

Chapter 4: The New National War Monuments: Interrogating Gendered Narratives in Commemorative Sculpture

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Introduction

In March 2017 Queen Elizabeth II and her younger grandson, the “warrior prince” (*BBC News* 21 January 2013), unveiled a new public artwork in central London commemorating the work of military and civilian personnel deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan between 1990 and 2015. Designed by sculptor Paul Day, it consists of a circular bronze disc mounted between two symmetrical pieces of white stone, the outside edges of which are rough and unpolished. The relief images etched on both sides of the tondo illustrate the convergence of defence and development that has characterised recent wars (Duffield 2001). One surface shows three male soldiers on foot patrol, eyes trained on the horizon and rifles at the ready; a jet fighter flies overhead, while a rough etching indicates four figures carrying a stretcher and a Chinook helicopter hovering in the distance. The reverse is notable for its extraordinary detail; it portrays women and men of all ages engaged in a range of activities associated with development and overseas aid: healthcare, education, food, water, women’s rights and negotiations with village elders. The words “Service” and “Duty” are inscribed on the stone above and below this tableau, while “Iraq” and “Afghanistan” adorn the depiction of military violence. The entire piece sits on a rectangular footing of grey slate; the viewer is required to walk around all four sides to read the words: “In recognition of all British Military Personnel and UK Civilians who served and worked in Iraq 1990–2009 and Afghanistan 2001–2015.”

Day's monumental sculpture provides a suitable entry point for this discussion of new forms of commemoration arising from the war in Afghanistan, not least because it raises questions about the different ways in which this conflict has been represented to domestic populations in fixed and permanent form. His design was chosen by a select group of trustees, including former military chiefs, supported by the government and part-funded by readers of the *Sun* tabloid newspaper. Despite its somewhat archaic attempt to represent modern warfare in pictorial language, the artwork projects a deceptively simple message. Seen from one angle, it presents the relationship between armed combat and development as complementary, as though they are two sides of the same coin. Seen from another, it actually reinforces a stark dichotomy between them. Like the two unfinished pieces of stone that hold the disk upright, they entail different approaches to military intervention, reflecting an unresolved tension evident not only in UK foreign policy, but also within the other national contexts analysed in this book. In fact, it could be argued that the intricately worked bronze reliefs positively draw attention to the gulf between military and civilian organisations, indicating that they might work within the same geographical spaces but not necessarily in partnership.

Shaping the legacy

Jenny Edkins begins her book on *Trauma and Memory of Politics* with the words:

In the aftermath of a war or catastrophe comes the reckoning. The dead and missing are listed, families grieve and comfort each another, and memorials are erected. If this is a war that has been won, commemoration endorses those in power, or so it seems at first glance. (2003, 1)

Following Edkins' lead, this chapter will examine some of the numerous material forms of commemoration created in all of the six countries, both during and after the ISAF operation in Afghanistan. First, however, it is crucial to note that this was not a war that was "won" in any sense of the word. As Julia Welland has suggested, "the 'Long War' in Afghanistan (2001–14) challenged a number of traditional conceptions about what war is" (2016, 127). Nor is this a war that has "ended" with any sense of achievement or accomplishment of military goals.

Our point of departure is that monuments nonetheless provide an essential tool used by those in power to legitimise particular wars, on the one hand, and to bridge the divide between the

military and society on the other. Commemoration through material structures is one way of bringing distant wars “home” and representing complex conflicts in a tangible way. With regard to all types of new memorials, factors such as the commissioning, design, location and reception inevitably reflect the unique orientation of each country towards its recent national past, particularly in relation to fascism, colonialism, the Cold War or the end of empire. In line with the comparative methodology outlined in Chapter 2, we examine a selection of monuments to ask how gender can intrude into, interrupt or help to reframe deep-rooted ideas about each nation’s historic commitment to, or involvement in, war, now interpreted in the light of the Afghanistan experience. Many of the examples included here entail the projection of a national identity based on a historically distinct relationship to political violence, on the one hand, combined with a statement about Afghanistan that clarifies “traditional misconceptions about what war is,” on the other (Welland 2016, 127). War may be framed in terms of protecting citizens from evil terrorists “at home,” creating the conditions for peace in a troubled region, or following a stated policy of counterinsurgency that incorporates both of these aims. Although it is tempting to read the dichotomy between combat and development, or war-fighting and peace-keeping, as one that pits military masculinities against feminine sensibilities, this does not ultimately produce fruitful insights into the gendering of military power (Duncanson 2009; Kirby and Henry 2012). While this analytical task often involves “paying attention to the margins and the marginal, variously characterized, of masculinities and war” (Chisholm and Tidy 2017, 99), in this chapter we are more concerned to interrogate traditional sites of power, nationalism and militarism in the form of official monuments and memorial spaces that predominantly record the premature deaths of young men in war zones far from home. How do these material objects attempt to give social and political meaning to contemporary military deaths? How does gender help to shape the different national “mythsapes” that are being articulated in these endeavours?

Following a typology of the multifaceted and extensive commemorative initiatives and war monuments in all of the countries studied, the chapter discusses two very different examples in greater detail. The Iraq-Afghanistan memorial in London described above provides a fitting case study as it idealises the “particular gendered character” of counterinsurgency, a strategy aimed at winning “the hearts and minds of civilian populations” (Khalili 2011, 1453). The second example concerns an artwork constructed in Italy, entitled *Gli Angeli degli Eroi* (The Heroes’ Angels). This consists of a maquette rather than a finished sculpture. Intended as the model for a mural, it takes the form of a series of black wooden panels on which are written the

names of the 177 Italian soldiers who have died between 1950 and 2016 in various “peace-keeping” conflicts worldwide, including Afghanistan. In a brochure compiled for the exhibition, artist Flavio Favelli explained that the list suggests “a silent army” serving Italy “in faraway lands,” raising the spectres of patriotism, sacrifice, honour and other values that are “obsolete and distant in the civilian world” (2015). His intervention highlights the invisible figure of the soldier as a humanitarian agent, who, as we noted in the introduction, exhibits an alternative form of masculinity characterised by selflessness, altruism and courage, far removed from the aggressive, hardened combat fighter normally associated with war-work.

As we draw out many other productive contrasts between these two memorials, we ask how gender emerges as a significant factor in the articulation of national values, as expressed by each country’s commitment to military force. In many ways, these two examples could not be more dissimilar. The former salutes the complex components of modern war work, highlighting the obligation of serving the nation abroad, but it does not address the question of death in any direct or obvious way. In the second, the names of the individual men, with the date and place where they died, pose questions about the contemporary meanings of those deaths in a political context in which the prospect of the “national” remains both divisive and contested. Where the UK monument represents the convergence of military and civilian contributions in graphic form, self-consciously demonstrating the gendered division of labour entailed in conflict zones, the Italian memorial discussed here requires a more forensic approach. As a model for an artwork, rather than an expensive installation commissioned “from above,” it disrupts the portentous status of the conventional war memorial. Differing so radically in form and content, the two examples provide rich material for unpicking notions of gendered power in terms of agency and vulnerability in war. Although one is fixed in its location and the other remains mobile, at least until the mural is realised, both memorials are placed in meaningful locations that endorse their ability to speak to and for the nation. However, before examining these examples in more detail, the next section will offer an overview of new memorials constructed in all six countries during the years 2002–2017.

