

And they called it Poppy love...: The contestation and politicisation of the Royal British Legion's red poppy.

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This thesis is not a personal attack to anyone who served or serves within the British Armed Forces. Nor does it mean to offend anyone who has lost a loved one whilst serving in the British military. I write this as an academic who wishes to deconstruct and question a symbol of deep cultural heritage. Hence, I feel it is important to highlight this sentiment as I am aware of the close alignment some may have with the red poppy.

“Capable, generous men do not create victims, they nurture victims.”

Julian Assange.

Abbreviations

Co-operative Women's Guild – CWG

Royal British Legion – RBL

WWI – World War I

WWII – World War II

Abstract

The red poppy is Britain's ubiquitous symbol of remembrance and has been for over a hundred years. Since its inception, it has been passed down through generations as an inherent cultural and social symbol commemorating British military personnel. Beginning in World War I, the red poppy has transcended to become a symbol encompassing all British conflicts. All the while, maintaining the narratives instilled from World War I. Despite the red poppy's symbolic expansion, it has remained a profoundly popular symbol in British society, falsely characterising it as apolitical. The red poppy's commemoration and linkage with British militarism since 1921 has seen it come to commemorate colonial, decolonial, and postcolonial conflicts.

This thesis's research will analyse the journey of the red poppy from its first major contestation until its contemporary introduction and inculcation in the English Premier League. I will argue that from 1933, the white poppy has become increasingly politicised, analysing themes that have become attached to the poppy through its symbolic expansion to all British military conflicts. This thesis will explore who and why individuals and groups are excluded from its symbolism. In addition, the subsequent politicisation caused by this has plagued the poppy's seemingly innocent symbolism. The causes and effects of introducing the red poppy into British football in 2008 represent a seismic shift indicating the veracious political nature of the poppy. Not only this but through the statements of two Premier League footballers, the poppy's political undertones can be assessed through each player's reasoning not to sport a poppy. Their experiences, reasoning, and backlash for their decision denote the red poppy as a profound symbol in British cultural heritage but also inherently political from its inception.

This thesis will unpack this contemporary culmination of the poppy's politicisation as the poppy moves away from its commemorative purpose onto a problematic road of national, exceptionalist, identity politics.

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Research Question	6
Theoretical concepts	7
Historiography	9
Methodology	15
Chapter One: Red or White	18
In Flanders Field: The Origin of the Red Poppy	19
A Contested Symbol: The Red Poppy's First Criticism Prior to 1933	20
White Poppy – the poppy's earliest contestation following 1933	22
Early Years: First Signs of Contestation	23
Sensationalist Development	29
Rise of War 1936 - 1937	33
Conclusion	35
Chapter Two: Apolitical?	37
World War II – A New Age for Commemoration	37
Narratives and Myths of War	38
Red Poppy Remembrance Discourse	39
Identity	40
British Exceptionalism	41
Exclusion	42
Women	43
Civilians and Victims	44
The Enemy?	44
Conclusion	45
Chapter Three – Football and the Poppy	47
"Commemorative Turn"	47
The Roots of the Poppy's Implementation 2006 – 2009	49
The Solution – The Football Jersey and the Poppy	51
James McClean	53
Nemanja Matic	55
The Importance of Both	56
International Perspective	57
Conclusion	59
Conclusion	60
Bibliography	63

Introduction

“Your deeds would shame all the devils in Hell – Ireland, Iraq, Afghanistan”.¹ These are the words Celtic supporters displayed on a banner in 2010 at Celtic Park. It highlights the problematic relationship between football, symbols, and politics as they protest their team wearing a commemorative red poppy to remember British military personnel. Following the end of World War I, the Royal British Legion have been the nations “custodian of remembrance” through the sale of the red poppy starting in 1921.² The red poppy’s politics have been distinguishable since its creation and continued to evolve minimally until a decisive surge in 1933. Today, the red poppy constitutes the hegemonic symbol of national military commemoration from World War I to Afghanistan as well as a distinct symbol of British identity and culture. The narratives, or myths, from World War I have been extended to all British military conflicts, establishing a popular narrowed perception of the British military. The collective national ritual on November 11th, or ‘Remembrance Day’, is celebrated annually to commemorate the heroism of British soldiers who fought since the beginning of World War I. Remembrance Day possesses a significant prominence in British culture and the red poppy is the central symbol of this. Despite the poppy being generally perceived as an apolitical symbol, there is an undeniable political essence to the poppy which has been embedded in British culture for over a hundred years.³ Contestations with rivalling commemorative symbols, the expansion of its military inclusivity, and the red poppy’s increased inculcation through football demonstrates a politicisation process this thesis will unravel. This thesis will delve into the poppy’s transitions and the methods in which it has expanded to become the hegemonic symbol of military remembrance, through a chronological analysis of its increased politicisation throughout the past decades.

The RBL’s red poppy has a profoundly symbolic place in British cultural memory but also British society. From a young age Britons are exposed and induced into its remembrance practices, normalising its symbolism and message. Thus, this thesis is incredibly relevant to British society. Fundamentally, this thesis will display how the poppy’s narrow symbolism

¹ Sportsmail reporter, “Red-faced Celtic Apologise After Supporters Launch Shameful ‘Bloodstained’ Poppy Protest,” *Mail Online*, November 9, 2010, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-1327712/Celtic-apologise-fans-bloodstained-poppy-protest.html>.

² Victoria, Basham, “Gender, Race, Militarism and Remembrance: The Everyday Geopolitics of the Poppy,” *Gender, Place and Culture* 23, No. 6 (Routledge, 2016): 885.

³ Daniel Fitzpatrick, “‘Football Remembers’ – the Collective Memory of Football in the Spectacle of British Military Commemoration,” *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 16 No. 1, (2021): 58.

promotes a one-sided outlook on remembrance which no longer correlates with Britain's multiculturalism. Furthermore, by doing this, this thesis will build on and revitalise prior scholarship on the red poppy's symbolism through emphasising the importance of looking at the first contestations and how they culminated into the contemporary politicisation.

Research Question

How has contestation towards the Royal British Legion's red poppy contributed to the expansion and subsequent politicisation of its symbolism?

The British public have been wearing the red poppy to honour the casualties of British military conflicts since 1921. It is because of this the red poppy has obtained a specialised status in British cultural heritage which has enabled it to wear a cloak of apoliticality. Despite this, the poppy is inherently political. A crucial element displaying the poppy's political undertones can be discovered through the symbol's contestation. This thesis will expose the poppy politicisation through analysis of its contestation and expansion into new spheres of cultural, national, and social sphere. Three sub-questions will extend from this research question and categorised into three distinctive chapters that highlight the politicisation of a seemingly apolitical symbol.

1 – To what extent can a critical discourse analysis of the contestation between the red and white poppy in British newspapers from 1933-1937 unveil a process of evolution and politicisation for the red poppy?

This sub-research question will digress into the aggressive competition between the two symbolic poppies. Answering this question will deconstruct the contestation into three distinct periods, highlighting how denunciations towards the white poppy aided by newspapers ensured a development the red poppy's symbolism and its earliest signs of political contestation.

2 – How did the conjoining and extension of the red poppy's symbolism and narratives to all British armed conflict affect the politicisation process of the red poppy?

The second chapter takes a more thematic approach as it explores the conjoining of conflicts under one umbrella and how it has resulted in a substantial shift in the red poppy's politicisation. Building on the myths of war the poppy sustained throughout the 20th century,

the poppy has maintained its societal and cultural relevance whilst adopting new relevancy sanctifying British militarism.

3 – Using the English Premier League as a case study, to what extent has the red poppy’s incorporation into British football displayed a contemporary contestation and climax of the red poppy’s politicisation.

The utilisation of football to promote the poppy’s symbolism can be observed as the pinnacle case study of the poppy’s politicisation. Using the statements and narratives of two international footballers, this question will display how the polarisation and politicisation of the poppy has compromised the apolitical façade of the red poppy.

These sub-research questions will divide this thesis’s research to delegate the politicisation across three unique spheres. As a result, these chapters will facilitate a core argument to answer the research question.

Theoretical concepts

This thesis will not be regulated to a single comprehensive theory. Instead, it will build on several theoretical concepts that have become inherent to the red poppy’s remembrance and theories that give root to its contestation. The theories used for this thesis’s analysis will have more prominence at different periods due to the expansion of the red poppy in differing contextual periods. For example, the theoretical concept of otherism, despite being inherent in the red poppy’s narrative, has greater prominence in the later stages of this thesis during an analysis of the contemporary period. The fragility of the red poppy’s symbolism and the nuanced interpretation means that certain theories are more relevant in different periods.

This thesis will utilise Anna Liddle’s theoretical concept of *Red Poppy Remembrance Discourse* (RPRD) on top of other mentioned concepts to strengthen the scope of this theory.⁴ RPRD essentialises on an even platform those remembered and forgotten within the red poppy’s remembrance rituals. Liddle’s theory, like this thesis, will build on theories such as imperialism, identity, and cultural heritage. Therefore, this thesis will be distinguished in its use of the theory by applying it to contestations surrounding the red poppy’s symbolism.

⁴ Anna Liddle, “‘Your School Needs You to Buy a Poppy’: Dominance and Fragility in School Remembrance Practices,” *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice* (Sheffield, 2023): 2.

Liddle applied her theory to the role of remembrance rituals in schools. However, this thesis will use it to analyse and define how the narrowness of the red poppy's remembrance practice transcends into its symbolism and subsequent role in generating contestation. It is worth noting that RPRD is a new theory, so this thesis seeks to build on its conclusions. Especially concerning the narrowness of the remembrance and symbolism of the red poppy and how this aids in sanitising and normalising British militarism, making the poppy inherently political.

Michel Foucault's 'counter-memory' theory is a vital concept for deconstructing the exclusion and silencing aspect of the red poppy within this thesis.⁵ Foucault's notion suggests that collective memory-making naturally causes parties or groups to become excluded from the memory it prolongs. Regarding the red poppy, this thesis will use this theory to unpack the red poppy's symbolism to analyse who and why groups feel subjugated from its remembrance discourse. The essence of militaristic remembrance and memory of the red poppy projects is wholly one-sided chiefly due to it specifically being dedicated to British personnel. Through this theory's application, this thesis demonstrates how the red poppy is fundamentally political. Its expansiveness throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and the red poppy's symbolic sustaining of WWI and WWII narratives display a profound growth in the theory's relevance. Foucault's 'counter-memory' concept exemplifies the basis of who is left out of poppy remembrance, displaying the poppy's political, partisan, and one-sided identity.

The British Legion's red poppy for over a hundred years has been an ineradicable part of British cultural identity. Its long history has enabled its symbolism to be fluid and unstable.⁶ As a result, varying theoretical concepts have been adopted and connected to the poppy through its historiography, ritualistic practice, and public perception. The red poppy's location in British cultural heritage is intrinsically connected to British identity. Hence, this is a crucial contributing theoretical concept of this thesis. The red poppy's perpetuation of British national identity has enabled other theoretical concepts to come to fruition. Giving rise to themes such as British exceptionalism and ethnocentrism that correlate with the red poppy's narrowed remembrance discourse. These themes are vital analysing the red poppy's symbolism as they have been inherent since its inception and a central point to its

⁵ Michel Foucault, "Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews," ed. Donald Bouchard, *Cornell University Press* (1977).

⁶ Maggie Andrews, "Poppies, Tommies and Remembrance: Commemoration is Always Contested," *Soundings: A Journal of Politics and Culture* 58 (2014): 109.

contemporary contestation. They highlight the poppy's embedded role in British cultural heritage and are vital for understanding the exclusion process of the red poppy this thesis addresses.

Otherism is a primary theory which acts as an extension of all the preceding theories above.⁷ Otherism becomes a particularly influential theory as it is rooted in why one would want to contest the red poppy's symbolism. Like national identity being inherent to the red poppy's symbolism, the diversification of Britain, British conflicts, and thus who is or isn't included within its symbolism puts the concept of otherism as an inherently profound theory. Therefore, this supports the notion that the red poppy's symbolism is narrow. Otherism will become a primary concept when investigating the reasoning for why selected footballers choose not to sport the poppy on their football shirts.

Historiography

The red poppy has prompted much academic work and research over the past two decades. Despite the British Legion's red poppy being over a hundred years old, historiographical research seems to have only come to fruition due to several anniversaries, controversies, and politically laden events. As the red poppy witnessed its one-hundred-year birthday in 2021, so did World War I in 1914 bringing forth a host of scholarly literature. Beginning in 2008, the scope of academic work varies greatly with different authors utilising differing lenses leading up to the contemporary period.

Jennifer Iles highlights the poppy's role as the "de factor custodian of remembrance" and begins the first big wave of academic work on the Flanders poppy's symbolism.⁸ Her research seeks to analyse the contributing factors that have perpetuated the poppy allowing it to become a respected symbol of remembrance for war dead. Using ethnographic fieldwork from battlefields in Flanders, the research discusses the poppy's controversies alongside its sustained symbolic power.⁹ Iles's work comes after a spiralling debate in British media. Jon Snow's refusal to wear a poppy on Channel 4 news, which he regarded as 'poppy fascism' becomes a central source of popular contestation for wearing the poppy.¹⁰ Lucy Noakes

⁷ Lajos Bron, "Othering, an Analysis," *Transcience* 5, no. 1 (2015): 69.

⁸ Jennifer Iles, "In Remembrance – The Flanders Poppy," *Mortality* 13, No. 3 (August 2008): 201.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ John Snow, "Why I don't wear a poppy on Tv," accessed 22 June, 2024, [Why I don't wear a poppy on air – Jon Snow – Channel 4 News](#).

builds on research into the red poppy's symbolism.¹¹ Noakes expands on Iles' framework of WWI remembrance and through a lens of memory underlines how memorials and commemorations are laden with controversies. Through the case study of Wootton Bassett, 'the political minefield', Noakes explores emotions felt at remembrance rituals, highlighting who is left out.¹² Not only this, but she also aligns the memory of World War I with the 'war on terror', displaying the contestation of poppy day commemorations and the poppy's expansion into far-right spheres and politics.¹³

The centenary of the beginning of WWI gave rise to another large wave of literature on the poppy, with authors studying the poppy through a lens of cultural heritage. Maggie Andrews expressively claims the influence of World War I and the "emotional and financial investment" that comes with commemorative rituals and symbols.¹⁴ She denotes the complexity of the remembrance and the poppy's symbol aligning with this, building on the symbolism narrative of Iles. The poppy's unstable symbolism has caused Britain's "obsession" with remembrance and myths of war to become inherent to the national narrative and cultural identity of Britain.¹⁵ Despite Andrews minimally investigating the politics of the poppy and focusing more on its place in British culture, James Fox centres on the role of the poppy in politics. Fox uses football as a case study to support his argument, highlighting FIFA's refusal of political symbols on jerseys. It should be noted that during this time two players refused to wear the poppy on the kit and received subsequent backlash.¹⁶ He displays his political critique of the poppy through two main factors. Firstly, the poppy's profound location in British cultural heritage in less than one hundred years.¹⁷ Not only this but the cultural force the poppy possesses. This leads to his second point, which shows the backlash

¹¹ Lucy Noakes, "The Politics of Poppy Day," OpenDemocracy, January 25, 2010, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opensecurity/politics-of-poppy-day/>.

