production, reproduce a white population, establish proper behaviour and morality, end the practice of mixed marriage, and facilitate the creation of hierarchical social relations required for settler colonization.¹¹⁶

It was thus white women who were expected to ensure the “civilization” of Indigenous peoples while keeping white men in check. By encouraging civility and morality through their actions and presence, white women could gain access to positions of influence within settler society and solidify the boundaries of whiteness, reinforcing their role as key agents of colonial state-building.

White women’s participation in colonial and racial violence extends beyond settler expansion into systems of enslavement. As historian Stephanie Jones-Rogers argues, white women actively participated in the enslavement of Black people and directly benefited from white supremacy, economically and politically. In her book *They Were Her Property*, Jones-Rogers deconstructs the notion of white women as bystanders or as victims of a patriarchal system that forced them to comply with enslavement. While certain laws passed in the United States showcase misogynist ideologies, white women were not always recognized as white men’s subordinates in social and legal interactions. On the contrary, the state itself legally recognized white women as enslavers and often acted in their favour to protect their “right to own property.”¹¹⁷ Their participation challenges the narrative that enslavement was

¹¹⁶ Krill, “The Settler State is a White Woman,” 73.

¹¹⁷ Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property*.

solely a male-driven enterprise, revealing instead how white women wielded power to maintain and expand systems of racial subjugation.

It is important to note that the decline of enslavement coexisted with the political mobilization of white women under the suffragettes movement. Many (white) leading figures of the cause, such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Belle Kearney, sided with pro-enslavement politicians and actively positioned themselves against the enfranchisement of Black people. In her essay *The South and Women Suffrage*, Kearney, the daughter of an enslaver, declares that “The enfranchisement of women would insure immediate and durable white supremacy, honestly attained [...] Just as surely as the North will be forced to turn to the South for the nation’s salvation, just so surely will the South be compelled to look to its Anglo-Saxon women as the medium through which to retain the supremacy of the white race over the African.”¹¹⁸ Here, Kearney argues for white women to gain the right to vote in order to solidify white voters’ influence against Black communities. White women thus leveraged their enfranchisement to maintain racial hierarchies, demonstrating that their relationship to power was not solely defined by gendered oppression but also by their active role in reinforcing racial dominance. This historical background is necessary to deconstruct the notion of innocence usually associated with white womanhood. In turn, it allows us to truly grasp how white women, regardless of time, will side with the white man to consolidate their power.

It is necessary to note that Canada is not excused from the conversation on enslavement and systemic racism. Due to the lack of archive preserved and the invisibilization of Black and Brown voices, it can be difficult to find information rendered

¹¹⁸ Kearney, “The South and Women Suffrage,” 265.

legitimate by academia on the history of enslavement in Canada, specifically when it comes to white women's relationship with such a system. But Canada is not innocent. In 1725, half of all settlers owning a home also enslaved an Indigenous or Black person, who were forced into horrendous living situations, and subjected to constant surveillance, sexual violence, Christianization, punishments, torture, abuse, early death, substandard food, interdiction to speak any language other than French or English, and the perpetual possibility of being exported to the Caribbean.¹¹⁹ During the American Revolutionary War, Black Loyalists were promised "freedom" as a way to thank them for their service, but, once in Canada, were instead met with re-enslavement.¹²⁰ Section 38 of the 1910 Immigration Act "[...] prohibit[ed] entry of immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada [...]."¹²¹ Canada is not innocent.

White Women's Violence and Safety

The news articles analyzed in Chapter 2 repeatedly mention white feminist issues as a way to portray white women as "strong" victims, as survivors. Whiteness itself is rooted in victimization: to be white is to find oneself superior to the Other, and yet to be scared of losing that status due to the Other's behaviour.¹²² This relationship between whiteness and victimhood then explains why white Canadian women are simultaneously depicted as facing "mild" gendered oppression and as beacons of feminist progress. Feminist theorist Alison Phipps explores how "[w]hite victimhood also produces the desire to 'take back control'—a slogan that has been at the forefront of far-right politics in many different countries,"¹²³ but

¹¹⁹ Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance*.

¹²⁰ Troxler, "Re-enslavement of Black Loyalists."

