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Article abstract

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# Kanata/Canada: Re-storying Canada 150 at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights

KARINE R. DUHAMEL

## *Abstract*

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## *Résumé*

*« Kanata/Canada : re-raconter “Canada 150” au Musée canadien pour les droits de la personne » cherche à contextualiser le rôle changeant des musées et des institutions patrimoniales au sein des discussions contemporaines sur la nécessité urgente d’une éducation du public aux histoires autochtones et aux réalités contemporaines. L’auteure de cet article soutient que les musées peuvent véritablement devenir des espaces de décolonisation s’ils ont la volonté de réexaminer leurs propres finalités et leurs mandats. En examinant les programmes du Musée canadien pour les droits de la personne pour 2017, elle maintient que le fait d’entreprendre une réconciliation réparatrice, aux fondements solides, et qui ait du sens pour les communautés dans un contexte muséal, signifie dépasser le simple fait d’admettre et de reconnaître, pour re-raconter les fondations mêmes de la construction de la nation canadienne et de projets tels que la Confédération qui restent, nécessairement, inachevés.*

In 2017 Canada proudly touted its 150<sup>th</sup> birthday in events and celebrations throughout the year. For many Indigenous people, however, the concept of Canada 150 was no reason to celebrate. The #Resistance150 movement, created in late 2016 by Anishinaabe traditional storyteller and teacher Isaac Murdoch, Métis visual artist Christi Belcourt, Cree activist Tanya Kappo and Métis author Maria Campbell, aimed to raise awareness of Canada's sesquicentennial celebration as a marker of 150 years — and more — of genocide, land theft, and colonial violence. Members of #Resistance150 were not alone. Other groups, such as Unsettling Canada 150, Colonialism 150, and others, coordinated days of action and concerted campaigns, while many academics and social commentators took to the airways to express their continued disavowal of many Canada 150-branded celebrations, projects, and events. While the resistance surrounding the historical and contemporary legacies of colonialism was not new in 2017, resistance to the celebration took on new meaning in the context of developing conversations about national reconciliation and the limitations of recognition. Reconciliation, defined in its broadest sense as “coming together,” refers to a process through which a new relationship might be established between Indigenous Peoples and the state within the context of truth-telling and reparation. Recognition refers to the way in which groups and rights are identified and recognized within the context of the liberal nation-state.

As a national museum, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) has been, for some time, involved in the development of its own projects for 2017. Curators planning exhibitions for the year grappled with ideas about how best to represent Canada's record in the area of human rights as well as its ongoing successes and failures regarding Indigenous rights and beyond. Ultimately, responsive and responsible curatorial planning and practice at the CMHR unfolded to respond to concerns like those raised by the Indigenous activists, artists, and thinkers who spoke against Canada 150 and, as a result, drove the development of exhibitions featured during the year in new and important directions. Through our planning and curatorial process, I, as the sole

curator for Indigenous Rights, sought to reframe the histories of Indigenous peoples and communities to challenge the idea that justice rests on recognition alone. Rather, our exhibition challenges the idea that the contemporary rights regimes that seek to move past historical injustice without fundamentally re-establishing the relationship between Indigenous and settler people are taking appropriate steps towards reconciliation.<sup>1</sup>

Through an examination of the CMHR's own exhibition development for 2017, this paper argues that undertaking grounded, reparative reconciliation that is meaningful to communities in a museum context means going beyond acknowledgement; it requires re-storying the very foundations of Canadian nation-building, and of projects like Confederation that remain, necessarily, unfinished. The practice of re-storying, defined as the reclamation of histories and group narratives within the context of "unsettling" settler history, can transform stories of victimhood into stories of resiliency. The story of resistance, of life lived on and with the land, the story of the ancestors — these stories represent thousands of years of lived on these lands. They are the stories that are key to helping the public interrogate Canada 150 in a way that goes beyond a simplistic and teleological narrative — and, ultimately, addresses the imperatives of reparative reconciliation as institutions of public memory.

### Decolonizing Methodologies at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights

The CMHR opened its doors in the fall of 2014. It is located on Treaty 1 lands in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, as well as in the heart of the homeland of the Métis nation. Situated on the ancestral territories of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Assiniboine, and Dakota peoples, its official mandate is "[t]o explore the subject of human rights, with special but not exclusive reference to Canada, in order to enhance the public's understanding of human rights, to promote respect for others, and to encourage reflection and dialogue."<sup>2</sup> The CMHR includes various perspectives on history, sociology, and international law in addition

to their limitations, and engages researchers of various backgrounds, disciplines, and areas of research. Since opening, the Museum has welcomed hundreds of thousands of visitors into its galleries. In 2016–2017, over sixty percent of visitors came from outside of Winnipeg. The number of visitors in the first half of the 2017–18 fiscal year (April through September) increased by two percent from the same period the year before; during the summer of 2017, over 70 percent of visitors came from outside Winnipeg. The Museum is proud to welcome Canadians, international visitors, and travel media from across the country and around the world. Increasing admission totals indicate the extent to which the Museum's reputation continues to grow as a result of national and international awareness, along with partnerships and collaborations with national and international human rights organizations.