¹² Since 2007 Wootton Bassett has hosted small ceremonies in honour of hearses driving through the small town from RAF Lyneham. A public silence occurs, traffic comes to a halt and church bells ring in honour of the military dead passing through. Controversies began during this sombre occasion in 2009 after Nick Griffin, leader of a far-right nationalist party joined the commemoration on November 10th. The year after more controversies surrounded the occasion as Islam 4UK threatened a counter protests co commemorated the deaths of Afghani civilians in the conflict.

¹³ Noakes, "The Politics of Poppy Day."

¹⁴ Andrews, "Poppies, Tommies and Remembrance," 104.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Alan Smith, "Wigan's James McClean explains refusal to wear poppy against Bolton," *The Guardian*, November 7, 2014, [Wigan's James McClean explains refusal to wear poppy against Bolton | Wigan Athletic | The Guardian](#).

¹⁷ James Fox, "Poppy Politics: Remembrance of Things Present," *Cultural Heritage Ethics, Between Theory and Practice* (2014): 22.

and uproar towards any challenge to the red poppy.¹⁸ Fox does assert the notion, however, that it is hard to prove if the poppy was or has been hijacked by politicians to justify international conflicts.¹⁹ Victoria Basham, in her feminist critique of the red poppy in 2015, contests this notion. Basham demonstrates how the poppy supports narratives of soldiers being heroes, and thus makes it harder to question the violence and controversies perpetuated.²⁰ To put simply, the poppy is used to sanitise the public of the horrors of war. She emphasises and expands on Iles' earlier point about the mythologising of the World Wars to enable this sanitisation and evaluates these myths for being profoundly masculine.²¹ An essence which has become inherent to the poppy's symbol despite feminine inception and a key point of contestation.

Scholarship of the poppy during the centenary period was interrupted by a major domestic political event in 2016. Despite being the one-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, a new impetus for academic research towards the poppy took centre stage - the Brexit referendum. This generated a new academic wave focusing on the intrinsics of the poppy within a fragile British national identity. Thus, this wave of academic research is unique for its nationalist lens. Building on the previous waves, through this lens the red poppy's close ties to the national identity is explored. Emily Barrett contextualises the poppy's symbol throughout time to historicise the poppy. She emphasises the materiality of the poppy, its correlation with changing narratives and associations, as well as the unpredictable transformation of its symbolism.²² Subsequently, Barrett concludes that the poppy's material reflects the poppy's role and efficiency in encouraging national identity.²³ Paul Breen adds to this notion. He concurs with the growth of the poppy symbolism within national identity but underlines the problematic nature of having a symbol attached to British nationalism.²⁴ Concluding that the poppy is political, he emphasises the perspective that the majority of British society perceives the poppy as apolitical.²⁵ Following the poppy's

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Fox, "Poppy Politics," 27.

²⁰ Basham, "Gender, Race, Militarism and Remembrance," 892.

²¹ Basham, "Gender, Race, Militarism and Remembrance," 885-886.

²² Emily Barrett, "The Poppy: Contextualising a Seemingly Timeless Symbol in History, Material and Practice," *Honors Capstone Project 5* (Spring 2016): 65.

https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone/970?utm_source=surface.syr.edu%2Fhonors_capstone%2F970&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages.

²³ Barrett, "The Poppy," 63.

²⁴ Paul Breen, "Poppies are a Political Symbol Both on and off the Football Pitch," *The Conversation*, November 6, 2016, [Poppies are a political symbol – both on and off the football pitch \(theconversation.com\)](https://theconversation.com/poppies-are-a-political-symbol-both-on-and-off-the-football-pitch).

²⁵ Ibid.

controversies within the footballing sphere, his work centralises around the poppy's nationalist tropes within the world of football. This comes after both England and Scotland were fined by FIFA during their World Cup qualifying match for wearing a red poppy on a black armband.²⁶ It is important to note that these sources focus on nationalism but do not directly mention Brexit, rather a topic of nationalism displaying the abundance of discussion of identity and nationalism. However, a year later, Maggie Andrews published another article. Her second article on the poppy concentrates on the political side of the poppy and its influence within an increasingly nationalistic and xenophobic climate in Britain.²⁷ Expanding on her myths of war arguments from 2014, she highlights the introduction of other poppies, like the black poppy.²⁸ She underlines the impetus of the black poppy being a response to how contested remembrance remains and how the far-right “peddles an inaccurate but pervasive version of the First and Second World Wars”.²⁹ Aligning it with the right-wing rhetoric of a “glorious pre-mass-immigration past”.³⁰ Brexit was a catalyst for a rise in cultural politics, and she warns that as Brexit negotiations continue, there is a hope that a correlation between the red poppy remembrance and the far-right ease.

The academic research post-2020 surrounds the discourse of the red poppy within the theatre of a fractured Britain, not to mention an increasingly fragile and contested British identity. Much of this academic research aims to deconstruct the aggressive nationalism linked with the poppy in a post-Brexit setting through a sport's nationalistic lens. Alexandre Christoyannopoulos applies a pacifist critique of the poppy, revealing his opinion that the poppy is a militaristic symbol ostracising many people including pacifists.³¹ Expanding on Andrews, and the myths of the World Wars, he analyses the permissibility of the poppy through the study of tag lines, like ‘Never again’ and ‘Lest we forget’.³² The latter being in

²⁶ “England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland Request to Wear Poppies,” *BBC News Sport*, accessed February 15, 2024, [England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland request to wear poppies - BBC Sport](#).

²⁷ Maggie Andrews, “British Practices of Remembrance: Politics and Poppies,” *British Politics Review – Journal of the British Politics Society* 12, No.2 (Spring 2017): 5, http://eprints.worc.ac.uk/5888/1/British%2520Politics%2520Review%252002_2017.pdf.

²⁸ Black Poppy Rose, launched in 2010. “Created to be a symbol that represents the contributions made by the African/Black/West Indian/Caribbean/Pacific Islands & Indigenous communities to various wars since the 16th century. A symbol that signifies pride, honour and glory, with the hope that future generations will be inspired by these largely untold historical legacies.” – Black Poppy Rose, “About us,” accessed May 18, 2024. [About Us – BlackPoppyRose](#).

²⁹ Andrews, “British Practice of Remembrance,” 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, “A Pacifist Critique of the Red Poppy: Reflections on British War Commemorations’ Increasingly Hegemonic Militarism,” *Critical Military Studies* 9, no. 3 (2021): 342.

³² Christoyannopoulos, “A Pacifist Critique of the Red Poppy,” 339.

his words an elevation of soldiers as ‘sacrificial heroes’ of British values.³³ Through a comparison, he declared the poppy’s vast expansiveness of militaristic narratives has allowed the poppy to drift, becoming a stern hegemonic and patriotic symbol. Daniel Fitzpatrick puts the spotlight on the ‘Britishness’ and the growing sense of a crisis following Brexit and how it is enacted within an increasing ‘spectacularization’ of British football.³⁴ Reiterating points made by Christonyannopoulos on the growing militarism, he refers to football becoming a ‘site of memory’ and labelling the Royal British Legion as ‘memory entrepreneurs’.³⁵ However, firstly Fitzpatrick’s article differs by the in-depth study of football commemorations and the poppy’s utility of football as a strategic means to protect military remembrance.³⁶ Secondly, building on Basham’s ‘masculinity’ narrative, he denotes the poppy’s position within football as a conjoining of masculine narratives of war within a highly economic masculinised sport - trivialising, manipulating, and distorting the experience of war through the beautiful game.³⁷ Archer and Matheson build on the nationalistic themes of Fitzpatrick using the term ‘emotional imperialism’ in the title of their 2022 analysis of the poppy. In this sense, arguing that the enforcement of the poppy violates one’s rights, allowing one to become a target of discrimination and hate.³⁸ Demonstrating the poppy’s ‘partisan nature’, they underline the enforcement of the poppy within the media and football as an impetus for its polarisation.³⁹ Emphasising concepts of imperialism, this work is unique in the sense it relates to the connection of the poppy and imperialism as well as the subsequent contestation it causes.

Anna Liddle and her research into the role and feasibility of the red poppy within schools displays where the current research of the poppy is located. Building on the previous literature, Liddle’s case study is unique in the sense it identifies, what she labels, “Red Poppy Remembrance Discourse”.⁴⁰ The narrowness of military commemorations regarding who is involved and forgotten is inherent to commemorations in British schools and becomes intertwined with nationalistic messages.⁴¹ A process supporting and maintaining the notion

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Fitzpatrick, “Football Remembers,” 57.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Fitzpatrick, “Football Remembers,” 72.

³⁷ Fitzpatrick, “Football Remembers,” 74.

³⁸ Alfred Archer, Benjamin Matheson, “Commemoration and Emotional Imperialism,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 35, no. 5 (2022): 770.

³⁹ Archer, Matheson, “Emotional Imperialism,” 766.

⁴⁰ Liddle, “Your School Needs You to Buy a Poppy,” 2.

⁴¹ Ibid.

that the poppy is apolitical, the discourse turns a blind eye on educating children on the horrors and victims of war. Liddle opens new ways of researching the poppy by correlating the poppy's politics and symbolism with the British education system. John Kelly's 2023 publication demonstrates a unique linkage between remembrance practices in sport in the UK and US. Building on narratives and myths established from previous waves of academic research, Kelly demonstrates how military commemoration practices display an inculcation that seeks to not only justify war, but imply that war needs no justification.⁴²

Academic research surrounding the symbolism on the red poppy will take up the majority of this thesis' historiography. However, it is crucial to highlight other academic research which relates to recurring themes and concepts. The academic research within this section gravitates towards a memory lens, as it deconstructs theories of memory and how memories projected into social spheres. Jay Winter has significantly influenced poppy academia. Her concept of the 'memory boom', not only aids in providing an analytical framework in this thesis but many of the proceeding works. Winters lays the foundations of memory research deriving from the Holocaust and shows how holocaust commemorations have become problematic through its mixing with other commemorative rituals.⁴³ Highlighting the processes of memory and how the dissemination of experiences over time leads to myths of war becoming prioritised over the experiences and horrors of war. Myths that express national identity and have been supported by state agents which legitimise British exceptionalism and ethnocentrism.⁴⁴ Winter's work provides an important innovation for the study of memory and the deconstruction of the poppy's political nature. Andrew Hoskins builds on Jay Winter's theoretical framework by identifying the 'obsession' with commemoration of triumphs and traumas of twentieth century conflicts as a driving force.⁴⁵ Hoskins, and his analysis of British tabloids, displays the role newspapers play in generating a correlation of past and current events. By using images and testimonies from the London Blitz, newspapers have compared the Blitz to the 7/11 London bombings. This analysis reflects the role newspapers play to fuel a collective sentiment by relating to national and cultural memories. In addition to this, Hoskins research links newspapers and memory

⁴² John Kelly, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Military-Related Remembrance Rhetoric in UK Sport: Communicating Consent for British Militarism," *Communication & Sport* 2023, 11, No. 1 (2023): 208.

⁴³ Jay Winter, "The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the "Memory Boom" in Contemporary Historical Studies," *Canadian Military History* 10, No.3 (2001): 58.

⁴⁴ Winter, "The Generation of Memory", 59.

⁴⁵ Andrew Hoskins, "Media and the Closure of the Memory Boom," in *Media and Nostalgia, Yearning for the Past, Present and Future* ed. Katharina Niemeyer, (Palgrave Macmillan, London) 118.

underlining their role as memory entrepreneurs and myth builders. Whilst Winter bases her research on conceptual analysis and Hoskins uses a methodological approach towards tabloid newspapers, Kathrin Bachleitner chiefly focuses on the politics of memory. Her recent work symbolises the contemporary discussions on the politics of memory thus making it an essential source for the study of poppy politicisation. Putting emphasis on the states sanctioning of memory, she displays how useful memory is for legitimising national politics in a ‘domestic political struggle’.⁴⁶ In the case of this thesis, legitimising the myths of war as collective memory and the political struggle being the British identity crisis and Brexit.

Historiography regarding the symbolism of the poppy and academic work focusing on concepts that influence remembrance have increased substantially within the last decade. Through analysis of the red and white poppy discourse through 1930s British newspapers and identifying to what extent the poppy has been politicised from its contestation as well as the expansion in British cultural identity, this thesis will add an innovative methodological approach to the historiography. This approach will present the Legion’s red poppy as a highly and unquestionably political symbol. Evoking the polarisation caused through its symbolism and utility since the 1930s. Subsequently, the research will build off the ‘memory boom’ and how Britain’s obsession with remembrance has enabled a hijacking of the red poppy as a means to promote identity. This hijacking has added to the further destabilisation of the poppy’s symbolism, enhancing its fragility and politicisation.

Methodology

The United Kingdom is made up of four distinct and differing nations with their own culture and identity, despite having a shared cultural history. British identity and English identity are objectively very different. However, as the poppy is a British symbol this thesis will broadly relate to the poppy’s place in British society, culture, and identity, despite varying degrees of support and relatability. Therefore, this thesis will not restrict analysis to a specific region in Britain. Rather, it will take geographical location into account when analysing a regional newspaper. This thesis will apply a critical discourse analysis to deconstruct regional, national, and tabloid newspaper articles surrounding the contestation between the red and white poppy. To exemplify, The *Richmond Herald*, on November 4th 1933, denoted the sale

⁴⁶ Katharin Bachleitner, “Memory of International Diplomacy,” In *Handbook on the Politics of Memory*, ed. Maria Mälksoo (April 2023): 246.

of the white poppy on “Poppy Day” as an “Insult to the dead and an injury to the living”.⁴⁷ Thus, this discourse analysis will highlight salient words like “Insult” and “Injury” to understand the sentiment towards the contestation and comprehend the level of denunciation. In addition, it will exhibit the vocabulary used in the titles of articles when necessary. A theme throughout this discourse analysis is the growing global militarism from 1933 - 1937. Thus, making note of other relatable news stories regarding these issues, such as “delegates to visit Germany”, will feature a linkage between the contestation between the red and white poppies.⁴⁸

Studying regional, national, and tabloid newspapers will provide a greater variety in the scope of the contestation. Regional newspapers exhibit personal stories and opinions on both the red and white poppies, channelled through personal experiences of WWI and their interpretations of the significance and meaning of each poppy’s symbolism. The *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Telegraph* showcase the discourse with a sensationalist tabloid narration. Tabloid newspapers offer an insightful source for this thesis’s critical discourse analysis, as the readership of each newspaper will be much greater than regional newspapers like the *Richmond Herald*. Subsequently, tabloids will underline a shift in rhetoric and offer a new dimension of contestation analysis.

The British Newspaper Archive has been the chief source for researching the discourse between the red and white poppy through their extensive archive. Keyword searches for ‘white poppy’, ‘red poppy’, ‘Armistice’, and ‘remembrance’ within November have taken up the bulk of this paper’s primary source analysis. Applying this to each year between 1933 and 1937 has been an effective method of analysing the discourse, correlating with geopolitical events in the build-up to World War II. Habermas and his concept of “the public sphere”, embrace a realm where public opinion is formed, emphasising the role of the media in attempting to be the voice of public opinion.⁴⁹ This is an influential theme for the methodological processes of this thesis, as the discourse of the contestation between both poppies has profoundly influenced how the public perceives each poppy’s symbolism.

⁴⁷ “White Poppies,” *Richmond Herald*, 4 November 1933, 20.

⁴⁸ “Attacks on Lord Haig,” *The Daily Telegraph*, June 11, 1935, 6.

⁴⁹ Rodney Benson, “Shaping the Public Sphere: Habermas and Beyond,” *The American Sociologist* 40, (2009): 180.