¹²¹ Calliste, "Race, Gender and Canadian Immigration Policy."

¹²² Phipps, *Me, Not You*.

¹²³ Phipps, *Me, Not You*, 76.

also at the forefront of white feminist movements. However, “taking back control” often means, in the case of white women, the criminalization of Black and Brown bodies and the hyper-reliance on state-sanctioned violence, both on the national and international levels.

White women have long been positioned as the moral arbiters of the nation-state, their presumed innocence and virtue serving as powerful tools in the justification of state violence. They then function as the moral face of military intervention, legitimizing warfare through the language of liberal feminism. By invoking narratives of gender equality, women’s empowerment, and protection from patriarchal oppression, white women provide a palatable, humanitarian veneer to what is ultimately an extension of imperial domination, as explored in Chapter 3.

The Canadian approach to the presence of Daesh in Iraq fights on two different fronts. On one hand, it brands its military intervention as a benevolent and humanitarian response, as seen in Chapter 3. Canada’s FIAP is deeply entangled with the imperialist logic of white feminism, positioning gender equality and women’s empowerment as moral justifications for militarization. Because white feminism presents an exclusive emphasis on gender, completely disregarding interconnected forms of oppression, it imposes, through militarization, a “one-size-fits-all” approach to issues it deems as stemming from patriarchy. Similarly, within international development and military interventions, such a framework determines which cultures are considered oppressive and in need of reform.¹²⁴ This then serves the interests of white heteropatriarchy, a system that inevitably benefits white women.

White women, as shown earlier, have an immense influence on what is considered moral and ethical. Indeed, the production of Western knowledge—including dominant

¹²⁴ Syed and Alie, “The White Woman’s Burden.”

discourses on gender and development—is inseparable from the production and exercise of Western power, and white women frequently occupy a privileged moral high ground in discussions on global development and humanitarian responses.¹²⁵ Their standards thus dictate which countries are deemed feminist enough, continuously compared to Canada, a symbol of what every state should aspire to be. This discourse situates white women as proof of liberation, reinforcing the racialized binary between the “civilized” West and the “oppressed” Other.

On the other hand, Canada’s FIAP promises white women’s safety through the strengthening of the CAF’s military presence in Iraq. Within white feminist discourse, (white women’s) “safety” is often pursued at the expense of true liberation.¹²⁶ Feminist philosopher Judith Butler’s conceptualization of “grievability” refers to how certain lives are recognized as valuable and worth mourning, while others are not. White lives are seen as inherently valuable, while racialized lives, on the contrary, are treated as disposable. Their suffering and deaths may go unnoticed, dismissed, or even justified under frameworks of war-making, security, and “progress.”¹²⁷ Within the analyzed news articles, white women are positioned as subjects whose vulnerability necessitates state protection, while the suffering and death of racialized individuals through military occupation are rendered invisible. This exclusive focus on white security dramatically impacts our collective/dominant understanding of whose safety the CAF is protecting (hint: it is white women’s).

The pretext of “protecting (white) women” has long been a tool for constructing certain communities, cultures, and nations as inherently violent, and justifying border regimes

¹²⁵ Syed and Alie, “The White Woman’s Burden.”

¹²⁶ Adams, “From White Feminism to Abolition.”

¹²⁷ Butler, *Precarious Life*.

and the military-industrial complex. So has been the pretext of “saving Brown and Black women so they can finally live the same lives as white women.” These rationales legitimize the disposal of Black and Brown bodies on the national and international scales.¹²⁸ By undergoing military interventions to both “protect” white women and “save” Black and Brown women, the CAF ends up killing the Other it deems “unsalvageable,” a mechanism that, according to Phipps:

has always been central to the necropolitics of race and imperialism. White supremacy is a politics of death: colonial massacres, lynchings, concentration camps. It constructs the Other as a mortal threat—often sexualised—which must be annihilated. White men protecting women from [B]rown and Black men has justified many of these orgies of killing, from the genocide of Indigenous peoples to the bombs of the War on Terror. And white women are now represented at the highest levels of the neo-colonial war machine.¹²⁹

Related to the selected news articles from Chapter 2, where we could see an important demand to “break the glass ceiling” and have more women in positions of power and male-dominated fields, Phipps notes more and more women are becoming CEOs of arms production companies.¹³⁰ Once again, white women’s desire for “liberation” comes at the expense of racialized people.

