

**National Myth in Canada:
Reproducing and Resisting Settler Colonialism at Memorial Sites**

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines myth and memory in settler colonial contexts. In particular, it explores the way Canadians engage with national mythology at sites of genocide commemoration. It focuses on three national sites that together constitute a memorial network: the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR), which opened in Winnipeg in 2014; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which released its final report in 2015; and the National Holocaust Monument (NHM), which was unveiled in Ottawa in 2017. These sites are ideal case studies because each addresses the history and memory of the Holocaust or Residential Schools. The history and memory of genocide, and especially Indigenous genocide, is an integral part of settler colonialism and settler mythology. In this dissertation, I ask how sites of genocide memory reproduce – or resist – settler colonialism in Canada. I consider how memory functions as an aspect of settler colonialism and, especially, how Canadians use commemoration to reinscribe settler mythologies, identities, and relationships. Furthermore, I address how these memories can become sites of resistance that destabilise settler colonialism.

My analysis is guided by the framework of difficult knowledge. The theory of difficult knowledge posits that learning occurs when marginalised narratives (difficult knowledge) disrupt dominant ones (lovely knowledge). This study considers how the CMHR, TRC, and NHM frame histories of genocide as difficult and/or lovely knowledge. I demonstrate that, while the NHM reproduces lovely knowledge, the TRC and CMHR both generate potentially difficult knowledge, albeit in limited ways. However, they use different techniques to do so: the TRC promotes a subversive counter-narrative whereas the CMHR encourages visitors to engage in the interpretation of national history. I contend that they are likely to produce difficult knowledge about Canadian history and myth when they engage with Indigenous peoples and perspectives.

Furthermore, I argue that the framework of difficult knowledge can work as a critical – and potentially decolonising – research methodology.

This study offers several findings regarding the relationship between settler colonialism and memorial networks. I argue that, while Holocaust memory and the memory of Residential Schools can – and do – inform one another, both memories emerge from and are shaped by settler mythology. In other words, settler colonialism plays a significant role in the production of genocide memory in Canada. Furthermore, I argue that the CMHR, TRC, and NHM are points of rupture that force Canadians to confront the myths and memories that undergird settler society. That is, these sites cultivate identity by enabling people to engage with, re-enact, and institutionalise myth and memory. At the same time, however, memorial sites are places of resistance that can disrupt national myth and destabilise settler colonialism.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Jason Chalmers. It received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, project title “Reproducing and Resisting National Myth: Using Genocide Narratives to Transform Colonial Relationships in Canada,” study ID MS2_Pro00062807, 14 April 2016. A version of Chapter III has been published as “Settled Memories on Stolen Land: Settler Mythology at Canada’s National Holocaust Monument,” *American Indian Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (2019).

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Knowledge is created by people. This dissertation is a product of who I am and cannot be separated from myself, my experiences, or the people in my life. It is subjective and personal and I take responsibility for it. And while this responsibility is mine, I must acknowledge that many others have played a significant role in the production of this work.

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List of Abbreviations

CAC	Content Advisory Committee
CMHR	Canadian Museum for Human Rights
CTHR	Canadian Tribute to Human Rights
CWM	Canadian War Museum
FCPP	Frontier Centre for Public Policy
IRSSA	Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement
MCH	Minister of Canadian Heritage's Advisory Committee on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights
MMIWG	Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
MP	Member of Parliament
NCTR	National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation
NHM	National Holocaust Monument
NHMA	National Holocaust Monument Act
NHMDC	National Holocaust Monument Development Council
NMAI	National Museum of the American Indian
RCAP	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNGC	United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide
USHMM	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Chapter I

Introduction: Remembering Genocide in Canada

In the spring of 2017, Conservative Senator Lynn Beyak delivered a speech to the Senate of Canada in which she defended the “good deeds” of the Residential School system.¹ Beyak, who was appointed to the Senate in 2013 and sat on the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, was prepared to respond to an inquiry on Indigenous women in Canadian prisons. Instead, she commented on the “excellent intentions” of Canadian policy-makers, especially in regards to federal policies concerning Indigenous peoples. Beyak argued that the 1969 White Paper was a “brilliant” but poorly understood piece of legislation and focused on the way Residential Schools did an “abundance of good” for Indigenous peoples. The purpose of her speech, she explained, was to commend “the kindly and well-intentioned men and women...whose remarkable works, good deeds and historical tales in the residential schools go unacknowledged.”² Notably, Beyak’s remarks came less than two years after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its final report, which condemns Residential Schools as “an integral part of a conscious policy of cultural genocide.”³ Her statement was, in fact, an attempt “to present a somewhat different side of the residential school story.”⁴ When faced with backlash in both Parliament and the popular press, Beyak refused to retract or apologise for her remarks. Moreover, she published an open letter several months later in which she reaffirmed her position and argued that Indigenous people should “trade [their] status card for Canadian citizenship.”⁵

¹ Canada, *Debates of the Senate*, 7 March 2017 (Hon. Lynn Beyak), 2514.

² Ibid.

³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the TRC* (Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 57.

⁴ Canada, *Debates of the Senate*, 7 March 2017 (Hon. Lynn Beyak), 2514.

⁵ Lynn Beyak, “More of the Same Is Not the Answer,” 1 September 2017, <http://lynnbeyak.sencanada.ca/p108091>.

The response to Senator Beyak's comments was intense but also divided. Senator Lillian Dyck, chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, suggested that Beyak had compromised the integrity of the committee and requested that she be removed from her role.⁶ Member of Parliament Roméo Saganash, a Residential School survivor, compared Beyak's remarks to denial of the Jewish Holocaust and indicated that she should resign from her position in the Senate.⁷ Yet many people also came to her defense, including several of her fellow Conservative senators who claimed that her comments were protected by freedom of speech.⁸ Beyak furthermore published more than a hundred letters on her website – of which she claimed to receive “thousands” – where people outlined their support for the senator and her views on Indigenous peoples.⁹ Some of the letters rearticulated Beyak's statements about the schools¹⁰ while others shared overtly racist beliefs about Indigenous peoples.¹¹ In response to the controversy, Beyak was dismissed from the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples less than a month after her initial comments and from all Senate committees in autumn of that year.¹² She was removed from the Conservative caucus in early 2018 – mostly because of her

⁶ John Paul Tasker, “Calls Mount for Senator Beyak to Step Aside from Aboriginal Committee after Residential Schools Remark,” *CBC News*, 16 March 2017.

⁷ John Paul Tasker, “Senator's Defense of Residential Schools akin to Excusing Holocaust, NDP MP Says,” *CBC News*, 9 March 2017.

⁸ John Paul Tasker, “Conservative Senators Come to Lynn Beyak's Defense while Others Say ‘Shame’,” *CBC News*, 28 March 2017.

⁹ Lynn Beyak, “Letters of Support,” Last accessed 13 November 2018, <http://lynnbeyak.sencanada.ca/p107924>.

¹⁰ Published on Lynn Beyak's website under “Letters of Support.” Letter dated 8 March 2017, <http://lynnbeyak.sencanada.ca/p108024/>.

¹¹ Published on Lynn Beyak's website under “Letters of Support.” Letter dated 10 March 2017, <http://lynnbeyak.sencanada.ca/p107962/>.

¹² John Paul Tasker, “Lynn Beyak Removed from Senate's Aboriginal Peoples Committee,” *CBC News*, 5 April 2017; John Paul Tasker, “Lynn Beyak Removed from All Senate Committees,” *CBC News*, 20 September 2017.

refusal to delete the racist letters from her website – but allowed to remain in the Senate as an independent.¹³ In May 2019, Beyak was temporarily suspended from the Senate.¹⁴

Senator Beyak’s comments were not, however, an isolated incident. In the autumn of 2018, an advertisement from the Winnipeg-based think tank Frontier Centre for Public Policy (FCPP) aired on several Saskatchewan radio stations. The advertisement began by asking “are Canadians being told the whole truth about residential schools?” and proceeded to discuss “a few myths and the actual facts” about the school system. It then purported to disprove several “myths” about the traumatic impact of Residential Schools, their impact on Indigenous languages and cultures, and the effects of intergenerational trauma. One statement, for example, declared: “Myth: the harm that was done to those attending residential schools has been passed on to today’s generation. In fact: there is little evidence that abuse that was suffered by a grandparent had any effect on the academic success of the generations that followed.”¹⁵ At the same time in Alberta, St. Paul Alternative Education Centre distributed an assignment to students that asked about the “positive effects” of Residential Schools. While the question was part of a grade 11 social studies correspondence course at the school, the content had originated with the Alberta Distance Learning Centre. The multiple-choice question, which a student shared on social media, asked: “A positive effect of residential schools was: children were away from home; children learned to read; children were taught manners; children became civilized.”¹⁶ Like Beyak’s speech, the radio advertisement and assignment question minimised the destructive

¹³ Catherine Tunney and Joe Lofaro, “Sen. Lynn Beyak Kicked Out of Conservative Caucus after Refusing to Remove ‘Racist’ Comments Online,” *CBC News*, 4 January 2018.

¹⁴ John Paul Tasker, “Lynn Beyak Suspended from Senate After Refusing to Take Down Letters Condemned As Racist,” *CBC News*, 9 May 2019.

¹⁵ Nic Meloney, “Radio Ad Claiming to Debunk ‘Myths’ of Residential Schools Draws Criticism,” *CBC News*, 24 September 2018.

¹⁶ *CTV News*, “Alberta Assignment Asks Students to Identify ‘Positive Effect’ of Residential Schools,” 21 September 2018.

impact of Residential Schools. Also like the speech, they appeared in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its multi-volume report that uses extensive historical, archival, and testimonial evidence to demonstrate that the school system was a policy of genocide.

Canadian society struggles over the meaning of history and memory – a competition over two distinct and deeply conflicting interpretations of the past. Indeed, Beyak suggested that she is engaged in a contest over the interpretation of historical events, and she claims that negative perceptions of Residential Schools are a consequence of “fiction getting in the way of fact.”¹⁷ On one hand, there is the narrative offered by Beyak and the FCPP which claims that the Residential School system was a well-intentioned and beneficial institution that had a positive impact on Indigenous communities. On the other hand, there is the narrative presented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that suggests Residential Schools were so harmful to Indigenous children and communities that they constitute a system of genocide. What is particularly noteworthy is that both narratives appear to receive broad public support. Beyak faced little more than a symbolic but largely impotent punishment: she was removed from Senate committees and the Conservative caucus but permitted to keep her influential position in the Senate.

Struggles over history and memory are neither new to Canada, nor are they exclusive to the history of Residential Schools. A fascinating counterpoint is the controversy surrounding plans to include a Holocaust gallery in the Canadian War Museum (CWM).¹⁸ In 1997, the Crown corporation responsible for the CWM announced plans to update the museum’s architecture and substantially increase the amount of gallery space. One of the leading proposals for this space

¹⁷ Canada, *Debates of the Senate*, 7 March 2017 (Hon. Lynn Beyak), 2514.

¹⁸ For discussions of the CWM’s proposed Holocaust gallery, see: Norman Hillmer, “The Canadian War Museum and the Military Identity of an Unmilitary People,” *Canadian Military History* 19, no. 3 (2010); Catherine D. Chatterley, “Canada’s Struggle with Holocaust Memorialization: The War Museum Controversy, Ethnic Identity Politics, and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 29, no. 2 (2015); Mark Celinscak, “The Holocaust and the Canadian War Museum Controversy,” *Canadian Jewish Studies* 26 (2018).

was a gallery devoted to the Jewish Holocaust that, at one point, was expected to be the largest gallery in the museum. While museum officials and visitors largely supported the proposal, there was also significant opposition. Canadian veterans were some of the fiercest critics, who argued that the Holocaust had little to do with Canada's military history or its involvement in the Second World War. The National Council of Veteran Associations declared that the "Holocaust has no connection with Canada's military history"¹⁹ while Cliff Chadderton, the association's chair, stated that "Canada has no direct connection with the Holocaust."²⁰ Historian Michael Marrus suggested that, instead of including a Holocaust gallery in the museum, "the Holocaust should be depicted in the broader story of the history of mankind and human civilization."²¹ At the heart of this controversy was a debate over which events should be remembered as part of Canada's historical past: Is the Holocaust a part of national history or not? The critics were successful in the short term, and the Holocaust gallery was abandoned in 1998. But as Catherine Chatterley points out, it was the supporters who won out in the long run: the Canadian Museum for Human Rights included a Holocaust gallery when it opened in 2014, and the Canadian government unveiled its National Holocaust Monument in 2017.²²

These debates – over the "good deeds" of Residential Schools and Canada's involvement with the Holocaust – highlight key issues surrounding history and memory in Canada. First, Canadians do not agree on the meaning of past events or how to frame these histories at national institutions. Furthermore, people interpret historical events in ways that reflect broader understandings about the meaning and significance of history. For example, Senator Beyak's perception of Residential Schools as "good deeds" reflects larger attitudes about the kindness

¹⁹ Cited in Chatterley, "Canada's Struggle with Holocaust Memorialization," 191.

²⁰ Cited in Celinscak, "The Holocaust and the Canadian War Museum Controversy," 19.

²¹ Cited in Chatterley, "Canada's Struggle with Holocaust Memorialization," 192.

²² Chatterley, "Canada's Struggle with Holocaust Memorialization."

and generosity (and superiority) of state policy. Likewise, opponents of the Holocaust gallery imply that the Holocaust plays a larger role in an overarching historical narrative – in “the broader story of the history of mankind.” It is therefore unsurprising that struggles over the meaning of past events can be especially salient at national sites and state institutions. In this dissertation, I examine similar struggles over the interpretation of historical events and, especially, the way these struggles shape myth and memory in Canada. My study focuses on three national sites that engage with myth, memory, and the meaning of history: the Canadian Museum for Human Rights; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; and the National Holocaust Monument. I explore how each site uses historical and memorial narratives to reproduce – or resist – national mythology and settler colonialism.

My study focuses in particular on the history and memory of Residential Schools²³ and of the Jewish Holocaust. As I demonstrate in the preceding examples, Canadians fiercely debate both histories at sites of national memory. Apart from this similarity, however, these two memorial struggles appear to have little in common: one addresses the role of Residential Schools in nation-building and their impact on Indigenous peoples;²⁴ the other focuses on Canada’s overseas involvement in the Second World War and the persecution of European

²³ I refer to the Indian residential school system as “Residential Schools.” I use this stylisation to emphasise the narrative construction and memorial interpretation of historical events. While “Indian residential school system” is an historical term that refers to a constellation of events that happened across time and space, “Residential Schools” frames these events as a distinct phenomenon. Likewise, “the persecution of European Jewry” refers to a disparate set of historical events but “the Holocaust” refers to a singular event. It is worth noting that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission refers to “Indian residential schools” while its mandate uses “Indian Residential Schools.”

²⁴ A note on terminology regarding Indigenous peoples: Government and policy documents in Canada tend to use the term “Aboriginal” and distinguish between three groups, namely First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Furthermore, “status Indian” refers to those people governed by the *Indian Act* and does not include all Indigenous peoples in Canada. In this dissertation, I use the phrase “Indigenous peoples” to broadly denote many diverse nations in both Canada and around the world. This language is the preferred current term, connotes the original inhabitants of place and their relationship to the land, and also conveys a global movement of peoples and their resistance to colonialism (for example, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*). I use the terminology of “Aboriginal” and “Indian” in reference to historical and policy documents. When appropriate, I refer to specific people or communities according to their particular nation.

Jewry. What I demonstrate in this dissertation, however, is that struggles over history and memory in Canada are profoundly interrelated. The most obvious similarity is that both memories are concerned with a history of genocide: Indigenous genocide in Canada and the Jewish Holocaust in Europe. But the connection goes much further. I argue that both memories are deeply embedded in the ideologies and practices of settler colonialism. Social, political, historical, and memorial practices in Canada are all shaped by the country's origins and development as a colony of the British empire. When Canadians commemorate the historical past – regardless of the particular event – they do so in a way that actively engages with narratives and myths that emerge from settler colonialism. That is, not only can the history of Residential Schools reproduce settler mythology, but so can the history and memory of the Holocaust. I also contend, therefore, that this sort of memorial struggle underlies Canadian society and that these struggles inform national identity. Conflict between settler society²⁵ and Indigenous peoples tends to underlie not only social relations in Canada, but also the way people construct history and memory – even when those histories do not directly involve Indigenous peoples, such as the Holocaust. When Canadians remember, they do so in a way that re-enacts these struggles and, in many cases, institutionalises them.

²⁵ The term “settler” refers to non-Indigenous people who have occupied Indigenous lands with the intent to stay; “settler society” refers to a (usually hegemonic and national) community composed of settler people. Settler identity exists in contrast to Indigenous identity and is usually, though not absolutely, rooted in the processes and practices of settler colonialism. As such, settler societies have a particular relationship to land, which is supported through distinctive forms of governance, economy, ideology, and cultural myths. Emma Lowman and Adam Barker contend that “Settlers, whether recent arrivals or longstanding residents, have actual or remembered roots of some sort in other countries. However, they do not have another homeland to which they expect to return, and identify primarily with the settler colonial society to which they belong” (53). They observe that the majority of non-Indigenous people in Canada, with the exception of “exogenous others” (such as refugees or temporary foreign workers), are settlers (39). Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker, *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2015).