Chapter One: Red or White

The Red Poppy - also referred to as Haig's poppy - is Britain's custodian of military remembrance.⁵⁰ Due to its nature as a remembrance symbol and its links to fragile topics of identity and memory, the red poppy - like many other symbols - has received criticism ever since its initiation. However, its contemporary place as a symbol of exceptionally heightened politicisation has its origins in 1933, when the white poppy was created and sold as a symbol of remembrance and peace. The creation and sale of the white poppy in 1933 reflects the first major contestation towards the Royal British Legion's red poppy. The sale of the white poppy by the Co-operative Women's Guild created a perceived competition between both poppies. What they symbolise, who they represent, and their differing aims are central points of contestation surrounding Remembrance Day in the 1930s and continues to this day. In this chapter, a critical discourse analysis of British newspapers from 1933 until 1937 underlines the first major debate on the red poppy's symbolism and represents a crucial first stage of its politicisation. The inception of the white poppy will display the red poppy's symbolic fragility whilst exposing it to be a vital symbol embedded in British cultural heritage. As the 1930s progresses, and the threat of another global conflict rises, the white poppy gained greater respect. However, this is not without a vast amount of criticism to its advocates, creators, and sellers. This contestation has aided in firstly politicising the red poppy and attributed to it becoming the hegemonic symbol of military remembrance. Through its sustaining of narratives experienced in World War I, which becomes an inherent signature of the red poppy's symbolism, this critical discourse analysis will deconstruct the discourse found in British newspapers to highlight the beginning of its extensive politicisation. This will be done firstly by introducing the origins of the red poppy - its symbolic illustrations through war time poems - followed by a look at initial criticism surrounding the red poppy's symbolism prior to the 1930s - before finally exploring the first major contestation of the red poppy with the creation and sale of the white poppy which are divided into three distinct periods of contestation.

⁵⁰ Basham, "Gender, Race, Militarism and Remembrance," 884.

In Flanders Field: The Origin of the Red Poppy

*In Flanders Fields, the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,
In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.⁵¹*

Since 1921, the Red Poppy - also referred to as Haig's poppy has been Britain's custodian of military remembrance.⁵² For the following decade, it was the uncontested symbol of World War I commemoration, chiefly due to its abundance in Flanders field inspiring poets on the front lines, growing in war-torn fields where thousands had fallen and acting as a "fitting metaphor for this extraordinarily brutal war".⁵³ *In Flanders Field*, written by Canadian poet John McCrae in Ypres (Flanders), found his words witnessing the wild poppies blooming around the grave of his closest friend.⁵⁴

⁵¹ John McCrae, "In Flanders Field," *Poetry Foundation*, accessed March 5, 2024, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47380/in-flanders-fields>.

⁵² Basham, "Gender, Race, Militarism and Remembrance," 884.

⁵³ Christoyannopoulos, "A Pacifist Critique of the Red Poppy," 326.

⁵⁴ Government of Canada, "Canada Virtual War Memorial," accessed March 4, 2024, <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/Detail/84214>.

The poem, whilst open to interpretation, suggests that as death litters the allies on the front line, there is still life on Flanders field through the poppy. A metaphor of rejuvenation amongst the vast amount of uncontrollable death, the poem elicits a romanticism representative of the earlier stages of the war. It would serve as a beacon for those away from the battlefield, in this case, those in America. Moina Belle Micheal began the sale of red poppies because of McCrae's poem.⁵⁵ Michael's initiative to commemorate those who died during the Great War spread across the Atlantic, winning the hearts of the British Legion who adopted its symbolism.

World War I violently consumed European and international states, altering the fabric of everyday life during and after the war.⁵⁶ There was without doubt every need to establish an acknowledgement of the sacrifice and consequences of the war. Modern warfare caused disfigurements, shell shock, and unrecognisable dead bodies to be recovered or lost into the earth. The tomb of the unknown soldier, the creation of cenotaphs across Britain and Remembrance Sunday all became central to the remembrance of the Great War. All shared the rhetoric that this would be the war to end all wars, centralising on the point that nothing as bloody and absolute can happen again. Nine million poppies were ordered during the first remembrance weekend, underlining the desire to commemorate such calamitous bloodshed and the popularity of a dedicated symbol to the memory of British casualties of WWI.⁵⁷ It became the principal symbol of war commemoration and reflected a shared nationalised attitude towards the experience of WWI.

A Contested Symbol: The Red Poppy's First Criticism Prior to 1933

Before delving into the creation of the white poppy and the first major point of contestation that showed the red poppy's earliest politicisation, the red poppy's politics have been distinguishable since its creation prior to 1933. Despite the vast support and popularity of the British Legion's red poppy, it has received criticism since its inception. Like many other symbols, its controversies and support have evolved through time, aligning with differing narratives by differing generations. Not only will this be a recurring theme of analysing the

⁵⁵ Barrett, "The Poppy," 23.

⁵⁶ Barrett, "The Poppy," 10.

⁵⁷ Kevin Rooney, James Heartfield, *The Blood-Stained Poppy: A Critique of the Politics of Commemoration*, (John Hunt Publishing, 2019), 10.

politicisation of the poppy, but it will also characterise its fluid nature.⁵⁸ In the period leading up to 1933, this criticism was generally mild. However, these earlier themes are vital due to their revitalisation in later criticism of the red poppy. Firstly, one of the main themes of criticism is the poppy's labelling as a bloodstained symbol, referencing the vast killing and death that entrenched the world between 1914 and 1918 rather than a reference to the colour of the poppy. The bloodstained narrative correlates with the notion that the red poppy glorifies war. This narrative evident in McCrae's poem through the words "take up our quarrel with the foe", denoting a sense of blood seeking.⁵⁹

The second theme in the main criticisms towards the poppy include it being a source of controversy between Unionists and Republicans in Ireland. Since 1921 both parties debated the poppy's connotation.⁶⁰ Republicans aligned with the bloodstained rhetoric (Celtic banner), whilst Unionists sided with the poppy's admiration of the British army. The red poppy's controversy and subsequent failure in Ireland is chiefly a result of Ireland fighting a domestic war for independence. Not only this, but the experience of British militarism in Ireland suggests that those opposed to its symbolism represent Foucault's notion of a "counter-memory".⁶¹ A theory which will only go on to become distinct with the poppy's development, correlating its imperial themes of the poppy's polarising effects. Imperial themes perpetuated throughout Ireland as British militarism was still in effect within a colonial theatre, displaying the poppy's imperial connection and underlying political tropes.

Thirdly, the opioid seeds of the red poppy flower have also been a source of criticism towards the RBL's remembrance poppy. Reinforcing the imperialist character of the red poppy, the vast exploitation from Britain in China using opium serves as a symbolic link. The injecting of opium into Chinese society in the First and Second Opium War (1839 and 1854) infected all classes of Chinese society – poisoning and destroying communities in the name of the British Empire and her commerce.⁶² One can understand why the vast imperial exploitation of China using the opium of poppy flowers could be symbolically problematic. The link between opium and the red poppy denotes a tone of forgetfulness caused by one

⁵⁸ Fitzpatrick, "Football Remembers," 58 - 59.

⁵⁹ John McCrae, "In Flanders Field."

⁶⁰ Breen, "Poppies are a Political Symbol on and off the Pitch."

⁶¹ Foucault, "Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews."

⁶² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "A Century of International Drug Control," *World Drug Report* (2008), 175, https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2008/WDR2008_100years_drug_control_origins.pdf.

smoking opium. Despite seeming like an unorthodox connection, after the World War I, opium consumption drastically increased in Britain. Its vast utility for casualties in war and the subsequent abundance of supply and addictions that came with this made opium an easily available commodity to deal with the horrors of war. The RBL effectively span the opioid interpretation of the poppy by highlighting themes of sleep. It adds a poetic narrative, suggesting that those who perished began their deep sleep, naturalising the deaths of thousands. This paradox underlines the popular notion that the poppy's interpretation is fragile and demonstrates how the Legion adopted a challenge to convert perceptions.⁶³

White Poppy – the poppy's earliest contestation following 1933

Having established the main points of original criticism towards the red poppy, the creation of the white poppy was the first point of contestation that highlights the explicit political nature of the poppy, outside of the more general themes mentioned above. The white poppy was never designed to diminish the role of the red poppy, nor was it a product to offend those who served in the Great War.⁶⁴ Its priority was to ensure that all those who suffered and took part in WWI were incorporated into its remembrance. It was created and sold by Co-operative Women's Guild beginning in 1933. Many of the women who orchestrated the inception of the white poppy has lost family and friends in the cataclysm of WWI. As such, it was the goal of the white poppy to maintain a message of 'never again'.⁶⁵ Despite this, the aggression towards those who supported the white poppy enabled the red poppy's established hegemony of remembrance to strengthen. A critical discourse analysis of the contestation of the red and white poppy from 1933 to 1937 shows the first major contestation towards the red poppy's symbolism. By identifying the profound embeddedness of the red poppy in British cultural heritage through reactions to the sale of the white poppy- correlating with the growing threat of war - the red poppy's symbolism becomes clear. The discourse between poppies displays a shift in the perception of the red poppy, built off the glorification of British militarism. A lack of support for the red poppy, reflected by the creation of the white poppy, ensured the RBL to become competitive through their defence of their remembrance and cultural hegemony.

⁶³ Jennifer Iles, "In Remembrance," 205.

⁶⁴ Christoyannopoulos, "A Pacifist Critique of the Red Poppy," 327.

⁶⁵ "Remembrance & White Poppies," Peace Pledge Union, accessed June 23, 2024, [Remembrance & White Poppies | Peace Pledge Union \(ppu.org.uk\)](https://www.ppu.org.uk/Remembrance-White-Poppies).

Early Years: First Signs of Contestation

The inception of the white poppy did not necessarily cause contestation. Prior to the supposed ‘rivalry’, there was a genuine perspective that both poppies could coexist in their differing narratives. On the 30th of June 1933, the *Ashbourne Telegraph* published an article highlighting the debate between the “Red or White Poppy”.⁶⁶ An enlightening article months before Remembrance Day displays the heated argument at the Jubilee Congress of the Co-operative Women’s Guild (CWG). One of the crucial elements of this source is the author. The writer served in the Great War and thus represents an actor who experienced the horrors which the red poppy seeks to commemorate. In the extract, he announces how those who chose to wear the white poppy seek to show respect for our war dead but are also brave enough to be “desirous of publicly announcing the fact they are opposed to future wars”.⁶⁷ Displaying the notion that it was socially unpopular to be opposed to future wars, especially from those who did not serve. Not only does this highlight the red poppy’s social hegemony in remembering the war dead, but it also reflects the need of people to support symbols which have a different purpose than just remembering those who died in war. This article represents a debate before the poppy has become politicised and commercialised through sale of white poppy. The sale of the white poppy on Remembrance Day changes this. It is difficult to know how popular this sentiment was, however, it provides a perspective of the white before widespread contestation has taken place. A mentality shared following the end of World War I was to not let something as gruesome and horrific happen again. The inception of the white poppy itself can be seen as a response to this narrative.

George Blagdon, a veteran and the author of the article, declares that for Armistice Day he will wear a white poppy in conjunction with his war medals. Thus, making a clear statement that whilst he stands strongly against allowing future wars to happen, he is proud of displaying his duty for the last war.⁶⁸ Highlighting his support for the white poppy, the author proceeds to state how it would be an impressive protest towards future wars if every soldier or ex-soldier wore a white poppy alongside a red one.⁶⁹ That a protest by those “who fought have the greatest right to hold decided opinions on this subject”.⁷⁰ He implies that those who fought have the greatest authority to choose how to commemorate Remembrance Day,

⁶⁶ George Blagdon, “Red or White Poppy,” *Ashbourne Telegraph*, June 30, 1933, 8.

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

suggesting veterans are in the best position to protest future wars. Furthermore, the age of this source provides scope for the debate. It's a debate from June, a significant time before Remembrance weekend and an early debate between the red and white poppies. The uniqueness of the source reflects the age of the article's publication, and it offers a foundational perspective from someone included in the red poppy remembrance. This article displays how a veteran supports the peaceful message of the white poppy before any contestation or backlash from RBL and the media.

As the year progresses, so does the news that the Co-operative Women's Guild is organising the sale of the white poppy in the build-up and during Armistice Day. The *Aberdeen Press Journal* identified a "White Poppy Protest" in October 1933.⁷¹ This signals the first significant contestation between poppies. It highlights how "considerable feeling" has been aroused amongst Legion members that the sale of another emblem is direct competition.⁷² Stating that unless this proposal is 'withdrawn', protests are to be organised to oppose its sale.⁷³ The very insinuation of a protest demonstrates the means one or a collective will go through to defend the red poppy's symbolism. It exhibits a distaste from Legion members and veterans that the white poppy is competitive due to the timing of its sale and its challenge to the red poppy's symbolism. The outcry and potential protest by Legion members against the white poppy reflect that the red poppy has a profound popularity within British society.

Second, veterans and members of the legion view the sale of a pacifist symbol as a direct challenge to the red poppy and their experience of War. This sentiment was adopted and expanded by the tabloid newspaper, the *Daily Mirror*. They published a story titled "Baffling", referring to the sale of the white poppy on Remembrance Day as an "insult".⁷⁴ Labelling it an "insult", refers to the sensationalist purpose of the newspaper and seeks to degrade the CWG.⁷⁵ The source declares an official response from the British Legion, that another emblem no matter its meaning should not compete with the sale of Haig's poppy on Armistice Day. Demonstrating that if the sale of the white poppies is allowed by the CWG, protest demonstrations will follow in Northamptonshire.⁷⁶ The threat of protest, as seen in the

⁷¹ "White Poppy Protests," *Aberdeen Press Journal*, October 30th, 1933, 5.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ "Baffling," *Daily Mirror*, October 30, 1933, 7.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

regional *Aberdeen Press Journal*, displays the Legion's disapproval towards another symbol of remembrance and its featuring in local and national newspapers informs the reader of the severity of the matter. Not only this, the emphasis of a protest, combined with the notion that the sale of the white poppy is an insult, degrades the white poppy's message. It devalues the message by inciting the perception that a protest towards its sale is justified. By including a response from the RBL, the *Daily Mirror* pushes the RBL's narrative of a protest being a justifiable approach to dealing with the white poppy contestation from an official nationalised institution. A protest towards the sale of a symbol which advocates a narrative of peace and 'no more war', signifies a prominent moment in the poppy's history and displays the means of protecting a diminishing collective memory of the Great War.

A popular reoccurring theme by the *Aberdeen Press Journal* and the *Daily Telegraph* is their devaluing of the CWG and the white poppy through reporting a dearth of valuable information on both. In the *Aberdeen Press Journal*, the article refers to the white poppy as a "peace emblem" but lacks any clarifying information about the white poppy's purpose.⁷⁷ Thus, it prevents the reader from the message and narrative of the white poppy. This notion aims to separate each poppy, countering the opinion from June supporting the poppy's coexistence. It encourages a choice between white and red, inciting the choice of red by not providing any information on the white poppy. Therefore, this contested terrain created by the *Aberdeen Press Journal* politicises the contest between both symbols by polarising those who support the white poppy.