The mobilization of white women in this context is not incidental; it is strategic. It allows for the presentation of war as an ethical obligation rather than a violent imposition. The mediatic comparison between Canada and Southwest Asia leads to the idea that war is

¹²⁸ Adams, “From White Feminism to Abolition.”

¹²⁹ Phipps, *Me, Not You*, 129-130.

¹³⁰ Phipps, *Me, Not You*.

not only necessary but a moral imperative that upholds the values of gender justice and democracy. Canada's advocacy for women's rights in conflict zones is deeply embedded in a racialized security apparatus that renders certain populations disposable in the name of progress. The language of feminism, when wielded in this way, becomes a tool of empire, a means through which militarization is framed as a force for good rather than as the basis of colonial violence.

Yet, the selectivity of this feminism reveals its contradictions. The same white women who advocate for the "rescue" of Iraqi women remain silent on the violence inflicted by the CAF, the displacement of communities, and the deaths of civilians caused by the very interventions they endorse. Their feminism does not extend to Palestinian women under Israeli occupation or to Indigenous women whose land they are on. Instead, it is a feminism that is deeply invested in securing white supremacy and maintaining the racial and geopolitical hierarchies that sustain imperial dominance.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

“The master’s tool is international law, and the master is also the creator of the problem. We, on the other hand, are using something that the master cannot silence, cannot oppress, cannot censor. That is an intersectional analysis that understands that we are connected and [...] greater than the sum of our parts. That is something that the master can’t handle and it’s the alternative that is going to liberate not just me and you, but all of us. Because the masters’ tools were never designed to deal with what is going on when we come together.”

— Palestinian feminist author Nada Elia¹³¹

Throughout this thesis, I have examined how the construction of white womanhood within the Canadian context has influenced the state’s military expansion in Iraq, post-9/11. My findings reveal that white women have been, and continue to be, active participants in the (re)production of imperial and colonial power, through the weaponization of feminist rhetoric to justify military expansion.

In Chapter 2, I explored media portrayals of Canadian womanhood post-9/11 across four national news agencies through a feminist discourse analysis. Because those portrayals centre on whiteness, meaning there is no mention of any social identification other than gender, it is clear that news agencies depict the belief that *white* womanhood is the only womanhood worth mentioning. While the gendered issues brought up in the articles affect most people read as women, the lack of intersectional analysis proves that there is little to no care about *how* these issues impact marginalized folks. As such, the focus on white womanhood and liberal matters completely obscures any other types of womanhood, pushing for a white-centric vision of feminist ideologies.

Thereafter, in Chapter 3, I demonstrated how feminist rhetoric was used across Canadian policy documents to justify military intervention. I first briefly introduced

¹³¹ Vusilović and Koldová, “The Erasure of the Palestinian Experience Is Central to White Feminism.”

Operation IMPACT, the CAF operation in Iraq since 2014, and the shift from a combat mission to a more development-based approach focused on gender inequities and women's empowerment. This transformation is categorized by a significant increase in the use of feminist language and terms in policy documents, rhetoric which is deeply associated with military interventions and deployment. Yet, this juxtaposition is hypocritical, as militarization of the state is inherently anti-feminist considering it is rooted in white supremacy, imperialism, and colonization.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I delved into white women's active participation in Canadian state-building, militarization, and the (re)production of white supremacy. Historically, white women's responsibility regarding those processes has been invisibilized to preserve the notion of purity associated with white womanhood. Nonetheless, because Canada justifies its military intervention in Iraq as a humanitarian effort, the state uses white feminist rhetoric to frame militarization as a moral duty, a duty white women love to take on. They play a strategic role in this discourse, positioned as both symbols of liberation and subjects requiring state protection, reinforcing racialized hierarchies. This exclusive feminism legitimizes military violence, rendering racialized lives disposable while upholding white supremacy under the guise of gender justice.