Myth and Memory in Settler Colonial Societies

This dissertation examines myth and memory in settler colonial contexts, and in particular, the way national mythology in Canada shapes – and is shaped by – histories of genocide. In this section, I set out the theoretical and methodological framework for my study and examine some of the relevant scholarship. I begin by examining theories of settler colonialism. Theorists define settler colonialism as a structural opposition between settler society and Indigenous peoples. Cultural narrative, or myth, is a core structural element that shapes the settler psyche, constitutes social and material realities, and ultimately sustains settler colonialism over time. It generally manifests in struggles over the meaning of history and, especially, is salient in the practices, debates, and controversies surrounding the commemoration of genocide. I therefore survey scholarship on genocide commemoration in Canada. Scholars observe that Holocaust memory, in particular, tends to reproduce Indigenous erasure by concealing histories of Indigenous genocide. Finally, I define my methodology and describe the methods that I used to collect and analyse data. In particular, I frame Deborah Britzman’s theory of difficult knowledge as a methodological framework that can help understand memorial struggles and, moreover, how these struggles might contribute to the destabilisation of settler colonialism.

Theory: Settler Colonialism as Structure

Frantz Fanon describes the power dynamics of colonial societies as a struggle between European settlers and (Indigenous) natives.²⁶ In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon outlines the process whereby settlers use violence to implement a colonial system and maintain social, political, and material divisions between itself and the native inhabitants. Settlers use institutions

²⁶ Fanon uses the language of “settler” and “native” to describe these opposing groups. I will retain this language for the discussion of his work.

to police and preserve the borders between groups, which includes physical and spatial apartheid, legal boundaries maintained by the military and police, and economic division of wealth and labour. In this way, Fanon observes that that the “colonial world is a world cut in two”²⁷ and which contains a sharp separation between settler and native.²⁸ Yet he is also clear that these two halves are neither equal nor conciliatory: “The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity.”²⁹ This opposition manifests as both material and spiritual. Fanon describes the settlers’ world as strong, clean, and full of material excess while the natives’ world is crowded, dirty, and deprived of comfort. Moreover, the colonial world is Manichean in that settlers are illuminated and good while, in contrast, the natives are the “quintessence of evil...[and] the negation of values.”³⁰ Settlers and natives are therefore engaged in competition over material resources and political power, but also in a teleological and moral struggle between good and evil. But despite this opposition, Fanon observes a certain intimacy between the two worlds and, in particular, explains that settlers know natives on an ontological level because “it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence.”³¹ Settlers have created and imposed the colonial system and, in doing so, also created native society and the opposition between groups. In other words, the struggle between settler and native is not merely historical but, rather, is also structural: it is a basic condition of colonialism that is embedded in its form.

²⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 38.

²⁸ In contrast, Lorenzo Veracini argues that the structure of settler colonial societies is tripartite: the settler collective, the Indigenous other, and the exogenous other. Regardless whether the population structure is bipartite or tripartite, it retains the dynamic of a struggle between groups. See Chapter 1 of Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

²⁹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 38.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

In his study of settler colonialism in Australia, Patrick Wolfe argues that invasion is a structural process that settlers continually re-enact and reproduce across time. Wolfe defines settler colonialism in terms of its underlying reason and basic ideological structure: settler societies operate according to a “logic of elimination,”³² that is, an impulse to erase and replace Indigenous peoples as the occupants of land. This logic remains unfulfilled in most cases and, as a consequence, “settler-colonisation has been historically realised as a range of shifting balances” between Indigenous peoples and settler society.³³ The key measure of this balance – and thus a cornerstone of settler ideology – is the frontier, which demarcates the boundary between settler and Indigene, civilisation and savagery, or self and other. It is not necessarily a physical space but, rather, a conceptual and “performative representation”³⁴ of that boundary that governs social, historical, and legal relationships. To be sure, this representation has facilitated the invasion of Indigenous lands to the point where a physical or geographical frontier has been virtually eliminated. The frontier remains however, although it is no longer an external geography but an internal one. That is, the frontier is now embedded in genetic and cultural identities – as an essentialised and transcendent “otherness within”³⁵ – that distinguishes between settler and Indigene. In this way, it is a cultural structure that endures over time, undergirds settler ideology and practice, and manifests in a variety of ways (i.e. in law, economy, science, etc.). In Wolfe’s words, “invasion emerges as a structure” capitulated on the frontier and settler/Indigenous binary “rather than an event.”³⁶ Historical analysis alone cannot explain settler colonialism because it is not a discrete historical moment, nor can it be defined solely by its

³² Patrick Wolfe, “Nation and MiscegeNation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era,” *Social Analysis* 36 (1994): 93.

³³ *Ibid.*, 94.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

origins. To understand the emergence, development, and continuity of settler colonialism, it is necessary to consider the structural elements that work to sustain it over time.

Cultural narratives are a core structural feature of settler colonialism. Lorenzo Veracini provides a theoretical account of settler colonialism in which he identifies several “modes of empire”³⁷ and, in particular, distinguishes between colonialism and settler colonialism.³⁸ Settler colonialism, he argues, is a structural “situation” that is not limited to any particular place, people, or historical moment.³⁹ Veracini defines this situation according to four structural elements: the governance of populations within the colony; the origin and location of sovereignty; states of consciousness and imagination; and cultural narratives. The fourth structure – cultural narratives – is of notable relevance to my study. On one hand, colonial narratives have a circular structure and follow the form of an Odyssey: the narrative begins with a departure from home, followed by an encounter with exotic Others, and concludes with a final homecoming. Settler colonial narratives, in contrast, have a linear structure and follow the form of an Aeneid: the settler departs from home and conquers a new land, but “no return is envisaged...[and] there is no possibility of returning.”⁴⁰ This narrative – and, in fact, all cultural narratives – are important organising principles: “Narratives are a fundamental part of everyday life, and their construction constitutes an act that allows nations, communities, and individuals to make sense of the world.”⁴¹ In other words, narratives are an implicit (and sometimes explicit)

³⁷ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1, emphasis removed.

³⁸ In contrast to Fanon and Wolfe, Veracini argues that settler colonialism contains a triangular, rather than binary, structure: between the settler coloniser, the Indigenous other, and exogenous others. My analysis relies largely on the binary model, though it does not necessarily contradict Veracini’s theory. The point I want to emphasise is that settler colonialism is a structure composed of struggles over history and memory. Whether these struggles involve two or three distinct groups – or more – is not of great importance.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

psychic and cultural structure that people use to interpret reality and construct it as a meaningful place. They shape the way people perceive the world, experience it, and engage with it: narratives create and constitute social realities. It is reasonable to conclude, then, that people reproduce settler colonialism (a set of established social relations) in part by continually reproducing cultural narratives (an element of social structure).

People perpetuate settler colonial narratives, and settler colonialism more broadly, through symbolic and narrative representation, and especially the representation of Indigenous peoples. Audra Simpson describes this as a process of “knowing” the Indigenous Other for the purpose of governing Indigenous bodies and lands.⁴² She explains that settler colonisers have used (and, to some degree, still use) anthropology and other scholarly disciplines as a means to know – that is, to define and contain – Indigenous peoples. In one respect, these practices result in problematic representations of Indigenous peoples as Others: representations that are often simplistic, fetishistic, and serve the interests of the colonial state. Moreover, by rendering Indigenous peoples as knowable and known, settler colonisers also render them governable. Settler colonial practices of knowing are therefore “a form of politics that is more than representational, as this was a governmental and disciplinary possession of bodies *and* territories.”⁴³ Daniel Heath Justice demonstrates how narrative representations – in other words, stories – can sustain or disrupt settler colonialism. Stories are important, he argues, because they have the capacity to create reality by “giv[ing] shape, substance, and purpose to our existence.”⁴⁴ Settler colonialism operates in large part through the particular stories it tells, and especially the stories it tells about Indigenous peoples, such as “the story of Indigenous deficiency” which

⁴² Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 95-9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁴ Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018), 2.

frames Indigenous peoples as inherently lacking in purportedly positive attributes.⁴⁵ In this way, “colonialism is as much about the symbolic diminishment of Indigenous peoples as the displacement of our physical presence.”⁴⁶ However, Justice stresses that stories can also work to build relationships, heal, resist, reclaim culture and identity, and conceive of new realities. While settler societies often weaponize representation in order to appropriate Indigenous lands, people can also use symbolic and narrative representation in a way that subverts settler colonialism and restores Indigenous self-determination.

Cultural narratives resonate throughout every aspect of settler society. Andrew Woolford proposes viewing settler colonialism as a multi-tiered network that operates at various sites across space and time: at the macro level are pervasive social and cultural institutions such as religion, science, or the economy; these systems are implemented at the meso level, which comprises bureaucratic institutions and organisations such as the military, school systems, or state policy; these are in turn encountered and experienced at the micro level by people, place, and other local elements. He suggests that “one can imagine colonialism as a series of nets that operate to constrain agency but are also prone to snags and openings that enable agentic resistance.”⁴⁷ Woolford refers to this layered and multidimensional network as the “colonial mesh.” It is worth emphasising two elements of this model: first, that individual sites are part of a larger structure where every idea, encounter, or experience will resonate throughout the entire netting; second, that this mesh is uneven and prone to ruptures, meaning that resistance is especially possible at certain places and times. Cultural narratives are a crucial and pervasive

⁴⁵ Ibid, emphasis removed.

⁴⁶ Ibid., xviii.

⁴⁷ Andrew Woolford, “Discipline, Territory, and the Colonial Mesh: Indigenous Boarding Schools in the United States and Canada,” in *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, eds. Andrew Woolford, Jeff Benvenuto, and Alexander Laban Hinton (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 31.

part of this mesh: they are encompassing structures that exist largely at the macro level; yet they are implemented and disseminated at the meso level through public policy, organisational practices, or networks of museums and memorial sites; and people encounter them at the micro level as individuals and local communities, where they become the basis for personal and collective identities. These narratives – when supported by a network of institutions, organisations, people, places, and other sites – both pervade settler society and become the basis for its ongoing existence.

I use the term “myth” to refer to such cultural narratives. By using this language, I do not suggest that myths are necessarily false or counter-factual but, rather, that they are deeply embedded in psychic and cultural structures and shape the way people make the world a coherent and meaningful place. In this sense, I follow the definition of myth provided by Gérard Bouchard: they are representations of values, beliefs, and ideals that “express the most profound feelings of a society, that nurture identities and ideologies, that structure visions of the past and the future, and that inspire collective choices and circumscribe public debate.”⁴⁸ These base assumptions are so central to the processes of social life that they become unquestioned, unquestionable, and ultimately sacred for the people who hold them.⁴⁹ More important than determining the veracity of myths, I would argue, is considering how they reproduce – and how they can resist – oppression, injustice, and social inequality. Paulette Regan, for example, articulates the Canadian myth of the “benevolent peacemaker,” which I discuss further in Chapter II. While she demonstrates that this myth does not correspond to historical realities,⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Gérard Bouchard, *Social Myths and Collective Imaginaries*, trans. Howard Scott (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁰ In this sense, one might argue that the myth is “false.” As a structuring principle, however, I think that myths go beyond the realm of truth and falsity.

her main purpose is instead to “unravel the Canadian historical narrative and deconstruct the foundational myth...to understand how colonial forms of denial, guilt, and empathy act as barriers to transformative socio-political change.”⁵¹

Myths impact the way people encounter history and construct memory. In his study of Jewish historiography,⁵² Yosef Yerushalmi provides a distinction between history and memory. History, he suggests, is the passage of humans through time and includes the entirety of past events, both significant and mundane: it is complete and cannot be repeated.⁵³ In contrast, memory is preoccupied with finding “meaning in history” and therefore focuses on those moments that people deem to be significant.⁵⁴ Yerushalmi explains that “memory is, by its nature, selective...the fact that history has meaning does not mean that everything that happened in history is meaningful or worthy of recollection.”⁵⁵ In other words, memory is the selective interpretation of history – it entails filtering out the meaningful from the meaningless. Yerushalmi identifies some of the key commemorative practices that the Jewish people have used to preserve and perform memory, including ritual, liturgy, the recitation of verse, and literature.⁵⁶ This type of socially meaningful memory is similar to what Aleida Assmann refers to as “cultural memory,”⁵⁷ or “the general cultural tradition...which binds the individual to a

⁵¹ Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 11.

⁵² Yerushalmi focuses on Jewish history and memory, although he does not limit his broader conclusions to the Jewish tradition. In fact, he suggests that while Jews were the first to find “meaning in history,” Christianity and Islam later appropriated (his word) this worldview. From this perspective, European/Western approaches to history and memory are rooted in Jewish cosmology. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1982), 6-8, 93.

⁵³ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1982), 6-13.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 8-11.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11, 45-8, 98.

⁵⁷ Or memory as *vis*, that is, memory as it shapes identity and emerges from the dynamics of remembering and forgetting. Memory as *vis* stands in contrast to memory as *ars*, which concerns the mnemotechnics people use to record information.

particular region or nation.”⁵⁸ Assmann observes that, in the contemporary West, “we are currently facing, reconstructing, and discussing new forms of memory that open up an access to the past that is...underpinned by media – by material carriers such as memorials, monuments, museums, and archives.”⁵⁹ Based on these definitions, I would also classify historiography – the act of writing historical narratives – as a memorial practice because it entails the selective interpretation of past events.⁶⁰ In this dissertation, I use the term “history” to refer to the past and present movement of agents through time. “Memory” refers to the meaningful interpretation of history, while “commemorate” or “remember” refers to the practices people use to preserve, perform, reproduce, or engage with memory.⁶¹ I use the term “narrative” broadly to refer to the particular shape and content of a myth, memory, or historical event. In this way, myth is an interpretive tool – an often unconscious hermeneutic – that undergirds these phenomena and binds them together: it structures the way people convert history to memory, determines the shape of narratives, and decides which narratives people use to commemorate the historical past. To draw on Bouchard’s definition, “myth is not a part of what we perceive – it is what we perceive *through*.”⁶²

⁵⁸ Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁰ I disagree with Yerushalmi on this point. Yerushalmi views historiography as a distinct way of relating to the past that is linked to, but not synonymous with, history and memory. See Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 14-5, 94-5.

⁶¹ I tend to use the term “commemorate” rather than “remember,” although I treat these terms as largely synonymous. While “remember” implies putting something together again (such as past events, or perhaps re-connecting past and present moments), “commemorate” suggests an act of memory that is also communal in character (i.e. co-memory).

⁶² Bouchard, *Social Myths and Collective Imaginaries*, 36.

Background: Genocide Commemoration in Canada

The history and memory of genocide plays an important role in settler mythology. This is partly because genocide – and in particular the genocide of Indigenous peoples – is central to nation-building in settler states.⁶³ As Wolfe observes, settler colonialism has a “logic of elimination” that presupposes the removal of Indigenous peoples from the land as part of the nation-building project.⁶⁴ This logic becomes genocidal when settlers use it to justify the murder of Indigenous people or the destruction of Indigenous cultures, societies, or identities. Settler mythology, however, frames Indigenous erasure as a natural process and is therefore rooted also in the *denial* of Indigenous genocide. I discuss the genocidal logic of settler societies – which I describe as the myth of Indigenous erasure – in Chapter II. Yet the history and memory of other genocides also plays a role. Specifically, the Jewish Holocaust has become a dominant cultural narrative in North America and across the Western world.⁶⁵ Not only does Holocaust commemoration reflect the socio-historical dynamics of its local and national contexts, but it also shapes the way people interpret and respond to other historical events and instances of genocide.⁶⁶ The Holocaust therefore has historical and memorial qualities, but also contains elements of myth: it is both “part of what we perceive” as well as “what we perceive *through*.”⁶⁷ In short, the discussion, debate, and commemoration of genocide can reveal a great deal about

⁶³ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006); Jason Chalmers, “A Genocide that Precedes Genocide: Reconciling ‘Indigeneity’ and ‘Genocide’ with a Paradox of Otherness,” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 12, no. 2 (2016).

⁶⁴ Wolfe, “Nation and MiscegeNation,” 93.

⁶⁵ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999); Jeffrey C. Alexander, “On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The ‘Holocaust’ from War Crime to Trauma Drama,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002); Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, trans. Assenka Oksiloff (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

⁶⁶ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); David B. MacDonald, *Identity Politics in the Age of Genocide: The Holocaust and Historical Representation* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁶⁷ I am using Bouchard’s aforementioned definition of myth.

settler mythology. My study focuses on memories of Indigenous genocide (especially Residential Schools) and the Jewish Holocaust, the interaction between them, and the way they mutually reproduce or resist aspects of national mythology.

Holocaust commemoration has a tendency to conceal the history and memory of other genocides, and in particular, the genocide of Indigenous peoples. Over the past few decades, activists have used the language of the Holocaust to frame Indigenous experiences of oppression under settler colonialism.⁶⁸ While this approach can illuminate histories of Indigenous genocide by drawing on an established and widely understood memorial narrative, it also has the potential to obscure these histories. Scholars have considered ways that Holocaust memory operates as a “screen memory”⁶⁹ or “conceptual blockage,”⁷⁰ that is, as a dominant narrative that can suppress or displace the visibility of other genocides. This process is well documented in the Australian context, where mainstream settler society tends to view the Holocaust as the prototypical or paradigmatic case of genocide.⁷¹ Tony Barta and others demonstrate that, when confronted with claims of Indigenous genocide, Australians will compare these histories to the most well-known

⁶⁸ Simone Gigliotti, “Unspeakable Pasts as Limit Events: The Holocaust, Genocide, and the Stolen Generations,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 49, no. 2 (2003); David B. MacDonald, “Daring to Compare: The Debate about a Maori ‘Holocaust’ in New Zealand,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 5, no. 3 (2003); Neil Levi, “‘No Sensible Comparison’? The Place of the Holocaust in Australia’s History Wars,” *History and Memory* 19, no. 1 (2007); David MacDonald, “First Nations, Residential Schools, and the Americanization of the Holocaust: Rewriting Indigenous History in the United States and Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 4 (2007); David B. MacDonald, “Putting Canada’s ‘Canadian Holocaust’ in Perspective: Comparative Indigenous History in Western Settler Societies,” in *Coping with Crisis: Conflict Management and Resolution*, eds. Shuli Barzilai, Arza Churchman, and Allen Zysblat (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2008); Laurence J. Kirmayer, Joseph P. Gone, and Joshua Moses, “Rethinking Historical Trauma,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51, no. 3 (2014).