A typology of Afghanistan war memorials

The astonishing array of new monuments thrown up during the Afghanistan war can be divided into two broad categories. The first consists of national memorials designed to commemorate recent (post-1948) and contemporary military deaths, while the second encompasses monuments specifically built to commemorate military deaths in Afghanistan, whether made

of materials brought back from the conflict or not. Inevitably, there are examples that fit both categories as well as those that belong in neither.

By asking who commissioned the monuments, who funded them, who designed them, where they are located, and what controversies they might have caused, it is possible not only to discern significant shifts in contemporary attitudes to mourning the deaths of soldiers, but also to calculate changes in how the state manages the concrete meanings of those deaths and the wars that justify that “sacrifice.” We pay particular attention to the significance of materials imported from the place of death, as well as noting the relevance of “natural” settings, not simply as an aid to reflective mourning but as a way to offer privacy for expressions of grief.

National Monuments

Sweden, Denmark and Germany each saw high-profile monuments erected in their capital cities. The Swedish example, known as Restare (From the Latin verb *restare*, to stay, to rest) or pejoratively, “en kotte” (a pine cone), was constructed in parkland in front of the National Maritime Museum in Stockholm in 2013. Dedicated to the memory of veterans and other personnel who served in international war zones, the conical sculpture, designed by Monika Larsen Dennis, provides three benches, each with a different inscription. The first reads: “To stop, to rest, to remain”; the second explains: “Because democracy is fragile. Because humanity must be safeguarded. For you who make a difference. For relatives who are left. Because freedom has a price”; the third bench carries an uncredited epigraph by Voltaire that states: “I do not agree with what you have to say, but I’ll defend to the death your right to say it.”

Two years earlier, in April 2011, Danish Prime Minister Løkke Rasmussen unveiled the foundation stone for the “National Monument to Denmark’s International Effort Since 1948” in the grounds of a seventeenth-century citadel called Kastellet, close to other tourist destinations and overlooked by military barracks in Copenhagen. According to Birgitte Refslund Sørensen, the controversy surrounding the construction of the monument “mainly concerned its location, aesthetics, and craftsmanship” (2016, 31) Designed by Finn Reinbothe, the granite memorial takes the form of three interlinked spaces, each designating a particular mode of commemoration: formal military and state occasions; appreciation of Denmark’s role in international conflicts since 1948 (complete with eternal flame); and a smaller enclosure for private grief and reflection. The names of those who lost their lives in service are etched on the dark grey walls of this last section. These discrete divisions ensure that the monument has

become “a significant collective landmark in the military’s framework, but also in the frameworks of the bereaved families and the national fellowship” (Ekman 2014, 142).

Germany saw two separate but not disconnected national memorials, built in 2009 and 2014. The former, designed by architect Andreas Meck, was located near the defence ministry in Berlin and was intended to commemorate the 3,200 military and civilian personnel who had died while in military service since the Bundeswehr was founded in 1955 (Federal Ministry of Defence 2014). Meck’s abstract design is marked by a restrained use of material and colour; it does not reference German national history, nor does it display any religious symbols. However, the siting of the monument, which bears the inscription “Our Bundeswehr’s Dead – For Peace, Justice and Freedom,” attracted criticism on the grounds that it should have been located closer to the Reichstag, symbolising the fact that it is the government that decides how the armed forces should be used (*Deutsche Welle*, 8 September 2009). The second monument, known as “The Forest of Remembrance,” was built in parkland on the edge of the Bundeswehr Commandment near Potsdam; the site and design were deliberately chosen to provide a secluded space for relatives to remember those who died in particular operations, including Afghanistan.

Although the Italian armed forces were not subject to radical restructuring in the post-war era (Ginsborg 2003), as they were in Germany, there are relatively few new monuments saluting the military as a national institution. Apart from the memorial to those who died in Nassiriya, Iraq, in 2003, the lapidary commemoration of twenty-first century military deaths is often attached to older historical structures, such as the monument in Verona which takes the form of two granite panels on either side of a large rock bearing the words: “Ai Caduti” under a large star. The panel on the left reads: “To the Fallen of ALL the wars: 1848–1945,” while the panel on the right names conflicts from 1945 onwards.

Alternatively, the official commemoration of military deaths in Afghanistan also falls in line with the dominant narrative of European geopolitics, particularly those deployments ostensibly dedicated to creating conditions for sustainable security. One example can be seen in the city of Diano Marina in Imperia, where the municipality commissioned a monument dedicated to the “Fallen Soldiers in Humanitarian Missions” in 2014. The work of sculptor Gabriele Garbolino Rù, the granite and bronze statue depicts a young man, naked to the waist, stretching out his hand to a dove. Surrounded by flowering trees and shrubs, the memorial is dedicated to

two soldiers from the region who were killed in Afghanistan. The Diano memorial was initiated by the municipality, in collaboration with the Alpini regiment, and is one of many examples in which war deaths in Afghanistan were commemorated in local settings where the deceased had meaningful connections to the place, with varying references to national history.

In Britain, several new war memorials were constructed during this period, both in the capital and in the National Memorial Arboretum located in Staffordshire (Andrews, Bagot-Jewitt, and Hunt 2011). In addition to London's new Iraq-Afghanistan monument described earlier, the prestigious UK Armed Forces Memorial was unveiled in this rural setting in 2007. The purpose of the new structure, designed by architect Liam O'Connor, was to provide the first official memorial to all British military personnel, female as well as male, who had been killed since 1948, whether in the course of duty or as the result of "terrorist action." Commissioned in 2000, months before UK forces were first deployed to Afghanistan, the monument features a circular wall that lists almost 16,000 names, leaving space for more to be added. It is adorned by two sets of figurative sculptures produced by Ian Rank-Broadley, each depicting the grief experienced by family members and colleagues on seeing the soldier's lifeless body. One of these scenes portrays, for the first time in a British military memorial, a female soldier who is acting as a medic. A Gurkha soldier assists her as she attends to the lifeless body of their colleague; both are dressed in uniform, unlike their white male counterparts who are naked from the waist up.¹

From 2004, Estonia witnessed an intense politicisation of national memorials, sometimes referred to as Estonia's "war of monuments" (Brüggemann and Kasekamp 2008; Burch and Smith 2007; Smith 2008). For example, in 2004, conflict arose over the Lihula monument commemorating Estonian soldiers who fought on the Nazi German side against the Soviet Regime. The relocation of the Soviet "Bronze Soldier," previously known as the Monument of the Liberators of Tallinn, from its original location in the city centre to a military cemetery, triggered violent riots on the streets of Tallinn in 2007 (Brüggeman and Kasekamp 2008; Ehala 2008; Lehti, Jutila and Jokisipilä 2008;). These are all reminders of how Estonia found itself caught within the ideological struggle between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. As Siobhan Kattago has argued, the conflicts around war memorials which are "not simply a domestic issue for Estonia," but part of a politicisation of the recent past in contemporary Europe, become "screens in which many of the blank spots of 20th century history are sharply contested" (2008, 432).

