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Résumé de l'article

Les professionnels du patrimoine du Canada et du monde entier commencent à explorer comment la décolonisation peut être appliquée aux expositions, aux collections et à la programmation des musées. Le Musée de l'Holocauste Montréal (MHM), qui a été fondé par des survivants en 1979 et lancé son exposition permanente actuelle en 2003, a récemment annoncé qu'il allait déménager dans un nouveau bâtiment et adapter son exposition. Il s'agit donc d'un moment idéal pour examiner comment le MHM peut répondre au paysage changeant de la pratique muséale au XXIe siècle. La décolonisation est-elle un processus qui peut être appliqué de manière significative aux musées de l'Holocauste et, si c'est le cas, comment l'exposition permanente du MHM peut-elle aborder de manière critique les questions relatives au colonialisme de peuplement et à l'indigénéité ? Cet article explore trois thèmes narratifs au sein du musée : l'histoire du Canada, les droits de la personne et la Palestine/Israël. Si l'exposition réinscrit les récits et les idéologies du colonialisme de peuplement, elle contient également de multiples points d'entrée que les conservateurs peuvent utiliser pour déployer des pratiques muséales de décolonisation. Un tel MHM peut conserver sa focalisation spécifique sur le génocide des Juifs d'Europe tout en mettant en lumière les structures coloniales dans lesquelles les visiteurs, le contenu du musée et la mémoire de l'Holocauste sont imbriqués.

Decolonizing the Holocaust: Curatorial Possibilities at the Montreal Holocaust Museum

JASON CHALMERS[*]

Abstract

Heritage professionals across Canada and around the world are beginning to explore how decolonization can be applied to museum exhibits, collections, and programing. The Montreal Holocaust Museum (MHM), which was founded by survivors in 1979 and launched its current permanent exhibit in 2003, recently announced that it will be relocating to a new building and updating its exhibit. As such, this is an ideal time to consider how the MHM can respond to the changing landscape of museum practice in the twenty-first century. Is decolonization a process that can be meaningfully applied to Holocaust museums and, if so, how can the MHM's permanent exhibit critically engage with issues surrounding settler colonialism and Indigeneity? This article explores three narrative themes within the museum: Canadian history; human rights; and Palestine/Israel. While the exhibit reinscribes settler colonial narratives and ideologies, it also contains multiple entry points that curators can use to deploy decolonial museum practices. A decolonial MHM can retain its specific focus on the genocide of European Jewry while also illuminating the colonial structures that visitors, museum content, and Holocaust memory are entwined within.

Résumé

Les professionnels du patrimoine du Canada et du monde entier commencent à explorer comment la décolonisation peut être appliquée aux expositions, aux collections et à la programmation des musées. Le Musée de l'Holocauste Montréal (MHM), qui a été fondé par des survivants en 1979 et lancé son exposition permanente actuelle en 2003, a récemment annoncé qu'il allait déménager dans un nouveau bâtiment et adapter son exposition. Il s'agit donc d'un moment idéal pour examiner comment le MHM peut répondre au paysage changeant de la pratique muséale au XXIe siècle. La décolonisation est-elle un processus qui peut être appliqué de manière significative aux musées de l'Holocauste et, si c'est le cas, comment l'exposition permanente du MHM peut-elle aborder de manière

critique les questions relatives au colonialisme de peuplement et à l'indigé-néité ? Cet article explore trois thèmes narratifs au sein du musée : l'histoire du Canada, les droits de la personne et la Palestine/Israël. Si l'exposition réinscrit les récits et les idéologies du colonialisme de peuplement, elle contient également de multiples points d'entrée que les conservateurs peuvent utiliser pour déployer des pratiques muséales de décolonisation. Un tel MHM peut conserver sa foca-lisation spécifique sur le génocide des Juifs d'Europe tout en mettant en lumière les structures coloniales dans lesquelles les visiteurs, le contenu du musée et la mémoire de l'Holocauste sont imbriqués.

The Montreal Holocaust Museum (MHM) is a community-based museum that uses curated exhibits, pedagogical tools, and memorial programs to educate people across Canada about the Holocaust and other genocides. The museum was founded in 1979 by local Holocaust survivors and launched its current permanent exhibit, "To Learn, To Feel, To Remember, To Act," in 2003. The exhibit, which is housed in the Federation CJA (Combined Jewish Appeal) building, guides visitors on a historical and mostly chronological journey through the causes, events, and impacts of the Holocaust. While this content focuses on the Nazi persecution of European Jewry, it also takes a distinctly Canadian approach that addresses pre-Holocaust Jewish life and postwar immigration in the country. A turning point in the museum's history occurred in 2021, when the MHM announced that it will be relocating from its home in Côte-des-Neiges to a more central location on Saint-Laurent Boulevard in 2025.[1] The move entails the design and construction of a new building for the museum as well as the redevelopment of its permanent exhibit. As this transition proceeds, it is an ideal time to consider how the MHM can approach the Holocaust, engage with histories of genocide, and continue to build relationships between Canadian Jewry and other groups.