My findings then challenge the dominant narratives around feminist foreign policy as they focus exclusively on the Canadian context, a task rarely undertaken within scholarly discourse. Canada's position as a leader in liberal feminist government is used as a cloak under which the state can hide itself and its systemic violence. Through my research, I reveal how feminist foreign policy operates as a tool of state power, masking the realities of occupation, and reinforcing imperialism and white supremacy under the guise of gender

equality. Moreover, like many Indigenous, Black, Brown, queer and trans peoples before me, I give space to the active role white women, specifically Canadian white women, play in the (re)production of violent and oppressive systems. Too often, our¹³² responsibilities are obscured, using patriarchy as a way to absolve ourselves from our whiteness. By stating that militarization is not simply a gendered project, but more importantly a deeply racialized one, I wish to write white women back into the story so that we may have a more accurate picture of what is truly happening in Iraq, so that we can honour those who have passed under Canadian artillery.

The Power of Utopia

This entire thesis is a call for the abolition of the military-industrial complex—a call for the abolition of the state itself. The state does not merely wield violence; it exists through it. Its power is sustained through militarization, policing, and occupation, all justified under the guise of security and democracy. As long as the state monopolizes the means of violence, it dictates the terms of resistance, deciding who is protected, who is expendable, and who deserves to be defended. To dismantle the military-industrial complex is to reject this arrangement entirely, refusing to seek justice within a system designed to prevent it. Abolition is not an endpoint but an opening—a commitment to imagining and creating new ways of being, relating, and protecting one another beyond the violence of the state.

Our collective liberation cannot emerge from the very structures that oppress, surveil, and discipline us. It must be taken, built, and imagined beyond the confines of state power. We must see past what we know, we must look elsewhere for solutions, we must believe in

¹³² While I am a trans/non-binary person, I cannot deny that I was socialized as a girl/woman and that I am still, most of the time, treated as such. I thus include myself in this statement considering I am also part of the problem and excluding myself would be hypocritical.

our wildest conceptions and start from there. We must not be imprisoned by the belief that “this is how it always has been” and refuse to explore further. Abolition asks us to leave behind a system which does not care for us and instead rely on our communities, on each other, to dream of something better. Let us believe in possibilities, let us partake in the radical act of reclaiming our future from a world that was never built for us, let us revel in the power of utopia.

Appendix I: Annotative Table**Source:**

What is the explicit message?	
What is the implicit message?	
Discursive strategies used	
Assumptions made	
What is being omitted?	
Governing themes/ideologies	

Appendix II: Detailed List of News Segments and Articles Analyzed

1. Amanat, Hayatullah. “‘Reality Gap’ Identified in Gender Equality Survey on What Canadians Think Vs. Experience.” *CTVNews*, November 26, 2024. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/article/reality-gap-identified-in-gender-equality-survey-on-what-canadians-think-vs-experience/>.
2. Banerjee, Sidhartha. “Vigils, Events Mark 35 Years Since Polytechnique Anti-feminist Mass Killing.” *Global News*, December 7, 2024. <https://globalnews.ca/news/10904997/polytechnique-35th-anniversary/>.
3. Brady, Rachel, Wency Leung, Shane Dingman, Wendy Stueck, Tim Kiladze, Selena Ross, Carrie Tait, Caroline Alphonso, and Mahnoor Yawar. “Have We Achieved Gender Equality? Nine Canadian Women Respond.” *The Globe and Mail*, March 4, 2016. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/have-we-achieved-gender-equality-nine-canadian-women-respond/article29013155/>.
4. CBC. “Looking Back on 50 Years Since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women,” March 8, 2017. <https://www.cbc.ca/2017/looking-back-on-50-years-since-the-royal-commission-on-the-status-of-women-1.4004778>.
5. CBC. “What International Women’s Day Means to Young Winnipeggers in 2016,” March 8, 2016. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/what-international-women-s-day-means-to-young-winnipeggers-in-2016-1.3481633>.
6. De Boer, Tara. “New Study Finds Canadian Women Are More Likely to Adhere to Social and Democratic Values Than Men.” *CTVNews*, November 29, 2024. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/lifestyle/article/new-study-finds-canadian-women-are-more-likely-to-adhere-to-social-and-democratic-values-than-men/>.
7. Fitzpatrick, Meagan. “‘We’ve Kept the Ball Rolling’: Canadians Mark 1 Year Since Women’s March.” *CBC*, January 20, 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/women-s-march-anniversary-1.4493355>.
8. Forrest, Maura. “Quebec Aims to Increase Access to Abortion Pills, Contraception.” *Global News*, November 18, 2024. <https://globalnews.ca/news/10874979/quebec-abortion-pills-access/>.
9. McTeer, Maureen, and Catherine Clark. “Is The Work of Feminism Finished?” *The Globe and Mail*, March 7, 2016. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/is-the-work-of-feminism-finished/article29038566/>.