Hackmann and Lehti (2012) point out that, while the earlier monuments commemorated Estonian civilian victims of Soviet occupation and the destruction of Estonian independence, the more recent monuments commemorate Estonian (military) heroes and emphasise Estonia's struggle to become a sovereign state. The most famous example is the Freedom Cross, erected in 2009 in Tallinn's Freedom Square to commemorate the heroes of the War of Independence (1918–1920), representing it as “a fixed point in the Estonian drama that declares the true authenticity of the nation” (Hackmann and Lehti 2012, 152).

This brief survey confirms the importance of scrutinising new national monuments in relation to domestic debates about foreign policy while, at the same time, being mindful of the wider geopolitical and historical frameworks. We have seen how governments in each country addressed the task of re-establishing national narratives that give meaning to military deaths suffered during the Cold War era as well as the post-1989 period of increasing US global domination. Here we noted how a gender perspective offers an intermittent glimpse into the changing representation of war as an exercise in securing peace, possibly on a global scale, as opposed to fighting wars to defend the nation. In the next section, we examine the resonance of monuments that specifically commemorate deaths in Afghanistan, and which were commissioned, designed and installed after 2006.

Bringing the deaths home

The second category of new monuments erected during or just after the Afghanistan war includes two subsets: memorials consisting of materials brought back from Helmand, sometimes as a result of pressure from military families or the soldiers themselves, and those that are simply erected in honour of those who died far from home. Here we also note how service personnel and their families can be proactive in making important decisions relating to site, design and function, especially when the government or military institutions are evidently responding to demand “from below.” Thus, we can glimpse how and when the process of mourning the deaths of soldiers can be validated, circumscribed and controlled by the state.

Britain and Estonia saw memorials constructed from brick and stone transported from Camp Bastion in Helmand Province, although the siting and design of the final structure involved very different decisions in each country. In the British version, the Bastion Memorial is situated in the National Memorial Arboretum within sight of the UK Armed Forces Memorial described

above. It takes the shape of a blast wall with three panels, a design that mirrors the Basra memorial located within the same grounds, a few hundred metres away. Both walls incorporate materials from original structures erected within the UK bases in Basra and Camp Bastion. The first rudimentary monument in Camp Bastion was a cairn topped by a cross made of spent 50mm shell cases. By 2007, the sheer number of casualties necessitated a larger cairn, topped by a new and larger cross. In 2011, a decision was made to erect a more substantial memorial in the camp, built by the UK Works Group Royal Engineers; two years later, after agreeing to the relocation of the Basra Wall to the NMA, the government announced that the Bastion Wall would be brought back to England in recognition of the fact that the bricks and mortar of the original memorial carried immense symbolic weight for the military families and colleagues who had suffered bereavement.

It was this structure, encased in pale grey granite, that provided the basis for the Bastion Wall erected in June 2015; this was the same cross that would be consecrated in St Paul's a few days before installation, in a ceremony that was analysed in Chapter 3. Today, the central panel of the monument bears the inscription: "*When you go home, tell them of us and say: 'for your tomorrow we gave our today'.*" The two side walls display dark panels bearing the 453 names, with rank and date of death, etched in gold. On the back wall, there is a large relief map of Helmand carved from black stone, which has been designed for its tactile qualities. Visitors can therefore run their hands over the map to make contact with the different areas where their relatives lost their lives.

The Estonian military were stationed with the British in Camp Bastion, and, like the UK troops, built a similar memorial in 2010 with the help of donations. Following the camp's closure in 2014, the cairn of stones was transferred to Estonia and reconstructed just outside a military base in Paldiski. In this new setting, it is dedicated to all Estonian soldiers who were killed while serving on "overseas missions," commemorating the names of the nine soldiers who died in Afghanistan, two who died in Iraq and one who died in Kosovo. The design of this simple monument and its location can be usefully contrasted with the larger British version. The relatively secluded positioning implied that the deaths of those men was primarily significant to comrades and relatives, which means that there was no reason to draw attention to it after the troops were brought back. However, it was subsequently designated as a site for the annual Veterans Day celebration, providing a backdrop for the solemn ritual of national commemoration. But this was not the only memorial in Estonia dedicated to those who were

killed in Afghanistan.

In October 2017, a second commemorative project was constructed in Narva, a border town close to Russia which is inhabited by a predominantly Russian population. This new memorial honours the 45 “sons of Estonia” who died in Afghanistan, whether in the course of the Soviet-Afghan war (1979–1989) or under the umbrella of the ISAF (2004–2014). It was also designed to make a general statement about the futility of war itself. Located in an area known as Heroes Street (Kangelaste tänav), the sculpture was commissioned by the Veterans’ Union of Narva (called Bastion) and funded by public donations. At the unveiling, Boris Abramov, a member of the organisation, said that the memorial was important for future generations so that they would remember that wars are started by politicians but it is regular soldiers who die (*ERR News*, 8 October 2017). The opening was evidently attended by hundreds of residents of Narva, veterans, the families of those who died and soldiers who had recently fought in Afghanistan. Sculptor Aivar Simson, a former soldier with experience of Afghanistan, explained in the same video recording that the black stone he had used for the cuboid structure symbolised the dark nights of the South (the literal meaning in Estonian is the “land of the South” which includes the English-language notion of the Orient). He placed two shell casings on top of the stone, each commemorating a decade of deployment there, to show “that this war is over, it is time to put a stop to it. Even though wars will never end in this world, but they do for those Afghanistan veterans” (*ERR News*, 8 October 2017).

In Italy, the practice of memorialising individuals in significant geographical contexts reinforces the local connection between soldier and regiment, even as it also endorses values propounded by the national institution. It is difficult to list all such local memorials erected in memory of individuals. For example, the National Association of the famous Alpine regiments, based predominantly in northern Italy, funded several monuments dedicated to members who were killed in Afghanistan. In Feltre, Belluno, where the Association was located until 2005, the artist Antonio Bottegal was commissioned to design a monument to five members of 7th Alpine Regiment who died during the winter of 2010. Bottegal’s design acknowledges the young men who were killed in Afghanistan, but it also commemorates those who died during other so-called peacekeeping missions. Constructed from white stone, with a carved relief section illustrating soldiers in the act of rescuing civilians, male and female, the monument depicts the *Alpini* and the values they espoused, paying tribute to the role they played in

emergency situations at home, as well as humanitarian work in Afghanistan and in the Balkans before that. At the opening ceremony, Colonel Stefano Mega, commander of the regiment, emphasised how important it was to remember “these guys who paid the price of life, fulfilling their duty for the good of the whole world” (*Difesa online*, 7 April 2014).

Many of the new national monuments described here maintain the convention that these structures should invite reflection rather than pass comment on the causes and outcomes of particular wars. The Italian examples stand out in their emphasis on the deceased soldiers’ connection to locality, which possibly hints at an ambivalence towards any clearly defined nationalist script. In the cases of Estonia and the UK, the transportation of memorials from the war zone itself not only underscores the “presence of war” on the home front (Shapiro 2011, 109) but also recreates a sacred space where the line between what is familial or national might become blurred. A piece of Afghanistan is literally “brought home,” allowing the relatives of deceased soldiers to feel closer to those who died so far away and symbolically linking the distant war to the national community.