As a national heritage institution, the CMHR curatorial team, comprised of a small group of scholars and subject matter experts, sees our mandate to encourage reflection and dialogue as an important reason for engaging in critical decolonizing practices. We have a particular responsibility to curate content which is oriented towards visitors, both domestic and international, and of all backgrounds, ages, abilities, and worldviews. As a museum based primarily on the exhibition of ideas, rather than artefacts, we understand our responsibility for maintaining the authenticity and integrity of the stories within our walls. Informing the discourse of human rights and of Indigenous rights from a variety of perspectives, we engage in intersectional analysis and examination of various topics and ideas that include colonization. In doing so, we seek to expose colonial practices as both a structural system of factors that act upon individuals and communities as well as dimensions of identity that help to shape the experiences of Indigenous peoples.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to its official opening, the CMHR's curatorial team engaged in the development of a decolonizing methodological framework with the help of community stakeholders and advisors. This framework works to prioritize community collaboration and Indigenous perspectives, while featuring Indigenous

content in every gallery and representing violations as shared history. The idea of shared history rests in a desire to build cross-cultural understanding and awareness — understanding relationships between different groups and segments of society as well as promoting intercultural dialogue, cultural pluralism, and reconciliation through awareness and truth-telling. The decolonizing approach is evident in all core galleries. Community collaboration, held between 2009–2011, and continues on an ongoing basis, informs the development of content and of programming while advisory boards, including our Standing Indigenous Advisory Council, also help to ensure that the institution remains accountable. Formal and informal external collaboration, including with a variety of guest artists and curators, appears in every gallery and is a part of all decision-making and approval processes.

Core galleries also prioritize Indigenous perspectives by deliberately limiting the interpretation of the material by non-Indigenous peoples, allowing the artwork, oral histories, and interpretations of human and Indigenous rights by notable Indigenous scholars and activists to direct the narrative. The Indigenous Perspectives Gallery, for example, uses land as a unifying platform to discuss the diversity and connectivity of Indigenous rights while the Indigenous voices in the space assert the idea that Indigenous rights are inherent, interconnected, and reciprocal. As a whole, the gallery represents a rejection of the universalizing discourse of human rights, of the ignorance of territorial dispossession, and of the assertion that the legacies of settler colonialism as somehow resolved. Based on the idea that visitors must understand original rights before they can understand the loss of those rights for communities and individuals, the gallery seeks to introduce ideas about Indigenous rights that may not be familiar to many.

While the Indigenous Perspectives Gallery prioritizes Indigenous rights, it also serves to ground the violations of Indigenous rights as featured in every other CMHR gallery as shared history. As former curators Emily Grafton and Julia Peristerakis explain, “The original rights examined in the Indigenous Perspectives



Figure 1. The Indigenous Perspectives gallery features a circular theatre. The film playing engages traditional Anishinaabe and Cree knowledge systems to ground Indigenous rights in Indigenous terms. Courtesy of CMHR/Aaron Cohen.

gallery are, in this way, traced through the entire museum and can be used as a framework for the visitor to better understand the impacts of colonial violations, which are displayed in all of the galleries, and represented as the history — and responsibility — of all Settler Canadians.”<sup>4</sup> Shared history can enhance visitors’ understandings of the history of these lands. It can also combat discrimination by promoting the idea of shared responsibility. The stories told throughout the Museum by Indigenous contributors, therefore, underscore the idea that state actors and institutions often perpetrate violations of Indigenous rights and that all Canadians have a responsibility to promote Indigenous rights and reconciliation.

The decolonizing approach is always a work in progress. The curatorial staff understands that this work needs to be undertaken in the context of the museum’s position as a national





Figure 2. In the Canadian Journeys gallery, rights violations are presented as shared history. The Indian Residential Schools story also connects the history of the system to contemporary child apprehension, drawing a connection between the past and the present. Courtesy of CMHR/Aaron Cohen.

museum that operates as a Crown Corporation, at arm's length from the Federal Government. To ensure integrity and accountability in content, Museum curators remain committed to its mandate to promote reflection and dialogue while not adjudicating human and Indigenous rights issues. At the same time, curators acknowledge that the process through which we work can and should reflect values that are important to the communities and individuals who trust the institution to share their stories. Curatorial staff emphasize the idea that these approaches are “decolonizing” but not necessary decolonial in the sense that they view their work as a process that will necessarily evolve and change in dialogue with Indigenous individuals, communities, and nations.<sup>5</sup>

### The Challenge of Settler Colonialism: Branding Canada 150

According to many leading political scientist and rights theorists, recognition, the legitimate address to rights claims, has an important basis in modern liberal democracies. For Charles Taylor, recognition is a basic human need. Political powers have



the obligation to recognize difference among groups in society. Because the self is developed in relational terms and in considering the position of others, the recognition of difference is an important measure for equality in liberal democratic societies.<sup>6</sup> Struggles over recognition, then, are in fact struggles over inter-subjective norms under which members of any society or system of government recognize each other and structure their interactions.<sup>7</sup> Within this model, groups are recognized as majority and minority groups often belonging to the same “set” or “society.” Within this arrangement, groups might be entitled to recognition by virtue of their historic or actual position. Recognition mandates the acknowledgement of one group by another whereby some issue or characteristic is identified then normalized, usually through the structures of the dominant group.

There are in fact limits to recognition, particularly as afforded within the context of the liberal democratic state. Glen Coulthard argues that the form of mutuality envisioned by many advocates of the liberal recognition approach fosters unfree and non-mutual relations precisely due to its inability to alter the generative structures, including a racist economy and the colonial state itself.<sup>8</sup> The affirmative relationship between recognition and freedom, he maintains, produces modes of thoughts and relationships that condition colonized peoples to certain subject positions “that are required for their continued domination.”<sup>9</sup> Recognition in Canada, according to Coulthard, has emerged as the primary expression of self-determination and has contributed to the erasure of alternative views. An examination of the idea of self-government and of self-determination within a legislative context, for instance, demonstrates how these ideas are inherently limited by the parameters and processes dictated by the needs, priorities, and structures of the state. The very idea of a power to recognize automatically structures an unequal and hierarchical relationship. This fact, in turn, denies the very principle of nation-to-nation relationships and of self-determination as understood through Indigenous worldviews and perspectives.

