

Editorial:

## A Military-Industrial-Communications-Complex in Canada?

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The goal of this special issue of the *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition* is to insert the study of a military-industrial-communications-complex (MICC) into the field of Canadian communication studies. At present, the MICC is a blind spot in existing communication studies research, yet is an important object of theory and analysis, as well as an entity that militarizes the structure, conduct, and output of the communication and cultural environment of Canada. In this introduction we define the MICC and its significance in the political-economy of communication tradition; foreground the need for communication studies of the MICC in Canada; and briefly outline how each paper included in the issue contributes to research in this area of inquiry. We conclude with questions suggested for future research.

### **Contextualizing the Concept of the MICC**

In his foundational study *Mass Communications and American Empire*, the American political-economist of communication, Herbert I. Schiller (1969; 1992), used the concept of the “military-industrial-complex” (MIC) to analyze the relationships in the United States between the Department of Defense (DOD), industrial corporations, and colleges and universities. Schiller shared the concerns of former U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower that the “acquisition of unwarranted influence”, and the MIC’s conflation of military, industrial, and intellectual power would “endanger” American “democratic processes”, and he wanted the “councils of Government” and “an alert and knowledgeable citizenry” to guard against the MIC’s corruption of the Republic. As a political-economist of communication, Schiller (1991) was skeptical that citizens could become effectively knowledgeable about the MIC because the corporations that formed the base of the communications system, which were supposed to keep the public critically informed about it, had significant links to and interests in supporting and sustaining the

DOD's policy, personnel, and immense budget. As Schiller observed: the "same forces that have produced the military-industrial-complex in American society-at-large have accounted for the rise of a powerful sub-sector, but by no means miniature, complex in communications" (1969: 51). He thus emphasized the significance of communication by advancing what he called the Military-Industrial-Communications-Complex (MICC).

Schiller's study of the U.S. Empire's MICC documented how the DOD "channeled enormous funds from its astronomical budget into research and development on new information and communication technologies" (1992: 5), and how public resources were mobilized to underwrite these later-to-be-privatized information communication technologies (ICTs) ranging from computer electronics, to satellites, to the future infrastructure of the Internet. In addition, he highlighted how the DOD supported the economic growth and profit of the communication industry through procurement practices, which established an "enormous guaranteed market" for commercialized goods and services (1992: 95). Furthermore, Schiller noted how the DOD operated its own communication network, and was outsourcing public affairs and its "psychological operations" to big advertising and public relations firms, which, although reliant on "heavy taxpayer support", made significant revenue from them to produce war-glorifying products that "bestow[ed] legitimacy and respectability to the entire military program" (1992: 121-122).

In sum, Schiller's study of the MICC put forward a critically important account of how state military and defence subsidizes private communication firms, acts as a significant consumer of the services and goods sold by them, and collaborates with culture industry firms to produce military-promoting media products.

Though developed over four decades ago, Schiller's concept of the MICC has lasting descriptive and analytical value, as demonstrated by important political-economy of communication scholars (e.g., Levidow & Robins, 1989; Maxwell, 2003; Mosco, 1996; Schiller, 2011). The concept of the MICC asks researchers to unpack its multifaceted interconnections, operations, and concentrations of power, in its political-economic and socio-cultural relations. It encourages scholarship that attends to both its complexity and complications in four significant ways. First, the MICC helps to identify the extent of integration, networking, and private-public partnerships that bring a state's national security and geopolitical interests together with the profit-motives and economic interests of private communications corporations. Second, it prompts scholars to shed light on and examine the organizational and "institutional edifice of communications, electronics, and/or cultural industries" that link and connect the military with media and communications industry power (Maxwell, 2003: 32). Third, it centres on how territorial states and capitalist industries intersect to drive developments in new information and communication technology. Fourth, it attends to the economic and political source organizations that control the means of producing, distributing, and exhibiting war and military promoting media products. In these ways, research on the MICC aims to identify the MICC's dynamic power relations and contribute to alternative ways of making communication policy, rather than disregarding or further advancing it.

### **Considering the MICC in Canada**

Much political economy of communication's research to date has focused on the workings of a U.S.-specific MICC, and for this reason, *the* MICC tends to be exclusively associated with the U.S. Empire. While studies of the dominance of this MICC is imperative, our aim in proposing

this special issue was to localize its analysis in Canada, so as to enable comparative or cross-border analysis with and beyond the United States, and encourage communication scholarship to research its further (inter)national applicability.

A study of the MICC in Canada is significant today, especially in light of the growing emphasis on national defence and security, and critical political-economy research indicating significant shifts in the substance of Canadian national and foreign policy (e.g., Gordon, 2010; Greenspun & Shamsie, 2007; Klassen & Albo, 2012). From the Cold War, Canada was mythologized as a peaceable state, a liberal internationalist middle power whose foreign policy centred on benign peacekeeping, and the economic and social development of postcolonial states. Yet, in practice, the Canadian state has been much more “militaristic” and “imperialist” than was heretofore believed (Ibid). Since the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, this is undeniable: the Canadian state dutifully supported the operations of U.S. Empire in Afghanistan as part of an endless and boundless Global War on Terror; it pushed for a deepening of continental integration with the United States on behalf of Canadian corporations and as a matter of “national security”; and it attempted to sell its “Operation Enduring Freedom” to citizens who were far from compliant with or consenting to this war (e.g., Gabriel & MacDonald, 2004; Grinspun & Shamsie, 2004; Laxer, 2007; McQuaig, 2007). Set in this context, a focus on the MICC in Canada is timely and complementary to research in Canadian political-economy that itself tends to neglect the significance of communication.