Mythscape and Modernity

Before embarking on a lengthier analysis of our two case studies, it is worth pausing to ask how these new public artworks might establish or reshape a national consensus about what the Afghanistan war was actually for. We approach this question using what Duncan Bell has called the “mythscape” of national identity-making (2003). For Bell, the term conjures up “the temporally and spatially extended discursive realm wherein the struggle for control of peoples’ memories and the formation of nationalist myths is debated, contested and subverted incessantly” (2003, 66). Although Bell does not specify the importance of a gender perspective in interpreting this mythscape, he insightfully describes the concept as “the page upon which the multiple and often conflicting nationalist narratives are (re)written” (2003, 66). However, while the concept can be useful in demonstrating the importance of the national historical context for each new memorial, we need to press it further to ask how monuments throughout Europe might mediate the relationship between the “national” and the “international” in the context of the US-led global counterinsurgency. In other words, when does the national mythscape become entwined with a universal mission to practise universal, humanitarian values dedicated to global peace and security? Here it is useful to make connections with earlier comparative work on the development of war memorials throughout Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

As many historians have shown, the practice of naming the dead began immediately after the First World War when “monuments to triumph appeared to give way, in part at least, to memorials to human loss, foci for the articulation of grief and remembrance” (Niven 2008, 39–40). Yet, at the same time, these structures were essential components of distinctly national forms of commemoration. In his analysis of the Myth of the War Experience, the ideological foundation for the sacralisation of war that emerged throughout Europe during the course of the First World War, George Mosse (1990) analysed the way in which the “cult of the fallen soldier” expressed the essence of nationalism in religious terms. Monuments and memorials within different European nation states provided tangible symbols of this cult, occupying “a sacred place dedicated to the civic religion of nationalism” (1990, 101). During the period immediately after 1918, however, the production of new memorials, notably in Germany, entailed arbitrations between the sacred and the profane, the functional and the sacred, the desire to reference the past and the impulse to embrace modernity.

Mosse argued that these tensions were resolved unevenly, but in material form, throughout the inter-war years. One result was that military deaths in the Second World War, in Germany as elsewhere, were simply commemorated by the addition of names to existing monuments. The deaths of millions of civilians in the global conflict meant that nationalist concepts of sacrifice and heroism were surpassed by the need to mourn on a more personal, familial or individual scale. He concluded that, by the end of the century, the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington DC was “the only really alive war memorial in any western nation” (Mosse 1990, 224). By this he meant that there was no patriotic inscription, “just the over-long list of the names of the dead engraved in the low-lying black wall, names to touch and to honor in private not public grief” (1990, 224). For Mosse, the absence of old symbols that summoned up “the cult of the nation” was a profound sign of changing attitudes to war.

What Mosse might not have anticipated, however, was the way in which both world wars would be utilised to bring life to national identities, long after the protagonists had passed away. A hectic calendar of anniversaries provides endless opportunities not only to remind citizens about the experiences of previous generations, but also to highlight the particular “national character” of each country today. As Paul Connerton has so eloquently explained, war memorials play an important role in this because “they conceal the past as much as they cause us to remember” (2009, 29). For most of the countries in our survey, this shared historical legacy will have its

own distinct resonance and political uses, shaped by dominant narratives of neutrality, occupation, defeat, compromise or victory. In the UK, for example, the repeated citation of the victory over the Nazis in 1945 has been diagnosed as an indication of “post-colonial melancholia” (Gilroy 2004). On the other hand, some of the new commemorative artworks commissioned during and after the Iraq-Afghanistan wars have provided an opportunity to revise stories about the national past in the post-Second World War period. In an analysis of the way in which Denmark’s new national monument expressed significant aspects of national identity through its material form, Sørensen suggested that:

[...] while the monument was motivated by a pressing need to publicly recognize the human costs of going to war, it was designed to de-emphasize or mute war by levelling combat, peacekeeping, and humanitarian emergency relief in a national narrative that presented “effort” as a collective and individual goal. (Refslund Sørensen 2017, 35)

This point underlines the role of many twenty-first century war monuments in redefining what is nationally specific, not just in the recent past, but especially in the context of the new security landscape dominated by US military power. Germany presents a different example of this reformulation of the place of war in national memory as new monuments were unveiled that forced a new national debate on appropriate commemorative approaches to contemporary military loss. Needless to say, this process has not unfolded without dissent. Art historian Cecilia Canzani has noted that it was Germany that pioneered commemorative public sculpture “in non-celebratory, anti-monumentary and procedural terms: in other words, in a form that is not compromised with the language of dictatorships” (2015). The protest over the siting of the Bundeswehr memorial near the defence ministry rather than the seat of government was evidence that this sensitivity is still intact.

The Italian intervention

Our analysis of these artefacts proceeds on the understanding that war memorials commissioned – or, in the case of Italy, appropriated – by governments play a key role in consolidating their attempts to legitimise the war effort. In this way, the monuments can be seen to express powerful ideas about what defines each country in its aspirations for global influence. The two monuments we will discuss in some detail were chosen because, although very different in terms of design, they were both created after the official withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014. Both attempt to represent – and thereby justify – their country’s

involvement in Afghanistan through the prism of peace and security, or what some have labelled the “hero-protector” narrative. A study of the role played by emotions in the justification of the use of force argues that: “The narrative manufacturing of collective emotions hereby relies on gendered social values that are historically grounded in political institutions as much as in popular culture” (Clément, Lindemann and Sangar 2016, 1). As Iris Marion Young argued during the early days of the Iraq War, if we expose the “gendered logic of the masculine role of protector in relation to women and children” we are better placed to challenge “the meaning and effective appeal of a security state that wages war abroad and expects obedience and loyalty at home” (2003, 2). In the next section, we examine the role that The Heroes’ Angels has been asked to play in bridging the gulf between the military and civilians in Italy.

A foreign and distant entity

The Heroes’ Angels monument is unique as an example of a war memorial because it began life as an art project without any involvement from the army or the defence administration. The artist, Flavio Favelli, devised the piece as a huge wall painting to be executed in his home city of Bologna. He was motivated by the realisation that, despite the deaths occurring in Afghanistan during this period, the public were relatively uninformed about, and disconnected from, what their national armed forces were doing over there. Aware that Italian cities had not experienced any major terrorist attacks since 11 September 2001, like those that had taken place in Paris, Brussels and London, he felt that the Italian public needed a better explanation of why soldiers were losing their lives in that conflict. As he explained to me in a private email in July 2017:

In Italy, the end of the War, the Liberation and the dawn of the Republic left many questions unanswered. The marked political differences, the drives for autonomy, the chronic division between North and South and the ancient and diverse histories of infinite territories undermine the notion of Country, Nation and State. Unlike other European countries, Italy lives a conflicting and problematic relationship with its army, often perceived as a foreign and distant entity, something unreal and considered politically closer to the culture of the centre-right. The polemics over missions to Iraq and Afghanistan exposed this gap.