10. Reuters. "Canada Slips 4 Places on World Index Measuring Women's Equality," October 22, 2019. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/women-global-quality-of-life-ranking-1.5330967>.
11. Reuters. "Women Inch Towards Equal Legal Rights Despite COVID-19 Risks, World Bank Says." *CTVNews*, November 25, 2024. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/world/article/women-inch-towards-equal-legal-rights-despite-covid-19-risks-world-bank-says/>.
12. Roche, Catherine, and Nandini DasGupta. "How One Company's Push for Gender Diversity Sparked Culture Change." *The Globe and Mail*, March 8, 2016. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/rob-commentary/how-one-companys-push-for-gender-diversity-sparked-culture-change/article29054684/>.
13. Sibbet, Justin. "New Lethbridge Military Museum Tour Honours Canada's Women Who Served." *Global News*, November 9, 2024. <https://globalnews.ca/news/10861632/lethbridge-military-museum-tour-canada-women-who-served/>.
14. Stechyson, Natalie. "Despite Gains, Women Still Do Most of the Housework. Will This Gender Gap Ever Narrow?" *CBC*, January 13, 2025. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/women-housework-division-labour-1.7426763>.
15. Stechyson, Natalie. "More Women Are the Breadwinners in Canadian Families—but Less so if They Have Kids." *CBC*, December 1, 2024. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/work-women-motherhood-penalty-1.7395512>.

Appendix III: Annotative Table (With Information)

1. **Source:** Amanat, Hayatullah. “‘Reality Gap’ Identified in Gender Equality Survey on What Canadians Think Vs. Experience.” *CTVNews*, November 26, 2024. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/article/reality-gap-identified-in-gender-equality-survey-on-what-canadians-think-vs-experience/>.

What is the explicit message?	Canadians perceive gender equality as improving, but a significant gap remains between public perception and women’s actual experiences
What is the implicit message?	Gender inequality is still deeply embedded despite legal and policy advancements
Discursive strategies used	Use of survey data to legitimize claims
Assumptions made	Public perception is shaped by surface-level policy changes + awareness and policy change can resolve gender inequality
What is being omitted?	Structural causes of inequality + intersectional analyses of how race and class shape gendered experiences
Governing themes/ideologies	Canadian exceptionalism ▾ Liberal feminism ▾

2. **Source:** Banerjee, Sidhartha. “Vigils, Events Mark 35 Years Since Polytechnique Anti-feminist Mass Killing.” *Global News*, December 7, 2024. <https://globalnews.ca/news/10904997/polytechnique-35th-anniversary/>.

What is the explicit message?	École Polytechnique massacre is a significant reminder of gender-based violence and the ongoing struggle for women’s safety
What is the implicit message?	Violence against women is an individual act of misogyny rather than a broader societal issue + commemoration is framed as a form of collective healing and awareness
Discursive strategies used	Emotional language and survivor testimonies = framing the massacre as a unique, exceptional event rather than part of systemic violence
Assumptions made	Memorializing past violence leads to social progress + gender-based violence is framed as an aberration rather than a structural issue
What is being omitted?	Links between state violence and gendered violence + which victims are mourned and which are ignored

Governing themes/ideologies	State benevolence ▾
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3. **Source:** Brady, Rachel, Wency Leung, Shane Dingman, Wendy Stueck, Tim Kiladze, Selena Ross, Carrie Tait, Caroline Alphonso, and Mahnoor Yawar. "Have We Achieved Gender Equality? Nine Canadian Women Respond." *The Globe and Mail*, March 4, 2016. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/have-we-achieved-gender-equality-nine-canadian-women-respond/article29013155/>.