The Daily Telegraph overlaps with this approach by not naming the group responsible for selling the white poppy. The article titled, "Red Poppies Only on Nov. 11, New Plan Rejected", supports the rhetoric that only the red poppy should be sold on Armistice Day.⁷⁸ Including the same statement from the RBL, *The Daily Telegraph* emphasises how a body approached the RBL, sponsoring the idea of selling white poppies on Remembrance Sunday and asked to quote a price.⁷⁹ Two elements of this part of the article are striking. The first was the refusal to mention who approached the Legion to sell white poppies, which from previous articles seems to suggest it was the Women's Cooperative Guild. The second is putting prominence on the unknown "body", attempting to sell the white poppies to a charitable organisation. Whilst not including the name of the "body" sponsoring the sale of white

⁷⁷ "White Poppy Protests," *Aberdeen Press Journal*, October 30th, 1933, 5

⁷⁸ "Red Poppies Only on Nov. 11 New Plan Rejected," *The Daily Telegraph*, October 31, 1933, 7.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

poppies, the article seeks to smear the white poppy and its organisers through its assertion that the Legion would never support another poppy. Reaffirming the Legion's red poppies are replicas of the poppies that grew "profusion" in the graves between those who made the supreme sacrifice.⁸⁰ In addition, the smearing of the white poppy displays The Daily Telegraph's populist tones by demonising the prospect of trying to sell another poppy to a charity. Not only does this underline the popular national support and symbolic cultural hegemony of the Flanders poppy, but it also adds to the notion that the white poppy was perhaps perceived as a threat. The Daily Telegraph had been a stern critic of Oxford Student Union King and Country debate and thus implies they are a firm supporter of British militarism in the name of the British monarchy.

The *Richmond Herald* offers a unique source for deconstructing the poppy's contestation in its earliest years. A letter published in the *Richmond Herald* on the fourth and eleventh of November is enlightening to assess the backlash of the proposed sale of the white poppy. The article on the fourth introduces the white poppy as a symbol representing peace, unlike the previous articles. Highlighting that the sale on any other day would probably be welcomed with a positive reception.⁸¹ This symbolises the climate of the early 1930s through their more nuanced approach, recognising that peaceful symbols are positive. However, the sale of the white poppy on Armistice Day is an insult.

The British Legion is the greatest factor for peace in the world to-day, for every member is has faced and known the horror and privations of war, and would not willing face another, except in the defence of his homeland.⁸²

Affirming the RBL as the "greatest" factor for peace seems far-fetched and represents a regional narrative closely tied to the production of red poppies. It denotes the role of the RBL in giving charitable support to those who suffered in the trenches of the Great War and that by doing this, they support peace. However, the implication that a charity to veterans is a peaceful entity is false. The RBL acts as a method to deal with the profound scale of industrialised violence never experience before. It seems that the experience of this level of conflict is a contributing factor in the ardent response to the white poppy. It showcases the

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ "White Poppies," *Richmond Herald*, November 4, 1933, 20.

⁸² Ibid.

emotional attachment towards the red poppy. An emotional attachment that has been sustained in British cultural memory.

The source later reiterates the notion red poppy's symbolic fluidity through the author's assertion that the red poppy is symbolic of peace. The letter's acknowledgement of "privations of war", references this sentiment of the vast toil, fatigue, and mental damage soldiers succumbed to during their experiences.⁸³ It distinguishes those who walked away from WWI returned home, returned with mental and physical damage, inciting that the RBL and the red poppy are symbolic to remembering and commemorating this experience. However, as noted earlier, the RBL was a product of the industrial unrest and social dislocation that emerged after 1918.⁸⁴ The necessity to bring British society together under one symbolic banner of remembrance to appease the dissatisfaction towards the orchestration of the War. The article refers to this by claiming how soldiers 'would not be willing to face another', aligning with the ethos of the white poppy. Indirectly this represents an altering narrative of the red poppy, suggesting that because those who fought in WWI experienced its horrors, they would never want to face another one like it. Proving the author's perspective that the red poppy withholds the same notion of 'never again' projected by the white poppy.⁸⁵ It is a vital interpretation as the discourse with the white poppy shows that people view the red poppy differently because of the introduction of an opposing symbol for peace.

A week later, the author of the same letter to the Richmond Herald has another letter featured due to the vast responses on the initial contribution. "Requests to enlarge" the matter discussed display the pervasiveness of the white poppy, RBL, and the red poppy's symbolism.⁸⁶ This discussion is evident when the letter states,

The red poppy does not in any way signify war; it is rather a sign of sympathy with the idea of future peace, in that it recalls to memory the saddest days for those of us who fought, and for those who lost their dear ones, in that great struggle that was thrust upon us.⁸⁷

This extract illustrates that there was a perception that the red poppy glorifies war in reaction to his previous letter. It highlights a debate surrounding the poppy since its inception and will

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Garnett, Weight, *A-Z*, 76.

⁸⁵ "Remembrance & White Poppies," Peace Pledge Union.

⁸⁶ A. V. Squire, "White Poppies and Red," *Richmond Herald*, November 11, 1933, 2

⁸⁷ Ibid.

continue to do so. The author does little to aid in his defence of the poppy not glorifying war later in his featured letter.

Therefore, let every father and mother, this day- Remembrance Day, impress upon their children that the red poppy is symbolic of the blood that was spilled to enable them to live in peace and at peace, and that the white poppy, if sold on Poppy Day, is a mockery of the sacrifices that have been made on their behalf.⁸⁸

This extract is a valuable assertion on two counts. Firstly, it suggests that blood must spill for Britons to live peacefully. A statement that sanctifies the involvement of militarism and bloodshed as a necessary act to ensure peace, in other words, glorifying war as a method to sustain peace. Not only does this glorify war as a means to securing peace, but it also demonstrates a political undertone of the red poppy's symbolism as it encourages the nationalist idea that British bloodshed is needed for a peaceful empire. Secondly, it underlines the previous criticism of the poppy being a bloodstained symbol. By claiming the red poppy is symbolic of blood, it directly refers to the poppy being a symbol of bloodshed and thus can be interpreted as symbolising war. It represents a problematic narrative for the red poppy evident since its inception and will continue in future contestation.

Another reflection of the popularity of this discourse is the page number of each article, the latter being on page two compared to page twenty. This could arguably be because it is a day before Remembrance Sunday. Equally, the page number displays the traction of the debate and the necessity of the newspaper to address the discourse. The letter then instructs to “impress upon their children”, suggesting that this demographic is the source of dissatisfaction towards the red poppy and its association with glorifying war.⁸⁹ From 1930 to 1935, the red poppy and Remembrance Day stressed to newer generations the importance of their connection to national memory and the significance of sacrifice.⁹⁰ The letter feature in the Richmond Herald supports this assertion and reflects this intention, by singling out the youth as the core demographic contesting the red poppy's symbolism. It attempts to act as a lesson to those who have forgotten the sacrifice of British soldiers and that the red poppy is the finest way to support their sacrifice and remember. In addition to these ushering tones supporting the notion that the poppy glorifies war; it politicises the red poppy as it shows its

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Emily Barrett, “The Poppy,” 17.

utility as a tool to conform the youth with the nationalistic messages of the red poppy's remembrance.

Lastly, looking at the Richmond Herald, the aggressive tone referring to the sale of the white poppy on Armistice Day as a "mockery" shows the author's rage towards the white poppy. Not only does this extract represent a more hardline criticism of the white poppy compared to previous sources. It also furthers the notion that the white poppy more commonly offended those who previously served despite never intending to be an offensive symbol.⁹¹ However, the origin of this article is vital sentiment. Firstly A.V. Squire, the author, was a veteran. Secondly, Richmond upon Thames has been the home of poppy production since 1922, and by 1931, it was making close to thirty million poppies a year.⁹² The community created through poppy production in Richmond is likely to have affected opinion towards the red poppy and thus, the white poppy. The sale of another poppy would in essence be more personal for those involved in Richmond and the factory. Compared to the national newspapers, this article has a greater sense of emotion towards the contestation of the poppies. Even compared to other local newspapers, the clarity of the red poppy's message, the need to educate the youth, and the insult of a competing poppy for sale on Remembrance Day clearly distinguishes the Richmond Herald as a hardline supporter of the RBL's red poppy. Overall, in these earliest years of the initial sale of the white poppy, a debate already instigated that signalled differing opinion on and contestations over the red and white poppy. The insult caused from the white poppy's proposed sale demonstrates how the red poppy was dominantly positioned in the British society.

Sensationalist Development

The popularity and significance of the red and white poppy discourse increased between 1934 and 1935 due to the experiences of the previous year. Subsequently, the discourse becomes increasingly popularised as it becomes more popularly featured in national and tabloid newspapers. Tabloid newspapers offer an insightful approach to analysing the growing discourse between the red and white poppy due to their sensationalist tone. Centering on two articles from the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Telegraph* on the sixth of November, there are noticeable developments in the rhetoric towards the contestation. *The Daily Mirror* in their titled article, "White Poppy Trespass", reiterates points made in 1933 about the CWG's ill-

⁹¹ Christoyannopoulos, "A Pacifist Critique of the Red Poppy," 327.

⁹² "The History of The Poppy Factory," Poppy Factory, accessed March 12, 2024, <https://www.poppyfactory.org/history-timeline/>.

timed effort to sell their pacifist symbol.⁹³ 1933 highlighted that prior to this ‘ill-timed effort’, there was little dispute towards the white poppy.⁹⁴ However, after a year of contestation towards its symbolism, a threat of protest and aggressive denunciation, tabloid newspapers are jumping on its popular discourse.

The British Legion strongly deprecate this encroachment on the national sale of red Haig Fund poppies which are made by disabled ex-Servicemen in the Legion Poppy Factory, and, in addition to being the accepted national emblem of remembrance, bring much relief to distressed ex-Servicemen and their dependents.⁹⁵

The extract definitively claims that the red poppy is “the accepted national emblem of remembrance”.⁹⁶ This is vital for deconstructing the poppy but also for understanding its subsequent emergence as a profoundly nationalistic symbol. Stating that it already is the accepted national emblem of remembrance is fair. The success of its sales in the proceeding years reflects this narrative. However, the point is not as robust as the author makes out. As discovered before the sale of the white poppy, there was a general alignment with the white poppy, suggesting a need for a more inclusive symbol of remembrance. Focusing on the red poppy ‘bringing relief’, it signifies the role of the white poppy in reducing this charitable relief to veterans.⁹⁷ Similar to the previous year, the article seeks to demonise the CWG and the white poppy’s support. This time using victims of WWI to generate disregard. The level of denunciation towards the white poppy is potent, and whilst it is not a different theme from articles in 1933, the methods of condemning the white poppy have changed. It represents a more callous form of criticism. Aligning this criticism with the position of the red poppy as a nationalist symbol, the article aids in sustaining and growing the embeddedness of the red poppy in British society.

A pivotal theme evident in the study of both populist newspapers is the recurring reference to the monarchy. Initially promoted by the *Daily Telegraph*, it exhibits a sensationalist method for perpetuating sales of the red poppy by appealing to the widely adored British monarchy. The Prince of Wales and the Duke of York are among the buyers of 30,000 poppy wreaths.⁹⁸ Noting that wreaths will be available through dedicated poppy

⁹³ “White Poppy Trespass,” *Daily Mirror*, November 6, 1934, 28.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ “Armistice Day Poppies – Only Red Ones for the Legion”, *Daily Telegraph*, November 6, 1934, 9

wreath showrooms in London. Highlighting this demonstrates a transition from 1933 in the run-up to Armistice Day. It displays the demand, and thus the red poppy's drive to be the only form of symbolic remembrance of WWI. The article also states,

It is not believed that the sale of the white poppies will have any serious consequences for the Poppy Day appeal.⁹⁹

Underlining the popularity of the red poppy over the white creates an element of competition, aligning with the *Daily Telegraph's* tabloid sensationalism. Picking up on the popularity of the rivalry the year before. The *Daily Mirror* followed the same monarchist approach through their articles titled, "King Salutes Britain's Dead".¹⁰⁰ It informs the reader that representatives of the CWG will be selling their "peace poppy", and that they are a rival.¹⁰¹ Aligning the sale of the rivalling sale of the white poppy with strong reference to the King and his 'salute', the article aims to slander the white poppy by positioning it as treacherous and anti-monarchist. The *Daily Mirror* simplified the debate into two opposing poppies. The most national institution, the British monarchy, buys the red poppy, meaning they regard the white poppy as a rival, despite this not being the official sentiment of the monarchy.

The introduction of monarchist themes in 1934 proceeded into 1935. The *Daily Mirror* published an article titled "The King Leads Nation at the Cenotaph".¹⁰² Not only does this article showcase that 40,000,000 red poppies were sold this year. It later claims that the "nation is united in remembrance".¹⁰³ Up to this point, with the contestation with the white poppy, the nation has not been united in remembrance. Thus, using the King to unite Britain in remembrance aims to bolster the red poppy as the only symbol of WWI commemoration.

Led by the King the nation today commemorates the seventeenth anniversary of Armistice Day-its thoughts, its hopes, its yearning stretch out towards Peace in our Time; its memories with the million loved ones who died; with the half-million disable and maimed, with the hot of women, their lives saddened for ever.¹⁰⁴

This extract illuminates several crucial details that display a transformation in rhetoric about remembrance and who the poppy commemorates. Firstly, the notion that the poppy's

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ "The King Salute to Britain's Dead," *Daily Mirror*, November 10, 1934, 5

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² "The King Leads Nation at the Cenotaph," *Daily Mirror*, November 11, 1935, 5.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

symbolism is fluid has been recurring throughout this discourse. However, this extract explicitly claims who is included and excluded in the poppy's symbolism. Chiefly, the reference to the "hot of women, their lives saddened for ever"¹⁰⁵ showcases the masculinised narratives around red poppy commemoration. It supports the notion that red poppy remembrance invited people to remember war in particular ways, in this case as a matter of masculinised sacrifice.¹⁰⁵ It promotes the narrative that mothers lost sons, fathers, and brothers, building of the emotional experiences of loss. Fundamentally, this was a real experience for many after WWI. However, it is a narrative that has become embedded within the symbolism of the red poppy, energised by tabloid and nationalist newspapers. The utility of widowhood offers something new compared to the beginning of the discourse. It is paradoxical as it comes after critiquing the white poppy, a feminist established symbol for peace. This narrative politicises the red poppy further as the hyper-masculinise nature of militarism, an inherently political notion, embeds the red poppy into this narrative.

The pro-red poppy article demonstrates the fear of rising global militarism, unlike article in previous years. Illustrated by "yearning stretch out towards Peace in our time", the text re-asserts the notion that the red poppy symbolises peace like the white poppy.¹⁰⁶ However, in 1935, it was more explicit in a global context rather than just being a counterargument to the white poppy. The *Daily Telegraph* in June 1935 reacted to a protest towards Lord Haig, the stern supporter of the RBL and Haig's red poppy. He was commander of the British expeditionary role and a leading figure during the Battle of the Somme (1916), Arras (1917) and Passchendaele (1917), three battles famous for their abundance British casualties. Controversy towards his "egoism and utter lack of scruple", has been a rhetoric towards Haig that has never shifted since the end of the war.¹⁰⁷ Despite this, his wife and the *Daily Telegraph* defend his honour when discussing his illustrious involvement with the RBL and red poppy. The article claims it was agreed that the white poppy was "said" to stand for peace, whereas the red poppy certainly does.¹⁰⁸ Similar to the previous source, there is a striking development in 1935 that the red poppy not only signifies peace, but it also suggests that the red poppy is a far greater symbol for peace. This transcends previous criticism of the white poppy as the red poppy aims to include the themes of peace within its symbolism,

¹⁰⁵ Basham, "Gender, Race, Militarism and Remembrance," 891-892.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Geoffrey Norman, "Field Marshal Sir Douglas," *Historynet*, 5 November, 2007, [Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig: World War I's Worst General \(historynet.com\)](http://www.historynet.com/Field-Marshal-Sir-Douglas-Haig-World-War-I-s-Worst-General/).