The Canada 150 brand, built on a tradition of recognition, has permeated all Canada Day celebrations to some extent.

During the first national simulcast on Dominion day in 1958, Governor General Sir Vincent Massey took to the airwaves to celebrate the duality of Canadian culture and the foundational elements of English and French. Since then, the development of celebrations of Canada has changed and transformed, becoming important tools in the development of national ideas about shared history and culture. As Matthew Hayday explains, although Canada Day celebrations have changed over the years, by 1982, celebrations were attracting significant public support and had solidified to emphasize a Canadian identity centered on diversity, individual rights, and achievement.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in 2017 Canada 150 invited Canadians to join the celebration of Canada's "linguistic, cultural and regional diversity, as well as its rich history and heritage"<sup>11</sup> through various events and projects funded under its branding.

While planning for the 2017 celebrations, museums were envisioned to have a role within the context of Canada 150 initiatives. In 2012 the Standing Committee on Heritage published a 63-page report detailing their vision for the contribution of museums to Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. Encompassing the views of six national museums and nine smaller institutions, along with the Canadian Museums Association and the Association des musées Québécois, the report highlighted the importance of Canada's heritage institutions in the promotion the year's festivities. As Bill Thorsell, manager of the Western Canada Pavillion at Expo 67, noted: "Canada is becoming multicultural with a capital G and a capital M, Global Multiculturalism. How do we sustain shared commitment, knowledge, and familiarity among various communities in the country — a swath of common ground, if you will — so we do not become many more communities of others, not two solitudes but many?" From a museums perspective, Kirstin Evenden, Committee Witness and then-Vice-President of the Canadian Museums Association, notes that role of museums was to ensure that the celebrations were inclusive for all Canadians, "with special recognition given to our Canadian diversity and our Aboriginal roots as a country." She continued to say that "museums should, with a presentation

of artifacts and of our intangible cultural heritage, celebrate the people, the stories, the songs, the traditions, the ideas that continue to shape this country.”<sup>12</sup> Looking back, she maintained, was necessary to move forward.

Canada 150 projects ranged from small, local events, to large, Canada 150 Signature Initiatives with broad national appeal. While the Canada 150 brand tended to emphasize themes of unity, inclusiveness, and a celebration of the country, there was also an emphasis on the principle of dialogue itself embedded in several projects, and of bringing Indigenous peoples to the table to engage in constructive conversations about the future of Canada — and their place in it. The celebrations often also engaged what Paulette Regan has characterized as Canada’s “peacemaker myth,” which emphasizes the largesse and generosity of the government alongside Indigenous passivity and, in many cases, complicity, particularly within the specter of treaty-making in a historical sense, as well as in the more contemporary conversations surrounding reconciliation.<sup>13</sup>

Collectively, these conversations tended to obscure the structure of settler colonialism, which aims to transcend colonialism as naturalized, normalized, unquestioned, and unchallenged.<sup>14</sup> This kind of colonialism often proposes redress through recognition based on an idea of landlessness and on society’s acceptance of the totalizing state’s appropriation of land and sovereignty. Shauna McRanor has characterized this view as the “dominant paradigm” whereby there exists an assumption that the settler state, and its norms, constitute a legitimate and unproblematic limit to Indigenous freedoms. As she points out, interrogating this paradigm is to question its very roots as based in a cultural argument: “Culture is therefore the difference that, according to liberal culturalists, ought to be protected and promoted by cultural rights.”<sup>15</sup> Policy-makers and legislators often pursue this protection and promotion through recognition.

In many cases, the Canada 150 discourses that emerged during the course of 2017 generated a discursive and epistemological structure that combined threads of inevitability and of complicity on behalf of Indigenous peoples and nations, while

insisting on the importance of recognition in moving forward towards reconciliation. The Canada 150 logo, for instance, features a series of diamonds, or “celebratory gems,” in the shape of the maple leaf. The four lower diamonds represent the four original provinces of Confederation in 1867, while the other diamonds create nine more points to represent the 13 provinces and territories. Created by Ariana Cuvin, the logo was chosen through a national competition in a field of over 300 entries, according to the Department of Canadian Heritage. Characterized as an “enduring reminder of one of Canada’s proudest moments,” the logo is intended to foster “pride, unity and celebration” by drawing attention to what is essential Canadiana — the idea of peaceful federation, and, of course, the maple leaf.<sup>16</sup> Importantly, the logo represents land — the thirteen provinces and territories that form the entity known as Canada — as evoking an image of empty, rather than contested, space. The much-lauded vision of Canadian settlers battling their way through an empty wilderness has become an enduring national image which, as Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker point out, is entangled historically and in a contemporary sense, in the processes of settler colonization, include current dispossession from land. Canada 150 Signature national projects also served, sometimes inadvertently, to advance a message of landlessness, all the while emphasizing Indigenous contributions to Canada. The co-option of Indigenous voices and worldviews included a variety of initiatives citing Indigenous representation, contribution or output, all of which lauded the benefits of recognition and of Indigenous cultural rights within the confines of Canadian statehood.<sup>17</sup> By the year’s end, an estimated 31 million Canadians had participated in at least one Canada 150 event, and there were 5800 events held across the country. The hashtag #Canada150 was used on Twitter 1.8 million times.<sup>18</sup>