What is the explicit message?	Nine Canadian women share diverse perspectives on whether gender equality has been achieved, with mixed responses reflecting progress and ongoing challenges (challenges like work-life balance as a mother, representation in male-dominated fields)
What is the implicit message?	Feminism focuses solely on liberal issues and the symbolic celebration of women
Discursive strategies used	Personal narratives
Assumptions made	Gender equality can be measured through individual experiences + how much easier it is to be a woman in Canada
What is being omitted?	Structural challenges women, particularly racialized women, face
Governing themes/ideologies	Liberal feminism ▾ Canadian exceptionalism ▾

4. **Source:** CBC. "Looking Back on 50 Years Since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women," March 8, 2017. <https://www.cbc.ca/2017/looking-back-on-50-years-since-the-royal-commission-on-the-status-of-women-1.4004778>.

What is the explicit message?	The Royal Commission was a turning point for women's rights in Canada, but work remains unfinished
What is the implicit message?	Legal reforms and policy reviews reflect a linear progression toward equality + Canada is a global leader in advancing women's rights
Discursive strategies used	Use of government reports
Assumptions made	State-led initiatives are the primary drivers of gender equality + feminism is compatible with state power + the Commission's work benefits all women equally

What is being omitted?	Exclusion of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized women's experiences in the Commission's findings + ongoing role of the state in perpetuating gendered and racialized violence
Governing themes/ideologies	State benevolence ▾ Liberal feminism ▾ Canadian exceptionalism ▾

5. **Source:** CBC. "What International Women's Day Means to Young Winnipeggers in 2016," March 8, 2016. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/what-international-women-s-day-means-to-young-winnipeggers-in-2016-1.3481633>.

What is the explicit message?	Young Winnipeggers reflect on International Women's Day and the importance of ongoing advocacy for gender equality
What is the implicit message?	It is easier to be a woman in Canada than elsewhere because we have economic opportunities BUT there is still work to be done
Discursive strategies used	Personal testimonies
Assumptions made	Economic and political opportunities inevitably mean gender equality
What is being omitted?	Systemic issues racialized people face in Canada
Governing themes/ideologies	State benevolence ▾ Canadian exceptionalism ▾ Liberal feminism ▾

6. **Source:** De Boer, Tara. "New Study Finds Canadian Women Are More Likely to Adhere to Social and Democratic Values Than Men." *CTVNews*, November 29, 2024. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/lifestyle/article/new-study-finds-canadian-women-are-more-likely-to-adhere-to-social-and-democratic-values-than-men/>.

What is the explicit message?	Gender and age influence how likely one is to adhere to social and democratic values
What is the implicit message?	Canadians tend to greatly value social and democratic values, but younger women care more about it than men
Discursive strategies used	Statistics and scientific research
Assumptions made	What social and democratic values mean (respect to law, ethnocultural diversity, respect of Indigenous culture, diversity)

What is being omitted?	Who was being interviewed, if the interviewee pool is representative of Canadian population, what respect to social and democratic values means to each interviewee
Governing themes/ideologies	Respect of state ▾ Canadian exceptionalism ▾

7. **Source:** Fitzpatrick, Meagan. “‘We’ve Kept the Ball Rolling’: Canadians Mark 1 Year Since Women’s March.” *CBC*, January 20, 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/women-s-march-anniversary-1.4493355>.

What is the explicit message?	Canadians are actively organizing through the Women’s March to defend women’s rights
What is the implicit message?	Canadian women need to get politically active if we want to obtain gender equality
Discursive strategies used	Interviews
Assumptions made	What women’s rights mean (more women in politics, bodily autonomy, being politically active), more women in politics inevitably leads to gender equality
What is being omitted?	What women of colour and Indigenous women are demanding regarding their rights
Governing themes/ideologies	Liberal feminism ▾

8. **Source:** Forrest, Maura. “Quebec Aims to Increase Access to Abortion Pills, Contraception.” *Global News*, November 18, 2024. <https://globalnews.ca/news/10874979/quebec-abortion-pills-access/>.