⁶⁹ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 12-6; Levi, “‘No Sensible Comparison’?”

⁷⁰ A. Dirk Moses, “Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the ‘Racial Century’: Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 36, no. 4 (2002); Tricia Logan, “Memory, Erasure, and National Myth,” in *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, eds. Andrew Woolford, Jeff Benvenuto, and Alexander Laban Hinton (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 152-4.

⁷¹ Moses, “Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas,” 17-8; A. Dirk Moses, “Genocide and Holocaust Consciousness in Australia,” *History Compass* 1 (2003): 6-7; Rowan Savage, “The Political Uses of Death-As-Finality in Genocide Denial: The Stolen Generations and the Holocaust,” *Borderlands* 12, no. 1 (2013).

and widely documented case of genocide (i.e. the Holocaust) rather than consider legal or scholarly definitions. As a result, settler society is unlikely to classify (and thereby legitimise) Indigenous genocide as such if it does not resemble the Holocaust.⁷² Rowan Savage, for example, argues that the concept of “death-as-finality” is central to Holocaust memory and, therefore, the popular definition of genocide. The public is hesitant to view settler colonial practices as genocide, such as the Stolen Generations,⁷³ because they are not usually framed in a way that represents the physical death of individual group members.⁷⁴ Dirk Moses argues that Holocaust memory, and especially the dogma of its “uniqueness,”⁷⁵ can reproduce hegemonic Eurocentrism and racist hierarchies. He observes that proponents of the uniqueness position favour the Holocaust – a European event with European victims – as sacred while framing non-European atrocities as profane. This privileges European people and history while relegating non-European histories, and especially atrocities against Indigenous peoples, to an inferior status.⁷⁶ In this way, Holocaust memory can reproduce racist colonial logic.

While there is only limited research on this phenomenon in Canada, existing studies suggest that national memories of the Holocaust and Indigenous genocide interact in a similar way. Such similarities are unsurprising given that Canada, like Australia, is a settler society that originated as a colony of the British Empire. Many of these studies focus on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights for several reasons: it has considerable content on the Holocaust, genocide and mass atrocities, and Indigenous peoples; and it is the product of a nearly two-

⁷² Tony Barta, “After the Holocaust: Consciousness of Genocide in Australia,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 31, no. 1 (1985); Colin Tatz, “Confronting Australian Genocide,” *Aboriginal History* 25 (2001); Savage, “The Political Uses of Death-As-Finality.”

⁷³ The state removal of Indigenous Australian children from their families between approximately 1900 and the 1970s.

⁷⁴ Savage, “The Political Uses of Death-As-Finality.”

⁷⁵ Proponents of the Holocaust’s “uniqueness” believe that it was a radically singular and, in some ways, transcendent event. As such, they argue, it cannot be meaningfully compared to any other historical event.

⁷⁶ Moses, “Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas.”

decade attempt to establish a national Holocaust memorial in Canada.⁷⁷ The museum has faced criticism for the centrality of the Holocaust within its exhibition space,⁷⁸ though it does not necessarily frame the Holocaust as the prototypical genocide (I discuss this further in Chapter VI). Tricia Logan, meanwhile, a former curator of Indigenous content, argues that the museum frames genocide in a way that erases the histories of Indigenous peoples. She contends that its representation of genocide focuses primarily on the Holocaust (and, to a lesser degree, the Ukrainian Holodomor) and the physical extermination of group members. According to Logan, this definition marginalises the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada, conceals the centrality of genocide to nation-building, and fails to classify certain Indigenous genocides as such (i.e. those rooted largely in cultural destruction, such as Residential Schools).⁷⁹ Moses similarly suggests that the Canadian Museum for Human Rights frames the Holocaust in a way that erases Indigenous genocide and, moreover, may justify state-perpetrated violence against Indigenous peoples. He observes that the museum situates the Holocaust within a narrative of human rights that, like the concept of civilisation, relies on a telos of historical progress. In other words, this narrative frames the Holocaust as a product of barbarism/savagery and suggests that humanity has since progressed beyond this type of atrocity. In this way, Holocaust memory reproduces settler narratives by reinscribing the colonial opposition between savagery and

⁷⁷ Chatterley, “Canada’s Struggle with Holocaust Memorialization.”

⁷⁸ 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* 46, no. 4 (2013); Karyn Ball and Per Anders Rudling, “The Underbelly of Canadian Multiculturalism: Holocaust Obfuscation and Envy in the Debate about the Canadian Museum for Human Rights,” *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 20, no. 3 (2014).

⁷⁹ Logan, “Memory, Erasure, and National Myth”; Tricia Logan, “National Memory and Museums: Remembering Settler Colonial Genocide of Indigenous Peoples in Canada,” in *Remembering Genocide*, eds. Nigel Eltringham and Pam Maclean (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

civilisation.⁸⁰ This is a central theme in my study of Holocaust commemoration in Chapter III and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Chapter V.

It is possible, however, to commemorate genocide in non-oppositional ways that enable productive dialogue between different histories of violence. In *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Michael Rothberg examines the way writers, scholars, and artists have used Holocaust memory to draw attention to other histories of oppression, such as racism in the United States or torture during the Algerian War. He observes that these critics “speak of Holocaust memory as if it blocks memory of slavery and colonialism from view...[but] actually use the presence of widespread Holocaust consciousness as a platform to articulate a vision of American racism [and other instances of oppression] past and present.”⁸¹ He argues that, while commemoration often appears to be a competition, these techniques are actually a “multidirectional” approach that entails “ongoing negotiation, cross-reference, and borrowing” between diverse histories and memories.⁸² Rothberg provides a useful framework for thinking about memory as a relational activity, although he does not seriously address concerns that the Holocaust has become the paradigmatic genocide and, therefore, the basis for determining the legitimacy of other genocides.⁸³ Moreover, he only briefly considers Holocaust memory as it relates to settler colonialism and Indigenous genocide, especially in the Americas.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ A. Dirk Moses, “Does the Holocaust Reveal or Conceal other Genocides? The Canadian Museum for Human Rights and Grievable Suffering,” in *Hidden Genocides: Power, Knowledge, Memory*, eds. Alexander Laban Hinton, Thomas La Pointe, and Douglas Irvin-Erickson (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014).

⁸¹ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 3.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ The Holocaust only began to emerge as a dominant global narrative in the 1970s, and did not fully reach this status until the 1990s. Many of Rothberg’s case studies, however, are drawn from much earlier in the 1950s and 60s. There is a massive difference between Holocaust memory in these two eras and, I would suggest, the power dynamics involved in genocide commemoration.

⁸⁴ Rothberg discusses colonialism and decolonisation in depth, although he focuses primarily on European colonialism in Africa and does not meaningfully distinguish between colonialism and settler colonialism. His goal is to demonstrate that Holocaust memory emerged during, and in conjunction with, the era of decolonisation. Thus, he only considers Indigenous genocide in settler colonial contexts in his conclusion.

Scholars writing on the Canadian context, and with special focus on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, have further developed Rothberg's approach to memory. In their study of the Holocaust controversy at the museum, Olena Hankivsky and Rita Dhamoon argue that intersectional feminist theory can help create a relational, rather than hierarchical, approach to genocide commemoration. They demonstrate that, while genocide memory often produces a hierarchical "Oppression Olympics" between groups, these competitions also take place within a matrix of power. An intersectional approach can highlight the relational nature of memory – the way multiple memories and identities interact within power matrices – to disrupt hierarchies and resist structures of violence.⁸⁵ Drawing on concepts of the "distributed museum" or "networked museum," Nadine Blumer examines how the museum is part of a larger system of discursive, multidirectional, and virtual spaces. Debates about the history and memory of genocide, she argues, take place within this larger "memorial network" of interconnected sites and spaces. By engaging with such networks, it is possible to create new spaces that enable productive dialogues between histories of violence.⁸⁶

Methodology, Method, and Sources

It may be informative to explain how I use the overlapping concepts of theory, methodology, and method. Theories are conceptual frameworks that people use to understand, interpret, explain, and classify a phenomenon or set of phenomena; they are, at root, organising principles. Methodologies are a particular type of theory. In *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Method*, Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie define methodology as "the

⁸⁵ Hankivsky and Dhamoon, "Which Genocide Matters the Most?"

⁸⁶ Nadine Blumer, "Expanding Museum Spaces: Networks of Difficult Knowledge at and beyond the Canadian Museum for Human Rights," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37 (2015).

epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions guiding the research, or in other words, the ways in which the researcher's explicit or implicit assumptions are at work in the selection of research focus, problem, and approach."⁸⁷ In this way, they explain that methodologies are largely synonymous with paradigms or worldviews.⁸⁸ Methodology therefore encompasses a person's understanding of the world and, specifically, includes their beliefs about the nature of reality, the nature and quality of knowledge, and the ethics or values that guide one's approach to knowledge. Based on this, I conceive of methodology as a theory of knowledge: methodologies usually explain the origin of knowledge, its relationship to reality and ethics, what constitutes knowledge, how knowledge becomes meaningful, how it is transmitted, and ways to gather, analyse, and interpret knowledge.

In contrast, Tuck and McKenzie define method as the particular approach that researchers take to "empirical data collection and analyses methods."⁸⁹ Methods, they explain, might therefore include such approaches to data processing as surveys, interviews, focus groups, mapping, and so on.⁹⁰ To briefly summarise the distinction: methodology includes the assumptions that underlie research practices while method entails the particular techniques that researchers use to translate knowledge into data that can be collected, analysed, and interpreted.

Decolonising methodologies include a broad spectrum of Indigenous and European research traditions that aim to disrupt colonial power relations. According to Fanon, "decolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men,"⁹¹ that is, the creation of a new social subject that goes beyond the settler/native opposition.

⁸⁷ Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 76.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Tuck and McKenzie, *Place in Research*, 79.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 77-8.

⁹¹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 35.

In this way, decolonisation must entail both the removal of settlers from positions of authority as well as the dismantling of colonial institutions and social relations, regardless of who controls these.^{92, 93} In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith locates scholarly research “as a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the [colonial] West and the interests and ways of resisting of the [Indigenous] Other.”⁹⁴ She proceeds to explore some of the ways that research practices and theoretical frameworks can contribute to the work of decolonisation. These “decolonizing methodologies” should both expose the assumptions that undergird colonialism and undo the harm it has caused: they involve “taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively” but should also “retrieve [the Indigenous] past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices.”⁹⁵ Decolonising research is a collaborative effort that can (and often should) involve both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.⁹⁶ Tuck and McKenzie stress the importance of Indigenous methodologies both because Indigenous resurgence is a crucial part of decolonisation, and because these methodologies are especially effective at disrupting colonial orders.⁹⁷ They also acknowledge, however, that European research methodologies have the potential to resist colonialism, which they

⁹² Ibid., 35-7.

⁹³ For example, Tuck and McKenzie examine the way theories, methodologies, and methods can decolonise place. They explain how settler colonialism transforms Indigenous land into property that can be owned and sold (and stolen). In order to decolonise place, people must reconceptualise it in a way that converts property back into land. In this sense, decolonisation requires the radical transformation of ontological and epistemological orders. Tuck and McKenzie, *Place in Research*, 64-6.

⁹⁴ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed (London and New York: Zed Books, 2012), 2.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 3-4.

⁹⁶ Ibid., xii.

⁹⁷ Tuck and McKenzie, *Place in Research*, 11, 52-3.

demonstrate using such examples as ethnography, phenomenology, archival research, and narrative inquiry.⁹⁸

In this dissertation, I use the theory of difficult knowledge as a methodological framework. I discuss this theory and its potential as a research methodology in detail in Chapter II. To briefly summarise, I suggest that the theory of difficult knowledge can help to understand memory as a conflicting, but also potentially relational and productive, dialogue between narratives. Psychoanalyst Deborah Britzman, who first developed this theory, argues that learning is a traumatic and transformative process that occurs when people “confront perspectives, situations, and ideas that may not be just unfamiliar but appear at first glance as a criticism” of one’s identity and worldview.⁹⁹ Alice Pitt and Britzman posit that these encounters are based on two kinds of knowledge: lovely knowledge, which includes dominant narratives that people find comforting and familiar; and difficult knowledge, which entails subversive narratives that disrupt worldviews.¹⁰⁰ When difficult knowledge interferes with lovely knowledge, people can experience conflicting aspects of the human experience – attachment and loss, love and hate, life and death.¹⁰¹ This encounter with conflicting and irreconcilable extremes can provoke radical transformation of a person’s identity, perception of the world, and relationship with others.¹⁰² As Blumer explains, difficult knowledge “refers not to the content of

⁹⁸ Ibid., 75-96.

⁹⁹ Deborah P. Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 11.

¹⁰⁰ Alice Pitt and Deborah Britzman, “Speculations on Qualities of Difficult Knowledge in Teaching and Learning: An Experiment in Psychoanalytic Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16, no. 6 (2003).

¹⁰¹ Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, 4.

¹⁰² Adrienne S. Chan, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Lisa Moy, “Metaphoric Representations of Women of Colour in the Academy: Teaching Race, Disrupting Power,” *Borderlands* 13, no. 2 (2014); Michalinos Zembylas, “Theorizing ‘Difficult Knowledge’ in the Aftermath of the ‘Affective Turn’: Implications for Curriculum and Pedagogy in Handling Traumatic Representations,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 44, no. 3 (2014); Eric C. Sheffield, “Toward Radicalizing Community Service Learning,” *Educational Studies* 51, no. 1 (2015).

what is being taught or narrated but to the contentious or disconcerting *effects of learning* about and having to engage with [historical] representations.”¹⁰³ Scholars who study difficult knowledge tend to focus on narratives and, especially, the way people construct historical information as coherent and meaningful narratives.¹⁰⁴ Britzman suggests that genocide and other histories of violence are especially likely to produce transformative encounters, although they are neither inherently difficult nor do they have a monopoly on difficult knowledge.¹⁰⁵ Any given narrative or representation therefore contains the potential for both difficult and lovely knowledges depending on who encounters it and how people engage with it. In one regard, difficult and lovely knowledges exist as a dichotomy: the effect of knowledge is either transformative, or it is not. In another regard, the distinction is more ambiguous because every narrative simultaneously contains the potential for both difficult and lovely knowledges, and whichever manifests depends largely on its audience. Accordingly, Chapters III, IV, and V focus primarily on the *potential* for difficult knowledge (i.e. the likelihood that historical representations will produce a transformative experience for a particular audience); Chapter VI examines my personal encounters with historical narratives and, therefore, addresses the realisation of lovely and difficult knowledges.

The theory of difficult knowledge can be a type of narrative methodology. Based on my earlier definition, the theory of difficult knowledge qualifies as a methodological framework: it explains that knowledge is embedded in (or as) narrative interpretations of history, events, situations, etc.; and that knowledge is transmitted through traumatic and transformative

¹⁰³ Blumer, “Expanding Museum Spaces,” 127, my emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ H. James Garret, “Why Didn’t I Know this Before? Psychoanalysis, Social Studies Education, and *The Shock Doctrine*,” *Canadian Social Studies* 45, no. 2 (2012); Julie C. Garlen and Jennifer A. Sandlin, “*Escape from Tomorrow*: Disney, Institutionalized Witness, and the Difficult Knowledge of Being,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 38, no. 2 (2016).

¹⁰⁵ Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, 117-20.

encounters with marginalised narratives. Specifically, the theory can be classified as a narrative methodology. According to Tuck and McKenzie, narrative methodologies presume that “narratives are how humans come to know, understand, and make meaning in the social world, while also making ourselves known, understood, and meaningful in the world,” and can include the study of “personal experience stories, ethnographic and historical stories, individual stories, shared stories, written texts, and oral stories.”¹⁰⁶ The theory of difficult knowledge is similarly rooted in the assumption that narratives constitute social reality and govern our ability to know the world. The theory of difficult knowledge is distinct, however, in that it focuses on the way conflicting narratives (that is, dominant and marginal – or lovely and difficult – narratives) interact to produce transformative educational experiences. My analysis focuses on the cultural narratives and social myths that people use to interpret the world, with particular emphasis on the way these narratives manifests in and around memorial sites.

The theory of difficult knowledge – and narrative methodologies more broadly – has potential to operate as a decolonising methodology. For Smith, decolonising methodologies both deconstruct colonial narratives and help to revive Indigenous traditions.¹⁰⁷ In her study of museum practices and Indigenous peoples, Amy Lonetree suggests that narrative and storytelling fulfill both these requirements. She explains that decolonising practices involve “speaking the hard truths of colonialism [in order] to generate the critical awareness that is necessary to heal from historical unresolved grief.”¹⁰⁸ Lonetree continues: “Telling the full story of the Native American holocaust proves a testament not to Native victimhood but to Native skill, adaptability, courage, tenacity, and countless other qualities that made our survival a reality against all

¹⁰⁶ Tuck and McKenzie, *Place in Research*, 82.

¹⁰⁷ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 3-4.

¹⁰⁸ Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 6.

odds.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, narrative methodologies can recount histories of colonial violence in a way that emphasises the agency and survival of Indigenous peoples. The theory of difficult knowledge may be effective in this respect because it focuses on the way narratives can disrupt dominant (i.e. colonial) identities and worldviews. As I discuss in Chapter II, however, there are some limitations to its usefulness as a decolonising methodology.