Museum practice in Canada has changed substantially since the MHM was founded more than four decades ago. Many of these changes were catalyzed by the exhibition *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* at the Glenbow Museum, which was developed in conjunction with the 1988 Calgary Olympics. Controversy erupted when the museum announced Shell Oil as a major sponsor, leading to national and international boycotts of the exhibition. In response, the Canadian Museums Association and the Assembly of First Nations initiated a Task Force on Museums

and First Peoples; its final report, released in 1992, asked Canadian museums to radically reconsider their relationships to Indigenous peoples and proposed a set of recommendations for museum practice.[2] Since then, national inquiries addressing other dimensions of Indigenous-settler relations have reached similar conclusions. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), which published its final report in 2015, included 94 Calls to Action that address museums, archives, education, and commemoration, among other social institutions in Canada. For example, the 79th Call to Action asks heritage and memorial institutions "to integrate Indigenous history, heritage values, and memory practices into Canada's national heritage and history."[3] The Viens Commission and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG) have made similar recommendations.[4] Although the MHM does not address Indigenous peoples in its permanent exhibit, it is important to view these reports within the changing landscape of museum practice in the twenty-first century. Museum professionals around the world are beginning to consider the necessity of decolonization and how it can be applied to museum collections, exhibits, and programing. If the MHM is to remain relevant, it is crucial that the museum situates itself within this new landscape and considers how its subject matter may be implicated in the structures and processes of settler colonialism.

Is it possible to decolonize the MHM and, if so, how can curators and heritage experts integrate decolonial museum practices into its permanent exhibit? The first part of this question considers whether decolonial perspectives can be meaningfully applied to the MHM's content and subject matter. This is an important question because decolonial museum practitioners often focus on museums that engage extensively with Indigenous content.[5] The Holocaust is not directly linked to settler colonialism or Indigenous peoples, and the MHM does not address these subjects in its permanent exhibit. In other words, is it meaningful and possible to decolonize the Holocaust, Holocaust memory, and Holocaust museums? The second part is practical and focuses specifically on the MHM's permanent exhibit. It is based on the observation that people interpret and experience Holocaust memory differently in different local and national contexts;[6] the MHM's approach to the Holocaust is shaped by its socio-political location in Montreal, which differs from Holocaust memory in other parts of Canada and other countries. Answering this question involves

examining the structure, design, representation, content, perspectives, erasures, and contexts of the MHM to understand its unique memory of the Holocaust. In particular, this question means considering how the museum's subject matter, themes, artefacts, and conversations can be entry points to a larger discussion of settler colonialism and Indigeneity. A decolonial MHM can retain a specific focus on the Holocaust and Jewish experience while also illuminating the colonial structures within which visitors are entwined.

In its current incarnation, the MHM's permanent exhibit fails to address settler colonialism and, in doing so, reinscribes colonial ideologies. However, it contains multiple entry points that curators can use to deploy decolonial museum practices and illuminate oppressive social relations in Canada and elsewhere. The present analysis begins by surveying decolonial practices at museums and heritage sites. Decolonization is a process of systemic and structural transformation that involves exposing and dismantling colonial knowledge, enabling suppressed knowledges to flourish, and "re-storying" historical narratives. The analysis then explores three thematic or narrative areas where the MHM can begin to engage with decolonial practice: Canadian history; human rights; and Palestine/Israel. First, the MHM takes a distinctly Canadian approach to the Holocaust that focuses on Canadian Jewry and postwar immigration but also erases Indigenous peoples from national history. Curators can begin to decolonize the exhibit by framing Canadian history in a way that critically engages with settler colonialism and illuminates the histories and experiences of Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, museums and memorials often rely on a teleological view of history that links the Holocaust to the advent of human rights. In some ways the MHM reinscribes this narrative framework, although its emphasis on memory also has the potential to disrupt colonial narratives of civilizational progress. Finally, it is informative to consider the museum's approach to the State of Israel, Jewish immigration to the country, and the experiences of Palestinians. While the exhibit discusses uncritically settler colonialism in the region and contributes to the erasure of Palestinians, curators can use critical discussions of Palestine/Israel to illuminate settler colonialism in local and transnational contexts. The MHM can contribute to decolonization, but this will likely be a difficult process that requires both visitors and curators to engage with history in uncomfortable and unsettling ways.

Decolonial Museum Practices

Decolonization, Indigenization, and other strategies for social change respond to settler colonialism in overlapping but distinct ways. Settler colonialism is a mode of empire wherein settler colonizers occupy and permanently inhabit Indigenous land, which they achieve by displacing Indigenous peoples from their ancestral territories.[7] Settlers justify the theft of land and the domination of Indigenous (and other non-European) peoples by constructing and naturalizing hierarchies — hierarchies based on race, gender, sexuality, class, and other social categories.[8] Because settler colonialism is a complex social structure that has an impact on people in different ways, scholars and activists have developed diverse responses. Decolonial practices directly confront settler colonialism and other modes of empire: this confrontation involves analyzing, critiquing, and disrupting colonial structures with the ultimate goal of dismantling them. These differ from Indigenizing practices that respond to the needs and interests of Indigenous peoples, which can include developing frameworks that reflect Indigenous identities, knowledges, and worldviews; they are usually Indigenous-led and seek to revitalize Indigenous cultures, which may or may not involve critiques of settler colonialism.[9] Yet Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang have stressed that "decolonization … is a distinct project from other civil and human rights-based social justice projects … [It] cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks."[10] The key distinction is that, while these frameworks respond to inequality and seek to disrupt social hierarchies, decolonial approaches focus on the settler occupation of Indigenous land. So, on one hand, decolonization is a specific approach to social justice rather than an overarching framework. On the other hand, it aims to dismantle social hierarchies and therefore depends on Indigenizing, feminist, anti-racist, and other anti-oppressive practices. In this way, decolonization often involves collaborating with anti-oppressive and anti-hierarchical practices while ensuring that settler colonialism, Indigeneity, and land remain at the centre of analysis.