Yet, even within the field of Canadian communication studies, the MICC is also a considerable blind-spot, particularly in the sub-area of research concerned with politics and policy. The focus of much Canadian communication policy research has been on the workings of federal regulatory institutions such as the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), Canadian Heritage, and provincial and municipal governmental agencies involved in shaping the country’s communication policy vis-à-vis public and private telecommunication companies and cultural organizations.

This concentration on traditional regulatory bodies means that other government policies and practices affecting communication can be overlooked. While the influence of Industry Canada is sometimes included, the policy, personnel, and practices of National Defence and Public Safety Canada generally fall outside of the scholarly purview of communication, and the role of the defence and security as a significant shaper of communication policy has been neglected. Even though these departments are not technically communication policy agencies, they possess and deploy significant resources and capacities for influencing the development and practices of communication; for communicating partial and selective ideas about what Canada is and is not to the public; and for shaping the structure, conduct, and output of the communication and cultural industries in Canada. Continued studies of the bureaucratic decision-making processes, practices, and effects of the federal communication policy-making and regulatory agencies (particularly the CRTC), and federal cultural promotion and protection agencies (such as Canadian Heritage) are vital, but National Defence’s communication and cultural practices and products, and the whole of the federal government’s defence and security policies, should be interrogated in a similar fashion, and their effects on the public and private communication entities that comprise Canada’s “single system” rendered visible.

However, the growing presence of defence and security in Canadian culture is beginning to influence critical scholarship. Jody Berland and Blake Fitzpatrick’s (2010) special issue of *TOPIA Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies: Cultures of Militarization* is a timely, novel, and critical example of research on the militarization of Canadian civic culture. The volume’s

contributors investigate a plurality of cultural processes that affirm, contest, or negotiate the growing presence of the military in national discourse, and break new ground in the field. Our issue offers a complementary focus on the institutions, policies, practices, and specific decision-makers that are implicated in the structures and discourses that militarize culture and the political economy of communication in Canada.

### **Initial Forays into the Canadian MICC**

As a contribution to this political economic focus, and to the field of Canadian communication in general, the papers published in this issue examine several different dimensions of the dynamics of the MICC in Canada. Using a combination of classical and cultural political-economy of communication methods and case studies, each author sheds light on the war-related state and corporate organizations that militarize ICTs, the commercial mediascape, and the very meaning of Canadian national identity in the past and early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Patricia Mazepa puts the contemporary MICC in Canada in historical relief by mapping the institutional intersections that draw the Canadian federal government, its military, and the ICT, defence, and security industries into relationships that reinforce and extend militarized capitalist control of communications. Kirsten Kozolanka examines how the Canadian Conservative government's domestic anti-terror communication strategies mobilize anxieties surrounding crime, defense, security, and immigration issues to foster a militarized national culture of fear, which further buttresses the workings of a militarized publicity state. Isabelle Gusse brings Jacques Ellul's theory of propaganda into the 21<sup>st</sup> century digital age with a sophisticated analysis of the how the messages and imagery carried by digital videos posted on the Canadian Army's website draw from and perpetuate dubious militarized myths to attract young people to military service. Tanner Mirrlees sheds light on the Canadian Armed Force's foray into the global battle-space of the Internet and its use of YouTube to serve its publicity goals.

In relation to MICC, this special issue of the *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition* provides also reviews of recent, relevant, and important books. The book reviews section starts with a review article, "Crisis and Resistance in the Age of Global Slump", by Sibö Chen, which reviews the three books: *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire* (2013), *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (2011), and *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crises and Resistance* (2010). The section also includes four individual book reviews. Stephen Brock Schafer reviews *Exchanging Terrorism Oxygen for Media Airwaves: The Age of Terroredia* (2014), Tracy Moniz reviews *Food will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front* (2014), Sibö Chen reviews *Yellow Ribbons: The Militarization of National Identity in Canada* (2013), and Byron Huack reviews *Empire's Ally, Canada and the War in Afghanistan* (2013).

In calling for research in this area, we had hoped to receive many more submissions to this special issue than we ultimately did. The dearth of submissions indicates not the unimportance of studies of the MICC in Canada, but the need for more examination and understanding of how militarization is reshaping the policies and practices of communication and how we understand "Canadian" society. In the U.S. communication and media studies scene, investigations, interrogations, and expositions of the U.S. MICC are understandingly more prevalent. We need to learn more about the Canadian (and greater international) context, however, and there is so much more work to be done. Our hope is to make an initial contribution

to this underdeveloped area of inquiry, and our goal is to encourage communication studies scholars to engage with these issues in the future.

### **Researching the MICC**

We thus conclude our introduction with three clusters of research questions meant to instigate further studies of the MICC in Canada:

- What are some past and present manifestations of the organizational and institutional links between the Canadian military, ICTs, and culture industry firms? What substantively links together the national defence and security concerns of the Canadian government with the profit-interests of communication and media corporations? What kinds of processes and practices advance or disrupt them? What (and how) do specific government and defence policies, research and development priorities, funding, or subsidies and procurement contracts influence ICT development and production, consumption and distribution?
- How does the MICC shape narratives, discourses, and images of Canada's past, present, and future? How is this connected to its political-economy? How do commercial media products represent Canadian foreign policy and the Canadian Armed Forces? What radio and television programs, advertising and public relations campaigns, news stories and digital media products contribute to the militarization of Canada and contribute to the militarization of capitalism? What state and corporate actors are responsible for their production and circulation?
- How do individuals and groups of activists use and develop ICTs to oppose or subvert the MICC? What digital media and cultural alternatives of resistance and opposition to militarization and war policy exist? Who made them, what are their similarities and differences, and how do they prefigure peaceful alternatives to the militarized state and militarized capitalism?

### **In Appreciation**

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**About the Editors**

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