It is worth highlighting some of the key ways that the theory of difficult knowledge can illuminate memorial struggles in settler colonial contexts. First, difficult knowledge and settler colonialism are both sustained by narrative or myth. According to theorists of difficult knowledge, people do not necessarily compete over which events happened but, rather, the way we interpret and remember these events. Whether people perceive an historical event – the Holocaust, Residential Schools, or other genocides, for example – as difficult or lovely knowledge depends on the way it is constructed as a narrative. Correspondingly, settler colonialism is supported by particular myths and cultural narratives that may become the basis for difficult (or lovely) knowledge. Second, difficult knowledge and settler societies are both characterised by struggle. Britzman argues that learning and knowledge are sites of conflict: between difficult and lovely knowledges, and between opposing aspects of the human experience. Canada and other settler societies are similarly rooted in conflict, particularly between settler society, Indigenous peoples, and their respective interpretations of the historical past and present. Third, theorists of difficult knowledge suggest that these struggles are productive sites. Encounters with difficult knowledge – that is, conflicts between difficult and lovely narratives – can result in the transformation of identities, worldviews, and relationships. Contested memorial sites in Canada, therefore, may also act as catalysts for the destabilisation

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 6-7.

and reconstruction of settler identities, social structures, and mythology. In other words, it is possible to unsettle settler colonialism by engaging with difficult knowledge at sites of national memory.¹¹⁰

Narrative methodologies require researchers to engage with a variety of sources and types of data. Individual and collective narratives can manifest through textual and discursive documents, oral stories, interviews, maps, and embodied movement through space and place, among others.¹¹¹ I focus largely on those sources that have developed from and in response to the state and its institutions. In his study of the “poem-lives”¹¹² embedded in prison and hospital archives, Michel Foucault explains that archival state documents can aid analyses of institutional power and authority. These historical documents constitute an “encounter with power...[a] power that watched these lives, that pursued them, that lent its attention, if only for a moment, to their complaints and their little racket, and marked them with its claw.”¹¹³ That is, these documents are manifestations of power, the state, its gaze upon subjects, and “what it [power] says or causes to be said” (or, I would add, what it causes *not* to be said).¹¹⁴ Yet national narratives can manifest at a multitude of institutional, archival, historical, memorial, cultural and other sites. In his classic study of collective memory in France, Pierre Nora examines the way people reproduce national history and memory at the myriad sites he refers to as “les lieux de mémoire.”¹¹⁵ These sites include signs, histories, material artefacts, and “the infinite ways of expressing the national life – not only its history, but also its landscapes, its traditions, its ways of eating, and its long-

¹¹⁰ It is important to note, however, that it is also possible to reinscribe settler colonialism by engaging with lovely knowledge at these sites.

¹¹¹ Tuck and McKenzie, *Place in Research*, 82-4.

¹¹² Michel Foucault, *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1994), 159.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Pierre Nora and David P. Jordan, eds., *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, trans. Mary Trouille (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

gone methods of production.”¹¹⁶ In sum, historical and memorial narratives emerge from both institutional archives and documents, as well as the practices, habits, and experiences that exist outside of the state’s purview.

My analysis relies primarily on text-based archival documents – with a particular emphasis on those requisitioned, produced, supported, and otherwise authorised by the state – as well as original data collected during fieldwork in Winnipeg. Archival documents include records of parliamentary debates (Hansard), ministerial or commission reports, commission mandates, design proposals for national memorial sites, and brochures distributed by national museums. It also includes non-state documents such as articles published in the news media. In addition to these existing sources, I also produced original data during two trips to Winnipeg and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in September 2016 and September 2017.¹¹⁷ I conducted semi-structured interviews with four curators at the museum. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted in a private or semi-private location at the museum, such as an office or boardroom.¹¹⁸ For these interviews, I developed a set of ten questions that addressed the planning and design of museum content, narrative techniques used at the museum, approaches to visitor experience, and how the museum and its staff engage with Canadian history and national myth. I used these questions as a guide while also allowing the line of questioning to remain open based on interviewees’ responses. I recorded interviews using a digital audio recorder and transcribed them after returning to Edmonton. During my visits to

¹¹⁶ Pierre Nora, general introduction to Vol. 1 of *Rethinking France*, xviii.

¹¹⁷ During each visit, I spent several days in Winnipeg and visited the museum multiple times. This provided me with an opportunity to explore the museum at different times of the day, on different days of the week, move through the museum in various ways (i.e. from bottom to top, or top to bottom), speak with curators and other staff, and attend various tours and other events.

¹¹⁸ For one interview, we began in a boardroom but, after 30 or 40 minutes of conversation, moved into the museum galleries. The remainder of the interview was effectively a guided tour where the curator pointed out and discussed content that related to my research topic.

Winnipeg, I also kept fieldnotes to document my encounters with and experiences of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. These notes address guided tours that I participated in, the space and architecture of the museum, the spatio-temporal journey through Winnipeg and the museum, and the design, arrangement, and content of exhibits and galleries. To aid my recollection of museum content, I also used digital photography to capture text from and the design of galleries and exhibits.

Each case study examines historical and memorial narratives by drawing on a distinct set of sources. Memorial networks can include a multitude of physical, virtual, discursive, and other sites involved in the representation of history and memory.¹¹⁹ Chapters III, IV, and V focus primarily on discursive spaces (albeit with physical and sometimes virtual referents) while Chapter VI explores several distinct sites within the physical space of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. The primary sources for my analysis of the National Holocaust Monument in Chapter III include records of parliamentary debates for Bill C-442 and the *National Holocaust Monument Act*, as well as design proposals from the six finalists selected for the monument design competition. Parliamentary debates surrounding the monument justify national commemoration of the Holocaust while also framing the Holocaust as an aspect of Canadian history. In turn, design proposals consider how to symbolically represent this history at a site of public commemoration. My case study of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Chapter IV draws primarily on the Commission's final report, and especially the summary of this report, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*. This report utilises the activities of the Commission, including its extensive testimonial and archival research, while also consolidating this research into a coherent and accessible text. The chapter also examines documents that have

¹¹⁹ Blumer, "Expanding Museum Spaces."

impacted the Commission's final report, including its mandate as well as the federal government's formal apology for the Residential School system. My analysis of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Chapters V and VI relies on two reports that shaped content within the museum: the 2008 *Report to the Minister of Canadian Heritage on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights* and the 2010 *Content Advisory Committee Final Report to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights*. These reports address the museum's approach to content and curation, propose specific histories and events for its permanent galleries, and suggest ways of framing this content for visitors. The chapters also draw on interviews that I conducted with curators at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. These interviews provide insight to the way curators select content and determine how to frame it for a broad public audience. Chapter VI also relies on my field notes regarding the content and architecture of the museum, as well as brochures and other documents collected during my visits. These sources provide an example of how visitors encounter the museum, the histories and narratives people find throughout its exhibition space, and ways to experience and interpret this content.

I coded this data for themes related to settler colonialism and national mythology. The purpose of my analysis is to understand the way each data set – and the memorial sites they constitute – reproduce cultural narratives and social myths. To begin, I reviewed the scholarly literature on Canadian mythology to identify core narratives pertaining to national history, memory, and identity. Scholars observe several narratives that, I suggest, can be classified into six main categories or themes: civilisational progress, lawful peacemaking, Indigenous erasure, settler indigenisation, white supremacy, and the frontier. While many scholars refer to each theme as a distinct myth (i.e. “the myth of the frontier”), I view them as interconnected components of the same mythical framework; I therefore refer to each component as a narrative

or mythical theme. Chapter II reviews and discusses the scholarship on Canada's national myth. For each case study, I developed a coding key based on these mythical themes as well as other themes relevant to my analysis, such as difficult knowledge, history and memory, or settler colonialism. I also included codes to identify whether a source reproduces or resists a particular narrative theme. Furthermore, I added other items to each key based either on my familiarity with the subject or on important themes that emerged from the data as I reviewed it.¹²⁰ After coding the data for each case study, I compiled a master document with all coded content arranged by theme (i.e. each document had a section for the theme of Indigenous erasure, another for civilisational progress, and so on). This allowed me to see the extent to which each data set expresses mythical themes and the manner in which it engages with them. I used this master document as the basis for a developing a chapter outline and translating my analysis into prose.

Research Questions

This dissertation explores the way people construct history and memory at national sites in Canada. It focuses on three relatively new sites that commemorate the historical past: the National Holocaust Monument (NHM), which was unveiled in Ottawa in 2017; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which released its final report in 2015; and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR), which opened in 2014 in Winnipeg. To understand memorial dynamics in Canada, Blumer and Hankivsky and Dhamoon argue, it is crucial that researchers consider the way such sites collectively constitute “matrices of power” or “memorial networks.”¹²¹ Memorial networks include physical, virtual, discursive, multidirectional, and

¹²⁰ For example, the key for Chapter III also included a code for “uniqueness of the Holocaust” and the key for Chapter IV included one for “genocide claims.”

¹²¹ Blumer, “Expanding Museum Spaces,” 130; Hankivsky and Dhamoon, “Which Genocide Matters the Most?” 910.

other spaces of representation that are “productively linked to one another – even if not on entirely equal footing – through various administrative, pedagogical, touristic, and commemorative activities.”¹²² As such, they enable people to produce and engage with memory in ways that do not necessarily reproduce oppressive power relations, such as competitions of suffering or victimhood. While a few studies situate these sites as part of a larger network – for the most part by situating the CMHR in relation to other museums¹²³ – there is no research that compares the NHM, TRC, and CMHR. My dissertation is therefore the first study to position these sites as part of a common memorial network.

Each national site focuses on the history and memory of genocide, especially the Holocaust and Residential Schools. I am particularly concerned with the discursive use of the concept “genocide” and do not directly argue that the Holocaust and Residential Schools either were or were not instances of genocide. Rather, I focus on the way people frame these events and use the term “genocide” to describe them. Raphael Lemkin, the Jewish-Polish lawyer who coined the term, defines genocide as “the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group...[it is] a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups.”¹²⁴ While scholars have developed Lemkin’s work and proposed various definitions,¹²⁵ people tend to use the language of “genocide” when one group has disrupted the social order of another. The Holocaust and Residential Schools are an ideal comparison: the Holocaust occurred in Europe, involved Europeans as perpetrators and victims, and its memory

¹²² Blumer, “Expanding Museum Spaces,” 130.

¹²³ For example, Chatterley considers how Holocaust memory has moved between the CWM and CMHR, while Janice Rieger explores embodied knowledge production within a matrix of dis/ability. Chatterley, “Canada’s Struggle with Holocaust Memorialization”; Janice Rieger, “Doing Dis/ordered Mapping/s: Embodying Disability in the Museum Environment” (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2016).

¹²⁴ Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), 79.

¹²⁵ The most widely used and well-known definition is the United Nations *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, which establishes genocide as a crime according to international law.

came to Canada in part through post-war immigration; in contrast, Residential Schools occurred in Canada, involved people who are either settlers or Indigenous to Turtle Island,¹²⁶ and emerged in Canadian consciousness through the activities of Indigenous survivors. While there is a tradition of research that examines the relationship between Holocaust memory and Indigenous genocide, there are only a few studies that provide a distinctly Canadian perspective. Many of these studies also focus on the lateral “negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing”¹²⁷ between memories but overlook the structural factors that underlie memory production.¹²⁸ I contribute to this research by situating memorial struggles within the Canadian context. Moreover, my study places this discussion within the structural context of settler colonialism and national mythology. I argue that, while Holocaust memory and the memory of Residential Schools can – and do – inform one another, both memories emerge from and are shaped by settler mythology. In other words, settler colonialism plays a significant role in the production of genocide memory in Canada.

My central research question is: How do sites of genocide memory reproduce – or resist – settler colonialism in Canada? I address settler colonialism primarily through the lens of national

¹²⁶ I use this name for the geographic region widely referred to as “North America.” In some instances, I refer to the continent as “North America” when speaking in reference to settler mythology or when it is historically consistent to do so. While many Indigenous nations refer to the continent as Turtle Island, others do not. I use this name to re-frame North America as an Indigenous space. However, I acknowledge that the name is not universal and that the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island are not homogenous. It may be helpful to think of the continent not as an island, but rather as a diverse but interconnected “archipelago” of peoples. See Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez, “Indigeneity and Transnational Routes and Roads in North America,” in *Our North America: Social and Political Issues Beyond NAFTA*, ed. Julián Castro-Rea (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 27-8.

¹²⁷ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 3.

¹²⁸ While many of the existing studies situate memorial struggles within a particular socio-political or historical context, they do not necessarily foreground structural contexts or address their role in depth. In fact, many scholars situate Indigenous genocide within the context of widespread Holocaust commemoration (i.e. studies that focus on the Holocaust as “screen memory”). Notable exceptions include: Hankivsky and Dhamoon, who consider the way both memories emerge from structures of hierarchy and domination; and Moses, who argues that these genocides are products of modernity and the “racial century.” Hankivsky and Dhamoon, “Which Genocide Matters the Most?”; Moses, “Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas.”

mythology and use the framework of difficult knowledge to understand how people reproduce (i.e. make lovely) or resist (i.e. make difficult) dominant national narratives. It is therefore possible to rephrase the question using these terms: Do these sites generate difficult knowledge or lovely knowledge about settler mythology in Canada? From this perspective, the question emphasises the importance of considering how Canadians construct historical and memorial narratives.

I use the theory of difficult knowledge to develop a set of specific questions to direct this analysis. I begin by asking: what constitutes lovely knowledge for settler Canadians? In other words, what is the dominant national myth of Canada? I then consider each site, the narratives that people produce in and around them, and compare and contrast these narratives with the national myth. For each site, I examine how it frames histories of genocide and constructs them as a coherent narrative for the public. I further consider how this narrative framing corresponds to the national myth. Does it reproduce core elements of this myth (i.e. as lovely knowledge) or resist them (i.e. as difficult knowledge)?

This study also provokes broader questions about memory, settler colonialism, and resistance. How does difficult knowledge operate (i.e. through which techniques) at national sites of history and memory? How can difficult knowledge work to unsettle national mythology and destabilise settler colonialism? How do contested sites – and memorial struggles more broadly – function to constitute Canadian identity, history and memory, and social relations? By approaching contested sites in this way, my dissertation also makes a methodological contribution to the study of difficult knowledge. In particular, I employ the theory of difficult knowledge as a useful framework for studying historical and memorial struggles in settler colonial contexts. I contend that this theory has the potential to operate as a multidirectional or

decolonising methodology. In particular, I demonstrate that difficult knowledge can disrupt the structural myths that sustain settler colonialism in Canada and, in doing so, transform identities and relationships.

Positionality in Research

It is necessary to position myself as a researcher for several reasons. First, theorists of difficult knowledge emphasise that learning is a deeply personal and subjective experience. A person's identity and worldview determines whether they encounter knowledge as lovely or difficult; likewise, a person's willingness and ability to engage with new ideas determines whether they will experience such an encounter as transformative. That is, knowledge is relational – not essential. It makes little sense to define certain histories or narratives as inherently difficult and, instead, we should ask *which* knowledge is difficult *for whom*. I can only speak about my own experiences of difficult and lovely knowledge with any certainty, and I can extrapolate my conclusions to other people (or Canadian society in general) in a very estimated and inexact way. Second, decolonial researchers explain that knowledge production is also a subjective and relational process. Universities are Eurocentric institutions that often reproduce (white, male, straight) Western superiority by framing knowledge as discrete, objective, and universally true.¹²⁹ Decolonising and Indigenist researchers, however, demonstrate that knowledge is in fact produced within a system of human and other-than-human relationships, which might include: individuals, communities and institutions, ancestors and stories, place and

¹²⁹ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; Peter Cole, “trick(ster)s of aboriginal research; or how to use ethical review strategies to perpetuate cultural genocide,” *Native Studies Review* 15, no. 2 (2004); Peter Cole and Pat O’Riley, “Coyote and Raven talk about equivalency of other/ed knowledges in research,” in *The Routledge Doctoral Student’s Companion: Getting to Grips with Research in Education and the Social Sciences*, eds. Pat Thomson and Melanie Walker (London, Routledge, 2010).

geographical location, and more.¹³⁰ A crucial step towards dismantling colonial power relations in the academy, then, is to acknowledge my social and physical location and critically reflect upon my role in the production of knowledge.¹³¹

I am a settler on Turtle Island who descends from Jewish and Scottish ancestry. On my mother's side, my family has been in Canada for three generations. My grandparents, Ashkenazim from Poland, survived the Holocaust and consequently immigrated to Canada with a group of Jewish war orphans in 1948.¹³² On my father's side, my family descends primarily from Scottish ancestors who settled along the St. Lawrence River five (or so) generations ago. I was born in Ottawa and grew up in a small village in rural Ontario that is traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, Anishinabek, and Mohawk peoples. I have lived in Edmonton while writing this dissertation and completing my PhD over the past five years, which is Treaty Six territory and home to Cree, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Saulteaux, Dene, and Blackfoot peoples. As such, I have a somewhat complicated relationship with genocide. On one hand, my maternal grandparents are genocide survivors who came to Canada to escape ongoing persecution in Europe. My grandmother supplied me with some early lessons on the Holocaust, and I am deeply invested in Holocaust commemoration. On the other hand, I am a settler and, therefore, implicated in the past and ongoing genocide of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. Moreover, my Jewish identity complicates my relationship to settler colonialism abroad, and especially in Israel/Palestine. While I am resolutely against Zionism and the state of Israel, I also recognise

¹³⁰ Joe Sheridan and Roronhiakewen Longboat, "The Haudenosaunee Imagination and the Ecology of the Sacred," *Space and Culture* 9, no. 4 (2006); Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008); Herman Michell, "Gathering Berries in Northern Context: A Woodlands Cree Metaphor for Community-Based Research," *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health* 7, no. 1 (2009); Tuck and McKenzie, *Place in Research*.