### A Changing Museological Landscape

For many critics, Canada 150 events amounted to a sort of “performative morality” that Rachael George argues helped validate

how Canadians would like to see themselves, despite the ongoing violation of Indigenous rights.<sup>19</sup> Métis scholar Adam Gaudry, for instance, explains how Canada 150 romanticized a narrative about unity “to celebrate this wonderful country that has been built on our territories, largely in opposition to our existence as independent peoples.”<sup>20</sup> The narrative’s insistence on mutuality and on reconciliation also contributed to a sense of permanence — the idea that we, as Indigenous Peoples, had always been, and would always be, Canadian — even though there exists a great deal of debate and diversity in communities on this issue. Therefore, throughout 2017, Canada 150’s branding principles encompassed a degree of epistemological violence — a structure of historical and contemporary discursive invasion — that was important for curators to address in the exhibitions of the CMHR.

Curatorial voices and choices critical of Canada 150 have not been popular with everyone. Controversy erupted when a Lethbridge, Alberta, art gallery chose to display a Colonialism 150 sticker, which features an upside-down replica of the Canada 150 logo. Creator Eric Ritskes rejected the controversy, maintaining that the gallery could display whatever perspective it wished among all of the perspectives supplied within its walls. For Ritskes, the Colonialism 150 logo he created stood for truth, while Canada 150 remained “a celebration of 150 years of the theft of indigenous lands, 150 years of genocide, 150 years of colonialism that is on top of the tens of thousands of years of indigenous sovereignty.”<sup>21</sup> According to the gallery spokesperson, Nicole Hembroff, the sticker was meant to draw attention to outstanding issues. Critics alleged the symbol was anti-Canadian and a product of a radical fringe whose work should not be on display within a publicly-funded institution.

The tension inherent in this situation is indicative of the changing role of museums nationally, and of the frequent disjuncture between what the public believes museums should do and what institutional staff, including curators, believe their work to be. According to Amelia Kalant, museums as nation-producing institutions often operate in “analogous ways to the nation”, creating a kind of basis of consensus about national identity in

a way that attempts to erase conflict and subsume alternative histories.<sup>22</sup> As Kelsey Wrightson observes, museums may play a role in the ongoing perpetuation of settler colonialism in Canada, though the complexity of museum spaces varies.<sup>23</sup>

Museums are seen often as sites of truth rather than of interpretation. The erasure of Indigenous peoples in the stories that, as Eva Mackey points out, nations tell each other about themselves<sup>24</sup> occurs in part because museums have often placed Indigenous peoples outside of the institution while their ideas and cultures have been represented by outsiders with little to no collaboration or discussion “as part of their subject-matter.”<sup>25</sup> As Deborah Doxtator explains, “in the nineteenth century, when most of the Native collections in museums were brought together, the act of building Canada involved asserting a nation literally over top of Native cultures.”<sup>26</sup> Since the mid- to late-twentieth century, many museums have also focused on the exhibition of multicultural nationalism, as analyzed by Caitlin Gordon-Walker, which implies unity in diversity, equal, and adequate recognition to every person and culture within it, and which promotes a model in which the adequate framework for understanding cultural difference rests in the recognition, then normalization, of that difference.<sup>27</sup>

New museological approaches have emerged that emphasize the importance of understanding museums as places firmly embedded in particular social, political, and economic settings. Museums are not neutral arbiters or apolitical spaces, as Kelsey Wrightson notes.<sup>28</sup> They are places where society establishes and normalizes elements of culture, history, and identity. In these spaces, the responsibility of museums as institutions for public memory requires “an acknowledgement of the meaning-making potential of the museum, and the imperative to utilize that to positive social ends.”<sup>29</sup> Whose authority, whose story, whose narrative — these are all crucially important questions critics, supporters, and visitors to the CMHR will raise through a critical engagement with the content. While the decolonizing museological practices of the CMHR are detailed earlier in this article — the prioritization of Indigenous voices and worldviews, the idea of emphasizing shared histories, and the principles of collab-



oration — the decolonizing approach requires revisiting within the context of Canada 150. Within the critiques of Canada 150, it was understood that the approach to exhibitions about Canada and its history in 2017 needed to engage in self-critique and in self-reflection. In talking about Canada's history and contemporary issues, the narrative created could be overly simplistic or uncritically celebratory.

### 'Rights' of Passage

Throughout 2017, the CMHR featured four separate exhibitions, each dealing with some element of Canada's history or identity. The following discussion will focus particularly on the final project, *Rights of Passage: Canada at 150*, a project that inspired new approaches to curatorial planning and research. It also led to new ways of engaging with Indigenous knowledge, as well as a host of new collaborations and relationship building centered on seeing beyond the confines of Canada as a nation-state. In the simplest terms, the task for curators was to create an entirely original exhibition based on 150 years of human rights discourse in Canada, referring specifically to the formal nation-state established through Confederation in 1867. Early on, the problems in curating this kind of project, intended to span only the nation-state period of 1867 to present, were apparent to me and to other exhibition curators. The temporal limit of the exhibition, which references only the period in which the nation-state of Canada exists, rather than the thousands of years of history of this land and its peoples, is extremely problematic.