Over the past decade, scholars and curators have begun to explore how decolonization can be applied to museum exhibits, collections, and programing. In a seminal study, *Decolonizing Museums*, Amy Lonetree has examined how Indigenous peoples are represented at tribal and national museums in the United States. According to Lonetree,

decolonial museums will respond to settler colonialism in several ways: "A decolonizing museum practice must involve assisting our communities in addressing the legacies of historical unresolved grief," which involves "speaking the hard truths of colonialism and thereby creating spaces for healing and understanding."[11] That is, a decolonial museum will provide visitors with a critical overview of settler colonialism, its structures and processes, and its ongoing impact on people's lives. It should also help to heal from the effects of colonial violence, which involves centring Indigenous experiences, knowledges, and lands in a way that contributes to the revitalization of Indigenous cultures.[12] Since the publication of Lonetree's book, scholars and curators have approached decolonial museum practices from a variety of perspectives and contexts. Some scholars have distinguished between decolonization and decoloniality in museum practice, although I use both terms to refer to a broad set of critical practices that seek to disrupt the ideologies, identities, political processes, and modes of knowledge production that sustain colonialism (with a particular emphasis on settler colonialism).[13]

One point of departure is to critically examine the legacy of museums as socio-cultural institutions. Museum practice is deeply rooted in the history and ideology of colonialism: museums historically functioned to document and classify non-European peoples, which involved collecting Indigenous artefacts and remains in order to "salvage" what Europeans perceived as "a dying race."[14] This practice relied on a colonial gaze that viewed non-European peoples as Other, asserted the authority of European people and empires, and ultimately reproduced social and epistemic inequality between colonizer and colonized.[15] Museum practice has therefore disproportionately had an impact on Indigenous peoples, and museums that address Indigenous content are especially active in the decolonization process. However, the call to decolonize is taken seriously by a diverse array of institutions, especially those that explore immigration, globalization, ethnicity, human rights, and other themes easily linked to the history of European imperialism.[16] These museums can begin to decolonize by engaging directly with their colonial pasts. At the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration in Paris, for example, Carol Ann Dixon has observed that the "valorisation of France's colonial project is built into the very fabric of the palace," which includes the museum's hundred-year history, architectural design, and the colonial gaze it imposes on its subject matter.[17] From this perspective, decolonization must be

a broad approach that grapples with a museum's history, its physical spaces, as well as the conceptual frameworks curators and visitors use to interpret collections.

Decolonization is more than superficial change to content or representation: it requires the structural and systemic transformation of museums as sites of historical and cultural knowledge.[18] Since *The Spirit Sings* controversy, Canadian museums have sought to engage with Indigenous peoples as both contemporary agents and museum stakeholders. However, these interactions are often mediated by the colonial politics of recognition that "reconciles Indigenous peoples' presence with the presumed status quo of Canadian state sovereignty."[19] In this way, superficial or uncritical attempts to decolonize museums can ultimately reinscribe settler colonialism by affirming the perceived superiority of the Canadian settler state.[20] A more effective way to achieve structural change is by viewing decolonization as an "epistemological reordering" that dismantles colonial knowledge while enabling new (or suppressed) knowledges to flourish.[21] This reordering can include challenging the museum's authority as a site of knowledge production, disrupting the colonial gaze that curators and visitors impose on exhibit content, changing the language professionals use to define museums, or dismantling the binaries that undergird traditional museum practice (i.e. art/artefact, past/present, primitive/modern).[22] Dismantling epistemic hierarchies will not only transform the content within museum walls, but it can also transform the identities of those who enter these spaces, including both colonizers and colonized.[23]

One way to achieve "epistemological reordering" is by disrupting and transforming the narratives that Canadians use to propagate settler colonialism. Museums play a crucial role in disseminating dominant (i.e. colonial) cultural narratives that people use to construct identity, interpret history, and govern social interactions; decolonization involves dismantling, or at least critically exploring, these narratives.[24] This may be accomplished in several ways. Erica De Greef has suggested that curators can disrupt Western hegemony by selecting material objects that tell multiple narratives, especially those that have been suppressed or marginalized.[25] Karine Duhamel has proposed "re-storying" museums by challenging the historical metanarratives that curators use to frame exhibits, which can entail presenting content from diverse (especially marginalized) perspectives or designing exhibits in a non-linear way.[26] While these strategies can

be employed at any museum regardless of subject matter, they may be especially effective at museums that address injustice and oppression. Roger I. Simon has contended that histories of state-sponsored violence can provide viewers with "an opportunity to reconsider what it might mean to make a relation to and with the past, opening us to a reconsideration of the terms of our lives now as well as in the future."[27] In other words, museum exhibits that feature historical violence enable visitors to relate to the past in new ways and, consequently, transform present and future identities. Exhibits that explore the Holocaust or settler colonialism — two cases of mass violence largely perpetrated by modern states — might therefore provide visitors with unique opportunities for decolonial change.