¹³¹ Jason Chalmers, "The Transformation of Academic Knowledges: Understanding the Relationship between Decolonising and Indigenous Research Methodologies," *Socialist Studies* 12, no. 1 (2017).

¹³² Molly Applebaum, *Buried Words: The Diary of Molly Applebaum* (Ottawa: Azrieli Foundation, 2017).

that many Jews support Israel and are complicit in the dispossession and oppression (and genocide, arguably) of Palestinians. I seek to resist settler colonialism in both my scholarly research and personal life – or, at the very least, I want to avoid reproducing colonial power dynamics. Yet its mythology, ideology, and privilege have been imprinted on my identity and experience. While my research is largely a critique of settler colonialism, I also recognise that I am not immune to its influence.

Chapter Outline

Chapter II, “Difficult Knowledge and National Mythology in Settler Societies,” surveys two areas of research that are central to my analysis: difficult knowledge and Canadian mythology. Theorists explain that difficult knowledge is the basis for both individual and social transformation and, therefore, can work to disrupt colonial, racist, patriarchal, and other oppressive power dynamics. Difficult knowledge operates at many sites of learning but is especially likely to catalyse social change when employed at public museums and sites of memory. Yet it always operates in conjunction with lovely knowledge. Before considering how difficult knowledge is realised at national sites, then, I must discern what constitutes lovely knowledge for settler Canadians. I review the scholarly literature on national mythology in Canada and identify six core elements, each of which emerges from the intersection of settler colonialism and national history: civilisational progress; Indigenous erasure; indigenisation of the settler; lawful peace; white supremacy; and the frontier. These themes materialise in cultural products and at symbolic and discursive sites, and they may be highly salient at sites of national history and memory.

The Holocaust is a dominant cultural narrative for many Western nations that shapes how people perceive other instances of genocide, and especially the genocide of Indigenous peoples. Chapter III, “The National Holocaust Monument: Settled Memories on Stolen Land,” examines the way Canadians construct historical and memorial narratives of the Holocaust at the NHM. I consider how proponents of the monument express mythical themes – specifically lawful peacemaking, civilisational progress, Indigenous erasure, and settler indigenisation – in the parliamentary, media, and creative discourses surrounding its planning and design. Not only do supporters reproduce many of these themes, but they fail to critically reflect on national mythology or Canada’s history of settler colonialism. That is, they construct a narrative of national history, human history, and the Holocaust that conveys lovely knowledge about – and thereby reproduces – Canada’s national myth. As a point of contrast to the following chapters, my case study of the NHM provides a sort of cautionary tale about public memory, and especially what can happen when people commemorate genocide in a way that is uncritical and unreflective. Holocaust memory in Canada, at least when enacted by the settler state, can become a tool of the ruling class that reproduces dominant cultural myths and oppressive social relations.

The TRC is an historical and memorial exercise that aims both to document the Residential School system and, in its final report, synthesise this information into a coherent and unified narrative of Canadian history. Chapter IV, “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission: (Re)writing Canadian History,” entails a case study of the TRC that provides a counterpoint to the preceding chapter. The TRC seeks to “rewrite” the dominant national narrative by engaging extensively and critically with settler mythology, and in particular by framing Canadian history through the lens of “cultural genocide.” Whereas the dominant narrative is premised on the displacement and erasure of Indigenous peoples, the TRC offers an alternative interpretation of

history based on the vacillation of respectful and harmful relationships between settler society and Indigenous peoples. It frames this narrative as difficult knowledge with the intent to transform Canadian society. But while the Commission has potential to disrupt settler narratives and national myth, it also offers an interpretation of Canadian history that does not entirely escape the logic of settler colonialism.

The CMHR provides a different perspective of the history and memory of genocide. While the NHM and TRC each focus on a particular case, the museum engages with the Holocaust, Residential Schools, and other mass atrocities. Chapter V, “The Canadian Museum for Human Rights: Setting the Stage for Difficult Knowledge,” explores the intentions that guided the planning and design of the CMHR. Advisory committees for the museum frame it as a place where visitors can interpret the significance of Canadian and human history. Moreover, curators and advisory committees seek to create an environment where visitors can critically reflect upon history, human rights, and the many stories they encounter throughout the museum’s galleries. That is, the CMHR contains the intent and potential to generate difficult knowledge for museum visitors, and advisory committees seek especially to resist the myth of Indigenous erasure by involving Indigenous histories and peoples in its operation. The representation of content is more important than the content itself, however, and whether visitors encounter difficult knowledge depends largely on the way they engage with and interpret the museum. Therefore, Chapter VI, “Inside the Canadian Museum for Human Rights: A Difficult Encounter,” turns to a personal encounter with the CMHR. It documents my experiences of the museum – of its galleries and exhibits, architecture, conversations with staff, tours, brochures, and larger surroundings – while I seek out and engage with difficult knowledge. The museum provides many opportunities to encounter both lovely and difficult knowledges: its architecture

leads visitors on a journey that mirrors civilisational progress, and is therefore its most lovely and limiting feature; yet its galleries contain interpretive openings that allow visitors to engage with difficult knowledge, particularly in exhibits that represent Indigenous content. Guided tours and other programming, such as the Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour, are especially likely to facilitate transformative experiences because they enable visitors to interpret content in a directed and intentional way. In this sense, the CMHR and TRC provide complementary perspectives on difficult knowledge. Both sites seek to generate difficult knowledge for settler society, although they do so in different ways: the TRC provides an alternative narrative of Canadian history that can subvert dominant myths, while the CMHR requires visitors to interpret content and construct their own historical narratives. What these sites share, though, is that they both force Canadians to confront the memorial struggles that underlie national society and, moreover, ask people to take an active role in the production of memory.

Chapter II

Literature Review: Difficult Knowledge and National Mythology in Settler Societies

This chapter reviews two areas of scholarship that can help to understand genocide commemoration in Canada: difficult knowledge and national mythology. From this review, I develop a framework for the study and critique of memorial sites in settler colonial contexts. I also explain how this dissertation contributes to the scholarship on difficult knowledge and the study of difficult knowledge at sites of myth and memory. The first section explores the scholarship on difficult knowledge and, in particular, considers how this knowledge can work to disrupt dominant narratives, destabilise oppressive relations, and unsettle colonial power dynamics in settler societies. Deborah Britzman and other theorists of difficult knowledge posit that learning occurs when dominant, or lovely, narratives are interrupted by marginalised, or difficult, ones. This can be a transformative process with the potential to radically reshape identities, worldviews, and social relations. It also provides an analytical framework for the critique of – and resistance to – dominant power structures such as patriarchy, white supremacy, and settler colonialism. I argue that the theory of difficult knowledge, when used to analyse public sites of history and memory, can operate as a decolonising methodology that destabilises settler worldviews and transforms settler identities. There are, however, some limitations to its usefulness as a decolonising methodology, namely, that difficult knowledge is not universal, centers the transformation of individuals, and risks (re)traumatising some audiences.

The following section defines Canada's national myth. Difficult knowledge operates in opposition to, and by directly conflicting with, the comforting and lovely narratives that people unquestioningly assume to be true. To understand how people create and engage with difficult knowledge, then, it is crucial first to define the lovely knowledge that they act upon. I propose

that Canadian mythology constitutes lovely knowledge for settler society. In this section, I survey the scholarly literature on national mythology in Canada to identify some of the core narratives and themes that comprise this myth. Scholars identify a variety of myths or narratives that, I suggest, can be classified according to six interrelated themes: civilisational progress; indigenisation of the settler; Indigenous erasure; lawful peacemaking; the frontier; and white supremacy. These themes are rooted in settler colonialism and its distinctive narrative content and form, as well as the unique way that this narrative manifests within the socio-historical context of Canada. It is possible to generate difficult knowledge for Canadian settler society by constructing historical narratives that challenge or contravene these themes. In the final section, I address how curators have used difficult knowledge to reproduce and resist national mythology at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR). I argue that lovely knowledge in Canada is deeply embedded in the country's ongoing history of settler colonialism and the suppression of Indigenous narratives. Thus, I also claim that Canadians can resist settler colonialism by engaging with national mythology at sites of history and memory.

Difficult Knowledge

This section addresses the scholarly literature on difficult knowledge, which includes both theoretical perspectives on difficult knowledge as well as the practical application of difficult knowledge in educational, historical, or memorial contexts. First, I explore the key themes and ideas concerning difficult knowledge. I then consider the theory's usefulness as a critical – and potentially decolonising – methodology that researchers can use to study sites of history and memory.

The theory of difficult knowledge, first coined and theorised by Britzman, is a model of education that frames learning as a traumatic encounter. In *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, Britzman explores the psychic experience or “primal scene of learning” that occurs when students encounter knowledge.¹ The dominant and widely accepted model of learning, she observes, treats education as a progressive process whereby students gradually accumulate knowledge over time – from simple to complex – and thereby progress from an uneducated to an educated state. Britzman rejects this model and instead posits one based on interference. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, she suggests that the human experience is composed of multiple overlapping and conflicting extremes, such as attachment and loss, love and hate, or individual and social. Britzman contends that learning occurs when one extreme interferes with another. For example, formal education in the West posits that teachers should use social conventions to curb the instincts of children: learning occurs when social demands interfere with an individual’s desires. Yet children (and all human persons) are constituted by both social and individual dimensions and cannot be reduced to one or the other, even though these aspects are contradicting. Western education therefore creates a struggle between student and teacher that can be especially painful because it “asks students to confront perspectives, situations, and ideas that may not be just unfamiliar but appear at first glance as a criticism of the learner’s view.”² As Alice Pitt and Britzman observe, encounters with knowledge are traumatic experiences and there is “a kernel of trauma in the very capacity to know.”³ For Britzman, knowledge is not composed

¹ Deborah P. Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 11.

³ Alice Pitt and Deborah Britzman, “Speculations on Qualities of Difficult Knowledge in Teaching and Learning: An Experiment in Psychoanalytic Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16, no. 6 (2003): 756.

of discrete units of information that accumulate over time, but is rather a process where students encounter contradictory and conflicting extremes.

Britzman defines difficult knowledge by its ability to disrupt, and thereby transform, a person's sense of identity. People tend to construct identity around a particular cluster of extremes; encounters with difficult knowledge, however, force people to confront multiple extremes and vacillate from one extreme to another. This can rupture a person's sense of continuous identity and coherence about the world. Britzman argues that learning from difficult knowledge is traumatic because "the knowledge offered provokes a crisis of the self and...is felt as interference or as a critique of the self's coherence or view of itself in the world."⁴ Students will likely resist this knowledge because of the crisis it precipitates, although Britzman stresses that "resistance is a precondition for learning"⁵ and a crucial part of effective education.

Difficult knowledge stands in contrast to hopeful or "lovely knowledge." Britzman considers whether it is the content of knowledge that is difficult or the process through which one learns it. She asks "can the study of genocide avoid a painful encounter?"⁶ and concludes that one can avoid difficult knowledge by constructing it as hopeful:

The disavowal, or the refusal to engage a traumatic perception of helplessness and loss, often pushes educators to the opposite spectrum of affect: the focus on hope and courage as the adequate lesson to be made from difficult knowledge...This is so because hope may be seen as a bridge to continuity and expectation.⁷

Difficult knowledge creates a sense of discontinuity: it forces people to experience the contradictory and inherently irreconcilable extremes of the self, and it is this sense of discontinuity that enables transformation. Yet hope creates a sense of continuity: it builds a

⁴ Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, 118.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 119.

⁷ Ibid.

bridge between extremes by suggesting that one can hope for pleasure in moments of pain, or love in times of hatred, and ultimately connects past suffering with future liberation. Hope eliminates the possibility of transformation by constructing extremes as aspects of one another rather than as contradictions: difficult knowledge transforms the self whereas hopeful knowledge assimilates knowledge into the self.⁸ Pitt and Britzman refer to this hopeful and continuous knowledge as “lovely knowledge.” If students experience difficult knowledge as pain and loss, Pitt and Britzman ask, what is it they mourn the loss of? What students “give up,” they suggest, is lovely knowledge. Lovely knowledge fits comfortably into an individual’s existing identity and worldview: it aligns with one’s identity, theories of the world, and sense of continuity between the past and present. Encounters with difficult knowledge interfere with this coherence so that “difficult knowledge is what one makes from the ruins of one’s lovely knowledge.”⁹ In short, lovely knowledge is consistent with one’s worldview while difficult knowledge disrupts this consistency to demand a radical reconceptualisation of the self.

Difficult knowledge and lovely knowledge are opposing forces, though they are not necessarily discrete or mutually exclusive – the presence of one does not require the absence of the other. To explain the impact of difficult knowledge, Britzman borrows Sigmund Freud’s distinction between “learning about” and “learning from”: students who “learn about” an event acquire facts and details but retain a sense of distance between themselves and the object of knowledge; students who “learn from” an event gain insight based on an intimacy between the self and knowledge.¹⁰ An encounter with difficult knowledge, she suggests, is equivalent to

⁸ Britzman defines hope in a radically different way than her colleague Roger Simon. For Britzman, hope is a process in which one uses a progressive framework to connect the past and present, and thereby redeem the past. For Simon, hope is an ongoing and impossible process where one strives for that which is ultimately unachievable. Whereas Britzman sees hope as continuous and past-oriented, Simon sees hope as discontinuous and future-oriented.

⁹ Pitt and Britzman, “Speculations on Qualities of Difficult Knowledge,” 766.

¹⁰ Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, 117-8.

“learning from”: when people learn from difficult knowledge they experience its contradictions, endure an identity crisis, and consequently transform their own sense of identity and worldview.

Accordingly, Nadine Blumer defines difficult knowledge by its effect:

Difficult knowledge thus refers not to the content of what is being taught or narrated but to the contentious or disconcerting effects of learning about and having to engage with representations of violent histories and unjust pasts – effects that generally signify a challenge and disruption to what we previously thought we knew and are willing to understand about the world.¹¹

In other words, knowledge is inherently neither difficult nor lovely; rather, knowledge becomes difficult when it catalyses a transformative experience or, alternately, remains lovely when it prevents (or simply does not facilitate) change. From this perspective, difficult and lovely knowledges may be opposed but they are not mutually exclusive. On one hand, people encounter knowledge as either difficult or lovely: the effect of knowledge is either transformative (and therefore difficult), or it is not (and therefore lovely). On the other hand, all knowledge has the potential to be either. Whether knowledge becomes difficult or lovely depends on the people who encounter it and how they engage with it, including such factors as a person’s identity, worldview, their willingness to engage with new ideas, interpretation of the new knowledge, and ultimately whether these factors converge to produce personal transformation. The same knowledge, therefore, may be difficult for one person and lovely for another. Moreover, the same site can yield both difficult and lovely knowledge. In a museum, for example, one exhibit might generate difficult knowledge while another exhibit produces lovely knowledge for visitors. In this dissertation, I explore the potential for difficult knowledge at three national sites and consider how this potential disrupts, interacts, or overlaps with lovely knowledge. By observing

¹¹ Nadine Blumer, “Expanding Museum Spaces: Networks of Difficult Knowledge at and beyond the Canadian Museum for Human Rights,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37 (2015): 127.

how each site produces multiple kinds of knowledge, I demonstrate that difficult and lovely knowledges can co-exist at the same time and in the same places.

Britzman suggests that, while all knowledge is potentially difficult, some knowledge is potentially more difficult than others. In particular, she observes that histories of violent conflict, such as genocide, are especially likely to be difficult because they highlight conflicting extremes: between love and hate, violence and peace, freedom and bondage, or humanity and inhumanity.

For this knowledge to be difficult, however, the teacher must present it in a particular way:

The term of learning acknowledges that studying the experiences and the traumatic residuals of genocide, ethnic hatred, aggression, and forms of state sanctioned – and hence legal – social violence requires educators to think carefully about their own theories of learning and how the stuff of such difficult knowledge becomes pedagogical. This exploration needs to do more than confront the difficulties of learning from another's painful encounter with victimization, aggression, and the desire to live on one's own terms. It also must be willing to risk approaching the internal conflicts which the learner brings to the learning.¹²

Many scholars examine how histories of violence – especially the Holocaust and other genocides – can facilitate encounters with difficult knowledge.¹³ A few scholars suggest that difficult knowledge is necessarily rooted in histories or experiences of violence, genocide, and other instances of human suffering.¹⁴ For my case studies in the following chapters, I focus on three

¹²Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, 117.

¹³ Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, 113-35; Nurit Cohen-Evron, “Students Living within Violent Conflict: Should Art Educators ‘Play it Safe’ or Face ‘Difficult Knowledge’,” *Studies in Art Education* 46, no. 4 (2005); Paula M. Salvio, “Uncanny Exposures: A Study of the Wartime Photojournalism of Lee Miller,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 39, no. 4 (2009); Jane Lesley Clements, “Difficult Knowledge: Possibilities of Learning in Holocaust Education,” (PhD diss., University of London, 2010); Jessica A. Heybach, “Learning to Feel What We See: Critical Aesthetics and ‘Difficult Knowledge’ in an Age of War,” *Critical Questions in Education* 3, no. 1 (2012); Teryl L. Dobbs, “Remembering the Singing of Silenced Voices: Brundibár and Problems of Pedagogy,” *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 21, no. 2 (2013); Nathan Moyo and Jairo Gonye, “Representations of ‘Difficult Knowledge’ in Post-colonial Curriculum: Re-imagining Yvonne Vera’s *The Stone Virgins* as a ‘Pedagogy of Expiation’ in the Zimbabwean Secondary School,” *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 23, no. 3 (2015); Neil Harrison, Jackie Burke, and Ivan Clarke, “Stolen Generations: Teaching *About* the Experiences of Trauma,” *Knowledge Cultures* 6, no. 2 (2018).