The larger exhibition, developed by a group of three curators — all historians — includes a focus on the discursive shift from civil to human rights in Canada. In part, the exhibition chronicles the story of the expansion of rights discourse and of the inclusion of new groups, including women, children, immigrants, and workers, within the rights apparatus of the state. It focuses primarily on the efforts undertaken by different groups and individuals to transform the discourse of rights in Canada and the concrete and practical effects of their work. A multi-vocal

approach, however, requires careful consideration, if grounded in an official narrative that celebrates state-centered politics. Considering that Indigenous people have organized both within and outside of the state, as well as given their exclusion from the category of “citizen” for an extended period, an exclusive focus on state-centered rights would have limited the display of survival and of resilience. Particularly with reference to Indigenous nations, an exclusively state-centered approach would have also negated the central importance of territory to historical and contemporary Indigenous claims for rights.

To combat the risk of drowning out Indigenous voices within a larger, multi-vocal presentation focused within the confines of the nation-state of Canada since 1867, the curatorial team opted to reframe a narrative that engaged new curatorial methods, as well as all the tenets of the existing decolonizing methodology. For instance, the introductory panel for the exhibition created by curators speaks to the idea of parallel histories that are intertwined — the histories of Canada and of Kanata. In conducting research for the idea of the parallel histories and in speaking with Knowledge-Keepers and Elders, I learned about a new and richer meaning behind the idea of Kanata. As the Knowledge-Keepers and Elders explained, Kanata was a concept that encompassed land, languages, and sovereignty. Kanata engaged relationships between peoples as well as between people and the Creator, and the Earth. The relationship between Canada and Kanata, within the context of contemporary reconciliation, also speaks to the ideals implicit in its construction — of peoples living on the lands, responsibly, in a good way, and according to the laws of the Creator. Framing the entire exhibition within parallelism helps to complicate some of the initial message around unity; it introduces the idea of nation as incomplete, or a work in progress.

To maintain a sense of historical movement and change, we decided to break the exhibition up into five distinct but non-linear zones. Four of the zones are temporal, though not exclusively limited by problematic colonial markers, while the fifth is not time-bound and will be discussed separately. The content within these zones is not organized chronologically, but thematically.

While many dates were considered for each of the first four zones, curators decided in the end that the zones, as reflections of a general rather than a fixed period, would help reinforce the message that history was shaped by many currents and peoples, rather than simply by the neoliberal state.

The non-linear trajectory of the exhibition is a surprise to many of our visitors, who are used to encountering historical material along a linear development of time. Of relatively equal total size, each of the zones is based on immersive décor and communication technologies reminiscent of each period. For example, in the first period immediately following Confederation, titled *Foundations and Dislocations*, a magic lantern projection as well as newspapers and broadsides highlight the period of settlement and self-definition around Confederation. In the second zone, *Transformations and Interventions*, a period-style radio broadcasts speeches from populist politicians. In the third zone, *Towards the Charter*, tube television sets play clips of moments of popular organizing in Canada over the course of the 1960s and 1970s that include the fight for language rights, for the rights of gay and lesbian civil service employees, and Indigenous rights. In the fourth zone entitled *Facing the Future*, social media, including interactive hashtags and wearable technologies, serves as an important mode of communication. Overall, all four temporal zones contain stories emphasizing shared responsibility and action from the perspective of different groups and individuals, including women, children, immigrant groups, workers, and others. Collectively, they also emphasize the importance of links between people in the form of relationships with the state, between groups within the state, and between the state and Indigenous Peoples.

In each of the first four temporal zones, a story is dedicated to Indigenous perspectives and emphasizes the dynamic nature of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the state. In the first zone, for example, we engage the little-known stories of Indigenous unionists on the West Coast who, in the early nineteenth century, organized themselves partially in response to discrimination from several trade unions. The emphasis on



Figure 3. In the first zone, a reproduction newspaper accompanies the large graphic to tell the story of Local 526 as Indigenous peoples organizing for their rights as workers. These stories help the visitor engage with history in a multi-dimensional way. Courtesy of CMHR/Aaron Cohen.

Indigenous people as participants in the wage economy helps to dispel the idea of separateness or isolation within the economic and social systems of the era. Specifically, the story included in the first zone focuses on Indigenous longshoremen prominent in early-twentieth century wage work who organized under the banner of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) after being rejected by mainstream unions, often because they were Indigenous. The IWW offered a venue, as “a radical organization that offered up a heady mix of revolution and reform to those workers who did not fit well into the established craft union structures; the unskilled, the migratory, and the marginal.”<sup>30</sup> In 1906 the IWW’s Lumber Handlers Union number 526 was formed with close to 60 men, most of whom were Squamish. The group became known as the “Bows and Arrows,” which Andrew Parnaby argues was based, at least in part, on the assertion of difference and identity.<sup>31</sup> As a whole, this story, as well as the large, nearly life-sized graphic of the workers, helps to convey the idea

that Indigenous workers participated in the capitalist economy not within the context of the abandonment of traditional ways of life, but as a part of the process of the integration of wage labour into seasonal employment and subsistence patterns.<sup>32</sup>

In the first zone, the exhibition also addresses the historic and contemporary ramifications of understandings of Treaty. This story engages one of the most foundational processes of nation-building from the state's perspective and is often linked to a national narrative of Canada as peaceful broker. Developed with members of Wasagamack First Nation, formerly known as the Island Lake Band, the story centers on an "artefact" loaned from the community — a cheque from the Government of Canada in the amount of \$79.38 received in August 2015 for 20 years of twine and ammunition, according to the original terms of the Treaty adhesion the band signed in 1909. For Indigenous signatories, that Treaty is regarded as a living document that defines the nature of a nation-to-nation relationship and that should be responsive to their circumstances in any given time, even if it was signed in 1909. On the other hand, the paltry sum represented by the 2015 cheque and for the entirety of the band, demonstrates how the narrow interpretation of Treaty terms today serves to further damage and jeopardize a relationship already impacted by broken promises and shattered trust. Since its receipt, the cheque has hung in the band council office and in Council chambers as a reminder to the leadership and citizens of Wasagamack First Nation about the importance of their rights. It has not been cashed, because the sum of \$79.38 is an insult to what signatories meant to establish by Treaty within a nation-to-nation relationship.