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) can provide insight into how curators might engage with decolonial museum practices at Holocaust museums such as the MHM. The CMHR is a national museum that opened in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 2014 and broadly explores the theory, practice, and development of human rights in Canada and around the world. Notably, the museum was initially conceived as a Holocaust museum and devotes one of its permanent galleries, *Examining the Holocaust*, to a historical overview of the Holocaust.[28] Duhamel, the former curator for Indigenous rights at the CMHR, has explained that the curatorial team developed a "decolonizing methodological framework" prior to the museum's opening. Key tenets of this framework include the following: prioritizing Indigenous perspectives and community collaboration in exhibit design and development; framing rights violations as shared histories; and promoting intercultural dialogue and cross-cultural understanding.[29] Based on her experiences implementing this framework, Duhamel has offered two conclusions about decolonial museum practice. First, decolonial museums are based on relationships between people and communities, which requires considerable time and effort to build and maintain. Second, curators should be flexible in regards to the content they include, timelines they follow, and overall frameworks they apply to exhibits and curation.[30] The CMHR's framework is by no means universal — like any decolonial practice — and curators at Holocaust museums will need to adapt such approaches in a way that is appropriate to their specific contexts, content, audiences, and locations.

A survey of decolonial museum practices provides several insights for the MHM and other Holocaust museums. First, it demonstrates that Holocaust museums can be sites of decolonization even though

their content does not directly address Indigenous peoples or histories. They may in fact be especially effective as decolonial sites because they engage with histories of state-mandated violence against marginalized groups. Curators will need to revise their approach to this subject matter, however, and in particular will need to consider how the history and memory of the Holocaust relates to settler colonialism. Furthermore, curators can begin to decolonize museums by transforming the narratives they use to interpret history and frame museum content. This transformation can be a difficult process because it requires people to reflect on and challenge some of their basic assumptions about themselves and the world. Finally, these "re-storied" exhibits should engage with land, Indigeneity, and settler colonialism in critical ways. It is not sufficient to discuss human rights or broadly promote social justice, nor is it enough to simply include Indigenous peoples in exhibits. A decolonial MHM can retain its focus on the Holocaust and Jewish history and memory, although it may need to explore these topics in radically different ways.

Nuanced and critical analyses of the Holocaust and its memory can help to illuminate settler colonialism as well as other forms of social inequality. While Holocaust museums and memorial centres do not widely frame the Holocaust as a colonial phenomenon, scholars have long considered how the genocide of European Jewry overlaps with colonial processes. In *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, a seminal study of the Holocaust that introduces the concept of genocide, Raphael Lemkin demonstrated that the Holocaust and other genocides operate through colonial processes of domination and displacement: "By 'genocide' we mean the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group … Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. The imposition, in turn, may be made upon the oppressed population which is allowed to remain, or upon the territory alone, after removal of the population and the colonization of the area by the oppressor's own nationals."[31]

Drawing on Lemkin's insights, a body of scholarship has developed over the past two decades that explores how both the Holocaust and Indigenous genocides are shaped by common socio-political forces, such as modernity, capitalism, racial ideology, or human rights regimes. Many of these studies have focused on the social dynamics of memory and, especially, have examined how Holocaust memory can either obfuscate or illuminate settler colonialism and the geno-

cides of Indigenous peoples.[32] Dorota Glowacka has positioned this dynamic within the rights regime that originated in the eighteenth century and flourished after World War II. She has suggested that both genocide and human rights depend on the politics of recognition that legitimizes certain histories by making them "visible" to the (hegemonically white, settler colonial) nation-state. As a result, victim groups may attempt to frame themselves and their histories in a way that is intelligible to white settler society, inadvertently reinscribing colonial ideology and epistemic inequality.[33] Other scholars have taken a historical approach that focuses on the origins of these events. A. Dirk Moses has proposed viewing the period from approximately 1850 to 1950 as a "racial century" compelled by the dual forces of modernization and nation-building. He has contended that European nation-building, with its increased emphasis on national identity and state borders, was sustained by a racial logic that presumed the extinction of both Jews and Indigenous peoples.[34] From this perspective, it is possible to see that while the Holocaust and Indigenous genocides are distinct historical events, they are not entirely separate.

The Montreal Holocaust Museum

The MHM is a community-based institution that responds to the needs of the local Jewish community while also turning its attention to national and global issues. The museum is located in the Côte-des-Neiges neighbourhood of what is usually referred to as the city of Montreal, but also named Tiohtià:ke in Kanien'kéha. The MHM occupies land that is the traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka nation, the most easternly nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.[35] By the end of the nineteenth century, Montreal/Tiohtià:ke had become a centre of Canadian Jewish culture and, after World War II, its Jewish community absorbed thousands of survivors who arrived from Europe. Many of these survivors became active in communal life and lobbied the local community for the creation of a Holocaust museum and memorial centre; survivors contributed not only their knowledge and experience, but also volunteered as docents for the museum and donated personal objects to its collection.[36] When the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre opened in 1979 (its name was changed to MHM in 2016), it initially occupied a small space in the basement of a building where several Jewish organizations operated. The museum was renovated in the 1990s during construction

of a $30 million campus for local Jewish organizations, expanding to a second floor and doubling in size.[37] The new museum, which was developed by Yitzchak Mais, the former director of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, re-opened in 2003 with a new permanent exhibit.

The museum has a broad mandate that focuses on the Holocaust and Jewish life but also weaves these into discussions of racism and discrimination. According to its mission statement, the museum's content is particular while its goals are universal: "The Montreal Holocaust Museum informs people of all ages and backgrounds about the Holocaust while raising awareness about the universal perils of antisemitism, racism, hate, and indifference. Through its exhibitions, educational activities, and commemorative programs, the Museum promotes respect for diversity and the sanctity of human life."[38] A central part of this process is to build relationships between the Jewish community and other groups. In a set of nine strategic priorities, the MHM expresses a desire to "reinforce our roots in the Jewish community while forging new partnerships with other communities, groups, and institutions at the provincial, national, and international levels."[39] In other words, the MHM maintains an emphasis on the history and legacy of the Nazi persecution of European Jewry, but it does not preclude engaging with the experiences of Indigenous peoples or other groups. In fact, it actively invites such collaborations and promotes relationship-building locally and globally.