¹⁴ H. James Garrett, “Difficult Knowledge and Social Studies (Teacher) Education,” (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2010), 45-50; Ya’ara Gil-Glazer, “Photography, Critical Pedagogy and ‘Difficult Knowledge’,” *International Journal of Education through Art* 11, no. 2 (2015): 262; Julia Rose, *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 28-34.

sites that address the history and memory of genocide – the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the National Holocaust Monument (NHM), and the CMHR – although I do not treat them as necessarily difficult. In fact, I demonstrate that while these sites can and do produce difficult knowledge, they also reproduce lovely knowledge. Moreover, they may produce difficult and lovely knowledges in different (and potentially problematic) ways for different audiences. I focus on the way these sites produce (or fail to produce) difficult knowledge for settler audiences; the same sites may be lovely knowledge for Indigenous audiences and, moreover, can be traumatic in unproductive ways (especially histories of colonial violence). In Chapter III, I demonstrate that Holocaust memory is especially likely to reproduce comforting and lovely narratives for settlers unless people engage with it in an intentional and critical way; Chapters IV, V, and VI observe a somewhat more complex mixture of difficult and lovely knowledges. That is, histories of violence may be likely to catalyse transformative encounters with difficult knowledge, although they are neither inherently difficult nor are they necessary for the production of difficult knowledge.

Scholars suggest that narrative construction – the way people frame history as meaningful events – impacts whether people encounter knowledge as difficult or lovely. James Garrett suggests that an effective way to generate difficult knowledge is to present students with multiple interpretations of events. By providing alternative interpretations, educators can disrupt dominant historical narratives and force students to reconsider their perceptions of the world and their positions within it.¹⁵ Julie Garlen and Jennifer Sandlin use the example of Disney World to illuminate how narrative construction impacts one’s experience of knowledge. Disney World provides visitors with a master narrative that reproduces white-supremacy and heteropatriarchy

¹⁵ James H. Garrett, “Why Didn’t I Know this Before? Psychoanalysis, Social Studies Education, and *The Shock Doctrine*,” *Canadian Social Studies* 45, no. 2 (2012).

while actively erasing violent, contested, or alternative narratives. Garlen and Sandlin demonstrate how the film *Escape from Tomorrow* uses a psychotic narrative of a family visit to Disney World to expose the hidden racism and patriarchy of Disney. While the dominant narrative of Disney World generates lovely knowledge by constructing a “sanitised” and pleasurable fantasyland, *Escape from Tomorrow* allows competing interpretations to emerge and thereby forces the viewer to confront difficult knowledge.¹⁶ In other words, the content of knowledge does not determine whether people will experience it as difficult or lovely: histories of genocide, war, and violence are not necessarily difficult; likewise, Disney World is not always lovely. Rather, difficult knowledge is a product of narrative construction and is especially likely to occur when one narrative of events (usually a marginal one) conflicts with a different narrative of the same events (generally a hegemonic narrative). Accordingly, I focus on the way people construct narratives at national sites of history and memory. Each site addresses the same or similar content – all three sites focus on genocide, and especially the Holocaust and Residential Schools – although they construct different narratives. As such, each site has a different potential for difficult and lovely knowledges even though they address similar content.

For this reason, different media and modes of representation can also impact the potential for difficult knowledge. Many scholars address the role of visual culture in modern education and explore the ways imagery can help produce or resist difficult knowledge.¹⁷ Jessica Heybach Vivirito suggests that contemporary classrooms are characterised by “difficult visual culture” and that this culture perpetually immerses students in representations of violence and injustice.

¹⁶ Julie C. Garlen and Jennifer A. Sandlin, “*Escape from Tomorrow*: Disney, Institutionalized Whiteness, and the Difficult Knowledge of Being,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 38, no. 2 (2016).

¹⁷ Cohen-Evron, “Students Living within Violent Conflict”; William Gaudelli, Margaret Crocco, and Alexandra Hawkins, “Documentaries, Outtakes, and Digital Archives in Teaching Difficult Knowledge and the Vietnam War,” *Education and Society* 30, no. 2 (2012); Gil-Glazer, “Photography, Critical Pedagogy and ‘Difficult Knowledge’”; Jessica A. Heybach Vivirito, “Confronting ‘Difficult Knowledge’: Critical Aesthetics and War in the Classroom,” (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 2012).

However, she also contends that, for this visual culture to have a transformative impact, educators must pair it with critical dialogue and an openness to controversy.¹⁸ Paula Salvio argues that educators can use visual surrealism to teach difficult knowledge because it enables the representation of multiple narratives and thereby resists the assimilation of knowledge into dominant narratives.¹⁹ Similarly, William Gaudelli, Margaret Crocco, and Alexandra Hawkins argue that educators can use outtakes and raw footage from documentary films to demonstrate how communications media frame, mediate, and interpret historical events. Teachers and students can then use the same footage to construct alternative narratives of events.²⁰ Researchers have also considered how other modes of representation can facilitate or prevent encounters with difficult knowledge, including creative and autobiographical writing, literature, and music.²¹ For example, Lauren Johnson and Maureen Kendrick argue that multimodal digital storytelling is an effective way to generate difficult knowledge because it does not rely on literacy or language skills. While language can pose a barrier for both learners and storytellers, multimodal digital practices enable people to communicate difficult experiences through accessible and multilayered texts.²² In short, the media that people use to represent history shape the narratives that they construct, which in turn impacts whether these histories become difficult or lovely knowledge. My analysis in the following chapters – especially of the CMHR in Chapters V and VI – do not focus on particular modes of representation, but rather explore the museum as a

¹⁸ Jessica A. Heybach, “Learning to Feel What We See”; Heybach Vivirito, “Confronting ‘Difficult Knowledge.’”

¹⁹ Salvio, “Uncanny Exposures”.

²⁰ Gaudelli et al., “Documentaries, Outtakes, and Digital Archives.”

²¹ Nectaria Karagiozis, “Chronicles of Melancholia: The Uses of Young Women’s Written Symbolizations,” *International Journal of Learning* 15, no. 10 (2008); Susanne Luhmann, “Gender and the Generations of Difficult Knowledge: Recent Responses to Familial Legacies of Nazi Perpetration,” *Women in German Yearbook* 25 (2009); Dobbs, “Remembering the Singing of Silenced Voices”; Moyo and Gonye, “Representations of ‘Difficult Knowledge’ in Post-colonial Curriculum.”

²² Lauren Johnson and Maureen Kendrick, “‘Impossible is Nothing’: Expressing Difficult Knowledge through Digital Storytelling,” *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 60, no. 6 (2017).

multimedia and multimodal site. My study therefore contributes to the scholarship on difficult knowledge by demonstrating how a variety of media – architecture, film, text, sculpture, artefact, and more – work together to construct historical narratives and difficult (or lovely) knowledge.

Marginalised narratives are especially likely to produce difficult knowledge. As noted previously, difficult knowledge occurs when narratives – generally two or more conflicting narratives of the same event or history – collide with one another. It is therefore unsurprising that difficult knowledge often emerges from the margins: when suppressed, subjugated, or otherwise silenced narratives and epistemes subvert dominant ones.²³ For example, Indigenous knowledges – ontological, epistemological, or axiological frameworks rooted in Indigenous practices and traditions – are likely to become difficult when people encounter them at colonial institutions such as national museums or memorials. In her study of national art museums, Margaret Tali observes that difficult knowledge often emerges from absence, which she refers to as the “forgotten stories, voices and identities...[that] are deemed unworthy of acknowledgement.”²⁴ These stories are significant because the presence or absence of certain voices – particularly within the context of national museums – can legitimise or marginalise certain people, histories, and knowledges. She concludes that difficult knowledge can be created for hegemonic audiences by exposing and confronting silenced narratives. Curators, educators, and scholars who seek to engage with difficult knowledge, then, need only to look for the narratives, histories, and voices that are excluded from or suppressed by social institutions. Ava Becker demonstrates how social institutions create hierarchies of knowledge by defining certain modes of knowing as more valid than others (i.e. textual as superior to oral). Suppressed voices have the potential to disrupt these

²³ Kerry H. Robinson, *Innocence, Knowledge and the Construction of Childhood: The Contradictory Nature of Sexuality and Censorship in Children's Contemporary Lives* (London: Routledge, 2013), 21.

²⁴ Margaret Tali, *Absence and Difficult Knowledge in Contemporary Art Museums* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 2.

hierarchies by using different media, providing alternative perspectives, and constructing different narratives.²⁵ This premise – that difficult knowledge is rooted in the interaction between dominant and marginalised narratives – directs my analysis in the following chapters. In each of the three case studies, I consider how marginalised narratives, especially those rooted in Indigenous experiences, subvert dominant narratives of Canadian history. In doing so, I expand on the existing scholarship by demonstrating how marginalised narratives can disrupt dominant colonial myths, with a unique focus on the way this process occurs at historical and memorial sites in Canada.

Difficult knowledge can help students to identify and understand power relations in society, especially unequal or oppressive ones, and may therefore be useful for social justice education. While knowledge of social inequality is not intrinsically difficult, it may become difficult when students become aware of their own privilege and complicity in the oppression of others. In this way, difficult knowledge has the potential to challenge social inequality by destabilising dominant power relations.²⁶ Scholars identify several ways difficult knowledge achieves this. According to Patricia DeYoung, difficult knowledge decentres subjectivities so that “relatively privileged learners can be helped toward a stronger, clearer, more responsible sense of self-in-relation” – in other words, to help students understand “that they are not at the centre of the universe.”²⁷ For both Nurit Cohen-Evron and Gordon Pon, decentring students’

²⁵ Ava Becker, “Funds of (Difficult) Knowledge and the Affordances of Multimodality: The Case of Victor,” *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* 10, no. 2 (2014).

²⁶ Audrey Bryan, “The Sociology Classroom as a Pedagogical Site of Discomfort: Difficult Knowledge and the Emotional Dynamics of Teaching and Learning,” *Irish Journal of Sociology* 24, no. 1 (2016); Adrienne S. Chan, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Lisa Moy, “Metaphoric Representations of Women of Colour in the Academy: Teaching Race, Disrupting Power,” *Borderlands* 13, no. 2 (2014); Michalinos Zembylas, “Theorizing ‘Difficult Knowledge’ in the Aftermath of the ‘Affective Turn’: Implications for Curriculum and Pedagogy in Handling Traumatic Representations,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 44, no. 3 (2014).

²⁷ Patricia Ann DeYoung, “Thriving on Difficult Knowledge: Poststructuralist Pedagogy and Relational Psychoanalysis,” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2000), 3-4.

subjectivities can blur the binary distinction between good and evil and thereby reduce the distance between the Self and the Other.²⁸ Students may consequently experience an encounter with difficult knowledge as an affective or emotional “shock to thought” that stimulates a sense of responsibility for the suffering of the Other.²⁹ Thus, the role of difficult knowledge in social justice education is to illuminate dominant power relations with the intent of unsettling them. Or, in the words of Adrienne Chan, Rita Dhamoon, and Lisa Moy, “the role of s**t disturber and catalyst [for social change] is central both to the experiences of teaching and student learning.”³⁰

Indeed, educators can combat injustice and facilitate social change by using difficult knowledge to transform the subjectivities of their students. While Britzman positions difficult knowledge as a psychic phenomenon that acts upon individual subjects, it also has the potential to shape and transform collectivities. This is because difficult knowledge acts upon identity – an aspect of humanity that is inherently relational (i.e. identity as a measure of difference/similarity in relation to others). By transforming identities, difficult knowledge has the potential to transform relationships and may therefore be a useful tool in the production of social change.³¹ Specifically, educators can integrate difficult knowledge into pedagogical practice as a way to transform students into new types (i.e. critical, compassionate, democratic) of social subjects. Michalinos Zymbylas argues that difficult knowledge can stimulate political action by transforming students into social and political subjects³² while Eric Sheffield identifies its

²⁸ Cohen-Evron, “Students Living with Violent Conflict”; Gordon Pon, “A Labour of Love or of Response? Anti-racism Education and Responsibility,” *Canadian Social Work Review* 24, no. 2 (2007).

²⁹ Roger I. Simon, “A Shock to Thought: Curatorial Judgement and the Public Exhibition of ‘Difficult Knowledge’,” *Memory Studies* 4, no. 4 (2011); Roger I. Simon, *A Pedagogy of Witnessing: Curatorial Practice and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (New York: SUNY Press, 2014).

³⁰ Chan et al., “Metaphoric Representations,” 17.

³¹ Difficult knowledge is a product of the tension between opposing forces – in this case, between the individual and the collective.

³² Zembylas, “Theorizing ‘Difficult Knowledge’.”

potential to transform communities by shaping both individual and collective subjects.³³ James Garrett as well as Jessica Heybach demonstrate that educators can use difficult knowledge to develop social consciousness amongst students and thereby produce democratic subjects.³⁴ Socially conscious educators therefore use difficult knowledge as the basis for pedagogies that focus on social justice issues: Britzman uses her analysis to develop a feminist and queer pedagogy,³⁵ Bettina Love works through an intersectional pedagogy rooted in black feminism,³⁶ and others use it in various ways to approach antiracist education.³⁷ It is worth noting that, while difficult knowledge is transformative and productive by definition, it is also unpredictable and may not produce the desired type of subject: scholars and educators who use difficult knowledge focus on the production of democratic or antiracist subjects, for instance, although encounters with difficult knowledge can also create the opposite. While most scholars focus on the role of difficult knowledge in formal educational contexts, such as classroom settings, I focus instead on less formal sites of education such as monuments, museums, and memorials. I do, however, retain their emphasis on social justice and the transformation of learners. Most scholars focus broadly on the potential of difficult knowledge to disrupt oppressive power relations, but only a few specifically explore colonial and settler colonial relations. Rather than address the production of democratic or critical social subjects, then, I consider the processes through which

³³ Eric C. Sheffield, "Toward Radicalizing Community Service Learning," *Educational Studies* 51, no. 1 (2015).

³⁴ Garrett, "Difficult Knowledge and Social Studies (Teacher) Education"; Heybach, "Learning to Feel What We See."

³⁵ Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*.

³⁶ Bettina L. Love, "Difficult Knowledge: When a Black Feminist Educator Was too Afraid to #SayHerName," *English Education*, 49, no. 2 (2018).

³⁷ Terry Carson and Ingrid Johnston, "The Difficulty with Difference in Teacher Education: Toward a Pedagogy of Compassion," *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 46, no. 1 (2000); Clements, "Difficult Knowledge"; Chan et al., "Metaphoric Representations"; Carl E. James and Joy Mannede, "Rethinking Access: The Challenge of Living with Difficult Knowledge," in *Power, Knowledge and Anti-Racism Education: A Critical Reader*, edited by George J. Sefa Dei, Agnes Calliste, and Margarida Aguiar (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2000); Yuha Jung, "Post Stereotypes: Deconstructing Racial Assumptions and Biases through Visual Culture and Confrontational Pedagogy," *Studies in Art Education* 56, no. 3 (2015); Pon, "A Labour of Love or of Response?."

difficult knowledge can transform – or reinscribe – colonial subjects into decolonial or non-colonial subjects.

Researchers and educators propose using difficult knowledge as a tool to understand settler colonialism and, therefore, suggest that it may be useful towards unsettling colonial relationships. Cathryn McConaghy reminds readers that difficult knowledge is rooted in contradictions and points to one such contradiction in settler colonialism: settlers desire to erase Indigenous peoples from the land while simultaneously seeking to preserve indigeneity or become Indigenous themselves. She contends that educators can use this contradiction as the basis for difficult knowledge and transforming settler colonial identities.³⁸ Liz Newbery observes that environmental educators often teach about the outdoors in a way that reproduces Western colonial logic and constructs the land as neutral and empty. She argues that Indigenous knowledges and histories of colonialism can become difficult knowledge that challenges colonial logic while unsettling white privilege and settler identities.³⁹ Jeannie Kerr contends that difficult knowledge emerges from “epistemological collisions” between conflicting systems of knowledge. She demonstrates that the academy privileges Western epistemes while marginalising non-Western ones so that Indigenous knowledges often conflict with dominant modes of academic thought. Kerr argues that these collisions provide opportunities to decolonise universities by challenging teachers’ and students’ assumptions about the academy, Canadian society, and the cosmos.⁴⁰ So while difficult knowledge has the potential to transform colonial and other oppressive relations, dominant social institutions – that is, colonial, patriarchal, and

³⁸ Cathryn McConaghy, “On Pedagogy, Trauma and Difficult Memory: Remembering Namatjira, Our Beloved,” *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 32 (2003).

³⁹ Liz Newbery, “Canoe Pedagogy and Colonial History: Exploring Contested Spaces of Outdoor Environmental Education,” *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* 17 (2012).

⁴⁰ Jeannie Kerr, “Western Epistemic Dominance and Colonial Structures: Considerations for Thought and Practice in Programs of Teacher Education,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 3, no. 2 (2014).

white-supremacist institutions – are especially resistant to difficult knowledge because of its potential to undermine their privileged status. For this reason, Indigenous and other non-Western epistemologies may be especially effective at generating difficult knowledge in settler colonial contexts, although they are neither inherently difficult nor a necessary part of this process. In the following chapters, I explore the process through which difficult knowledge illuminates and disrupts settler colonialism. In particular, I compare the way difficult knowledge subverts settler colonial myths and narratives at several sites of national memory, including monuments, museums, and national commissions. Moreover, I contend that difficult knowledge can not only disrupt settler colonialism in education and classroom settings, but that people may be able to use the theory of difficult knowledge as a decolonising methodology in scholarly research.