What is the explicit message?	The Quebec Government wants to increase access to abortion pills considering past restrictions which were lifted in 2022
What is the implicit message?	Quebec is slower in terms of gender equality compared to other Canadian provinces
Discursive strategies used	Interviews, statistics
Assumptions made	N/A
What is being omitted?	How racialized women and Indigenous women are impacted by these policies
Governing themes/ideologies	Liberal feminism ▾

9. **Source:** McTeer, Maureen, and Catherine Clark. "Is The Work of Feminism Finished?" *The Globe and Mail*, March 7, 2016. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/is-the-work-of-feminism-finished/article29038566/>.

What is the explicit message?	Questions whether the objectives of feminism have been fully achieved, suggesting that while progress has been made, there is still work to be done
What is the implicit message?	Past generations of (white) women have done so much, meaning it is significantly easier for today's generation to achieve change
Discursive strategies used	Historical context, interview, expert point of view
Assumptions made	Achievements of feminism can be universally measured without considering intersectional differences + goals are homogenous and universally agreed upon
What is being omitted?	Perspectives from racialized peoples
Governing themes/ideologies	Liberal feminism ▾ Canadian exceptionalism ▾

10. **Source:** Reuters. "Canada Slips 4 Places on World Index Measuring Women's Equality," October 22, 2019. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/women-global-quality-of-life-ranking-1.5330967>.

What is the explicit message?	Canada has fallen four places in a global ranking that measures women's equality
What is the implicit message?	Countries who do well on this ranking are from the global core, while countries who do not are from the global periphery
Discursive strategies used	Expert point of view, study
Assumptions made	Global indexes are accurate reflections of the state of women's equality in a country + country's rank is a direct indicator of its commitment to gender equality
What is being omitted?	What specific factors are used to calculate a country's ranking
Governing themes/ideologies	Canadian exceptionalism ▾

- 11. Source:** Reuters. “Women Inch Towards Equal Legal Rights Despite COVID-19 Risks, World Bank Says.” *CTVNews*, November 25, 2024. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/world/article/women-inch-towards-equal-legal-rights-despite-covid-19-risks-world-bank-says/>.

What is the explicit message?	Women are making slow progress toward achieving equal legal rights, despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic
What is the implicit message?	Legal reforms are gradually being implemented to promote gender equality
Discursive strategies used	Expert point of view
Assumptions made	Legal rights automatically result in gender equality
What is being omitted?	How Covid-19 impacts racialized people and marginalized groups
Governing themes/ideologies	State benevolence ▾ Liberal feminism ▾

- 12. Source:** Roche, Catherine, and Nandini DasGupta. “How One Company’s Push for Gender Diversity Sparked Culture Change.” *The Globe and Mail*, March 8, 2016. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/rob-commentary/how-one-companys-push-for-gender-diversity-sparked-culture-change/article29054684/>.

What is the explicit message?	Company’s initiative to promote gender diversity led to significant positive changes in its organizational culture
What is the implicit message?	Corporate efforts toward gender diversity can result in broader cultural transformations within organizations
Discursive strategies used	Case study
Assumptions made	Corporate-led initiatives are effective means of achieving gender diversity. + changes in organizational culture are indicative of broader societal progress toward gender equality
What is being omitted?	Limitations of corporate diversity programs, experiences of marginalized employees
Governing themes/ideologies	Liberal feminism ▾

- 13. Source:** Sibbet, Justin. “New Lethbridge Military Museum Tour Honours Canada’s Women Who Served.” *Global News*, November 9, 2024. <https://globalnews.ca/news/10861632/lethbridge-military-museum-tour-canada-women-who-served/>.