The MHM is outspoken on issues of racism and discrimination and, in particular, responds to the marginalization of Indigenous peoples in a pair of public position statements. The first statement, issued in October 2019, responds to the final report of the Viens Commission, which "concluded that it is impossible to deny systemic discrimination against First Nations and Inuit" peoples in Quebec.[40] This statement praises the provincial government's apology to Indigenous peoples, promotes Indigenous self-determination and Indigenous rights, and affirms the museum's "solidarity with Indigenous peoples."[41] In October of the following year, the MHM issued a similar statement in response to the death of Joyce Echaquan, an Atikamekw woman who was subject to verbal abuse and medical mistreatment by hospital employees, and Quebec Premier François Legault's insistence that "systemic racism" is not an issue in the province.[42] The statement "encourage[s] the government to recognize the existence of systemic racism in Quebec and Canada" and to implement the recommendations of the TRC, Viens Commission, and NIMMIWG.[43] Like the previous statement,

it also affirms that the museum "stand[s] in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples and will continue to amplify Indigenous voices, stories, and excellence."[44] The MHM has issued other statements and organized related events on anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, and genocides around the world, but these statements reveal the direct but limited ways it has responded to settler colonialism in Canada.

In recent years, the museum has shown an interest in decolonization, which is reflected in its guiding vision and role as a public voice for Montreal's Jewish community. This concern is not reflected in its permanent exhibition, however, which has remained largely unchanged since its opening. Substantial modifications to a permanent exhibit require money, space, and other resources that are not always available to small community museums. But with the announcement that the MHM is updating its exhibit and moving to a dedicated building, it is an ideal time to consider how decolonial practices can be integrated into its permanent exhibit.

Decolonizing Canadian History

Canadian society reproduces settler colonialism through the literal and narrative erasure of Indigenous peoples from national history. On one hand, Indigenous erasure is a literal process wherein settler society physically removes or displaces Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands. Canadian society has employed multiple strategies to this end, such as imposing the reserve system, extinguishing treaty rights or Indian status, and, at its most extreme, through the physical and cultural genocides of Indigenous nations. Indeed, the TRC concluded in its final report that "the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal [peoples]" and that this system of policy "can best be described as 'cultural genocide'."[45] On the other hand, Indigenous erasure is also a representational and narrative process that settlers use to remove Indigenous peoples from official histories of Canada. It is an act of symbolic violence that occurs when settlers frame Indigenous peoples as "a dying race" who are doomed to extinction, represent Indigenous nations as part of pre-history, or ignore the past, present, or future realities of Indigenous peoples.[46] Such acts of erasure are partly rooted in the legal doctrine of *terra nullius*, or "nobody's land," which European governments used to claim ownership of Indigenous land.[47] This doctrine provides a legal basis for colonizers to ignore Indigenous peoples during the nation-building

process or, at least, ignore their ancestral and traditional claims to the land. The way historians and curators present national history therefore has serious implications for settler-Indigenous relations and the socio-political foundation of the Canadian state. Erasing Indigenous peoples from national history is not only inaccurate, but it also reproduces settler colonialism while contributing to ongoing genocides of Indigenous nations. Central to the decolonization process, then, is to present Canadian history in a way that includes Indigenous peoples as contemporary actors and defends Indigenous sovereignty.

While the MHM's permanent exhibit focuses on the Nazi genocide of European Jewry, it also explores the Canadian dimension of these events and weaves Jewish Canadian experiences throughout. This distinctly Canadian perspective of the Holocaust begins in the introductory gallery, which explores "Jewish Life Before the Holocaust" and briefly surveys several centuries of Jewish history in North Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. One panel in this gallery, "Jewish Life in Canada Before WWII," specifically addresses the history of Jews in Canada. It explains that the history of Canadian Jewry begins in the 1760s with the formation of Canada's first synagogue in Montreal, describes a robust Yiddish culture that thrived by the beginning of the twentieth century, and outlines the period of pre-war immigration: "Jews began arriving en masse in the early 1900s, as waves of immigrants left eastern Europe. By 1922, the predominately working-class Jewish population had reached 131,000, the majority living in distinct neighbourhoods in Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg."[48] This introduction is important because, while acknowledging that Canadian Jewry is not as old as Jewish communities elsewhere in the world, it also frames them as a significant minority group in Canada with a vibrant cultural life.

Visitors continue to explore Canadian dimensions of the Holocaust as they proceed through the exhibit, which gives particular attention to widespread racism and the country's failure to respond to the situation in Europe. "Antisemitism in Canada" considers popular and institutional discrimination against Jews during the first half of the twentieth century, focusing especially on racism in Quebec. Two other panels, "A Closed Door: Canada Responds" and "Canadian Response: 1940–1945," describe Canada's efforts to keep Jewish migrants out of the country between 1933 and 1945. These discussions focus especially on Canada's restrictive and racist immigration policies that "favoured certain groups over others [and placed] Jews, Blacks and Asians at the

bottom" of its racial hierarchy.[49] The latter panel is accompanied by a display that documents the national media's response to European events, some of the exceptional refugees who arrived in Canada during the war, and the internment of German- and Austrian-Jews that the government considered "enemy aliens."