In recent years, Canadian educators have begun to use difficult knowledge as the basis for decolonising pedagogies. Avril Aitken and Linda Radford consider how educators use and encounter difficult knowledge in the wake of the TRC. They asked students (teachers in training, primarily from settler backgrounds) to keep online journals while engaging with learning materials on Residential Schools, colonialism, decolonisation, and reconciliation. Aitken and Radford note a few key responses from students: an awareness of previously unknown histories; negative affective responses; resistance to knowledge; and the desire to create emotional distance from this knowledge. That is, students encountered the history of Canadian colonialism as potentially difficult knowledge, although most of them refused it in a way that prevented transformative experiences and reinscribed lovely knowledge. Aitken and Radford conclude that such encounters can disrupt settler identities, but only when students engage with affective responses and feelings of ambivalence in a sustained way. Similarly, Lisa Taylor addresses the way educators can use difficult knowledge within the context of Canada's sesquicentennial

anniversary. She observes that, while dialogues surrounding #canada150 increase the salience of settler colonial narratives, counter-discourses such as #colonialism150 or #resistance150 can disrupt these narratives, challenge settler identities, and create counter-hegemonic publics. Indigenous approaches to history and memory are especially likely to generate these counter-narratives. To create difficult knowledge, at least within the context of hegemonic settler society, is a process whereby “dissonant publics unsettle and reconfigure settler colonial imaginaries, temporalities, and futurities.”⁴¹ Difficult knowledge can be an effective way to decolonise classrooms, although educators who seek to use it will face challenges: it may require the use of Indigenous epistemologies (which is problematic when taught by settler educators); and teachers will likely encounter significant resistance from students. While these educators consider how to teach difficult knowledge within the context of the TRC, they do not examine the TRC itself or the degree to which it produces difficult knowledge. My dissertation fills this gap in the research by focusing specifically on the TRC (Chapter IV), with special attention to the way its final report produces difficult (or reproduces lovely) knowledge.

Epistemological collisions between difficult knowledge (i.e. subjugated or marginalised knowledges) and dominant systems of knowledge are likely to occur at sites of public memory. Roger Simon and his colleagues contend that practices of commemoration and remembrance are inherently resistant to encounters with difficult knowledge. They explain that commemoration is a conservative practice because its purpose is to interpret historical events in light of their contemporary significance and, thereby, create a sense of continuity between the past and present. Memory is therefore resistant to knowledge that challenges dominant identities,

⁴¹ Lisa Karen Taylor, “Pedagogies of Remembrance and ‘Doing Critical Heritage’ in the Teaching of History: Counter-memorializing Canada 150 with Future Teachers,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 52, no. 1 (2018): 219.

relationships, or interpretations of history.⁴² McConaghy shows that this sort of resistance occurs at colonial museums in Australia. Curators for Australian history museums tend to erase histories of colonial violence because these histories threaten to disrupt national identity and memory.⁴³ However, memory is not always resistant to difficult knowledge and, in fact, difficult commemoration can be an effective way to transform present and future relationships. Roger Simon proposes that the memory of historical violence can be “a terrible gift” from the past to the present that “offers 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.”⁴⁴ For example, Cynthia Milton demonstrates how public monuments can physically embody difficult knowledge. She documents the Peruvian *Ojo que llora* (Eye that Cries), a monument to the victims of national conflict, and the way some groups have repeatedly defaced the monument while others have rewritten memory onto it. In other words, the public physically reinscribes the monument with layers of memory and violence so it becomes “a tangible working out of conflicting memories” in Peruvian national memory.⁴⁵ In sum, public memorials are contested sites where people compete over the interpretation of historical events. They often frame history in a way that promotes the interests of dominant institutions, authorities, or social groups – especially national sites – and are therefore likely to reproduce comforting narratives and lovely knowledge. As public sites, however, people can also impose alternative interpretations of the past upon them, and they may therefore be ideal locations to encounter

⁴² Roger I. Simon, Claudia Eppert, Mark Clamen, and Laura Beres, “Witness as Study: The Difficult Inheritance of Testimony,” *Review of Pedagogy, Education, and Cultural Studies* 22, no. 4 (2000).

⁴³ McConaghy, “On Pedagogy, Trauma and Difficult Memory.”

⁴⁴ Roger I. Simon, “The Terrible Gift: Museums and the Possibility of Hope without Consolation,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 21, no. 3 (2006), 189.

⁴⁵ Cynthia E. Milton, “Defacing Memory: (Un)tying Peru’s Memory Knots,” in *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places*, edited by Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E. Milton, and Monica Eileen Patterson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 163.

difficult knowledge and bring about social change. By exploring memorial struggles at three national sites, I contribute to this scholarship by comparing the different ways (that is, the various techniques) people use to produce difficult and lovely knowledges at memorial sites.

Museums can be sites where diverse publics encounter, and are potentially transformed by, difficult knowledge. Unlike classrooms and other sites of formal education that work to socialise specific groups (usually youths), museums expose more diverse audiences to potentially difficult knowledge. Furthermore, museums may be especially effective at stimulating social change because they tend to exist at the nexus of individual and collective action. While museums generally act upon and educate individual visitors, their content is usually directed more broadly at a larger public (in the case of national museums, they target national and sometimes international publics). In this way, museums presume that individual encounters with particular content can play a role in shaping collective identities. Erica Lehrer and Cynthia Milton suggest that museums can produce social change because they exist at the intersection of multiple domains – academic, political, artistic, etc. – and enable dialogue between them. They consider the possibilities of “curating difficult knowledge” at museums and other sites of public memory. Lehrer and Milton explain that “to curate” comes from the Latin meaning “to care for” and therefore describe “curation not only as selection, design, and interpretation, but as care-taking – as a kind of intimate, intersubjective, interrelational obligation.”⁴⁶ Borrowing a term from theatre and cinema, Simon contends that curating difficult knowledge depends largely on the “mise-en-scène” of a museum exhibition. He proposes that curators shape the mise-en-scène by making decisions regarding:

⁴⁶ Erica Lehrer and Cynthia E. Milton, “Introduction: Witnesses to Witnessing,” in *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places*, edited by Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E. Milton, and Monica Eileen Patterson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4.

what is to be shown, the placement of such in space, the discursive environment that will inscribe that space and the materials in it (including such texts as object or image labels, brochures, and press releases), and the ‘programming’ initiated to dialectically foster thought and understanding in a manner that might make evident shared concerns and various perspectives held by people visiting a given exhibit.⁴⁷

Simon also suggests that there is a performative element to curating difficult knowledge:

an exhibition *mise-en-scène* is here to be understood as a material social practice that enables (but also can obstruct) various forms of thought and social relationships. In other words, an exhibition *mise-en-scène* is potentially constitutive of subjectivity and sociality.⁴⁸

Museum exhibitions – and whether they engage the public with difficult knowledge – depend on many factors including not just exhibit content, but also the arrangement of that content in museum space, as well as the intentions and actions of both curators and visitors.⁴⁹ Elsewhere, Simon addresses how one might distinguish difficult from lovely knowledge in museum space. He suggests that curators can approach commemoration in several ways: memory can affirm existing social identities and values, or it can provoke new interpretations of the past that require the transformation of social relationships. While the former approach reproduces lovely knowledge, the latter practice can facilitate transformative encounters with difficult knowledge.⁵⁰ In Chapter VI, I examine the *mise-en-scène* of the CMHR – its architecture, artefacts, artwork, text, use of space, programming, etc. – and the way these factors converge to generate difficult knowledge or reproduce lovely knowledge.

Many museums prefer to frame content in a way that conveys lovely knowledge. Because they often promote state interests, national museums in particular may be resistant to knowledge that challenges state authority and national identity. Amy Sodaro considers how the Kigali

⁴⁷ Simon, *A Pedagogy of Witnessing*, 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁹ Simon, “A Shock to Thought”; Simon, *A Pedagogy of Witnessing*.

⁵⁰ Roger I. Simon, “Museums, Civic Life, and Educative Force of Remembrance,” *Journal of Museum Education* 31, no. 2 (2006).

Memorial Centre focuses on the history of Rwandan violence and genocide but does so in a way that fails to challenge dominant national narratives. She argues that “the current regime [uses the museum] to legitimate its anti-democratic policies and advance its political agenda, often at the expense of the victims and survivors.”⁵¹ Avner Segall compares how two national American museums – the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) – mediate difficult knowledge. Although these museums address violent histories that curators can potentially frame as difficult knowledge, both represent content in a way that mitigates difficult encounters: the NMAI obscures the ongoing history of colonialism in the United States; and the USHMM acknowledges difficult histories but ultimately integrates them into a larger and more comforting narrative of hope and redemption. Furthermore, both museums create distance between visitors and difficult knowledge by locating violent histories in the past, failing to implicate visitors in violence, and eliminating the need for visitors to feel responsible or accountable for violence.⁵²

However, some museums are moving towards the representation of difficult knowledge. Julia Rose addresses historical plantation museums in the United States. While these museums tend to privilege the history of white planter families and erase or dehumanise the histories of enslaved workers, some are refocusing their tours towards the experiences of black slaves. This shift can disrupt hegemonic interpretations of these sites by forcing both museum workers and visitors to reconsider the “iconic meaning of the historical sites.”⁵³ Vivienne Szekeres argues that the Migration Museum in Adelaide, Australia, produces difficult knowledge by focusing on the

⁵¹ Amy Sodaro, “Politics of the Past: Remembering the Rwandan Genocide at the Kigali Memorial Centre,” in *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places*, edited by Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E. Milton, and Monica Eileen Patterson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 73-74.

⁵² Avner Segall, “Making Difficult History Public: The Pedagogy of Remembering and Forgetting in Tow Washington DC Museums,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 36 (2014).

⁵³ Julia Anne Rose, “Rethinking Representations of Slave Life at Historical Plantation Museums: Towards a Commemorative Museum Pedagogy” (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 2006).

social histories of marginalised groups, especially the histories of refugees and Indigenous peoples.⁵⁴ Yet it is also important to consider that difficult knowledge is not always desirable. Heather Igloliorte explains her decision-making process while curating *'We were so far away'*, a travelling exhibition that uses oral histories to represent the experiences of Inuit people in Residential Schools. While the history of Residential Schools can challenge dominant colonial narratives and become difficult knowledge for settler Canadians, Igloliorte directs her exhibit toward a primarily Inuit audience, many of whom are survivors or intergenerational survivors. Igloliorte consequently adopted “protection” as a guiding principle and sought to minimise distress: she included warnings about exhibit content, ensured that health care professionals were on site, and sought to preserve and protect Inuit culture.⁵⁵ As museums increasingly seek to engage with difficult knowledge, it is important to identify the particular techniques that curators use to stimulate or prevent transformative encounters for museum visitors. Such research will provide curators with a repertoire of practical techniques to use when representing difficult knowledge, as well as techniques that can help to avoid difficult or traumatising encounters when necessary. This dissertation contributes to this research by defining several distinct ways that curators, educators, and researchers create difficult knowledge, with particular emphasis on the techniques used at the CMHR (Chapters V and VI). I identify some of the ways – both intentional and unintentional – that curators produce difficult and lovely knowledges, consider when difficult knowledge might be desirable in galleries and exhibits, as well as those instances where lovely knowledge may be preferable.

⁵⁴ Vivienne Szekeres, “The Past Is a Dangerous Place: The Museum As a Safe Haven,” in *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places*, edited by Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E. Milton, and Monica Eileen Patterson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁵⁵ Heather Igloliorte, “‘We were so far away’: Exhibiting Inuit Oral Histories of Residential Schools,” in *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places*, edited by Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E. Milton, and Monica Eileen Patterson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Based on my review of the scholarship on difficult knowledge, I contend that researchers can use the theory of difficult knowledge as a research methodology – and possibly as a decolonising methodology – although this approach has certain limitations. Methodologies are theories of knowledge that comprise the epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions people use to determine what constitutes knowledge, how knowledge becomes meaningful, and ways to gather, analyse, and interpret knowledge.⁵⁶ In this sense, I suggest, difficult knowledge is a distinct methodological framework: it posits that knowledge is rooted in narrative and symbolic representation; and it explains that knowledge is transmitted and interpreted via traumatic encounters with marginalised narratives. Furthermore, difficult knowledge has the potential to disrupt and destabilise dominant identities and worldviews, especially those that are rooted in patriarchal, racist, and colonial power relations – that is, it has a potential to operate in a decolonising way. Researchers can therefore use the theory of difficult knowledge to interpret, analyse, and critique museums, monuments, and other sites of history and memory. When using the theory of difficult knowledge as a research methodology, research will need to do several things: define lovely knowledge for a person or community; explore the symbolic and narrative techniques through which memorial sites reproduce this knowledge; locate subversive or marginalised counter-narratives; and observe how these narratives – the lovely and the potentially difficult – rub against each other to create consonance or dissonance. Most scholars use difficult knowledge as a pedagogical framework in educational contexts such as classrooms and museums, but do not position it as a critical research methodology. And while many use it as the basis for antiracist and anticolonial pedagogies, they do not explicitly situate it as a decolonising methodology. My study contributes to the research on difficult knowledge by

⁵⁶ Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 76-9.

filling these gaps. I treat the theory of difficult knowledge as a decolonising methodology that researchers can use to identify and challenge – and potentially subvert and transform – settler mythologies and, thereby, colonial power dynamics. In the remaining chapters, I use three case studies to demonstrate how researchers can apply this approach at historical and commemorative sites.

When using the theory of difficult knowledge as a pedagogical or methodological framework, it is important to consider a few factors – namely, that difficult knowledge is unpredictable and never absolute. Encounters with difficult knowledge depend on a number of symbolic elements such as the content of a specific history or memory, as well as its narrative representation. They also depend on personal factors including a person’s identity and worldview, willingness and ability to engage with difficult narratives, and ability to resolve (or avoid resolving) new knowledge into existing worldviews. Furthermore, encounters with difficult knowledge are emotional experiences that can trigger strong affective responses.⁵⁷ In short, encounters with difficult knowledge are personal experiences. Many of these elements – experience, affect and emotion, identity, symbolic representation – cannot be measured or quantified. This has implications for a methodology rooted in the theory of difficult knowledge. It means that difficult knowledge is not universal: it is impossible to define specific events, histories, or narratives as inherently difficult; likewise, a narrative that is difficult for one person might be lovely for another. It also means that the study of difficult knowledge is not a scientific process that can reach positive conclusions; rather, it is a critical process that challenges

⁵⁷ Michalinos Zembylas, “Teacher Resistance to Engage with ‘Alternative’ Perspectives of Difficult Histories: The Limits and Prospects of Affective Disruption,” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 38, no. 5 (2017).

dominant practices.⁵⁸ That being said, it is possible to consider which histories or narratives are likely to be difficult (but only in respect to a particular community), or speculate when someone has had a transformative encounter with subversive knowledge. For this reason, when I talk about difficult knowledge in Chapters III, IV, and V, I am referring primarily to the *potential* for difficult knowledge. Difficult knowledge must be read in context, will manifest differently for each person, and researchers cannot authoritatively speak about the experiences of others. This is also why, in Chapter VI, I turn to my own experience with lovely and difficult knowledges at the CMHR. This approach enables me to consider what difficult or lovely encounters might look like without appropriating the experiences of others.

Researchers who decide to use the theory of difficult knowledge as a methodological and analytical tool must also consider its limitations – especially in regards to its usefulness as a decolonising methodology. First, the theory of difficult knowledge is rooted in psychoanalytic theory and therefore focuses on the psychic processes of the individual: difficult knowledge is usually a product of personal encounters with challenging narratives, acts upon an individual's identity and worldview, and facilitates transformation of the self. While many scholars maintain that difficult knowledge can promote radical social change, this change is often a product of widespread individual transformation (i.e. social change occurs when many individuals are transformed in classrooms, at museums, and so on). This is problematic because the concept of individuality is a Western ideology. The theory of difficult knowledge may therefore reproduce Eurocentrism by focusing on personal transformation and framing the individual as the basic unit of society. Researchers should therefore remain wary of difficult knowledge, particularly when using it to disrupt Eurocentric orders and colonial relations. However, individual transformation

⁵⁸ In this sense, science works within a set of defined rules to reach positivist conclusions. Critique, on the other hand, examines and challenges the rules themselves.

can be an important part of decolonisation. Frantz Fanon, a trained psychiatrist, argues that colonialism produces a certain kind of subject – a colonised subject with distinctive psychological characteristics.⁵⁹ In this way, colonialism operates as both an individual and a structural process.⁶⁰ This means that decolonisation must occur in part (though not entirely) at the individual level and that the transformation of individual patterns – the psychic conditions that characterise colonial subjects – can help to disrupt and transform structural patterns. Indeed, my analysis considers how people can use difficult knowledge to transform both individual identities and the hegemonic cultural narratives that sustain them. Moreover, difficult knowledge may be especially useful to disrupt settler identities, since settler colonialism is a Western phenomenon and therefore presumes the ideology of individuality. Difficult knowledge may act upon individual identities and transform them in a way that subverts, for instance, perceptions of the self as individual.

The theory of difficult knowledge is also problematic, or at least limited, when applied to Indigenous and other non-Western peoples. In regards to a travelling exhibit on Inuit experiences of Residential Schools, Igloliorte explains that curators were careful to frame content in a way that did not re-traumatise survivors.⁶¹ This is because exhibit organisers did not want visitors to encounter challenging or traumatic narratives – difficult knowledge was not a goal of the exhibit. This raises several important points about difficult and lovely knowledges. First, difficult knowledge is not always desirable, especially for people suffering from existing traumas. Second, difficult and lovely knowledges always exist in relation to a particular person or people.