¹⁰⁸ "Attacks on Lord Haig," *Daily Telegraph*, June 11, 1935, 6.

representing a product of a growing global militarism. Thus, the experience of WWI was reinvigorated and centralised on the need for symbols representing peace. Overall, following the initial contestations between the two different poppies, 1934-1935 saw an increase in sensationalisation of the poppy discourse that point to its increased presence in political spheres. Tabloids incorporating new methods to establish a popularised critique of the white poppy catalyses the support for the red poppy to become increasingly nationalised, underlining a modification in the red poppy's symbolism.

Rise of War 1936 - 1937

The pacifist message of the white poppy gains greater support in 1936 as the threat of another global war increased. Taken from the *Hull Daily Mail*, known then as *The Daily Mail* and not to be mixed up with the national organ *The Daily Mail*, includes "Our readers Say" directed towards the M.P. Sir A. Lambert Ward.¹⁰⁹ Constituent questions offer an insight into the moods and opinions of the public. Instead of gaining an interpretation from the narrative set by the newspaper, these types of sources identify an opinion from the members of the public. A popular topic surrounding these questions is the growing militarism of Germany and Mussolini's breaking pledges. The section titled "Red and White Poppies" begins by highlighting the breaking of agreements by Italy and Nazi Germany, but then digresses into the debate surrounding the white poppy.

If it is true that we are to-day menaced by German militarism, surely in our own interest we could do no more patriotic service than help those who are opposing that militarism at its source.¹¹⁰

This initial feature from Martin Dakin, shows how German militarism is an ever-growing threat in 1936. He justly correlates this with the narrative and purpose of the white poppy, indirectly stating it is more patriotic to wear a white poppy and support its anti-militarism narrative. This quote displays a culmination of the pacifist rhetoric observed in the previous year. Dakin later claims,

Those we commemorate believed they died to put an end to war. Can we pay a better tribute to their memory than that of proclaiming symbolically our determination that their sacrifice shall not have been in vain? Those who would prevent us from wearing our

¹⁰⁹ "Our Readers Say," *Hull Daily Mail*, November 5, 1936, 11.

¹¹⁰ D Martin Dakin, "Red and White Poppies," *Hull Daily Mail*, November 5, 1936, 11.

emblems (though we have never interfered with theirs, and indeed help to support them) are themselves guilty of that intolerance of differing opinions which is one of the causes of war, and so pay a poor tribute to the memory of those who gave their lives in the hope of ending it.¹¹¹

A powerful quote that reiterates his perspective that the symbol of the white poppy is the best way to commemorate those who sacrificed their lives. This narrative is like the first source analysed in 1933 but differs from the notion that wearing both poppies is the best way to support peace. Now war seems inevitable, attitudes shift to not wanting to repeat the horrors of WWI. His perspective is incredibly valuable as it highlights a politicising shift from the contestation of the poppies on three counts. Firstly, those attempting to prevent the white poppy's use are indeed as guilty of the "intolerance" which aided in causing the war, demonstrating how the previous methods of preventing and degrading people who wear the white poppy politicises the red poppy. Secondly, Dakin's interpretation represents a transparent shift in how the red and white poppy are viewed because of the geo-political events of mid-late 1930s. This shows that support and criticism for the poppy is dependent on political influences, domestic and international. Thirdly, the reference to 'intolerance' also demonstrates the rivalry which was created through the backlash to the creation and sale of the white poppy.¹¹² Thus, showing how the contestation between both poppies, aided by rhetoric used by newspapers, polarised differing groups politicises the initiatives of each poppy. Claiming how those who have supported the white poppy have never interfered with the Legion's poppy's symbolism, contrasting many anti-white poppy views featured in the previous years.

Towards the end of the extract from Dakin, he reintroduces an initial reason for the white poppy's backlash. The sale of white poppies on Armistice Week caused an abundance of controversy in 1933 and degraded the initial perception of the white poppy.

The answer is that the week when public attention is naturally focused on the question of peace is obviously the most appropriate one for directing that attention to the urgent problems of peace, and the avoidance of the war dangers threatening us.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

The source appropriately advocates that the sale of pacifist symbols during Armistice Week reflects a powerful statement for supporting peace. In turn, it contrasts the opinions promoted by many newspapers in the preceding years, particularly tabloids. This clear transition underlines how the threat of war has altered the perception of the white poppy. It also shows how the enforcement of the red poppy, denunciation of the white poppy, and their contestation has politicised the red poppy's symbolism. Stuard C Hood in 1937 states,

It is necessary to state very emphatically that there is no competition between the white poppies and the red Flanders poppies. No one who in the past years has worn the red Flanders poppy is likely to cease to wear that Flanders poppy. The white poppy will be placed beside it and both will their message; the red poppy for remembrance; the white poppy to say 'no more war.'¹¹⁴

This extract highlights a culmination of the contestation between both poppies. It addresses the vast competition between both symbols stating how there should not be. The fact that it is 'necessary to state' this, displays a level of weariness to the discourse of remembrance poppies. It arrives a year after the opinion of Dakin and his support for the white poppy, suggesting it is a response to the growth in support of the white poppy.

Conclusion

The sale of the white poppy beginning in 1933 acted as a catalyst for the changing narrative of the British Legion's red poppy. Prior to the sale, there was a level of empathy towards the white poppy and its symbolism. However, following its sale, and the threat of a protest opposed to this notion, the white poppy became a deeply unpopular symbol attracting waves of criticism. The following years up to 1935, witnessed a surge in newspaper publication on the white poppy. Particularly popular in tabloid newspapers, criticism strengthened, taking new forms to discredit the white poppy and its supporters. During this period, the red poppy became more aligned with nationalist tropes, highlighting the susceptibility of the red poppy's symbolism to new factors. This process nuanced the red poppy, representing a shift in its politicisation. Finally, following the profound disavowal from tabloid newspapers, the years leading up to the WWII there was a growing alignment with the white poppy's pacifist

¹¹⁴ "White Poppies for Peace," *Edinburgh Evening News*, November 8, 1937, 4.

ethos. Through newspapers, reactions to the growing global militarism and reflection of the immense contestation between the poppies, process of politicisation is demonstrated.

Chapter Two: Apolitical?

The blood, sweat and tears endured in World War II entered Britain, and much of the world and Europe, in a new era for the study of memory. Maintaining its ceremonial significance on Remembrance Day, new experiences of war enabled the poppy to expand its spheres of influence and increased in its social and political significance. Not only were there practical changes to when it was represented, the poppy became more expansive and nuanced in terms of what and who it represents. Memory is generational, thus, stories and ‘myths’ expressed about war, if conjoined, can become dangerous to how a historical event is perceived. David Blight claims how historians who study memory have begun to study the history of how a society or state remembers itself collectively.¹¹⁵ Through the thematic study of mythologising WWI and WWII, British exceptionalism, and ethnocentrism; a perceptive façade towards the poppy and British military can be identified. The mythologising of WWI, its relevancy to emphasising British exceptionalism and its effects on the perception of the poppy all can be identified in a post-WWII study of the red poppy. A diminishing British global imperium and a series of unpopular post-colonial conflicts emphasises the hegemony of the poppy as well as its infiltration to becoming a symbol of identity. The increasingly nuanced symbol throughout the twentieth century, centralised on imperial narratives of WWI and WWII, has allowed a polarisation to gravitate to who is remembered and who is forgotten.

World War II – A New Age for Commemoration

World War II set the world on fire. The vast destruction, elimination, and decimation of humanity, cities, wildlife, civilisation and the economy surpassed that of WWI. Naturally, due to the scale of the conflict, there would be an increase in the need to reflect just as there was three decades prior. In Europe, the close of the war led to the creation of remembrance days. May 8th became ‘Victory in Europe Day’ (VE day), commemorating the signing of unconditional surrender from Germany. Alongside this, national Liberation days became central theatres of remembrance to commemorate the ending of Nazi occupation. Italy on the 25th of April. Netherlands and Denmark on May 5th. Simply, between the 25th of April and the 9th of May, nations commemorate victory, peace, and liberation across Europe. Amidst the formulation of new dates of remembrance following the end of World War II, Britain

¹¹⁵ David, Blight, “The Memory Boom: Why and Why Now?” Chapter In *Memory in Mind and Culture*, ed. Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch, 241 - 242 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

transitioned ‘Armistice Day’ to ‘Remembrance Day’. Moving ceremonial activities from November 11th to the second Sunday of November or the closest Sunday to the 11th. A feature of this is the conjoining of ceremonial practices of both World Wars, including the poppy as a representable symbol. This is epitomised empirically by the inclusion of WW2 casualties on local cenotaphs built to commemorate soldiers who died in WWI.¹¹⁶ These are the sites of memory where poppies and wreaths are laid in November every year. A vital part of this transition is the extension on WWI narratives rather than the replacement include this taken from last paragraph.

It is important to note that the collective memory of World War II varies greatly in Europe and the world. States would remember and formulate their experiences differently, focusing on different aspects and effects of the war to embellish a sense of identity. Bachleitner prioritises the power of memories labelling them a “vital asset” for legitimising causes and politics in a domestic political struggle.¹¹⁷ This assessment can be applied to most European nations after WWII. However, in Britain the memories and myths established from World War II combined with the first lay a ritualistic framework for the future on how all conflicts and combatants will be remembered. The poppy, being a central feature within British remembrance rituals, adopts a role of supporting a nationalistic sense of collective identity and memory.

Narratives and Myths of War

The combining of World War narratives has enabled them to become woven into society and profoundly influence how people perceive past and current conflicts. The stories, images, narratives, and myths are so pervasive that they have become a part of the “national narrative in Britain”, also constituting a “major part in its cultural capital”.¹¹⁸ Through a simple conversion of dates, both wars become intrinsically linked by remembrance rituals, joining the two under the same umbrella of collective memory. Rather than the patriotic duty of going to war in the name of King and country in 1914, the going to war narratives in 1939 can be viewed as “a sombre necessity, not with a jingoistic swagger”, differing greatly from

¹¹⁶ “The History of the Cenotaph,” English Heritage, accessed June 22, 2024, [The History of the Cenotaph | English Heritage \(english-heritage.org.uk\)](https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/cenotaph/).

¹¹⁷ Bachleitner, “Memory in International diplomacy,” 246.

¹¹⁸ Andrews, Poppies, Tommies and Remembrance

those identified in chapter one.¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, both prewar narratives have been adopted in remembrance rituals and are an inherent part of collective memory of both wars. The Third Reich's aggressive conquest, the rise of fascism, and the Holocaust nurtured the perspective that Britain's involvement in WWII was not only necessary but justified. Giving rise to the narrative of a "just war", instilling the view that Britain only goes to war when necessary.¹²⁰ The mythologising of British memory in World War II bases around a distinction between 'us' and 'them'. The myth that Britain stood alone against Nazism supports the narrative that Britain, free of any crime, were the heroes and Nazi Germany the villains.¹²¹ The mythologising of past wars, in Basham's view, invites the risk that wars of past become affirmation of contemporary conflicts.¹²² In the case of the poppy, this is not a risk in the sense it has already happened through the weaponisation of its symbolism.

Red Poppy Remembrance Discourse

It is necessary here to introduce *Red Poppy Remembrance Discourse* (RPRD), as Liddle uses this term to display how the poppy and remembrance practices reproduce myths of war. Her words define the RPRD as "a narrow, militarised, nationalistic discourse of remembrance".¹²³ The pervasive stories and narratives of the Two World Wars have become inherent to any form of military commemoration in Britain. Andrews reiterates this notion by claiming how the years that followed 1945, Remembrance Sunday and the donning of the red poppy were extended to all British armed conflicts.¹²⁴ Subsequently this has led to British military personnel since 1914 to be viewed, appreciated, and admired on the same level, despite the objective differences in experiences. World War I and particularly World War II witnessed a substantial loss of civilian lives, not to mention to the 384,000 soldiers killed in combat.¹²⁵ Comparing this to conflicts after 1945, the sum is drastically different; The Troubles (1400), Falklands (255), Iraq (179) and Afghanistan (454).¹²⁶ By extending commemoration to these

¹¹⁹ Christonyannopoulos, "A Pacifist Critique of the Red Poppy," 327.

¹²⁰ Fitzpatrick, "Football Remembers," 65.

¹²¹ Caroline Sharples, Olaf, Jensen, *Britain and the Holocaust*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 3.

¹²² Basham, "Gender, Race, Militarism and Remembrance," 884

¹²³ Liddle, "School needs you to buy a poppy," 5.

¹²⁴ Andrews, "British Practice of Remembrance," 6.

¹²⁵ "The Fallen," UK Parliament, accessed November 6, 2024, [The Fallen - UK Parliament](#);

¹²⁶ "The Troubles," National Army Museum, accessed May 6, 2024, [The Troubles | National Army Museum \(nam.ac.uk\)](#); "The Falklands War," Royal British Legion, accessed May 6, 2024, [The Falklands War | Remembrance | Royal British Legion](#); "Operations in Iraq," GOV.UK, accessed May 6, 2024, [Iraq - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#); "Afghanistan statistics: UK deaths, Casualties, Mission Costs and Refugees," House of

armed conflicts, it aligns the experiences of these conflicts with the narratives of WWI and WWII.

This is problematic as it categorises a conscripted ‘Tommy’ on the same page as a soldier overseas in Iraq, or in Northern Ireland, or Kenya during the Mau Mau Rising. In essence, it institutionalises all these conflicts to be seen and appreciated in the same way. Despite the vast differences in British personnel deaths, especially compared to those on the opposing side. Nonetheless, the narrative sets a precarious relationship between the memory of British conflicts and how the public perceives the military. Popularly, since the end of WWII, British conflicts have been associated with imperialism, differing greatly from a defensive fight against fascism. This has allowed the poppy to take on a pillar position for all the remembrance of these conflicts to gravitate around, a collateral feature of this being each conflicts condemnation. This feeds into the RPRD, as myths glorify military deaths from the past as heroic and necessary which in turn is then applied to modern conflicts which feature a smaller cost to British civilian and military personal. The complication of remembering all British military personal is that it remembers those who have been complicit in war crimes and massacres, such as Bloody Sunday 1972.¹²⁷ This is highlighted through RPRD as the poppy, and who it remembers, is narrow and does little to consider parties not involved.

Identity

Myths of war are a profound factor in the creation of national identity and arguably are more significant than experiences themselves.¹²⁸ The myths, which the poppy supports, spreads and secures them as foundational values of British identity and cultural memory. The reducing scale and influence of the British empire means that identity in Britian was in a transitional state. Highlighting the use of myths of war as a tool to perpetuate ideals and stories treasured from the World Wars to sustain a sense of collective identity in a shrinking colonial empire and developing post-colonial world. Inaccurately, these colonial conflicts within cultural memory are linked to when Britian had a global imperium, and thus are imperialistic.¹²⁹ The

Commons Library, accessed June 22, 2024, [Afghanistan statistics: UK deaths, casualties, mission costs and refugees - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#).

¹²⁷ Bloody Sunday 1972, British soldiers opened fire and shot 26 unarmed civilians during a protests march in Bogside, Country Derry, killing twelve.