The museum further engages with Canadian history by exploring migration and settlement in the postwar years. The exhibit concludes with several displays that document the history and experiences of Jewish survivors after the war, including mass migration to Canada and Palestine/Israel. "The Montreal Survivor Community" describes the arrival of survivors to Canada and Quebec: "Between 1947 and 1950, 40,000 Jewish displaced persons immigrated to Canada. Many of them settled in Montreal, making the city one of the largest communities of Holocaust survivors in the world."[50] It includes artefacts from the local survivor community that document the origin and diffusion of Holocaust memory across Canada. These artefacts are significant because many emphasize the emergence of Canadian national identity amongst survivors and throughout the broader Jewish community: citizenship documents belonging to survivor Eliasz Rosengarten; promotional items for the first National Memorial Rally on Parliament Hill in 1965; a letter of recognition from Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in 1977. In other words, the exhibit recounts the integration of survivors into local Jewish communities, but it also documents their transition from displaced persons to members of Canadian society.

The MHM's permanent exhibit presents national history in a way that reproduces Indigenous erasure. The museum consistently interprets the history and memory of the Holocaust from a Canadian perspective: it outlines several periods of Jewish migration to Canada; positions Canadian Jewry as part of settler society; and documents the emergence of Canadian consciousness within the survivor community. Yet it fails to examine Jewish-Indigenous encounters or even acknowledge that Jewish migrants settled on what was and continues to be Indigenous land. This omission reflects a problematic understanding of Canadian history, but one that is consistent with official narratives.[51] While the scholarship is still nascent, George Colpitts and David Koffman show that Jewish traders and settlers have encountered and engaged with Indigenous peoples since at least the late eighteenth century.[52] Furthermore, the omission of this history reproduces the logic of Indigenous erasure and settler colonial ideology, thereby contributing to the ongoing genocides of Indigenous peoples.

The MHM can begin to decolonize its permanent exhibit by re-storying Canadian history. This re-storying involves presenting national history in a way that includes Indigenous peoples and land, frames nation-building as a colonial process, and critically examines the structures, processes, and ongoing effects of settler colonialism. An updated and decolonial version of Canadian history should do several things: acknowledge that Jewish migrants are settlers on Indigenous land, and consider the implications of this; include Indigenous peoples as historical and contemporary agents; describe and analyze Canada as a settler colonial state; consider instances where Jewish and Indigenous identities overlap; explore Jewish complicity in settler colonialism and Indigenous genocides; compare Jewish and Indigenous experiences of displacement; and explore similarities and differences in experiences of genocide. It is important to emphasize that curators should re-story national history in a way that does not reproduce the colonial politics of recognition, and which ideally involves collaboration with local Indigenous peoples such as the Kanien'kehá:ka nation. Furthermore, a decolonial approach to Canadian history can situate antisemitism within larger processes of racism and colonial domination. The exhibit explains that antisemitism and "racism was the foundation of Nazi ideology"[53] while also demonstrating that similar attitudes defined popular opinion and public policy in Canada. Curators can apply a decolonial lens by showing how the same racial logic is directed towards Indigenous peoples and by exploring how it is entwined with the ideology, narratives, and practices of settler colonialism.[54] Highlighting commonalities between Jewish and Indigenous experiences of discrimination can help to build relationships between these groups, but it can also work to illuminate the structures and processes through which settler colonialism operates.

Decolonizing Human Rights

A problematic trend in Holocaust commemoration is to frame the Holocaust as a precursor to human rights, which involves situating both in a linear, progressive, and celebratory narrative of human history. Christopher Powell has observed that Canadian society views human rights not as a social construct but rather as a "top-down" phenomenon "in which human rights descend, as if from the heavens, and we rise to meet them."[55] According to Samuel Moyn, the Holocaust plays a central role in this narrative, with popular consensus

treating "human rights as an old ideal that finally came into its own as a response to the Holocaust."[56] In other words, such teleological views of history frame the Holocaust as a causal antecedent to human rights. This perceived relationship is problematic because it relies on the same narrative framework that undergirds settler colonial ideology. The narrative of civilizational progress, which views history as a linear progression from savagery to civilization, sustains settler colonialism; it frames Indigenous and non-European peoples as "savage" or "barbaric" Others who will ultimately be replaced by "civilized" Europeans.[57] The popular narrative of human rights employs the same teleological structure but replaces the concept of "civilization" with the framework of "human rights."[58] Critics therefore point out that human rights are a Eurocentric idea that reproduces the logic of settler colonialism.[59] For example, Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez has demonstrated that human rights contains an exclusionary logic that dehumanizes and denies rights to Indigenous peoples.[60]

Despite these perils, this narrative framework prevails at key sites of Holocaust memory in Canada. The National Holocaust Monument (NHM), unveiled in Ottawa in 2017, relies on a progressive design where visitors ascend from the main gathering space to a platform that faces Parliament's Peace Tower. Nadine Blumer has noted that "the redemptive narrative could not be clearer: from Nazi fascism in Europe to salvation in Canada."[61] This interpretation is reinforced by a set of thirteen panels that provide visitors with a chronological account of events: the penultimate panel, "Recognizing Our Human Rights," explains that "the Second World War and the Holocaust were turning points in history {from which} emerged a growing recognition of human rights."[62] The CMHR relies on a similar narrative. Visitors follow a linear path through the museum, which begins at ground level and concludes in the "Tower of Hope," an outlook that provides a panoramic view of Winnipeg. Within the museum's exhibition space, its "Examining the Holocaust" gallery, which focuses on the genocide of European Jewry, leads directly into "Turning Points for Humanity," which examines the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other pieces of international human rights legislation. It is somewhat unsurprising that the NHM and CMHR take this teleological approach to history, however, considering both are national sites that are connected to the settler state. As a community museum, the MHM has greater distance from the state and may therefore have more potential to disrupt this narrative.