While he was thinking about the absence of any debate about what it might mean to “serve” as a soldier for a country in which patriotism was such a contested ideal, he was constantly struck by media reports showing the faces of Italian soldiers who had been killed in Afghanistan, seeing them as “normal” men, “often young, each with their own stories and images.” He was particularly affected by a photograph of a poster held by family and friends at a memorial to Luca Sanna, killed in 2011. Translated into English, the poster read: “Dear Luca, thank you! The angels of heroes smile upon you and fill you with honour until you reach the light of God in paradise. Long live Italy!” Observing this image a few years later, Favelli wrote in the gallery brochure that “everything felt so distant and superfluous, yet beyond the flag and language, which are those of my nation, there was something else that instilled in me a sense of being a participant” (2015).

The wooden maquette came to the attention of the Ministry of Defence when the details of the listed deaths were being checked before the exhibition in early 2015. As Canzani observed, “Something of this work seduces, its news comes to the ear of the Minister, who sees it, and appropriates it” (2015). A few weeks later, the artwork was employed as a backdrop to a concert attended by the defence minister, Roberta Pinotti. It was then requisitioned for use on 4 November, the Armed Forces Day, which marks the end of the First World War and the completion of the Unification of Italy, at the Piazza Quirinale in Rome. On that occasion, the president of the republic, Sergio Mattarella, placed a bouquet of flowers at the foot of the monument, and after a minute’s silence, met representatives of the wounded veterans and family members of the deceased. Favelli, who was also present, explained that he was moved when a young relative of a soldier who had died in Afghanistan approached him to show their gratitude. This was proof for him that the Ministry had been able to identify the work’s potential for making the armed forces seem less remote in the eyes of Italian citizens.

Although the artist felt ambivalent about being thrust into a military environment, he later regretted the fact that the Ministry projected a one-dimensional reading of his attempt to communicate with civil society in a more subtle and ambiguous manner. His main concern had been to draw out the contradiction that his art revealed. As he explained in his email, written in July 2017, the Heroes’ Angels was intended to be a memorial that “re-writes absent bodies onto the landscape, giving form to an absence [...] It is neither calm nor peaceful, but re-weaves trauma into the social fabric.” Unlike the austere monument to “The Fallen” in Verona, described earlier, this artwork revealed the names of the soldiers who had died in those places.

Where that monument bore the words: “*Ovunque la patria ha chiamato il suo esercito in pace ed in Guerra*”, a text which underpinned the patriotic duty of citizens to lay down their lives for their “fatherland,” Favelli’s intervention posed questions about the meaning of military sacrifice for a cause that was not well understood. In showing where the young men died, the monument was able to record the footprint of Italian military activity over more than half a century: first Congo, then Yugoslavia, Somalia, Lebanon, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan. The list reveals a disturbing geography of global war, demanding an explanation of how exactly those deaths have contributed to peace in distant lands. This disarmingly simple strategy underlines what is at stake in presenting the Italian military as a force working for humanitarian principles, as opposed to one that exists to defend the country from external aggression.

Coticchia and De Simone (2016) argue that there was indeed a contradiction between the work that the armed forces were doing in Afghanistan and the way it was “sold” to the public. Initially, the war was presented as a “peace-keeping mission” in line with public expectations (2016, 29–30). From 2006 onwards, Italian troops were frequently involved in combat actions in Afghanistan, yet these and military intelligence activities were rarely covered by the Italian media. 2009 saw a further rise in casualties, prompting a public discussion on what the military was doing so far away “at such a human and economic cost” (ibid 31). During 2010, ten Italian soldiers died, and at the end of the year the foreign secretary announced that Italy would withdraw from the operation by 2014. By the end of 2011, the number of units in the country had reached almost 4,000 and there had been eight more casualties. The following year saw three more military deaths in Afghanistan, including that of Sgt Major Michele Silvestri. The commemoration to Silvestri in his home town of Bacoli, near Naples, provides a telling example of the way in which the meaning of military loss was interpreted at a local level. At the ceremony to install a plaque in his memory on the existing monument to the war dead of the town, the Mayor of Bacoli, Schiano Ermanno, said that “The memory of Michele should be a warning, a guide for our youth who need to know that even in Bacoli there are people who have given their lives for Peace” (*Cronaca Flegrea*, 12 February 2013).

This language of peace was echoed at the ceremony to unveil the statue installed on the waterfront at Diano Marina, mentioned earlier. The new memorial was dedicated to “Fallen Soldiers in Humanitarian Missions” although it had been commissioned to mark the deaths of two local men who had been recently killed in Afghanistan. In his address, the mayor said that, “Two young people who, despite being aware of the risks to which they were exposed, did not

hesitate to follow orders to bring peace in countries where internal strife sows death, too often striking innocent victims” (*Civico20 News*, 6 July 2014). This choice of words, combined with the evocative form of a lithe male body holding the symbolic dove of peace, projects a gendered narrative of Italy’s role in the world, one that personifies a noble masculinity radiating compassion and altruism. Thus, despite the government’s fluctuating messages about the aims and objectives of the deployment in Afghanistan, those municipalities that saw relatively high levels of recruitment were able to maintain a more consistent story. By commemorating young men who had roots in or ties to the local community, mayors and regimental officers effectively reinforced the belief that they had been deployed to bring peace and stability to beleaguered civilian populations. Against this backdrop, the force of the intervention made by The Heroes’ Angels derived from the fact that it demanded a recognition of what those military deaths had been for *at the national political level*. We can see how its potentially insolent challenge was further co-opted following the appointment of Democratic Party leader Paolo Gentiloni as prime minister.

First, by installing Favelli’s maquette in the prestigious location of the Vittoriano, the new Ministry of Defence, headed by Roberta Pinotti, Italy’s first female defence minister, was able to bestow the new artwork with immense symbolic value transferred by association (cf. Ekman 2014, 155). Inaugurated in 1911, the Vittoriano houses the Museo Sacratio delle Bandiere delle Forze Armate within its complex architectural structure. One of two military museums there, the Sacratio delle Bandiere displays the flags and insignia of Italy’s armed forces from the period of unification in the nineteenth century to the present day. But the Vittoriano also contains the Shrine of the Unknown Soldier, that supreme icon of ghostly *national* imaginaries (Anderson 1991, 50). Inaugurated on 4 November 1921, the Altare della Patria, or the Altar of the Fatherland, was placed under the imposing statue of the goddess Roma and flanked by two eternal flames. The spectre of Italy’s imperial past summoned up by the *tomba de militi ignoto* is able to reach out to embrace the individuals whose names are painted on the panels of The Heroes’ Angels nearby. This transfer of symbolic value takes place as an effect of proximity. At the same time, the contagion ensures that the lineage of those who have died in the service of their country since 1950 remains unquestionably gendered as male and racialised as white and European, just like the body in the tomb. As Nirmal Puwar (2011) has pointed out in the context of Britain’s sepulchre in Westminster Abbey, installed in 1920, the identity of the person inside the casket might not be known, but we can be sure it was a man. Meanwhile, “Non-white faces from the ex-colonies, who participated with their bodies, labor, land, and

resources in both World Wars, have been largely erased in the ‘imagined community’” (Puwar 2011, 328). There is no doubt that the same erasure took place in the construction of all of Europe’s shrines to anonymous soldiers during the post-First World War period (Mosse 1990, 94–98).