¹²⁸ John Hutchinson, “Warfare and the Sacralisation of Nations: The Meanings, Rituals and Politics of National Remembrance,” *Journal of International Studies*, 38, No.2. (2009): 411, 10.1177/0305829809347538

¹²⁹ Andrews, “British Practices of Remembrance,” 5.

long conflict from 1914-1945 birthed new identities through their rupturing of the foundation of Europe's imperialism, lighting the fuse to an era of decolonisation.¹³⁰ Linking these narrative and myths of war to the need to reinforce identity through a mythologised perception of the army highlights the poppy as a political tool used to sustain an essence of popularity in decolonial conflicts post 1945. This can be labelled as a Remembrance hijacking. The contesting poppies in the 1930s enabled the poppy to become the hegemonic symbol of British military remembrance. The championing over the white poppy has enabled the red poppy to become the sole commemorative symbol affiliated with an imperialistic rhetoric justifying British involvement in military conflicts.

British Exceptionalism

World War II decimated Britain's global imperium. The economy was destroyed and became reliant on the United States, not to mention the calls for independence within the Commonwealth spreading like wildfire. However, this did not deter the popular domestic belief that Britain saved the world from the Third Reich, which could be far more easily credited to the Soviet Union or United States. This belief greatly reinforced British exceptionalism and played a distinctive role in British commemoration post WWII, allowing it to become a central feature of pride and national identity.¹³¹ The self-image of Britain thus transformed after World War II to become even more distinct compared to its European neighbours and greatly affects the British memory of World War II and the way the British military is perceived. British exceptionalism is argued to have most profoundly taken root in the Napoleonic era but has a longer history in Europe due to Britain's geography.¹³² The British Empire's augmentation in the nineteenth century bolstered British exceptionalism, leaving a lasting footprint on British identity particularly English identity. However, after World War II, there was an increased sense of gallantry in Britain's island defence against the rest of Europe. What is interesting is how this feeling of gallantry and exceptionalism seems to have only grown in recent years, identified through the 2016 Brexit referendum. Thus, the

¹³⁰ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Fictions of Europe," *Race and Class* 23, 3 (1991): 9.

¹³¹ Andrew Crozier, "British Exceptionalism: Pride and Prejudice and Brexit," *International Economics and Economic Policy* June 8 (2020): 635.

¹³² Crozier, "British Exceptionalism," 635.

weakening of Britain as a global superpower, did little to affect English attitudes of themselves, it only “exalted” their exceptionalism.¹³³

Myths of war and narratives built upon from both World Wars have supported British exceptionalism. The “Island fantasy”, refers to a level of British exceptionalism whose society view their nations place above others.¹³⁴ Narratives from the wars are central to this belief, built off ethnocentrism which can be located within the poppy. The ethnocentrism established through national memories, shapes how people view their nation or another nation through a lens of their own history.¹³⁵ The varying ethnocentrism discovered following WWII make it unique compared to WWI, and Christoyannopoulos highlights the subsequent evolution of the red poppy in this period.¹³⁶ Ethnocentrism through post war narratives, observe Britain as the saviour in Europe, which in then applied to Remembrance commemoration and the poppy. British exceptionalism was epitomised in 2016 with the Brexit referendum. Peter Ammon, German ambassador to the United Kingdom in 2018 claimed how the ‘standing alone’ rhetoric was inherent in British national identity and a vital motivation for voting for Brexit.¹³⁷ This highlights the role of the myths in generating an otherism and ethnocentrism inherent in British and more commonly English identity. Commemorative rituals and the poppy are embedded in this ‘standing alone’ narrative and are an annual reminder, cementing its place in British society and culture.

Exclusion

Michel Foucault’s ‘Counter memory’ denotes the idea that through collective memory making, parties are silenced or excluded from the memory’s narrative.¹³⁸ For this example, counter memory of the British military remembrance channelled through the British Legion’s poppy. As the previous sections have highlighted, resentment towards the poppy’s symbolic

¹³³ Crozier, “British Exceptionalism,” 656.

¹³⁴ Francis Farrell, “‘Why All of a Sudden do we need to teach fundamental British values?’ A critical investigation of religious education student teacher positioning within a policy discourse of discipline and control,” *Journal of Education for Teaching* 42, 3. May 2016, 282.

¹³⁵ Henry L. Roediger III, Magdalena Abel, Sharda Umanath, Ruth A. Shaffera, Beth Fairfieldd, Masanobu Takahashi, and James V. Wertsch, “Competing national memories of World War II,” *PNAS* 116, no. 34 (August 20, 2019): 1.

¹³⁶ Christoyannopoulos, “A Pacifist Critique of the Red Poppy,” 324.

¹³⁷ Patrick Wintour, “German Ambassador: Second World War Image of Britain has Fed Euroscepticism,” *The Guardian*, accessed June 20, 2018, [German ambassador: second world war image of Britain has fed Euroscepticism | Brexit | The Guardian](#).

¹³⁸ Foucault, “Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews.”

meaning is nothing new. There have constantly been parties left out of its commemorative practices throughout its hundred-year history. Just one example is that of Indians and West Indians who are hardly identified in commemorations of World War I and II.¹³⁹

Commemoration centralises on Churchill's white 'Island race' which is supported through British imperial exceptionalism discussed earlier.¹⁴⁰ Women, victims (in Britain and opposing states), civilians and servicemen in states the state wages war against would have a counter memory of Remembrance Day commemoration. Exploring these parties are necessary to understand different resentments and opinions to method of British military commemoration.

Women

Throughout this thesis's investigation, women have been a driving force for military commemoration and remembrance. The founding and sales of the red poppy and the creation of the white poppy by the Women's Co-operative Guild reflect this. However, women have been institutionally left out of military remembrance of World Wars and 'modern' conflicts. Throughout poppy commemorations, women have been institutionally cast as victims of war; widows, mothers, daughters of heroic husbands, sons, and fathers.¹⁴¹ Despite of the vast and significant contributions of women during war time. This highlights the poppy and Remembrance Day commemorations as being masculine, deriving from myths earlier and rhetoric's such as "our boys".¹⁴² By driving narratives such as this, it creates a counter memory for women as their involvement is left out of national commemorations of War. Empirical evidence of this dissatisfaction is firstly highlighted with the very creation of the white poppy and secondly by the first protest at a Remembrance Day commemoration. In 1973, at the traditional Queens laying of the wreath at Whitehall, the *Daily Mirror* reported that a group of women called out, "What about the War Widows?".¹⁴³ The fact that the first protest at a Remembrance Day service displays there is a level of dissatisfaction in how commemorative practices have progressed since the end of the WWI. Not only this, but the fact women are also the protestors is significant because it goes against the traditional narratives of women being the 'protected' and defeminises their agency in a masculine ritual. As discovered within the sensationalist narratives in 1934/35, the masculinised rhetoric within the poppy's remembrance discourse politicises those who are left out of military

¹³⁹ Basham, "Gender, Race, Militarism and Remembrance," 884.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Fitzpatrick, "Football Remembers", 65.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ "Where DID You Get My Hat?," *Daily Mirror*; November 12, 1973, 3.

commemoration. It's a correlation that underlines a development in the red poppy's politicisation as decades later it reflects an eventual protests towards the masculinised narratives embedded in the red poppy.

Civilians and Victims

Remembrance Day and the poppy have constantly been united in overlooking the civilian experiences of war. This can be highlighted through Remembrance Day rituals of laying the wreath, which is primarily and abundantly done by veterans or serving military personnel.¹⁴⁴ Despite the British Legion highlighting how the poppy's symbol is a personal choice, nuanced with a personal experience of war or personal memories, civilian involvement in war is minimally reflected through commemoration.¹⁴⁵ By minimalizing civilian narratives, it masks the horrors of war and the effects war has had on civilians.¹⁴⁶ Whether that be the suffering of civilians in Coventry during the Blitz or the German refugees carpet bombed in Dresden, the dearth of these narratives suggest that they are not as important. This highlights the role of the poppy and British military commemoration rituals as being political, as it seeks to create and instil a glorified nationalistic and militaristic perspective of war by prioritising emotions of admiration and gratitude opposed to grief.¹⁴⁷ Subsequently it enables the poppy to accumulate ethnocentrism previously discussed and shows the poppy's partisan nature. This means the poppy's symbol and Remembrance Day doesn't include a minority factor which is problematic for a national commemoration in an increasingly diversifying Britain.

The Enemy?

Touched upon in the previous paragraph; the poppy and military commemorations do little to acknowledge or remember those the military wages war against. Now this may seem an obvious notion, however, as a practice it aids in supporting the myths, ethnocentrism, othering, and British exceptionalism. This is a narrative the white poppy supports to prevent war and deconstruct prejudices built by othering identities. A problematic example is the red poppy adopting remembrance for servicemen who fought in Northern Ireland. Not to say that there should be a level of acknowledgement for a soldier's duty, rather commemorations

¹⁴⁴ Liddle, "Your School Needs You to Buy a Poppy," 6.

¹⁴⁵ "The Poppy," Royal British Legion. accessed May 7, 2024, [All about the poppy | Remembrance | Royal British Legion](#).

¹⁴⁶ Liddle, "School Needs You to Buy a Poppy," 8.

¹⁴⁷ Archer, Matheson, "Emotional Imperialism," 764.

should expand to those on the other side and the narratives they support for an educational purpose. Why shouldn't Kenyan and Irish rebellions and those who fought in them, on either side, be commemorated? The same for the acknowledgment of Iraqi's who fought against British servicemen but with an intention of defending their homeland against a foreign invasion. Especially as the opposing nations normally have a much higher combatant and civilian mortality rate.

The narrative of soldiers being victims derives from World War I. Youthful 'Tommy's' being forced to fight under negligent generals is not of its time, despite the popular experience of it. This narrative however has enabled poppy remembrance to reproduce war as a masculinised matter of sacrifice.¹⁴⁸ Effectively erasing the violence perpetrated towards supposed 'enemies', establishing a narrowed reflection of duty. Liddle acknowledges a discourse surrounding soldiers as victims, identified through opposing military charities prioritising a rhetoric of heroism.¹⁴⁹ "Help for Heroes" is evidence of this after being established in 2007.¹⁵⁰ The establishment of "Help for Heroes" signifies a desire to change the narrative of British soldiers as victims. To contest the notion that British soldiers are no longer victims of undesired and nugatory wars (WWI) but rather are heroic. This seems to reflect the unpopularity of 21st century British conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Especially the Iraqi war which witnessed worldwide anti-war demonstrations. It is important to deconstruct these cases as it highlights the fragility and fluidity of the poppy. Not to mention the inherent political nature of modern military commemoration in Britain.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the conjoining and extension of the myths and narratives of World War I and II into British conflicts post 1945 has enabled the poppy to become a partisan and polarising symbol. The application of myths established from different wars featuring different agents and circumstance puts these conflicts within the same institutionalised spheres. By doing so it enables the poppy, originally a symbol of WWI remembrance, to be hijacked to justifying British military activity overseas. Although these narratives have maintained the poppy's

¹⁴⁸ Fitzpatrick, "Football Remembers," 72-73.

¹⁴⁹ Andrews, "Poppies, Tommies, and Remembrance," 113.

¹⁵⁰ "Our History," Help for Heroes, accessed May 7, 2024. [Read the story of how it all began and the people who made it happen | Help For Heroes.](#)

hegemony and relevance as a recognised national symbol of remembrance, it has generated a substantial disassociation through its more recent aligning with nationalistic and right-wing narratives which have been rising exponentially since the Brexit campaign. Understanding the poppy's political fluidity and expansion in society since 1945 is vital to comprehend how a First World War symbol of remembrance has been hijacked for to propel other ideologies. The Legion's red poppy competition with the white poppy laid the foundations for it to become the dominant symbol of remembrance. Alongside this, it has enabled the myths of World War I to be projected into its widening significance in decolonial conflicts which share extremely different narratives. This has generated a level of cultural imperialism, projecting 'normal' and uncontested 'correct' narratives whilst opposing narratives like that of the white poppy are categorised as deplorable and insignificant.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Archer, Matheson, "Emotional Imperialism," 770.

Chapter Three – Football and the Poppy

Chapter One displayed the first wave of popular contestation towards the red poppy enabling its cultural growth to become a hegemonic symbol of remembrance. The conjoining of narratives and the expansion of the poppy to all British conflicts after World War I have altered the agency of the red poppy, expanding its societal significance. Not to mention who it silences. By directing the focus of this next section towards the poppy's role in football, the culmination of the poppy's politicisation manifests. The poppy's place and symbolism in football signifies the largest theatre of contestation and controversy. Utilising football, the media representations of the poppy discourse within the sphere of football will display the zenith of the politicisation of the poppy. The red poppy's newfound cultural significance in football during Remembrance weekend represents the transcending of its symbolism through newly invented forms of commemoration, putting focus on consumption rather than commemoration.¹⁵² Contemporary debates on the poppy demonstrate how the poppy's symbolism has become ungovernable and increasingly nuanced. Using examples of two premier league football players, the polarising issues presented in chapter two are evident through their decision not to wear the poppy. Although the British Legion continue to reaffirm its role in protecting the red poppy from partisan misuse, they assure the poppy is not political.¹⁵³ However, its discourse through football since 2008 displays a failure to recognise the poppy as a political.

“Commemorative Turn”

Football stadiums since the 1980s have increasingly become “sites of memory”.¹⁵⁴ The tragic stadium disasters of the 1980s, which caused the deaths of 191 supporters was a “critical juncture”, enabling commemoration and memory to become inherent elements of stadium culture.¹⁵⁵ The horrific experiences of Heysel (1985), Bradford (1985) and Hillsborough (1989), centralised the importance of remembering ordinary football fans in three avoidable catastrophic disasters.¹⁵⁶ Commemorative practices shifted following these disasters,

¹⁵² Fitzpatrick, “Football Remembers,” 61.

¹⁵³ “Royal British Legion Urges Fifa Rethink Over Poppy Ban Stance,” *BBC News*, November 4, 2016, [Royal British Legion urges Fifa rethink over poppy ban stance - BBC News](#).

¹⁵⁴ Jay Winter, “Sites of Memory and the Shadow of War,” in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Herausgegeben von Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2008), 61.

¹⁵⁵ Fitzpatrick, “Football Remembers,” 69

particularly following Hillsborough in 1989. Referred to as the “commemorative turn”, this transition has given room for memory entrepreneurs to occupy.¹⁵⁷ Since the 80s, stadiums have been a successful source for eliciting emotions. Whether that be for minute silences, memorialising the recent deaths of people affiliated with a club or nation - and most recently - commemoration for war. Despite the poppy’s symbolism not being a part of the memory boom of the nineties, there were changes in the decade affecting its significance and place.