While the museum promotes and engages with human rights through its educational programing, its permanent exhibit does not link the Holocaust to human rights in a way that suggests a direct or causal relationship between them. The museum describes itself "as a leader in Holocaust and human rights education in Canada" and has developed a "Human Rights Action Plan" with a concrete set of educational objectives.[63] When the MHM addresses human rights in its published materials, it does not suggest a causal relation but rather stresses the need to establish "past-present links between the history of the Holocaust and human rights abuses today."[64] Yet this emphasis on human rights is virtually absent from the permanent exhibit. The exhibit concludes by discussing international efforts to prosecute Nazi war criminals, the migration of survivors from Europe to Palestine/Israel and Canada, and commemoration initiatives within the survivor community; it does not address human rights or the UDHR. In other words, the museum does not situate the Holocaust within a teleological structure that leads to the advent of human rights. When it does address human rights — primarily in its published materials and educational outreach — the museum uses them as an analytical framework that can help to illuminate the Holocaust and other forms of injustice.

The exhibit does rely on a linear structure, albeit one that is not necessarily teleological. Unlike the CMHR, which comprises a series of spacious galleries connected by walkways, the MHM's exhibition space is situated in narrow corridors that lead visitors on a chronological march through the prelude, events, and outcomes of the Holocaust. Since re-opening with COVID-related restrictions, visitors must also follow a set of arrows imprinted on the floor. While visitors move through the museum in a way that is shaped by practical factors — namely, public health guidelines and limited exhibition space in the Federation CJA building — this movement is nevertheless linear and unidirectional. At the same time, however, this procession is not necessarily progressive or teleological (i.e. the exhibit is linear, but visitors may or may not interpret it as teleological — see the following section on Israel). After viewing the final displays on local and national memorial projects, visitors proceed into the Memorial Room: a commemorative rather than educational space that concludes one's journey through the Holocaust. Relics from eastern Europe, an Eternal Flame, and a list of concentration camps and destroyed communities encourage visitors to reflect on the content they have just encoun-

tered. Thus, the Holocaust leads not to human rights but to memory. This narrative approach perforates the boundaries between past, present, and future to create a journey that is simultaneously linear and circular — a timeline that reaches both forward and backward.

The MHM has the potential to disrupt settler colonial narratives but also to reinscribe them. Its gallery space relies on a linear design, and the museum addresses human rights although not in its permanent exhibit. Yet its culmination with memory — rather than the celebration of political ideology — is one way the museum can challenge narratives of progress. Memory is not a linear process but one that forges connections between disparate moments in time; this approach to history can be an effective way to decolonize Holocaust memory.[65] The MHM might use this strategy, for example, to expand on Lemkin's work and explore parallels between Nazism and settler colonialism in Canada. Its exhibit outlines core elements of the Nazi's program of domination and genocide: the creation of a "Jewish problem"; territorial expansion to create *Lebensraum* (living space) for Germans; and the creation of Jewish ghettos. Curators can compare these to similar practices in Canada, such as the perceived "Indian problem," the displacement of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral territories, or the creation of the reserve system. Exploring such parallels can help visitors to understand Canada as a settler colonial state and illuminate some of the processes through which settler colonialism operates. Moreover, it would demonstrate that humanity has not simply progressed beyond racist ideologies and discriminatory practices but, rather, that oppression is a transhistorical phenomenon.

Decolonizing the State of Israel

A crucial step towards decolonizing the MHM is to consider its relationship to the State of Israel. The Jewish people originated in the biblical land of Israel, a region of the Mediterranean that is today largely contained by the modern political states of Israel and Palestine. Although some Jews remained in the region over the following centuries, the majority began to migrate from these homelands especially from the first century onwards, creating a population of displaced Jewry known as diaspora. When the State of Israel was created in 1948, followed by the mass immigration of diaspora Jews, many perceived this migration as a return to their mythical and ancestral homelands. A tension emerged within Jewish identity:

some Jews feel their peoplehood is defined by experiences of displacement and diaspora; many others use their ancestral connection to place to identify with the modern nation-state.[66] Significantly, critics of Israel view the state as a settler colonial project created through the theft and displacement of Palestinian land.[67] While Jewish presence in the region is not inherently colonial, ongoing acts of displacement and the exercise of severe political and economic control over the Palestinian people are.[68]

Holocaust museums and memorials frequently promote the narrative of mythical return by framing the Israeli state as compensation for the Holocaust. Yad Vashem, Israel's national Holocaust memorial, for example, is structured around an "architectural narrative [that conveys] a dialectic between a past of exile, destruction, and catastrophe in the Diaspora and a future of homecoming, life, and redemption in Israel. Through the suffering and deprivation of the past, a new and hopeful future is made possible."[69] This narrative also prevails in Canada where political support for Israel plays a central role in both Jewish identity and Holocaust commemoration.[70] This perceived link is problematic because Holocaust commemoration, when used to promote Israel or Zionism, can legitimize and perpetuate the territorial dispossession of Palestinians.