Italy followed the trend of other European nations by commemorating its war dead through a single tomb containing the body of an unidentified soldier. However, here it was a bereaved mother, deprived of the chance to visit her son’s grave, who selected the corpse to be placed in the tomb (Wittman 2011, 66). In this way, the *tomba de militi ignoto* incorporated mothers into this community of loss, acknowledging their suffering as part of a national process of mourning. This was in contrast to other countries, which appointed military men to perform this task, thereby emphasising military brotherhood, as in France, or the hierarchy of military authority, as in the British case where a high-ranking officer made the final choice (Mosse 1990, 95).

A second connection to the *tomba de militi ignoto* emerged when the Ministry of Defence published a press release indicating its plan to tour the artwork round the country, accompanying Pinotti as she laid out the government’s new policies and strategy. The transportation of the artwork from the gallery to the Quirinale and then to its temporary resting place in the Sacratio delle Bandiere already suggests that it falls within a particular category of itinerant forms of commemoration: the original journey of the *militi ignoto* from the Aquileia to the Vittoriano, for example; the horse-drawn procession of British coffin bearing the unknown soldier from the cenotaph to the tomb. The use of the maquette as a small-scale version of a national memorial can be compared to the small-scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, commissioned in 1984 by a group of veterans who wanted to bring the positive power of the wall to those in the USA who were not able to visit the permanent version (Canzani 2015). The plan to transport The Heroes’ Angels around the country in an attempt to explain the government’s foreign policy to the people also suggests a way to “bring war home,” that we noted earlier in this chapter. We now turn to the solidity of the Iraq-Afghanistan monument standing in its permanent position in the shadow of the Ministry of Defence in London.

Monument to British counterinsurgency

There can be no doubt that the Iraq-Afghanistan memorial unveiled in central London in 2017 signified a new direction in UK foreign policy. As described briefly in the introduction, the

artwork features a two-sided, circular, bronze relief. The surface facing the garden, which can be seen from a distance, is relatively sparse in terms of detail, although it clearly depicts the “enemy-centric” approach that is integral to the practice of counterinsurgency. The profile of the three soldiers indicates that UK servicemen were involved in difficult and dangerous wars, often without protection. Only up close can you see the rough sketch of four figures carrying a stretcher in the background. Women are absent on this side, as they were not eligible for ground combat at that time. On the reverse, however, facing the forbidding edifice of the rear of the MoD building, women dominate the more complex scenario illustrating the role of civilian agencies in conjunction with military power, otherwise known as the “population-centric” approach.

As figure 1 shows, the sculptural relief depicts intricately wrought scenes of communication and response. It features bodies round a water pump, girls seated at a desk with paper and pens, men and women handing out and receiving boxes marked UK Aid and stamped with a Union Jack, wizened old men wearing turbans in dialogue with bare-headed white men, watched by veiled women with more pens and notepads. If this is war, it comes with a commitment to gender equality, openness to dialogue and expertise in building infrastructure. While there are risks involved in deploying military force to keep the enemy at bay, indicated by the scene on the other side (see figure 2), the lives of vulnerable civilians are not endangered by the violence of the armed conflict that makes this exchange possible.

Situated in the Victoria Embankment Gardens, on a tourist route along the river, the monument is, in fact, easy to miss. The well-maintained park hosts a gallery of other memorials, both to devastating wars with massive casualty figures and to decorated military men. The nearest is the austere pillar dedicated to Major General Orde Wingate and all those who fought under his command in Burma in 1943 and 1944, including the Chindits, the famed multinational special forces. On the other side is the monument to the Korean War (1950–1953), which bears the inscription: “In this fierce and brutal conflict those who fought included many second world war veterans, reservists and national servicemen.” This reminder of the different conditions of military recruitment in the post-1945 period, far from the all-volunteer professionalism promoted today, is all the more stark in the light of British military casualties: during this three-year war, 1,106 were killed, 1,060 were taken as prisoners of war and thousands were injured. One of the largest and most visually striking sculptures in the park is dedicated to the Fleet Air Arm, the naval aircraft section of the armed forces. A tall stone column supports the dark bronze

figure of an airman wearing a flying suit and helmet, sometimes referred to as Daedalus. His outstretched wings were designed to recall an angel or the figure of winged victory. Another notable statue situated in the well-kept gardens depicts the contemplative figure of General Charles Gordon, memorably killed during the siege of Khartoum in January 1885. Although the oldest item in the park, it was this last monument that resonated most deeply with the newest addition.

A hugely popular hero at home, described by historians as the epitome of a fervent Christian militarism that was prevalent during the second half of the nineteenth century (MacKenzie 1984, 5), Gordon was memorialised as a humble man with a commitment to helping the poor. The asceticism of this “imperial saint” (Berenson 2011) is signified by his simple military dress and a pocket bible clasped in one hand. Designed by Sir W. Hamo Thorneycroft, who was renowned for being interested in “spiritual rather than physical states of being” (Beatty 1983, 205), the statue is mounted on a pedestal decorated with two large bronze low-relief panels decorated with allegorical female figures, draped in classical garb from head to foot. One side depicts Charity and Justice and the other, Fortitude and Faith, values echoed in the citation of Duty and Service on the new memorial located on the other side of the gardens.

While this cluster of memorials might seem random and unplanned, the fact that a spot was found for the latest addition serves to underline its significance as an official statement about the conflicts it represents. According to a document published by Westminster City Council (WCC), “Demand for new statues and monuments continues today at a level unequalled since the Victorian period” (Westminster n.d., 11). Victoria Embankment Gardens had become a “monument saturation zone” (ibid., 21), a situation that had resulted in rather strange juxtapositions of subject matter. For this reason, the council had issued advice on siting new public artworks elsewhere in the borough, or further afield in the capital, as well as making suggestions for less obtrusive and possibly less permanent forms of commemoration. WCC had also ruled that no statues or memorials could be erected before ten years had elapsed since the death of the individual or the event to be memorialised, or at least, “only in exceptional circumstances” (ibid., 22). This was partly due to pressure of space, but also because “Decisions on memorials made so quickly in the wake of an event can lead to the emotional investment in the subject over-riding issues of aesthetic design or good planning” (ibid., 22). Evidently, the board of trustees that had commissioned and raised funds for the Iraq-Afghanistan monument had received support from the highest authority possible. The presence of the Queen and her

extended family at the unveiling of the artwork was proof enough that the project had qualified as an exception.

However, it was not only the siting that demonstrated its strategic importance. As noted earlier, a fundraising appeal for the memorial was launched in November 2014. The decision to press ahead with the monument on the basis that 2015 marked the end of a significant phase of military deployment certainly risks being seen as a premature judgement a decade later. But there were other controversial aspects as well. The trustees were conscious that a public memorial affirming the success of the Iraq invasion in 2003 was not an option; the artist too was unwilling to shy away from acknowledging the depths of public anger provoked by the decision to go to war. In a private phone conversation, sculptor Paul Day mentioned that an earlier version of the design involved more rough edges, emphasising the unfinished, even broken, aspect of the campaigns, Iraq in particular. Nevertheless, the trustees were adamant that the memorial should offer a positive message about the value of service, at the same time providing a dedicated monument to honour the civilian and military personnel involved in those conflicts. For this reason, the work does not explicitly commemorate the war dead, although the discourse of war, service and duty inevitably summons the prospect of sacrifice for a noble cause. In any case, by November 2015 memorials to the dead in both wars had been established in the National Memorial Arboretum, far away from the scrutiny of tourists and passers-by. But the risks involved in creating a monument in central London that did not explicitly commemorate the many hundreds of soldiers who died during those wars became evident during the inauguration ceremony on 9 March 2017.

