



Members of Operation PRESENCE-Mali conduct their eleventh aeromedical evacuation mission, treating two civilian contractors involved in an IED attack before transferring the casualties to a MINUSMA Role 2 hospital in Gao, near Camp Castor on August 16, 2019.

Image by: Cpl Richard Lessard  
Task Force-Mali

## Editorial: Transforming Military Cultures

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In recent years, a series of class action lawsuits,<sup>1</sup> external and internal reviews and reports,<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada surveys,<sup>3</sup> and allegations of sexual misconduct against high-ranking officers,<sup>4</sup> have documented the systemic and interlocking problems with Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) culture. Sexual misconduct is widespread, as are discrimination and hostility towards women, two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, inclusive (2SLGBTQI+), Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour military members. In 2021, Department of National Defence (DND) and the CAF created a new organization, Chief Professional Conduct and Culture (CPCC), to “develop a professional conduct and culture framework that holistically tackles all types of discrimination, harmful behaviour, biases and system barriers.”<sup>5</sup> At the same time, new funding became available through Mobilizing Insights in Defence and Security (MINDS) to assist the DND/CAF in its culture change efforts. With funding from MINDS, the co-editors of this special issue established the Transforming Military Cultures (TMC) network. TMC is a network of Canadian and international academic researchers, defence scientists, military members, veterans, youth, and people with relevant lived experience. The network takes a feminist intersectional trauma-informed approach to reimagine and transform CAF culture. We argue that culture change requires not just addressing sexual misconduct *or* homophobia *or* racism *or* the legacies of colonialism—but understanding them all as interrelated root causes of the military’s culture problem.

It is important to locate the issue of culture change in the CAF alongside larger societal shifts. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, inequities were revealed across sectors including, but not limited to, the labour market, health care, and higher education. Amidst the health care crisis, 1700 CAF members were deployed to support the day-to-day operations of long-term care homes and help with infection control and prevention.<sup>6</sup> A few months into the pandemic, George Floyd's death mobilized massive protests across the globe and catalyzed a rewriting and reclaiming of history. These events along with the ongoing climate crisis, human rights abuses, geopolitical instability, and the rise of right-wing movements are threatening democracy and profoundly impacting our lives as individuals and communities. For many, returning "to normal" has simply not been an option.

There is today a tremendous opportunity and appetite for social change. The CAF is not alone, as institutions and organizations across the board grapple with culture change initiatives. These include creating Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) offices; adding diversity statements to organizational websites; encouraging EDI training for staff and employees; in addition to myriad other efforts aimed at a range of underrepresented groups. EDI is now big business in Canada and the United States, with numerous consultants and companies engaged in this work.<sup>7</sup> And yet, as much as culture change is underway, we ask: Will institutions be fundamentally changed in their constitution and functioning, or will their efforts only amount to performative gestures? How do power and hegemony continue to reassert themselves in the midst of culture change? How will we know when transformative change has been achieved?

With this special issue we provide readers with insights and recommendations for meaningful military culture change. This special issue grew out of two TMC panels at the 2022 Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society (Ottawa, Canada). These panels were titled *Transforming military cultures: An educational and leadership lens* and *Transforming military cultures: Identity and organizational change*. Several panelists, as well as others interested in transforming military cultures, have contributed to this issue. The articles in this special issue discuss research on root causes, lived experiences of racialized military personnel, contested military identities, familial norms, critical feminist education, and trauma-informed pedagogy as they relate to transforming military cultures. The issue also includes an article about Argentinian public and military gender policies, as well as a book review essay on Australian and Canadian military cultures. The issue concludes with perspectives pieces, which respectively focus

on military culture change through research, professional, and personal lenses in relation to women's experiences on deployment, regimental ritual objects, feminist identity in a military context, CPCC, and youth.

This issue begins with an article from two of us, Eichler and Brown, *Getting to the root of the problem: Understanding and changing the culture of the Canadian military*. This article grounds the special issue in a discussion of how various forms of oppression operate in Canadian society and in the military. Their exploration demonstrates that any discussion of military culture must engage with patriarchy, heteronormativity, colonialism, white supremacy, ableism, and classism. Eichler and Brown's analysis informs the articles that follow, with a call to address and challenge how institutional systems and structures are not only shaped by these root causes but reproduce them. Their analysis and insights open new pathways to think about transformative culture change in the CAF and the agency of the institution and its members to contribute to broader progressive societal change.

The next article, "*I'm not your typical white soldier*": *Interrogating whiteness and power in the Canadian Armed Forces*, by Tammy George, explores the service of racialized military personnel in the context of white privilege and supremacy. Her research demonstrates the importance of learning from the experiences of racialized military personnel by listening to and centering their voices, to challenge the ways racism is embedded in policies and practices. Leigh Spanner's article, *Supporting military families: Challenging or reinforcing patriarchy?*, focuses on how the CAF conceptualizes and supports military families. She argues that, despite some recognition of the diversity of military families, military culture, policies, and supports are still largely informed by the heteronormative patriarchal assumption that families consist of a military man married to a civilian woman who cares for the family and home.