Jewish migration to Palestine/Israel plays a key role in the MHM's historical narrative. As noted previously, the exhibit concludes by addressing Jewish migration from Europe, with particular focus on settlement in Canada and Palestine/Israel. It explains that many survivors sought to emigrate to Palestine after the war but most were prevented by Britain's restrictive immigration policy; large-scale Jewish immigration only became possible in 1948 when British-controlled Mandatory Palestine became the independent State of Israel. Survivors, the museum suggests, played a critical role in this transformation. "Building New Lives" explains that survivors "organized to gain control of their lives and influence Allied policy, the great majority pressuring for a Jewish state in Palestine."[71] A neighbouring panel further observes that "their Holocaust experience spurred an intense determination to fight for Jewish continuity and a Jewish state as a safe haven for survivors and for all Jews."[72] That is, the MHM integrates Israel into its narrative in several noteworthy ways. First, it frames Israel as a vital component of Holocaust memory. Second, it frames Israel as a direct, although not inevitable, consequence of the Holocaust (i.e. the state became a political reality through the activism

of survivors). Third, it fails to acknowledge that Palestine/Israel was already home to hundreds of thousands (now millions) of Palestinians, thereby erasing their past and contemporary presence and reinscribing the colonial logic of *terra nullius*.

The museum's approach to Palestine/Israel reveals its complicated relationships with settler colonialism and decolonization. By linking the Holocaust and Israel, the exhibit reinscribes settler narratives and legitimizes colonial practices. As demonstrated in the previous section, however, this narrative interpretation is not inevitable and depends partly on whether visitors perceive the Memorial Room as an element of the permanent exhibit: visitors may interpret the exhibit in a linear and teleological way that leads towards redemption in Israel, but they might also interpret it in a non-linear way that culminates with memory. Thus, the history that one encounters at the MHM depends largely on their interpretation of museum content and design. Curators may therefore need to frame content in a way that facilitates critical discussion while also destabilizing problematic narrative tropes. One approach is to explore settler colonial structures, processes, and practices in the State of Israel and compare these to similar processes in Canada. This strategy may be especially useful because it fulfills multiple needs. On one hand, it enables the museum to retain its focus on Israel, which the MHM (and many Canadian Jews) consider to be a key part of Holocaust memory and Jewish identity. On the other hand, it can help visitors to explore settler colonialism in both local (i.e. Canadian) and transnational (i.e. Israeli) contexts, thereby providing a more nuanced analysis of the phenomenon. A decolonial approach to Holocaust memory does not mean dismissing Palestine/Israel — just as decolonization does not entail ignoring Canada — but it does mean re-storying in a way that acknowledges the past and continued presence of Palestinians, addresses their legitimate claims to ancestral lands, and recognizes that most Jews are relatively recent settlers in the region.

Conclusion

Decolonizing the MHM would involve re-storying the Holocaust and Canadian history. The museum's permanent exhibit reproduces settler colonialism in several ways: it erases Indigenous peoples from national histories of both Canada and Israel; it relies on a linear structure and potentially teleological narrative of human history; and, by uncritically

engaging with the State of Israel, it tacitly supports settler colonialism at the international level. Yet in recent years the museum has also articulated its solidarity with Indigenous peoples and expressed a desire to illuminate Indigenous experiences of systemic racism. If the MHM is committed to this process, it will, like other museums across Canada and around the world, begin to explore how its collection and exhibits are implicated in the structures of settler colonialism. Decolonization does not require the MHM to find new themes or eschew any of its subject matter; it would, however, mean exploring this subject matter from different perspectives. For example, its redemptive narrative of Palestine/Israel is problematic, but it also creates an opportunity for curators and visitors to explore settler colonialism from a comparative perspective. Likewise, recentring Indigenous peoples in Canadian history is an effective way to introduce critical discussions of settler colonialism and Indigeneity into larger conversations about the Holocaust.

In seeking to decolonize the MHM and other Holocaust museums, it is important to consider that this is an ongoing process without a clear end in sight — or at least without an end that is quickly and easily attained. I have considered how the museum can begin to decolonize its permanent exhibit in hopes that doing so will promote and catalyze larger efforts at decolonization. Decolonization is a multifaceted process: it requires the critique of settler colonialism, re-interpretation of history, dismantling of social hierarchies, among other things. Yet it is also a dynamic process, since society and history both exist in a state of constant flux. As such, it may be productive to view decolonization, like reconciliation, as a perpetually unfinished practice "without the promise of the eventual liberation from this self-critique."[73] More importantly, decolonization is ultimately about land, and in particular the return of land to Indigenous peoples and the restoration of Indigenous sovereignty. In this way, critical engagement with Canadian history, human rights, and Palestine/Israel can not by itself achieve decolonization. A fully decolonized MHM is one that stands on sovereign Indigenous land.

It is imperative that the MHM engages in this act of self-critique because Holocaust museums are a key source of historical knowledge and memorial wisdom. The reality is that many people learn about the Holocaust through popular culture and public education: movies and television, popular literature, high school education, memorial sites, and museums.[74] It is therefore crucial that Holocaust museums remain up-to-date and respond appropriately to both public concerns

and scholarly discourse. This means critically engaging with settler colonialism and actively implementing decolonial practices. This may be a difficult process that requires curators, educators, and visitors to think about the Holocaust in more complicated and nuanced ways, but it is an integral part of Canada's commitment to reconciliation and international efforts to dismantle oppressive structures. Failure to do so puts Holocaust museums — and Holocaust memory in general — at risk of losing their status as ethical guides and rendering them incapable of transmitting the Holocaust's lessons to future generations. Just as decolonization is essential to the liberation of colonized peoples around the world, so too is it indispensable to ensuring that Holocaust memory and education remain relevant in the twenty-first century.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

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