Insult to injury

The unveiling of the Iraq-Afghanistan monument was an exceptionally high-profile occasion, demonstrating the symbolic role of public art in incorporating new wars into the mythscape of British national identity. In addition to the Queen, Prince Harry and other members of the Royal Family, there were numerous military chiefs and high-ranking politicians in attendance, including three former prime ministers. Also present, according to media reports, were more than 2,000 guests composed of veterans and their families, charity workers and civil servants. However, although the assembled company was supposed to reflect the wide range of personnel whose efforts were part of the administration of UK defence policy, there was a significant group who felt they had been excluded: the relatives of those who had been killed in either Iraq or Afghanistan. The media was quick to seize on the fact that some of the women whose

husbands had died in service were vocal in their anger at not being informed of the event or invited to take part (*The Guardian*, 9 March 2017).

Despite the focus of the monument on service rather than sacrifice, it was clear that no amount of positive spin or fine design could mollify those who felt betrayed. Yet the government's failure to invite bereaved families to the unveiling provides further clues as to how the construct of the nation is deeply gendered in the context of commemorative events. The omission was evidence that, in official calculations, they were not the intended audience for the memorial, and that it was never meant to be a focus for expressions of private grief. The bereaved mothers and widows had had their high-profile ceremonies in the National Memorial Arboretum; they had already been allocated a remote spot in central England where they might articulate their private emotional response to the death of their loved ones, emotions associated with unruly, unpredictable outcomes (cf. Chapter 7). Instead, the new sculpture was a public relations exercise to mark the formal integration of foreign aid and international development with a traditional defence policy that relied on armed force. By emphasising duty and service in the cause of this "strategic narrative," the MoD was partially acknowledging those who had served in the armed forces or civilian development agencies and who had come back alive. It is tempting to conclude that it did not occur to them that the "bereaved community" might be comforted by this endorsement of the values for which many of their soldier relatives might have died. There is ample evidence that many military families went to great lengths to find out exactly why their sons and daughters were fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Margaret Evison, for example, whose son Mark was shot and killed in Helmand in 2009, wrote at some length about her journey to Afghanistan to see for herself what he had died for.

I wanted [...] to comfort myself that his death had a worth or a meaning in some way – that perhaps a country or people had benefitted. I thought that going to Afghanistan might help me make sense of the sacrifice of these young British lads. (Evison 2012, 212)

Although thankful that the trip gave her a context for understanding her son's death, Evison was clearly perplexed that British generals should have chosen to go to Helmand Province, a deeply conservative area that other NATO countries wanted to avoid (2012, 230). Her observations, enhanced by her conversations with Afghans, certainly cast the complacent imagery on the Iraq-Afghanistan memorial in a different light – particularly in its depiction of

aid and development. The exclusion of many bereaved military families from the ceremony possibly signified a nervousness that the public would agree with furious relatives who protested that the wars were simply “a terrible waste” (*The Times*, 10 March 2017).

A “civilised” nation

Although the sculpture projects an idealised representation of UK defence and security strategy, it was not, even at the time of its unveiling or in the official brochure, expected to be read as a literal account of what actually took place. This was confirmed by Lord Stirrup, chairman of the memorial project’s board of trustees, and head of the Armed Forces from 2006–2010. In a comment to the media after the inauguration, he was reported as saying that the monument was “not about the campaigns themselves per se, it’s about those principles which are important in any civilised society and have always been an integral part of who and what we regard ourselves to be as a nation” (*The Telegraph*, 9 March 2017). The words “always” and “civilised” must have echoed strangely in this garden of monuments to so many distant military exploits, serving as a reminder that, particularly in the UK context, the study of gender and nation cannot take place outside the wider framework of imperial history (Sinha 2004). The ideological work performed by gender in this new addition cannot be deduced simply from the representation of men and women working together and separately. As Sinha writes, the imperial context shows that “gender itself is constituted by other forms of difference such as class, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, as well as colonizer and colonized” (2004, 184).

The presence of General Gordon in the far corner was evidence enough of the British Empire’s “civilising mission,” in which the impulse to subdue and to colonise was the motivating factor. In his classic study, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880–1960*, John M. MacKenzie (1984) writes that school textbooks in the late Victorian age represented British history as a “series of unavoidable wars” which inculcated pupils with the value of patriotism and moral training: “The beneficent effects of these wars lay, of course, in their opening of the world to the civilising effects of trade, technology, and Christianity” (MacKenzie 1984, 181). In this light, the pensive figure of Gordon portrays a heroic, educated, compassionate white masculinity (Dawson 1994) that complements the wise, demure and stalwart white femininity represented by the allegorical females beneath his feet (Warner 2000). Charity, for instance, holds a child in one arm; her face is clearly visible, but her garment modestly covers her head and that of her infant. Her other hand rests on a small naked boy who holds a slate, one figure pointing as if to a line of words. The details of her costume and the

presence of the literate child bear an uncanny resemblance to the veiled women and girls appearing, also in relief form, on the twenty-first century sculpture on the other side of the park.

This correspondence between the two sets of figures cannot be attributed to the conventional language of commemoration found when monuments to the war dead are clustered together. The link is provided by the personification of Charity in the Victorian sculpture, which demands that we take into account, not just the legacy of imperial rule, but its manifestation in different forms today. This analogy involves a strange inversion, however. In the contemporary depiction of charitable work, the feminised and racialised targets of humanitarian concern, male, female, old and young, are the ones draped in cloth and holding pens, while the white women act as equals to their male counterparts, both dressed in the gender-neutral uniform of civilian aid workers. Feminist scholars have documented and analysed the ways in which colonial powers attempted to “rescue” women from barbaric, uncivilised customs, but the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 proved that little had changed (Abu-Lughod 2015; Ware 2006). Although the resonance between these variously racialised and gendered figures in the park might be dismissed as an insubstantial link, there is no doubt that it returns us to the underlying tensions in UK military strategy that are manifest in the Iraq-Afghanistan monument. As the two-sided relief sculpture indicates, the counterinsurgency doctrine, with its emphasis on the indigenous population, enables a reframing of the role of men as “real” soldiers helping to keep the foe at bay while women are reconfigured “both as ‘practitioners’ and ‘targets’” (Dyvik 2014, 411).

In a volume on the British practice of counterinsurgency from colonial wars in the 1950s to the present (Dixon 2012), Claire Duncanson and Hilary Cornish argue forcefully that gender is indispensable for understanding why some policies and strategies are privileged over others, “particularly in the military field where ideas about manliness and soldiering have long been mutually reinforcing” (2012, 147). In 2006, having failed in Iraq, British military leaders saw the opportunity to re-establish their reputation by leading a counterinsurgency operation in Helmand Province, based on their extensive experience. They planned to create and hold centres of stability on the assumption that the benefits of good governance, schools and other forms of infrastructure would then spread to surrounding regions. This strategy required military force to repulse the enemy, otherwise known as the “enemy-centric approach,” supplemented by a “population-centric approach” that entailed winning the “hearts and minds” of the indigenous population.