In the second zone, we explore the genocidal and patriarchal policies of assimilation and control through the Indian Act and the pass system.<sup>33</sup> Artefacts include a pass issued by the local Indian Agent to allow an Indigenous farmer to sell his goods at market, a linen poster illustrating the fines for selling intoxicants to First-Nations people, and a handgun belonging to an Indian Agent. Many visitors come to the CMHR unaware that legislation like the Indian Act ever existed and are even more surprised

that it still exists today. The story as a whole deals with these policies of assimilation and control as contrary to Indigenous, human, and treaty rights. The multiple examples and policies featured in the zone helps visitors see settler colonialism as a system of connected policies, structures, and methods that continues to affect communities as a whole today, rather than a law that serves to restrict individuals.

In the fourth and final temporal zone, the exhibition features an important story about the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada as told through the lens of a residential school survivor.<sup>34</sup> In this portion of the exhibition, the CMHR was fortunate to be able to borrow a small valise donated to the National Center for Truth and Reconciliation by Marcel Petitquay, a residential school Survivor. The valise, accompanied by a framed photograph of Marcel's poem, *Ma petite valise du pensionnat*, demonstrates the lasting legacy of the experience of residential schools as well as the ongoing need for healing and reconciliation. The poem itself is a vivid description of Marcel's departure for residential school with a suitcase carefully prepared by his mother and containing clothes, toys, and mementos as well as other intangible lessons and values. As Marcel recounts, his trip lasted 12 years; when he returned, his suitcase was heavy, not with those same objects, but with hate, self-loathing, and fear. For many students, the suitcases they brought were immediately seized and burned upon arrival, for fear of disease or simply for intimidation. The author donated the poem at the Québec National Event on 25 April 2013. This display also includes Marcel's beaded brooch, featuring yellow, black, and red beads as a symbol of healing.

All of the stories in the zones deal with the idea of dynamic relationships in a constant state of negotiation and flux. They engage the notion of nation-to nation relationships — stories of Canada and of Kanata. The stories also present a variety of new points of view to encourage settlers who may have only heard from a single perspective to learn the truth about Canada's past and present, and to play a role in improving its future.



## Defending Sovereignty and Forging New Relationships at the CMHR

The fifth zone is focused on the ways in which Indigenous Peoples have articulated their rights to a foreign state — the Canadian state — for the past 150 years. Entitled *Defending Sovereignty*, it focuses on oral histories as a historic and contemporary mode of communication that is central in transmitting teachings, messages, and cultural and political understandings. Created exclusively for this exhibition, oral history contributors were selected due to their ongoing battles and unresolved claims to justice for themselves and for their communities. Together, the oral histories, which form the basis of research and content for the zone, call attention towards the thousands of years of history, culture, and sovereignty on these lands. The themes addressed are land, stewardship, and identity. The sub-themes are titled “On Turtle Island,” “Lessons from the Earth,” and “All Our Relations,” respectively. The development of the content for this zone inspired some important new approaches within our exhibitions development centering on content, institutional standards, and the display of artefacts.

As Marjorie Halpin notes, exhibition is a process rather than a product, and a critical museology is necessarily one in service to communities, rather than the state or its elites.<sup>35</sup> The content of the exhibition and the selection of stories was driven by the individuals and communities involved and aligned with their personal, political, and community priorities. David Serkoak was the first person to contribute his story of colonialism, violence, and, ultimately, of his community’s resilience. An Ahiarmiut Elder, David’s family was relocated, first from Ennadai Lake and then to four subsequent locations in the Arctic by the Government of Canada, without any prior or informed consent during the 1950s. The implications of his painful story were staggering and included tales of starvation, violence, and murder. Over the course of nearly two full days, David shared his story of both pain and resilience, including the story of his return to Ennadai Lake with a group of elders in the mid-1980s. The project



Figure 4. The Two Row Wampum runs through the entirety of the Defending Sovereignty zone, engaging visitors to consider the values of peace, friendship and respect in the nation-to-nation relationship of state governments and Indigenous nations. Courtesy of CMHR/Aaron Cohen.

provided David with the opportunity to discuss some of his current work in order to gain tangible recognition in the form of an apology and compensation for his community's relocation from the government of Canada, which continues to deny his claims. Providing a space for David Serkoak to tell his own story helped to advance his community's search for justice in the form of compensation by raising the profile of the Ahiarmiut relocations.

Duke Redbird, noted poet and artist, is also a contributor to the project who helped frame its content. Although I had initially contacted Dr. Redbird regarding a particular story, we opted to reframe the story to focus on the idea of what Indigenous peoples have provided for Canada, rather than the other way around. In his compelling interview, he reframes Confederation as a racist exchange that excluded Indigenous peoples. In doing so, he posits a new vision about Canada's future — one in which Indigenous people can be truly treated as partners, rather than as wards. Through his own journey of self-discovery and

self-determination, Dr. Redbird makes a strong case for a re-envisioned view of Canadian history, an argument he takes into his daily work in Toronto and around Canada in encouraging schools, in particular, to adopt decolonizing practices, including a daily acknowledgment of territory.<sup>36</sup> In this way, the exhibition was a way for him to connect to a broader audience to assert these principles and to encourage the adoption of similar practices elsewhere.