In *Understanding and addressing opposition to transforming military cultures: Moving from technical and humanist to critical learning*, Nancy Taber examines how traditional military educational approaches of technical and humanist training, while effective in skill development and socialization, are ineffective in supporting transformative organizational culture change. To challenge the institutional and individual privileging of the warrior ideal—which is embedded in military policies, practices, teaching, and learning—she argues that the CAF must embrace a critical feminist pedagogical approach. In *Trauma and military cultures: Transformation through community*, Ash Grover illustrates how acts of "othering" can result in responses

typically associated with post-traumatic stress disorder. Her work demonstrates the need for a trauma-informed approach to culture change and the importance of seeking transformation through community and mutuality across difference. Alan Okros' article entitled, *Anticipating future culture struggles over contested military identities*, explores key areas where military identity will remain contested. He examines how CAF members might respond to a shift in the dominant identity alongside evolving military roles and broader societal changes. In light of these shifts and changes, Okros draws our attention to several issues such as hegemonic patriarchal systems and the potential impacts of AI and Cyber on military identity.

Laura Masson's article, *Gender identity, professional identity, and military culture: Challenges in the implementation of gender policies in the Argentinian Armed Forces*, uses a sociological framework to trace women's leadership roles in relation to historical and contemporary public and military policy. She recommends that to understand women's experiences, researchers and policymakers must consider structural power relations. Meaghan Shoemaker's book review essay, *Power and culture change in the military*, discusses two recent books on military culture change, one focusing on the CAF and one on the Australian Defence Force: *The ones we let down: Toxic leadership culture and gender integration in the Canadian Forces* (by Charlotte Duval-Lantoine) and *Blood lust, trust and blame* (by Samantha Cromptoets). She notes how both authors problematize, in each of their national contexts, the ways in which change initiatives remain disconnected from actions on the ground and from meaningful accountability. The work of critical scholars, she concludes, is required to draw the connections between military power relations and culture change.

Research, professional, and personal perspectives pieces conclude the issue. The first, by Sandra Biskupski-Mujanovic, is titled, *Women's deployment experiences: Safety, barriers, and CAF culture change*. She discusses how her dissertation research about the experiences of deployed women military personnel has informed her understanding of transforming

military cultures. She argues that a focus on including women in peacekeeping operations solely for reasons of operational effectiveness misses opportunities to create organizational equity and engage in culture change. The second, titled *Hidden in plain sight: Ritual items as inhibitors to culture change*, by Walter Callaghan, explores the role that nuanced elements of culture, such as traditions and rituals, play in the maintenance and transmission of culture. His piece highlights the need for ethnographic research in liminal spaces, to understand and challenge how often hidden traditions can work against culture change.

The third perspectives piece, by Karen Davis, is titled *Feminism in the military: Misconceptions and possibilities* and explores how the author had to negotiate her feminist identity as a military member and civilian defence scientist throughout her career. She examines how, although misconceptions about feminism in the military create barriers, feminism can be mobilized for culture change. The next perspectives piece, *A message from CPCC*, is written by Lieutenant-General Jennie Carignan. She details how CPCC conceptualizes and is addressing culture change in the CAF, stating the importance of acknowledging how the CAF has historically discriminated against women, Indigenous people, persons with disabilities, members of racialized groups, and the 2SLGBTQI+ community. She notes that the CAF is committed to change and diversity as well as to implementing the recommendations of the Arbour report.

The final piece, *Youth perspectives on military culture change*, is co-written by members of TMC's Youth Advisory Board, who describe what transforming military cultures means to them. Collectively, they call for more education on diversity, equity, and inclusion; listening to the voices of non-commissioned members, junior ranks, and youth; and, continuing to improve health and wellness services for CAF members and their families. We end with their piece, so their voices can take the CAF into the future.



## Notes

- 1 Government of Canada. *Apology to LGBTQ2 Communities*, <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/free-to-be-me/apology-discrimination-individuals-families-communities.html>, (2020); Epiq Class Action Services Canada Inc., CAF-DND Sexual Misconduct Class Action Settlement, <https://www.caf-dndsexualmisconductclassaction.ca>, (2022); Stewart McKelvey, *Class Actions. Canadian Armed Forces*. [https://www.stewartmckelvey.com/class\\_actions/canadian-armed-forces/](https://www.stewartmckelvey.com/class_actions/canadian-armed-forces/), (2022).
- 2 Marie Deschamps, *External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces*. External Review Authority, 2015; Louise Arbour, *Report of the Independent External*

- 3 *Comprehensive Review of the Department of National Defence*. Borden Ladner Gervais, 2022; Department of National Defence, *Minister of National Defence Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination with a Focus on Anti-Indigenous and Anti-Black Racism, LGBTQ2+ Prejudice, Gender Bias, and White Supremacy*, Government of Canada, 2022.
- 4 Statistics Canada, *Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces*, 2016. Canada: Statistics Canada, (2016).
- 5 David Pugliese, General who replaced senior officer accused of sex assault is now himself under investigation for sexual misconduct. *Ottawa Citizen*, (2021).

- 5 Government of Canada, *Chief of Professional Conduct and Culture*, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/organizational-structure/chief-professional-conduct-culture.html>, (2022), para. 2.
- 6 Jocelyn Halladay, "Fast Facts on COVID-19 and the Canadian Armed Forces," *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health* 6, no. 2 (2020): 7-8, <https://doi.org/10.3138/jmvfh-C019-0015>.
- 7 Conor Friedersdorf, "The Paradox of Diversity Trainings," *The Atlantic*, January 23, 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/newsletters/archive/2023/01/diversity-training-paradox-intolerance/672756/>.