In the late nineties, the Royal British Legion (RBL) expressed anxiety about a “silence inflation” and how annual memorials for those killed fighting for their country were waning.¹⁵⁸ This “silence inflation” refers to minute silences being held more commonly for commemorating other institutions than the British army. Therefore, the Royal British Legion laid out initiatives to sustain its relevance in cultural memory. Similar to the discourse of the 1930s, the RBL attempts to maintain its hegemony and uses football to expand its cultural and social influence as a result of competing memory agents. The 1999/2000 season was the first footballing season that observed a minute silence for British casualties of war.¹⁵⁹ One could perceive in a way that praises the RBL for being an institution that cares for the authenticity of remembrance as they acknowledge there is a ‘silence inflation’. However, it represents a significant shift in the role of memory and commemoration in football, moving away from the commemoration of victims of footballing disasters. Football was seized by memory entrepreneurs, such as the Royal British Legion, to drive their influence into new lucrative spheres of memory. Since the 1999/2000 season, the RBL have lobbied to have fixture changes to cater for military remembrance practice on Remembrance Sunday. Enabling it to become a permanent feature of the British footballing calendar. Correlating with the wider trends of memory, the commodification of memory has become one of the largest growing industries in the world.¹⁶⁰ This is a crucial factor for understand why the RBL seek to bolster their societal, commercial and cultural influence through football. Therefore, the British Legion’s lobbying can be described as commercially and monopoly driven instead of being perpetuated with the intention of memory.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Fitzpatrick, “Football Remembers,” 72.

¹⁵⁹ Fitzpatrick, “Football Remembers,” 71.

¹⁶⁰ Blight, “Memory Boom,” 246.

The Roots of the Poppy's Implementation 2006 – 2009

In order for this thesis to deconstruct the role of the red poppy in the Premier League, it is crucial to underline how, why, and what caused its implementation. It is imperative to display how and why the RBL hijacked British football, intensifying the ungovernability and politicisation of the poppy. Thus, it is necessary to provide some contextual scope for why this decision is political and a defining moment for the poppy's politicisation. This section will deconstruct this influential period of the red poppy's development from 2006 to 2009 before proceeding to analyse the consequences of the evolution of the poppy in this period. There are numerous factors which this section will explore that have caused the RBL to reimagine their strategy of cultural influence and civil-military relations, increasing the red poppy's politicisation and enlargement of its partisanism.

In 2008, footballers sported the red poppy on their football shirts for the first time. However, according to British officials from 2007 to 2009, there was “unsatisfactory support” by the public for British militarism.¹⁶¹ A series of unpopular conflicts continued to take the lives of British soldiers overseas. Involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq had been going on for some time, since 2001 and 2003, with the British military leaving Iraq in 2009. Nonetheless, these post-colonial conflicts, among others, enabled a reimagining of military commemoration. Football showcases this reimagination with the beginning of the red poppy's aggressive inculcation within football in 2008.

Before 2008, several notable events were vital for the poppy's introduction on football shirts. In 2007, a rivalling charity called *Help for Heroes* was founded.¹⁶² *Help for Heroes*, with their distinctive labelling of soldiers as “heroes” can be seen as a product of the series of unpopular conflicts and the need to reinvent how Britons see and support the British military. Formulating a distinctively American approach to military commemoration, the name works to unsettle the existing narratives established by the Legion's red poppy, attempting to dislodge the discourse that soldiers are victims.¹⁶³ Not only was the new charity a product of a shifting perception of British militarism, but it also provided a the RBL with a problematic challenge. It challenged their monopoly of British military remembrance. A full circle moment from the contestation witnessed in the 1930s between the red and white poppies. Despite these attempts to transmit a shift in how the public perceives soldiers in the

¹⁶¹ Kelly, “A Critical Discourse Analysis of Military-Related Remembrance Rhetoric in UK Sport,” 198.

¹⁶² “About us,” *Help for Heroes*, accessed 06 June, 2024.

¹⁶³ Andrews, “Poppies, Tommies and Remembrance,” 113.

contemporary period, the labels of ‘victim’ and ‘heroes’ are both problematic and political. A ‘victim’ builds on the horror experiences of WWI, whereas registering soldiers as ‘heroes’ deliberates them as individuals who do no wrong, separating them from realistic scenarios of soldiering.

In 2006, Veterans Day was first observed and celebrated. A commemorative day on the 27th of June to ensure that veterans and their contribution to Britain were never forgotten. In addition, Veterans Day officially became Armed Forces Day in 2009. The distinction between Remembrance Day, which the poppy is aligned to, and Armed Forces Day is the focus on celebrating the lives of current and ex-servicemen rather than honouring the deaths of British military servicemen since World War I. Changing the name of the day in 2009 reflects a strategy to deal with the widespread unpopular sentiment towards British militarism in Afghanistan and Iraq. To support those who continue to serve, it seeks to justify the contemporary conflicts Britain is involved in. Building of the narratives that were sustained by the red poppy. The Peace Pledge Union (PPU), founders of the white poppy, have continuously criticised Armed Forces Day for supporting militarism and pushing militaristic messages in an attempt to rebuild support for British wars.¹⁶⁴ Despite the fair criticism of the PPU, the creation of the Armed Forces Day prompted a change in the commercial and social strategy of the Royal British Legion and poppy. Not only does this change display the unpopularity with British militarism at this point, but it underlines why the RBL sought to change their strategy. For over a hundred years, the red poppy and Remembrance Day have been the dominant forces in British military remembrance. Armed Forces Day provides contestation towards this notion. The response of the RBL to increase its inculcation commercially and socially through football, symbolises its desires to maintain its cultural influence.

General Dannatt, a former general in the British military and a chief influencer in the creation of *Help for Heroes*, stated in 2007 that there was a lack of public support for the military.¹⁶⁵ This ratifies the notion from someone within the military - and later political mainstream debates - that there was a desire as well as initiatives put in place to reconstitute support for the military, orchestrated by state institutions. The lack of public support gives rise to the role of the RBL in generating this sentiment, alongside other methods such as *Help*

¹⁶⁴ “What’s wrong with Armed Forces Day,” *Peace Pledge Union*, accessed, June 6, 2024, [What's wrong with Armed Forces Day? | Peace Pledge Union \(ppu.org.uk\)](https://www.ppu.org.uk/what-s-wrong-with-armed-forces-day/).

¹⁶⁵ Kelly, “A Critical Discourse Analysis of Military-Related Remembrance Rhetoric in UK Sport,” 203.

for Heroes and Armed Forces Day. During this period from 2007 – 2009, British officials lamented what they viewed as unsatisfactory support and endorsement of British militarism. Kelly claims “the most visible representation of the manufacturing of militaristic support has been the coordinated and purposeful re-articulation of the meaning and interpretation of remembrance and its primary signifier the (red) poppy”. Kelly fails to underline how the “commemorative turn” following the stadium disasters sowed the seeds for memory to become such an intrinsic practice in football. However, Kelly’s prominence on manufacturing militaristic support is evident through the British Legion’s response to a perceived declining support in their symbols message and representation. This reflects an essential perspective to understand the poppy’s politicisation as it shows the orchestration of the Legion, emphasising the poppy’s fragility. The response of the Royal British Legion to the growing elitist perception that their needed to be more support for British militarism engaged the poppy to become a symbol pushed for something more than remembrance. An agenda that politicises the poppy and makes it susceptible to scrutiny. Not to mention, by perpetuating this initiative on a widely popular and culturally diverse sport, this decision politicises football and endangers those silenced by the red poppy.

The Solution – The Football Jersey and the Poppy

In November 2009, The *Daily Mail* vilified several Premier League clubs who decided not to sport the red poppy.¹⁶⁶ The tabloid newspaper themselves claim to be the catalyst for encouraging and forcing clubs to wear the poppy, labelling it the “Sportsmail Campaign”.¹⁶⁷ This campaign, in their words, has been a “major factor” in club’s decision to change their stance on wearing the poppy. Despite not being a political decision in any way, these clubs came under severe scrutiny from the press. This is crucial information as it transcends the pre-existing debate on the poppy being forced upon media workers to football clubs having to deal with the same pressure. A change in the public meaning of the red poppy, observed as a result of the faltering support for British militarism, is correlated with an increase in social

¹⁶⁶ “Kop out: Liverpool, Manchester United and Bolton Refuse to Wear Poppies for Weekend Matches,” *Daily Mail*, November 5, 2009, [Kop out: Liverpool, Manchester United and Bolton refuse to wear poppies for weekend matches | Daily Mail Online](#).

¹⁶⁷ Charles Sale, “Poppy Power! Now Only Three Premier Clubs are Still Refusing to Back Sportsmail’s Campaign to Honour our Heroes,” *Daily Mail*, 5 November, 2009, [Poppy power! Now only three Premier clubs are still refusing to back Sportsmail's campaign to honour our heroes | Daily Mail Online](#).

and professional pressure to wear the poppy.¹⁶⁸ Highlighted by Jon Snow through his term ‘poppy fascism’.¹⁶⁹ The fascism Snow refers to is through his experience as a news broadcaster being pressured to wear a red poppy whilst on television. The ‘Sportsmail Campaign’ is precisely the sort of pressure Snow refers to and thus his notion of ‘poppy fascism’ has transcended into the realm of British football.¹⁷⁰ This echoes the same notions of pressure instilled by the sensationalist newspapers discovered in the discourse analysis of the 1930s. Tabloid newspapers criticising those who do not conform with a national symbol of remembrance for militarism. Not only does this define the perception that the poppy is viewed as apolitical, but the parallels of this circumstance to those in the 1930s highlight the red poppy’s contested nature.

The new utilisation of the poppy in football displays the attempt to conjoin a symbol of profound cultural heritage into a sport of popular culture and has had multiple consequences. Firstly, the red poppy has greatly benefitted from boosting its place in society and cultural heritage. An already highly powerful and influential symbol has increased its popularity considerably since its injection within football through annual popular inculcation on Remembrance weekend. Not only this, but the ramifications of the newly invented tradition of wearing the poppy on football shirts have resulted in debates about the political nature of the poppy. Secondly, the incision of the red poppy into a diverse and globalised sport has enabled it to become politically stratified through more diverse spheres of influence. Subsequently leading to alienation and polarisation from players within the football leagues, primarily the Premier League. The premier league in its contemporary setting displays a rapidly growing, diversifying, and international arena that features a plethora of contestations and controversies. Thus, exclusion and silencing projects by the poppy’s symbolism becomes more apparent than any prior form of contestation. The subsequent section will analyse two players who have been left out or silenced by the British military commemoration and the red poppy’s symbolism. Both represent differing narratives and display the only two players who choose not to wear a poppy on their football jerseys. Building on the themes discussed in the previous chapter, their justification for not sporting a poppy shows the politicisation of the poppy and the contemporary culmination of its polarisation. In addition to this, using these

¹⁶⁸ Archer, Matheson, “Football remembers,” 764.

¹⁶⁹ Snow, “Why I Don’t Wear a Poppy on Tv.”

¹⁷⁰ Sale, “Poppy Power!”

two football players as a case study will identify the apolitical perception of the poppy and how this, in turn, affects the growth of the poppy's politicisation.

James McClean

James McClean was born in county Derry in Northern Ireland in 1989, ten years before the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.¹⁷¹ He moved to Sunderland in 2011 and experienced his first remembrance weekend fixture in 2012, for which he did not wear the poppy. Ever since, McClean has been a target of a vast array of criticism within stadiums, social media, and media outlets. Often footballers become targets of rival fan's chants and slogans. However, on rare occasions, players become victims of abuse from their own teams' fans. McClean was targeted abundantly by Sunderland supporters and vilified for every English club he has played for since. Sunderland football club were extremely quick to highlight how the decision was McClean's and that they "wholeheartedly" support the poppy and remembrance commemorations. Not only does this display their separation from McClean's personal decision. It represents the scale of backlash one becomes susceptible to if one chooses not to wear a poppy, whether that be a football club or an individual. Hence, the pressure politicises the red poppy as it suggests that if you don't adhere to the pressure of supporting British militarism, you polarise yourself from British societal ideals and culture. McClean claims,

"They didn't understand. To them, I was disrespecting their country, disrespecting their fallen heroes, disrespecting their culture. I was getting booed every touch".¹⁷²

He later states that Sunderland had no conversations with him about the issue and allowed the abuse to continue.¹⁷³ The comments denote Archer and Matheson's notion of "emotional imperialism".¹⁷⁴ By centralising on the poppy enforcement through football, and the practice of generating emotions from spectators, McClean becomes a target for 'emotional imperialism' due to his decision not to wear a poppy. He separates himself from an embedded nationalistic cultural symbol and thus becomes a target for being anti-British, demonstrating the inherent national identity theme found in the poppy. Not only this, but it also displays the

¹⁷¹ The Good Friday Agreement, signed on April 10th officially ended the Troubles which had been ongoing since the 1960s and played a major part in bringing peace and stability to Northern Ireland. It became effective from 1999.

¹⁷² "James McClean 'Hung out to Dry' by Sunderland Over Poppy," *BBC*, March 28, 2015, [Poppy power! Now only three Premier clubs are still refusing to back Sportsmail's campaign to honour our heroes | Daily Mail Online](#).

¹⁷³ *Ibid*.

¹⁷⁴ Archer, Matheson, "Commemoration and Emotional Imperialism," 763.

imperialistic themes of the poppy. McClean reflects a sentiment from a post-colonial narrative. Thus, his abuse highlights British exceptionalist attitudes. McClean's exclusion in the ceremonial practice of the poppy alienates him and others who feel sympathetic to him and his cause, underlining the polarising nature of the poppy.

McClean's perspective becomes clearer through his statement to the chairman of Wigan football club in 2014. Following two years of continuous backlash and media isolation, McClean breaks his silence with an official letter explaining his reasoning for not wearing the poppy. This letter is necessary following his experience at Sunderland. The vast sectarian persecution and abuse he received seems to have impacted his reasoning for writing a letter to the chairman. McClean argues that if the poppy was purely utilised to mourn the deaths of those who fought in both World Wars, he would wear one.¹⁷⁵ He then goes on to claim how the red poppy remembers soldiers of British conflicts after 1945 and that this is problematic for him.¹⁷⁶ As discussed in the previous chapter the expansion of the poppy's symbol to all British conflicts after 1945 greatly emphasises the politicisation of the red poppy and McClean represents a product of that. Therefore, by applying the red poppy to football kits from 2008, the politicisation of the red poppy is exacerbated as it puts footballers who chose not to support its symbolism under a spotlight of scrutiny. His rejection of the red poppy, and his denunciation of British militarism after 1945, show a stern rejection of British mainstream values.

Later in McClean's statement, there is a response to the types of abuse he falls victim to.

"I am not a war monger, or anti-British, or a terrorist of any of the accusations levelled at me in the past."¹⁷⁷

Highlighting these three points expresses how people have insulted McClean's stance on not sporting the poppy. 'Anti-British' confirms the perspective that the red poppy is an indirect nationalist symbol. The poppy's rich cultural imperial history has enabled it to become a beacon of Britishness in a fractured British identity. Memory agents have sought to use the poppy to reinvigorate a time which was perceived as being more British. Abuse towards

¹⁷⁵ Oisín Collins, "Pic: James McClean Pens Open Letter to Wigan Chairman Explaining why he Won't be Wearing a Poppy Tonight," *JOE*, November 7, 2014, [JOE.ie](http://joe.ie) - [Pic: James McClean pens open letter to Wigan chairman explaining why he won't be wearing a poppy tonight.](http://joe.ie)

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

McClellan underlines a declining sense of Britishness that has become increasingly problematic in domestic politics. Through the labelling of ‘anti-British’, the poppy has become increasingly political due to it being a source to rejuvenate a feeling of collective national identity in support of one of Britain’s oldest and most popular institutions – the British Army.¹⁷⁸ It demonstrates the poppy's common perception as a nationalist symbol making it inherently political despite people also believing it is not political. Its introduction to football has caused McClellan to become a victim of nationalistic discrimination, alienating his Irish heritage.