This exhibition also engaged the idea of flexibility within institutions and on how institutional standards might be responsive and dynamic, rather than fixed and unchanging. Ellen Gabriel, known as a spokesperson during the “Oka” Crisis, had a clear vision of the story she wanted to tell from the outset, and for what purpose. When first contacted to ask if she was interested in retelling the story of the Oka Crisis from the Longhouse perspective, she informed me that she did not like the term, “Oka Crisis”. Instead, she felt it was important to call it the Kanessatake Resistance or the Kanessatake Siege to signal the centrality of the peoples’ struggle and the responsibility of the town of Oka in creating what she characterized as a human rights catastrophe during the famed standoff in 1990. Even though our visitors are more likely to recognize the label “Oka Crisis,” we took her words seriously, and referred to the situation in the label copy as “Kanessatake Resistance.” Ellen Gabriel also contributed to advancing our institutional conversation regarding our own museological practices, especially in terms of discussions over the licensing of oral histories and who has the right to someone’s story. Her collaborative work helped us develop an addendum to our standard agreement laying out a series of moral obligations on the part of the institution to both Ellen Gabriel and to her descendants.

In terms of artefacts and loans, the story I developed with Andrew Keewatin of Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation, otherwise known as Grassy Narrows First Nation, was instructive. I initially began to research a story focused on mercury poisoning in the English-Wabigoon river system which, since the late 1960s, has been causing serious health problems within the communities of White Dog and of Grassy Narrows due to dumping

by the Reed Paper Ltd. mill. Despite the lasting legacy of pollution, what I found was that people like Andrew Keewatin remain preoccupied with other issues facing the community, such as the clear-cutting and logging on traditional territories that threatens hunting grounds and trap lines. Andrew believes in combatting these current threats through educating youth about the land. Working for years on land-based education projects, he lent the Museum a pair of snowshoes which blend modern materials with traditional techniques that he created with community youth. Like all of the artefacts for this zone of the exhibition, the loans were secured directly from the contributor — in this case, Andrew himself — in order to both cement the relationship of trust between the institution and the individuals and to engage with the difficult history of museums appropriating and exhibiting Indigenous stories and items without permission.

Similarly, a hand-woven Métis sash from France Lemay informs the content of the story focusing on the identity of the Red River Métis as linked to territory and land, rather than to blood. For France and her daughter, Paulette Dugay, the hand-woven sash represents a tangible piece of the present and of the past. Borrowing the priceless artefact directly from the family while negotiating elements like insurance, value for each artefact, as required in Museum loan agreements, and how best to display the piece also helps to build trust with Métis individuals and the Métis community. As a curator, I am proud to be able to share these items on behalf of our collaborators, and I am very thankful for the trust that has been placed in the Museum as an institution. Overall, these experiences illustrate the idea that working towards a transformative museology requires considerable time and investment, as well as the ability, desire, and flexibility to cede some of the traditional aspects away from museum “authority”.

The design of this particular exhibition zone also speaks to building this relationship of trust and collaboration. The oral histories play on circular monitors framed by sweet grass braids, which underwent a blessing by Elders before they were installed. The design incorporates the four sacred medicines — tobacco,

sage, sweetgrass, and cedar — which were all collected according to territorial protocols. The design, which traces a two-row wampum throughout the zone's space, represents the values of peace, friendship and respect, while respecting the principle of nation-to-nation.<sup>37</sup> At the very end of the *Defending Sovereignty* zone, Indigenous youth from a Winnipeg high school helped create an interactive element which draws inspiration from the two-row wampum design and represents youth's hopes, aspirations, and priorities for today and for the future.

### Taking Stock of Canada 150: Challenging the Politics of Recognition in 2017 – and Beyond

The collaborative process employed for the fifth zone, in *Rights of Passage*, as well as its fundamental challenge to the politics of recognition based solely in cultural rights, has offered important insights for the institution in terms of engaging in respectful and reparative practices that work towards institutional reconciliation. Chiefly, Museums wanting to engage in Indigenous histories must focus on the process by which they conduct research and prepare exhibitions, understanding that the way in which they establish processes and conduct research is as important as the product itself. Institutions themselves must move beyond recognition and be willing to acknowledge alternative constructions of history and time as well as new ways of knowing. It is only through working with Indigenous peoples and in truly and authentically representing them as they wish to be represented (or, in some cases, not be represented) that tangible museological reconciliation can happen. Museums do not have the right to demand collaboration from Indigenous communities and individuals — many wounds are still too fresh for that — rather they must understand that they can be sites of power for Indigenous people, but only if they dare to challenge the very processes of oppression and erasure which they have supported in the past, been part of, and may do so still.

Lessons learned from our process are many but fall into two general areas. First, true collaboration and engagement is

based in relationships, which are formed over time. The principles of friendship, peace, and respect that animated our treaties as Indigenous peoples are as important today as they ever were, and institutions must account for the time, energy, and capital investment it takes to build these relationships in the first place. Pursuing positive relationships with Indigenous people and communities involves respecting and observing protocols, taking the time to listen and to understand, and not viewing relationships as mere transactional research enterprises. Rather, community-engaged research, particularly when conducted by institutions, should reflect the needs of that community in addition to the needs of the institution. When the community and the institution are at odds, institutions should be willing to challenge their own agendas and assumptions.