What is the explicit message?	Lethbridge Military Museum has launched a new tour to honor and highlight the contributions of women who served in the military
What is the implicit message?	Military service is portrayed as empowering and as a form of national pride
Discursive strategies used	Historical context, personal stories
Assumptions made	Having more women in the military is indicative of a country’s dedication to gender equality
What is being omitted?	Critique of how women’s military service is instrumentalized to justify military expansion + colonial violence perpetuated by the Canadian Armed Forces + specific experiences of Indigenous and racialized women within the military
Governing themes/ideologies	State benevolence ▾ Respect of state ▾ Liberal feminism ▾ Canadian exceptionalism ▾ Military feminism ▾

- 14. Source:** Stechyson, Natalie. “Despite Gains, Women Still Do Most of the Housework. Will This Gender Gap Ever Narrow?” *CBC*, January 13, 2025. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/women-housework-division-labour-1.7426763>.

What is the explicit message?	Despite increased workforce participation, women continue to take care of the majority of household labour in Canada
What is the implicit message?	Cultural expectations sustain gendered division of labour
Discursive strategies used	Statistics, testimonies
Assumptions made	All mothers share a similar experience of balancing paid work and household labour
What is being omitted?	Experiences of racialized women + role of state policies in maintaining gendered division of labour
Governing themes/ideologies	State benevolence ▾ Liberal feminism ▾

15. Source: Stechyson, Natalie. “More Women Are the Breadwinners in Canadian Families—but Less so if They Have Kids.” *CBC*, December 1, 2024. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/work-women-motherhood-penalty-1.7395512>.

What is the explicit message?	Mothers in Canada face economic penalties due to their caregiving responsibilities
What is the implicit message?	Women’s professional value is diminished if they become mothers
Discursive strategies used	Expert point of view
Assumptions made	Women are solely responsible for balancing work and family life
What is being omitted?	Critique of capitalist system + experiences of non-traditional/marginalized families
Governing themes/ideologies	Liberal feminism ▾

Appendix IV: Detailed List of Official Records Analyzed

1. Government of Canada. "Airstrike history: Operation IMPACT in Iraq," *Department of National Defence*, July 21, 2017. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-impact/airstrike-history.html>
2. Government of Canada. "CAF operations and activities: Operation IMPACT in Iraq," *Department of National Defence*, September 30, 2021. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/transition-materials/caf-operations-activities/2020/03/caf-ops-activities/op-impact-iraq.html>
3. Government of Canada. "Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy," 2017. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2018/amc-gac/FR5-113-2018-eng.pdf
4. Government of Canada. "Canada's Middle East engagement strategy," *Global Affairs Canada*, February 2, 2024. https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/mena-moan/strategy-strategie.aspx?lang=eng
5. Government of Canada. "Canada's strategy for Iraq," *Global Affairs Canada*, August 13, 2021. https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/mena-moan/iraq-irak.aspx?lang=eng
6. Government of Canada. "Foundations for Peace: Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2023-2029," 2023. <https://www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/assets/pdfs/women-peace-security-femmes-paix-securite/2023-2029-foundation-peace-fondation-paix-en.pdf>
7. Government of Canada. "Operation IMPACT: Canada's military response to Daesh in Iraq and the region," *Department of National Defence*, May 17, 2023. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-impact.html>
8. Government of Canada. "Project profile – Work Empowerment for Women in Iraq," *Global Affairs Canada*. <https://w05.international.gc.ca/projectbrowser-banqueprojets/project-projet/details/P006009001>
9. Government of Canada. "Women, peace and security," *Global Affairs Canada*, May 8, 2024. https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/gender_equality-egalite_des_genres/women_peace_security-femmes_paix_securite.aspx?lang=eng

10. National Defence. “Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy,” 2017. <https://dgpaapp.forces.gc.ca/en/canada-defence-policy/docs/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>
11. NATO Association of Canada. “Operation IMPACT: A sit-down with Brigadier-General Colin Keiver,” September 10, 2019. <https://natoassociation.ca/operation-impact-a-sit-down-with-brigadier-general-colin-keiver/>
12. Trudeau, J. “Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s statement on Canada’s new approach to the ongoing crises in Iraq and Syria,” *Government of Canada*, February 8, 2016. <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2016/02/08/prime-minister-justin-trudeau-new-approach-address-ongoing-crises-iraq-and>

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<https://read-and-resist.org/2022/09/22/from-white-feminism-to-abolition-a-work-in-progress/>.
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