Nemanja Matic

McClellan’s case reflects a very political and contested environment for the British army. The violent history in Ireland and Britain between 1960 and 1990 has caused the topic surrounding McClellan to be very political. The IRA, The Troubles, and Bloody Sunday are all politicised topics which can affect how one views the poppy. Nemanja Matic, on the other hand, represents a very different sphere of poppy politics. Whilst McClellan reflects a sphere of disrespect from the poppy, Matic highlights a personal experience of trauma.¹⁷⁹ The red poppy, for Nemanja Matic, is a reminder of the attack he felt personally living in Vrelo during the NATO bombings of Serbia in 1999.¹⁸⁰ By highlighting a personal experience of British militarism, Matic represents a traumatic experience as a twelve-year-old Serbian boy. Despite the conflict being opposed to an authoritarian regime, Matic falls under the supposed ‘enemy’ and ‘victim’ category of those excluded from poppy remembrance. He was not involved in the regime, yet his trauma is re-energised through the red poppy. Although the NATO involvement in Serbia could be perceived as justified, the poppy does not remember the vast array of people and civilians war effects such as Matic.

In addition, the red poppy’s nuanced symbolism is crucial to his perspective of the poppy. The red poppy is not necessarily a symbol commemorating NATO; it is strictly for the British armed forces. It can be said that military alliances with Britain were not officially included, even since the earliest adoption of the poppy after World War I. As Matic connects NATO with the commemoration of British militarism through the red poppy, his perception

¹⁷⁸ Fitzpatrick, “Football Remembers,” 64

¹⁷⁹ Archer, Matheson, “Emotional Imperialism,” 767.

¹⁸⁰ Nemanja Matic @nemanjamatic, “I recognise fully why people wear poppies, I totally respect everyone’s right to do so and I have total sympathy for anyone who has lost loved ones due to conflict,” Instagram photo, November 5, 2018, [Nemanja Matic | I recognise fully why people wear poppies. I totally respect everyone’s right to do so and I have total sympathy for anyone who has lost... | Instagram](#).

demonstrates the poppy's unintentional political affiliations and vulnerabilities whilst also showing its international nuances.

What is interesting in Matic's case, and vital for understanding the poppy's growing politicisation, is that Matic used to wear a poppy at the beginning of his career in England.

“Whilst I have done previously, on reflection I now don't feel it is right for me to wear a poppy.”¹⁸¹

Arriving 2018, his U-turn decision for not wearing a poppy stem from the growing politicised discourse of its symbolism. His change in mindset is not very clear, nor can it be narrowed down to one reason, but it does display varying nuances. Firstly, the poppy has become increasingly perceived as a political and glorified militaristic symbol, excluding more and more people since its initial donning on football shirts in 2008. Secondly, the decision comes after McClean's and his experience of profound abuse could demonstrate a change in opinion for Matic due the poppy's firmer alignment with radical nationalism. Primarily the decision's impetus comes from the pressure to wear the poppy earlier in his career. Within his statement, Matic puts prominence on his intention not to offend fans and asks them to respect his decision.¹⁸² Through his statement, Matic affirms that there has been pressure to wear the poppy due to an abundance of backlash for choosing not to wear one, as seen with McClean. Not only this, by asking fans to respect his decision, he is aware of the embeddedness of the poppy in British society and the nationalistic narratives aligned with its symbolism. These nuanced reasons for deciding to not wear the poppy are crucial for understanding the increased politicising of the Royal British Legion's red poppy. He indirectly claims that at the time of his arrival in England, he did not necessarily view the poppy as political. Therefore, his decision shows the pressure and political alignment of the poppy's message.

The Importance of Both

Understanding McClean's and Matic's reasoning for not wearing the red poppy is crucial, as their statements reflect their desire to prevent offending fans and spectators. It distinctively underlines the 'counter-memories' of both Matic and McClean as they view the poppy's symbolism entirely different to British nationals. By doing so, it shows how the poppy is perceived as apolitical in Britain, and the embeddedness of its symbolism in British cultural

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

heritage bolsters its apolitical perception. Anna Liddle, in her study of the remembrance rituals and poppy's symbolism in schools, demonstrates how the *Red Poppy Remembrance Discourse* is narrow and intertwines messages of nationalism and pro-militarism.¹⁸³ Despite her study coming from the 2020s, the embeddedness of the red poppy remembrance discourse is traceable from the 1930s. The consensus is presented by both players receiving abuse for being anti-British. The vast abuse both players have succumbed to displays the embeddedness and the adoption of the poppy's symbolism with nationalist sentiments in Britain. Not only this, through this thesis's adoption of Liddle's theory, the pressure to wear the poppy projected by the 1930s newspapers and later to Matic, McClean, and other figures within and outside football, showcases an unwavering politicisation of the red poppy.

Archer and Matheson use the term "expressive harm", in their analysis of McClean and Matic.¹⁸⁴ It demonstrates how 'expressive harm' is caused through them wearing a poppy as the ideas and consequences one projects whilst wearing a symbol of British militarism is more impactful than the material consequences.¹⁸⁵ Thus by doing so, it underlines the imperialist nature of the poppy as the poppy project feelings coinciding with British imperialism. However, it is imperative to understand how this projection is not understood to be political, reasserting the point that the red poppy has become ungovernable. McClean states how wearing a poppy would be witnessed as an act of disrespect to his people, implying that by wearing the poppy, he supports the British militarism during the troubles and in his home county, Derry.¹⁸⁶ As a result of the vast inculcation through schools which Liddle underlines, the vast majority of peoples perspective on the poppy's symbolism does not include the experiences and attitudes of those who have been affected by British militarism. Extending the apolitical façade of the poppy, its polarisation, and its increasing politicisation.

International Perspective

A warning was imposed in the build-up to a friendly on Remembrance Weekend in 2011 between England and Spain due to the proposal of wearing a red poppy on the England shirt.

¹⁸³ Liddle, "Your School Needs You to Buy a Poppy," 2.

¹⁸⁴ Archer, Matheson, "Emotional Imperialism," 770.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

Not only was this a profound incident for the poppy's expanding politicisation, FIFAs approach to this nationalised controversy represents the juxtaposing opinions on the poppy's politics between Britain and the international community. Later in 2016, the year of the Brexit referendum - another defining moment in the politicisation process of the poppy - England and Scotland received fines from FIFA for wearing poppies during their World Cup qualifying match.¹⁸⁷ A crucial event chiefly due to FIFA, the top institutional organisation regulating professional football, applying their "Law 4: The Players' Equipment", enforcing no political symbols footballing equipment.¹⁸⁸ It reflects an international perspective that the poppy's symbolism is political, conjoining with the narratives and reasoning of McClean and Matic. It crystallises the debate on whether the poppy is apolitical or political as it displays how an international institution views the poppy as political.¹⁸⁹ This is supported by the fact that in 1987, the English national team did not wear poppies against Yugoslavia on Armistice Day – nor did they in November 2000 against Scotland.¹⁹⁰ It begs the question, if not then, why now?

FIFA's decision to prevent England from sporting the poppy in both fixtures culminated in a torrent of dissatisfaction from royalty, politicians and the British public. Not to mention the far-right, who felt particularly aggravated to the point a member of the EDL (English Defence League) staged a protest at the FIFA headquarters in Zurich. His banner stated, "English Defence League. How dare FIFA disrespect our war dead and wounded – Support our troops", featuring two large poppies.¹⁹¹ A protest at FIFA by a far-right political party member demonstrates one; that the red poppy is so deeply embedded in British identity that it has become a symbol of right-wing nationalism. Secondly, a protest at the international governing institution of football symbolises the pressure for footballers and people to wear a poppy or become a target. The discourse from 2011 is interesting when referring to the 2016 fines as the EDL protesting at the FIFA headquarters symbolises the red poppy's politicisation, going against the continual rhetoric and support for its apoliticality to this day. McClean and Matic are crucial figures demonstrating how this politicised rhetoric has

¹⁸⁷ Jack, de Menezes, "England Fined £35,000 by FIFA for Wearing Poppies Against Scotland but will Appeal Sanction," *Independent*, December 19, 2016, [England fined £35,000 by Fifa for wearing poppies against Scotland but will appeal sanction | The Independent | The Independent](#).

¹⁸⁸ "Law 4: The Players' Equipment," TheFA, accessed 22 June, 2024, [Law 4 - The Players' Equipment \(thefa.com\)](#).

¹⁸⁹ Kelly, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Military-Related Remembrance Rhetoric in UK Sport," 201 – 202.

¹⁹⁰ Maggie Andrews, "British Practices of Remembrance," 5.

¹⁹¹ Press Association, "EDL Stages Roof-top Protest at FIFA Headquarters Over Poppy Ban," *The Guardian*, November 9, 2011, [EDL stages roof-top protest at Fifa headquarters over poppy ban | England | The Guardian](#).

affected those who play football in Britain. In addition, they demonstrate that promoting the red poppy within football has enabled British exceptionalist abuse to formulate.

Conclusion

James McClean and Nemanja Matic offer two examples of victims of the poppy's politicisation. Despite representing two differing examples of the symbol's polarisation, it reflects the broad scope of the poppy's political problems. The utilisation of football to drive the poppy's message as a response to wavering support for British militarism is a defining culmination of the poppy's contemporary politicisation. The pressurised sporting of the poppy on football kits from 2008 has transformed its cultural significance and influence, causing it to spiral. Fuelled by the myths of both World Wars, nationalistic rituals discovered during remembrance weekend fixtures echo similar voices and opinions of senior military personnel and political leaders.¹⁹² Not only has this made transparent the apolitical façade of British football and the red poppy, but it has also promoted an ego-history which has alienated foreign and local players within the Premier League. FIFA's firm stance on the poppy being political demonstrates an international institutions critique on the poppy's political essence. Fundamentally classifying the poppy as a political symbol contrasting the opinions of leading British figures and much of the public.

There cannot be any doubt that football is a powerful propaganda tool, just as it was a powerful tool for British colonialism. The introduction of the poppy in football has clouded its purpose, making the message of the poppy narrower as it does not aid in the education of its symbolism. It promotes the ideological framing of British militarism through the poppy and the correlating remembrance rituals in uncritical ways to normalise British militaristic violence. In an increasingly diverse Britain, with an even more diverse and multicultural demographic playing in the Premier League, the poppy – a remembrance symbol - has been aggressively hijacked to promote British militarism and identity.

¹⁹² Kelly, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Military-Related Remembrance Rhetoric in UK Sport," 200.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the contestation towards the Royal British Legion's red poppy has contributed to the expansion and subsequent politicisation of its symbolism. The discourse analysis in chapter one unveiled how the contestation between the red and white poppy from 1933 to 1937 evolved the red poppy's symbolism to become increasingly politicised. Chapter two underlined how the extension of the red poppy's symbolism to all British conflicts increased the poppy's polarisation, representing a substantial shift in its politicisation, as it excluded a greater number of people whilst enlarging its position in British cultural heritage. The final chapter utilised the red poppy's introduction and location in the English Premier League to demonstrate the significant effects of the poppy's politicisation – providing a contemporary contestation and climax of the poppy's political identity.

When looking at how the contestation towards the red poppy contributed to the politicisation of its symbolism, it is evident that through both continuous discourse, debate and expansion of its symbolism the poppy as a symbol is extensively political in nature. The exclusion created by the narrowed and masculinised symbolism of the poppy disrupts the popular and embedded notion that the poppy is apolitical. This thesis has uncovered that the poppy's drive and inculcation into social environs, due to contestation in the 1930s and contemporary period, has resulted in a profound impact on the poppy's non-political alignment – a paradoxical circumstance that definitively makes the RBL's red poppy political. In its earliest years, throughout its growth and expansion, and in its contemporary form as seen in its use in football, the notion of the poppy as an unbiased token of remembrance is proven invalid. The ungovernable symbol, despite being narrow in terms of who it remembers, has enabled it to become adopted by a wide variety of politically affiliated groups. Its adoption by the far-right and subsequent contestation from those more aligned with left-wing pacifist morals showcase its inherently politicised, ungovernable, and fragile status within Britain. FIFA's unpopular but accurate assertion that the red poppy's symbolism is political supports the conclusions of this thesis.

This thesis has linked these earliest notions of contestation in the early 1930s to contemporary ones, uniquely highlighting the long-ranging inherent nature of its politicisation process. Represented through the case of the white poppy and latterly by the personal statements of James McClean and Nemanja Matic, the poppy nuanced symbolism becomes clearer. The poppy's position in the British cultural heritage makes it a difficult

symbol to dispute. However, this thesis has identified a linkage from the poppy's first major contestation to the modern contestation discovered in British football.

Through the critical discourse analysis of the contestation between the red and white poppy in the 1930s, this thesis has delved into an area of study which has only been mildly referenced before. Academic research surrounding the red poppy's symbolism has been analysed through numerous lenses which have been identified in the four varying waves. However, the origins of the poppy's politicisation, primarily through the lens of contestation, have been overlooked. Whilst there is a generalised academic consensus that the red poppy is political, analysis of its contestation with a rivalling symbol enables a strengthening of this notion. Uncovering a linkage between the contestation of the red poppy between the 1930s discourse and the realm of British football in the twenty-first century underlines a new observation of the poppy's politicisation. This thesis addressed this through its discourse analysis of 1930s newspapers, enabling it to expand on pre-existing research on the poppy's role in British society and the results of its politicisation in an innovative way. Britain's fractured identity has been a crucial influence for the aggressive utility of the poppy, nationalising and radicalising its exceptionalist narratives. Despite covering these notions in chapter two, more research into the nationalistic alignment of the poppy could deconstruct the red poppy's contemporary jingoistic swagger. This thesis observes that if the red poppy's symbolism was limited to purely commemoration of World War I and World War II, its politicisation, whilst still being inherent, would become far less problematic and polarising, separating itself from contemporary nationalistic causes and centralising on its original purpose of remembering and commemorating the horrors of war.

Despite this thesis having a unique space within the current academic research of the red poppy's symbolism, there are undoubtedly several limitations to this research. The critical discourse analysis is limited to one period of the poppy's long history. There have been a few periods which witnessed an upswing in controversies to the red poppy. Not to mention multiple periods of popular contestation between the red and white poppy, like explicit criticism of the white poppy in the 1980s. Despite not analysing all instances of contestation, this thesis is still sufficient in proving its aims of showing the longer history of the poppy's political nature. The first major contestation of the red poppy in 1933 provides a progressive pedestal to deconstruct the red poppy's politicisation.

Utilising a critical discourse analysis purely for the contestation discovered and not for the discourse stemming from the implementation of the red poppy on football shirts in 2008 can be considered a limitation of this thesis. However, this chapter aims to understand the footballers personal understanding of the poppy's symbolism and politicisation. Thus, limiting the analysis to focus on player statements, rather than the perspectives of football fans, club stakeholders, and players who choose to wear the poppy, does not deter the original purpose of this thesis. Moreover, while having the potential to be repetitive - as prior academic research also centralises on the abuse towards McClean and Matic - this thesis nevertheless offers a unique perspective by emphasising the importance of understanding the poppy's earliest contestation to analyse the current political signature of the red poppy.

Lastly, this thesis is extremely relevant for expanding the awareness of the red poppy's polarisation and partisanism, something which is not popularly perceived due to its deep embeddedness in Britain's 'island' culture. As the world becomes increasingly globalised, the poppy's polarisation is not restricted to Britain and there is a necessity to make sure that messages of remembrance and memory are inclusive. Not only this, but as global militarism rises, assessing symbols which embolden and glorify militarism using a one-sided approach is vital for deescalating international animosity.

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