Duncanson and Cornish (2012) argue that these two approaches underpinning UK counterinsurgency doctrine were evidently in tension throughout the operation. They analysed the British Army's practice of counterinsurgency in Helmand through reading both official documents and soldiers' autobiographies, which have acquired value as "popular geopolitical texts used as source materials for civilian public understandings of war" (Woodward and Jenkins 2012, 495). Their research shows that, despite the British military's claims to have mastered this model of warfare over many decades, there is a fundamental tension between those who favour the combat-oriented approach, including all its associations with manliness and "proper soldiering," and those who champion the "battle for hearts and minds" which "privileges restraint, control, intelligence and compassion" (Duncanson and Cornish 2012, 147). This tension relates to the notion of "culture" as a key factor in engaging with civilian populations. As Khalili explains, the concept of culture is conceived in entirely instrumental terms: "In the field, counterinsurgency transforms the population it is intended to pacify into a human terrain which can be made visible, knowable, and malleable" (2011, 1477–1478). Welland makes a similar point: "The everyday practices, lives and doings of the Afghan population were no longer simply background to the military intervention, but their observation and regulation became integral for its success" (2016, 142).

One effect of the gendering of counterinsurgency is that the prospect of engaging in a less aggressive, less combative form of war has led to "a renewed seduction of militarism" (Welland 2016, 143). In fact, a concerted feminist critique of counterinsurgency, as both a doctrine and a policy, has shown that the main benefit of the "population-centric model" lay in its appeal to domestic populations back home (Ware 2014). The significance of the Iraq-Afghanistan monument is that it projects a more acceptable, that is, feminised, form of warfare by representing humanitarian work performed by civilian agencies who are supported by compassionate and courageous military professionals risking their lives to make this partnership possible. In this way, the depiction of an alternative form of militarised masculinity that values restraint and compassion, coupled with a narrative of female soldiers successfully engaging with Afghan women in their homes and villages, becomes effective in disconnecting the practices of the armed forces "from the simultaneous violence that continued throughout the military intervention" (Welland 2016, 142–143). However, as we observed at the start of this chapter, the ambiguous form of the sculpture offers a rather different interpretation to those who are not convinced by this neat division of labour. The two-sided circular disk, held in place by two unfinished pieces of stone, can also be made to symbolise the fundamental disconnect

between the two approaches to counterinsurgency that characterised Britain's fourth Afghan War.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have addressed some of the ways in which different examples of sculpture, plaques, statues and other commemorative items have marked the 2001–2014 phase of military intervention in Afghanistan, showing how they have been instrumental in shaping the legacy of that operation within distinct local, national and postcolonial contexts. We have been particularly concerned to find out how a gendered analysis of these artefacts might illuminate the value or status of military deaths suffered during one of the largest multinational coalitions in history (NATO 2015). By examining a range of memorials designed to commemorate the military deaths that resulted from the ISAF campaign, we have tried to interrogate the different but overlapping narratives employed to justify the cost of that war, whether in terms of lives or expenditure. Using the concept of “mythscape” (Bell 2003) to explain how the national past is constantly revised or recast in order to suit the contingencies of the present, we argued that representing military projects in terms of “peace-keeping” or “counterinsurgency” revealed the centrality of gender in expressing what was distinct about each national story.

Many of the new war memorials, but particularly the Italian and British case studies, have a pivotal role to play in managing political tensions around the rationale for military deployment in Afghanistan. Where *The Heroes' Angels* asks for a public discussion about why young Italian men have been asked to risk their lives fighting for peace in different areas of the world since 1950, the British Iraq-Afghanistan monument presents 25 years of violent armed conflict in two completely different countries as a bounded activity that seamlessly merged defence priorities with the symbolic icons of development. The two memorials might at first appear dissimilar, not simply in terms of design and form but also in their commissioning and reception. Nevertheless, we found substantial similarities between the ways in which they arbitrate between the past, present and future of each nation.

Our analysis of Italy's panoply of memorials, and the ceremonies carried out at their unveiling, indicates that there was widespread ambivalence caused by the deaths of soldiers in Afghanistan. The attempts by successive governments to control media coverage of the country's role in the US-led “War on Terror” meant that there was relatively little public debate about what their troops were being asked to do there. However, the lack of clarity also reflects

a much more complex and contested relationship between nationalism and militarism. We found that an array of government, military and civilian personnel were eager to reinforce the ideal that Italian soldiers were prepared to give their lives in the service of universal humanitarian values. At times, this emphasis on peace was conveyed in a manner that stressed gentleness, compassion and altruism, qualities associated with a mode of military masculinity that differs from the conventional construct of aggression and fearlessness. It implied a common purpose, but this was rarely stated in terms of a unified, distinctly national mission.

Since the UK cannot draw on a national narrative about the military being deployed primarily for peace-keeping purposes, the doctrine of counterinsurgency provides an alternative framework for presenting humanitarian work as an integral component of conventional warfare. This helps to allay public fears about the illegitimacy of particular wars and distrust of political leaders who, in turn, “discursively exploit the audience’s desire to avoid damage to its moral dignity and self-image through the activation of social emotions, such as compassion for the victim and moral anger towards the aggressor” (Clément, Lindemann, and Sangar 2016, 2). However, McBride and Wibben argue that “One difficulty in analyzing how gender inflects counterinsurgency is the fact that counterinsurgency is both a doctrine and a strategy; this means that it is an aspirational vision as well as a guide for planning operations” (2012, 200). The two-sided Iraq-Afghanistan monument effectively fudges the difference between a vision and a strategy but, in doing so, it provides a way of understanding the dichotomy between the “enemy-centric” and “population-centric” approaches that underpins British and US versions of this doctrine. The artist’s attempt to depict a range of different roles performed by gendered bodies reveals war work to be compassionate, caring and attentive on the one hand, and dangerous, lethal and combative on the other. This public artwork perfectly illustrates the way in which “gender was thus shaped and (re)produced by counterinsurgency, provided a framework for its understanding and justification, and was integral to its concealments and seductions” (Welland 2016, 143). At the same time, by viewing the monument within the context of its location, we can glimpse striking continuities between older and current modes of imperial intervention. Here the figure of Charity, resplendent in her idealised Victorian persona, is able to speak directly to her twenty-first century counterparts, who wear the uniform of civilian aid-workers. This understanding of gendered norms as being partially constituted through other kinds of difference along the lines of race, religion and culture deepens our analysis of contemporary structures of empire, nation, militarism and war.

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¹ The artist, Ian Rank-Broadley, explained that “The choice of the male figure / nude as a dominant motif was made quite early when I realised that the female nude had, to a large extent, been robbed of its power by the commercial world of advertising, whereas the male nude still retained a power that could excite, grab attention and shock. The reaction of the spectator to the male figure was stronger, whether out of competition, fear or embarrassment. It proved to be a potent image. For me, the sculptor, this fact reinforced the work with a greater resonance and meaning.” <http://www.ianrank-broadley.co.uk/ian-rank-broadley/>