Second, engagement in curation must be based on a model that incorporates flexibility in time and perspective. Investing enough time to develop projects in a meaningful way is necessary if museums and other institutions are serious about decolonizing their own frameworks. That flexibility must extend to content as well. As a practitioner in an institution that deals with both historical and contemporary subject matter, I understand that my institution may need to cover certain subjects. At the same time, there are many different ways of covering any topic. With very few exceptions, all topics can and should engage Indigenous peoples meaningfully and with respect, both at the CMHR and in other heritage institutions.

In a recent panel conversation with a noted women's activist and an author specializing in activism and change, I advocated the need to look beyond the state and international systems. I explained that the federation we have — Canada — is, by all accounts, a relatively young one. Built by individuals, it can also be deconstructed by individuals. Upon hearing my commentary, one of the panelists asked, "If not the state, then what?" This seemingly simple question represents the crux of the issue, and the beginning of a new conversation about the difficult nature of limited federation. For Canada to truly embody the ideals it has espoused in its own sagas and narratives, the federation must, at



least for the time being, be regarded, at best, as a work in progress. Canada 150 is the story of a nation built upon the Turtle's back, but it is not the story of Turtle Island. The story of Turtle Island is the story of thousands of years and hundreds of generations — it is a story about the past, about the present, and about the future. Re-storying Canada 150 means acknowledging its limitations and the implicit violence it can represent to communities whose struggles are rooted in others' celebrations. It means challenging the idea that mere recognition can ever be enough, unless accompanied by new relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers, and, ultimately, new ways of seeing, and of telling, the history of these lands.

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## Endnotes

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- 3 Early critics of the CMHR alleged the inability or unwillingness of the institution to engage in intersectional analysis. For examples of such critiques, see Olena Hankivsky and Rita Kaur Dhamoon, "Which Genocide Matters the Most? An Intersectionality Analysis of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights," *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* 46, no. 4 (December 2013): 899–920; A. Dirk Moses, "The Canadian Museum for Human Rights: the 'uniqueness of the Holocaust' and the question of genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 14, no. 2 (2012): 215–238; and the *Special issue of the Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, ed. Angela Failler, Peter Ives, and Heather Milne, 37 (2015), which focuses on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights as a site of difficult and contested knowledge. The popular press also stringently critiqued the CMHR, drawing on criticism from scholars, archeologists, and other observers who were not necessarily involved in early planning or design.
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- 15 McRanor, "The Imperative of 'Culture'...", 59.
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- 17 While the organizations themselves may not have necessarily intended to convey this particular message, the branding and the description of projects, as provided by the Department of Canadian Heritage, maintained this thread. For instance, the 4Rs Youth Movement, an organization of young leaders and adult allies from across fourteen national organizations, hosted regional and national discussion gatherings to "highlight Indigenous contributions to Canada, and engage Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people in meaningful conversation in support of taking action on reconciliation," according to the Department of Canadian Heritage. Similarly, Reconciliation Canada's "Reconciliation in Action: A National Engagement Strategy," sought to bring recon-

- ciliation to the heart of Canada 150. The project description on the Department of Canadian Heritage's website featuring it and other Canada 150 Signature Projects includes the idea that events would focus on "exploring and celebrating the perceptions, action and aspirations of Canadians with respect to reconciliation". The output from these events would serve to compile "a National narrative on reconciliation [capitalization in the original], a narrative that acknowledges our shared history, celebrates current achievements in reconciliation, inspires hope and love, and encourages action for the next 150 years. For examples, see Government of Canada — Department of Canadian Heritage, "Signature Projects", <http://canada.pch.gc.ca/eng/1475163068164>, < accessed 30 October 2017 >.
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- 33 The original Indian Act of 1876 was a consolidation of previous legislation governing status Indian people. Among other things, the Act determined who was considered an Indian, disenfranchised those deemed to be too educated, and interfered in Indigenous systems of governance and identity with impunity. Gradually becoming more coercive, the Indian Act eventually banned several First Nations ceremonies, provided for compulsory attendance at residential schools, and even forbade the gathering of Indigenous people or the hiring of legal counsel. Though amended many times over the years, the Indian Act is still law today and works to promote assimilation primarily through its establishing of Indian status, as well as its continuing interference in Indigenous governance and land management. The pass system, on the other hand, was never a part of Canadian law, or of the Indian Act. It operated illegally from the mid- to latter-part of the nineteenth century, depending on accounts, and well into the twentieth century. Passes were administered by Indian Agents to regulate the movement of First Nations people who were obligated to travel with a pass or permit specifying the purpose of their trip, the destination, and the amount of time they would be absent from the reserve. Oral histories frequently engage stories of the pass system and how First Nations people were forced to obey under threat of withheld annuities, rations, or other possible penalties.

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- 37 The Two Row Wampum is one of the oldest treaty relationships between the Onkwehonweh (original people) of Turtle Island (North America) and European immigrants. The treaty was made in 1613 between the Dutch and the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) as Dutch traders and settlers moved up the Hudson River into Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) territory and became the basis for all future Haudenosaunee relationships with European powers. The white beads of the belt symbolize peace, friendship, and respect, while the purple rows symbolize two vessels travelling down the same river, neither interfering with the other. The principles of the Two Row were consistently restated by Haudenosaunee spokespeople and were extended to relationships with the French, British, and Americans under the framework of the Silver Covenant Chain agreements. The Two Row is a foundational philosophical principle, a universal relationship of non-domination, balance, and harmony between different forces. The Two Row principles of peace, respect, and friendship can exist within any relationship between autonomous beings working in concert.