⁵⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 249-53.

⁶⁰ For example, Fanon writes: “The defensive attitudes created by this violent bringing together of the colonized man and the colonial system form themselves into a structure which then reveals the colonized personality” (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 250). Fanon focuses primarily on the psychic condition of colonised people, although it is possible to view colonisers as a particular type of subject who manifest distinctive psychic characteristics.

⁶¹ Igloliorte, “Exhibiting Inuit Oral Histories of Residential Schools.”

As stated earlier, theorists tend to define difficult knowledge by its effect, not by its content: knowledge becomes difficult when it disrupts a person's sense of coherence and, thereby, transforms identities and worldviews. In this way, the history and legacy of Residential Schools might be difficult for settlers (since it reveals violence perpetrated by the Canadian state) but not necessarily for Indigenous people (who may be less surprised by state violence). Similarly, the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in a national museum may be difficult for settler visitors, but not necessarily for Indigenous visitors (I explore this point in Chapter VI). To be sure, the history of Residential Schools may be upsetting and traumatising for Indigenous viewers, though it is not necessarily difficult since it may not disrupt their worldviews. Curators and educators must therefore be careful how they frame violent histories such as Residential Schools, especially at sites where both settlers and Indigenous people are likely to visit. (Representing Indigenous knowledges may have less risk of traumatising Indigenous visitors). In this dissertation, I focus on the production of difficult knowledge for settler Canadians. I take this approach because, to quote Roger Epp, Canada does not have an "Indian problem" but rather a "settler problem."⁶² As such, it is primarily settlers who need to change.⁶³ In doing so, however, I recognise that what might constitute difficult knowledge for settlers – such as histories of state violence against Indigenous peoples – are not necessarily difficult for Indigenous viewers and may in fact be traumatic in unproductive ways.

Finally, it is important to stress that difficult knowledge does not necessarily follow a progressive telos. Encounters with difficult knowledge are transformative experiences that work

⁶² Roger Epp, "We Are All Treaty People: History, Reconciliation, and the 'Settler Problem'," in *Dilemmas of Reconciliation: Cases and Concepts*, eds. Carol A. L. Prager and Trudy Govier (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2003), 228.

⁶³ However, Fanon contends that colonised people internalise their own oppression. From this perspective, it is necessary to transform both colonisers and the colonised.

to disrupt and restructure dominant identities and worldviews. This sort of transformation, however, is not always for the better. To be clear, most of those scholars who develop the theory and practice of difficult knowledge seek to use it in a way that changes people in a positive way – that is, to improve people, however that may be defined. I situate myself amongst these scholars: my analysis explores how difficult knowledge can destabilise oppressive identities, worldviews, and social relations that are rooted in settler colonialism. Yet difficult knowledge is a variable, dynamic, and unpredictable process, and it may be challenging for educators and curators to steer transformations in a particular direction. On one hand, encounters with difficult knowledge may generate subjects who are less likely to reproduce oppressive power relations; on the other hand, these encounters can also create subjects who reproduce different, albeit equally oppressive, power relations. In other words, educators can use difficult knowledge to transform people into democratic, decolonial, or anti-racist subjects, but they can also use it to produce totalitarian, exploitative, and racist subjects. In addition, there is also the chance (and, in fact, likelihood) that people will resist encounters with knowledge that is potentially difficult. It is therefore crucial that researchers avoid viewing difficult knowledge as a sort of Hegelian dialectic that compels human history in a particular direction and, instead, treat it as an ongoing and anarchic process that always contains many possible outcomes.

The theory of difficult knowledge has limitations, especially as a decolonising methodology, although it remains useful as an analytical framework. While Britzman originally developed the theory as a psychoanalytic framework that operates primarily at the individual level, this sort of approach is a crucial part of decolonisation. According to Fanon, colonial social structures produce colonial subjects with distinctive psychic patterns, and decolonisation must work in part by transforming these subjectivities; in this way, individual change is a crucial albeit

partial aspect of decolonisation and social change. The theory of difficult knowledge, especially as formulated by Britzman, can work to transform the identities and worldviews of individual people. However, other scholars have more recently suggested that difficult knowledge can also operate at the social and structural levels: it can transform the identities and worldviews of both individuals and collectives, and it may also act on the larger structures that sustain these identities, such as myth. Indeed, an objective of this dissertation is to demonstrate how the theory and practice of difficult knowledge can act upon, disrupt, and transform settler colonial mythologies – especially as this mythology manifest at national memorial sites. I accomplish this by deviating from the pedagogy of difficult knowledge – which guides much of the scholarship – and focusing instead on the research methodology of difficult knowledge. The theory of difficult knowledge, when used by researchers as an analytical and critical framework, can help to illuminate the power relations of settler colonial societies (Chapter I): both difficult knowledge and settler colonialism are sustained by narrative; both manifest as struggle; and these struggles may be productive sites of social change. While it is impossible to know (or ensure) a particular outcome in advance, the result will nevertheless disrupt the status quo in some way. And as I demonstrate through my analysis, the theory of difficult knowledge can provide insight regarding national sites of history and memory. In particular, I argue that, by exploring these sites through the analytical lens of difficult knowledge, researchers can expose ideologies that are often invisible or unconscious. That is, the theory can help researchers critique the power dynamics involved in memory production.

In this dissertation, I contribute to and expand upon the existing scholarship on difficult knowledge by comparing how different memorial sites produce (the potential for) difficult and lovely knowledges about settler colonialism. According to this scholarship, people are likely to

encounter difficult knowledge at sites of public memory, especially those that address genocide and other instances of extreme violence. While the NHM and TRC both address histories and memories of genocide, there is no research that considers them from the perspective of difficult knowledge. My project fills this gap by exploring the extent to which each site produces difficult and lovely knowledges, as well as the techniques through which they achieve this. (I review the scholarship on the CMHR in the final section of this chapter). My research is also unique in that, while many scholars explore the relationship between genocide and difficult knowledge, I also emphasise that histories of genocide can be sites of lovely knowledge. That is, my study explores how these sites both disrupt and reproduce dominant narratives. Furthermore, my analysis expands on the scholarship that considers how difficult knowledge can illuminate and disrupt unequal or oppressive power relations, and it especially develops the research that focuses on settler colonial contexts. In each case study, I explore how memorial sites use difficult and lovely knowledges to resist and reproduce settler colonial narratives, with particular attention to myths and narratives in Canada. I also uniquely suggest that researchers can use the theory of difficult knowledge as a decolonising methodology that can work to illuminate colonial identities, worldviews, and social relations. Finally, my research contributes to the scholarship on difficult knowledge through its comparative approach. This dissertation compares and contrasts three distinct sites – the CMHR, TRC, and NHM – each of which address either the Holocaust or Residential Schools. In doing so, I show how the same histories can be the basis for difficult knowledge and lovely knowledge and, in addition, how the same narratives can simultaneously embody the potential for both difficult and lovely knowledges. By exploring three different sites (and for the CMHR, multiple sites within the same museum), I am also able to identify and

compare the particular techniques that educators, curators, commissions, designers, and so on use to conjure difficult and lovely knowledges.

Difficult knowledge always operates in response and in opposition to lovely knowledge: it is likely to manifest when marginalised narratives subvert dominant ones. Before addressing whether memorial sites in Canada produce difficult knowledge, then, it is necessary to consider what might constitute lovely knowledge. In the following section, I describe the dominant Canadian myth – an oppressive myth that is rooted in settler colonialism and remains largely unquestioned by settler society – which I define as lovely knowledge.

National Mythology in Canada

Canada's national mythology is shaped by the intersection of transnational and national histories: it is in part the product of settler colonialism as well as the product of settlement in the geographic region known today as Canada. According to Paulette Regan, this myth can be summarised most simply as “the foundational myth of the benevolent peacemaker,” in which settlers used British law to peacefully transform the land and its inhabitants into a civilised society.⁶⁴ This narrative formulation is a useful starting point, although it does not fully capture the multiplicity of interrelated themes that constitute the national mythos. This section surveys the scholarly literature on national mythology in Canada. Scholars identify several key narratives or myths that I place into six thematic categories: civilisational progress; indigenisation of the settler; Indigenous erasure; lawful peacemaking; white supremacy; and the frontier. This mythology constitutes lovely knowledge for settler society in Canada. My review demonstrates that, while it is possible to identify several distinct myths, these myths (or mythical themes, as I

⁶⁴ Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 11.

refer to them) are interconnected components of a larger mythical framework (which I refer to as the national or Canadian myth). It is worth addressing this scholarship in detail because these themes become the criteria that I use in the following chapters to determine whether certain narratives reproduce or resist the national myth: narratives that uncritically rely on these themes may be responsible for reproducing the national myth (and are likely to be lovely knowledge); narratives that challenge these themes likely resist the national myth (and are likely to become difficult knowledge).

Settler colonialism generates a distinct narrative structure defined by linear progress. In his theoretical exploration *Settler Colonialism*, Lorenzo Veracini distinguishes between colonialism and settler colonialism and contends that each has a unique narrative form. In colonialism, a centralised political body – usually located in Europe – dominates political bodies located elsewhere; that is, political sovereignty is external to a colonised territory. Settler colonialism, on the other hand, entails transplanting and (re)creating a political body in a new territory; sovereignty is internal to a settler colony. Distinctive narratives emerge from the relationship between the coloniser and the location of sovereign power. From the coloniser’s perspective, colonial narratives have a closed structure based on departure, encounter, and return: “Colonial narratives normally have a circular form; they represent an *Odyssey* consisting of an outward movement followed by an interaction with exotic and colonised Others in foreign surroundings, and by a final return to an original locale.”⁶⁵ In contrast, settler colonial narratives have an open and linear structure “where the settler coloniser moves forward along a story line that cannot be turned back.”⁶⁶ The trajectory of this progress, as Regan observes, is towards civilisation: as colonisers settle a new territory, they gradually transform savage peoples and

⁶⁵ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 96.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

lands into a civilised society.⁶⁷ The basic narrative structure of settler mythology is of forward moving progress where the settler leaves their land of origin, arrives in and settles a new land, and transforms it in their own image. This settler colonial narrative – the linear movement from savagery to civilisation – is the mythical element that I refer to as the theme of civilisational progress: Canada’s national mythology, as a settler colony, is rooted in this narrative.

This narrative of settlement contains several overlapping and parallel trajectories that together culminate with the indigenisation of the settler. Veracini argues that settlers conceive of their linear spatial movement from imperial centre to colony as a return to land. This return also entails the restoration of a state of primordial purity: “settlers construe their very movement as a ‘return’ to something that was irretrievably lost: a return to the land, but also a return to an Edenic condition.”⁶⁸ Settlers aim to (re)emerge as the original inhabitants of a new territory by transforming both themselves and the landscape to a state of purity. This process entails the symbolic and/or physical erasure of Indigenous peoples from the land.⁶⁹ Emma Lowman and Adam Barker identify “three main pillars” of the settler’s transformation: structural invasion; permanent settlement; and that “the end goal of settler colonialism [is] transcending colonialism.”⁷⁰ The third pillar demands that “Indigenous peoples are eliminated and the presence of this new people – the settler society – becomes so deeply established that it is naturalized, normalized, unquestioned and unchallenged.”⁷¹ That is, settler society aims first to erase Indigenous peoples and then replace them, and thereby transcend their settler status and become the “natural” inhabitants of land. This is a process that Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson

⁶⁷ Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 85-6.

⁶⁸ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 98-99.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

⁷⁰ Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker, *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2015), 26.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

define as the “indigenisation of the settler.” The settler does not become indigenous in the same way as Indigenous peoples; rather, indigenisation is a process through which “the settler mimics, appropriates, and desires, the authority of the indigene” in an attempt to create a sense of legitimate belonging.⁷² Lowman and Barker describe several ways that settlers move towards indigenisation: writing new stories of belonging and origin; claiming Indigenous genealogy (i.e. claiming Indigenous ancestry, or receiving Indigenous blessing); or the appropriation of Indigenous beliefs, practices, and symbols.⁷³ In sum, the settler narrative is linear and progressive in form, but also contains multiple progressions: a spatial movement from empire to colony; an historical movement from savagery to civilisation; and an existential movement from settler to Indigene. Together, these movements define the teleological arc and endpoint of the settler narrative, namely, when the settler transcends settler colonialism to become the legitimate and sole inhabitant of land. Like the theme of civilisational progress, the process of indigenisation is similarly rooted in the linear and progressive narrative of settler colonialism. Following Johnston and Lawson, I refer to the narrative movement from settler to Indigene as the theme of indigenisation of the settler (or settler indigenisation).

As suggested above, settlers aim both to replace Indigenous peoples as well as erase them. For this reason, genocide, and especially the denial of genocide, is an important element of settler mythology. Patrick Wolfe suggests that settler colonialism has a potentially genocidal logic. He argues that coloniser and colonised share a “negative” relationship whereby “the [settler colonial] logic of elimination seeks to replace indigenous society with that imported by

⁷² Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson, “Settler Colonies,” in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 369.

⁷³ Lowman and Barker, *Settler*, 31-47, 58-68. Also see Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012).

the colonisers.”⁷⁴ This logic can become genocidal if settlers use it to justify the murder or cultural destruction (which can include any disruption to Indigenous ways of life, including the destruction of land⁷⁵) of Indigenous peoples. Yet settlers do not view their project as genocidal. Rather, settler mythology frames the erasure of Indigenous peoples as inevitable: progress is unavoidable, and progress dictates that Indigenous peoples are a disappearing race. In other words, settler societies naturalise the elimination of Indigenous peoples by framing it as a consequence of historical progress. Veracini identifies a contradiction in the settler psyche: while settler colonialism is a socio-historical process rooted in “founding violence” and the genocidal destruction of Indigenous peoples, settler mythology requires the denial of any such violence.⁷⁶ Settler mythology can therefore become especially salient when settler societies confront accusations of genocide. In Australia, for example, the History Wars are an ongoing debate amongst the political and academic elite regarding whether “genocide” is an appropriate way to describe the Stolen Generations⁷⁷ in particular and Australian settlement in general. Many scholars and activists conclude that Australian settlers committed genocide against Indigenous peoples, although politicians, journalists, and the general public have been hesitant to accept this conclusion.⁷⁸ Accusations of genocide⁷⁹ challenge the Australian mythos and undermine state legitimacy: the claim that settler society perpetrated genocide against Indigenous peoples

⁷⁴ Patrick Wolfe, “Nation and Miscegenation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era,” *Social Analysis* 36 (1994): 93.

⁷⁵ Jennifer Huseman and Damien Short, “‘A Slow Industrial Genocide’: Tar Sands and the Indigenous Peoples of Northern Alberta,” *International Journal of Human Rights* 16, no. 1 (2012).

⁷⁶ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 76-86.

⁷⁷ The state removal of Indigenous Australian children from their families between approximately 1900 and the 1970s.

⁷⁸ A. Dirk Moses, “Coming to Terms with Genocidal Pasts in Comparative Perspective: Germany and Australia,” *Aboriginal History* 25 (2001); A. Dirk Moses, “Genocide and Holocaust Consciousness in Australia,” *History Compass* 1 (2003); A. Dirk Moses, “Moving the Genocide Debate beyond the History Wars,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 54, no. 2 (2008); Colin Tatz, “Confronting Australian Genocide,” *Aboriginal History* 25 (2001).

⁷⁹ Accusations of genocide tend to suggest that the perpetrating group had a genocidal *intent*. Settler mythology does not deny that Indigenous peoples have disappeared or are disappearing, but it does deny that settler society is intentionally responsible for this disappearance.

contradicts the myth that settlers rightfully and lawfully founded the state on an emptied or emptying land.⁸⁰ The settler impulse to eliminate Indigenous peoples – a process that is potentially and in some cases actually genocidal – comprises the mythical theme I refer to as Indigenous erasure (I discuss the theme of Indigenous erasure in more detail later in this section). Debates surrounding genocide in settler states are therefore important entry points into settler mythology, and scholars can use these debates to explore shifts in the national mythos. As I observed in Chapter I, there is relatively little research on genocide commemoration in Canada, particularly in respect to the way memories of Indigenous genocide and other genocides interact. There is a need for scholars to examine the way Canadians commemorate genocide at national sites and, especially, if and how these memorial practices contribute to the erasure of Indigenous peoples.

In Canada, settler narratives manifests as the benevolent peacemaker myth, which Regan describes:

we [settler Canadians] cast ourselves in the role of benevolent peacemakers – neutral arbiters of British law and justice, Christian messengers of the peaceable Kingdom – who collaborated together in various ways to negotiate treaties and implement Indian policy intended to bestow upon Indigenous people the generous benefits or gifts of peace, order, good government, and Western education that were the hallmarks of the colonial project of civilizing ‘savages.’⁸¹

The benevolent peacemaker myth frames Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians in distinct roles: Indigenous peoples are lawless savages, but also the passive and powerless “victims of progress” who must be saved by the Canadian state (or British empire);⁸² European settlers are responsible for saving savages by imposing Western order as it is embodied in British law,

⁸⁰ Moses, “Coming to Terms with Genocidal Pasts”; Rowan Savage, “The Political Uses of Death-as-Finality in Genocide Denial: The Stolen Generations and the Holocaust,” *Borderlands* 12, no. 1 (2013).

⁸¹ Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 83.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 86.

religion, and education. According to this myth, British law is a gift that settlers bring to North America, bestow upon primitive people and land, and thereby peacefully transform the landscape into a just, orderly, and civilised society. Regan points out that the “peacemaker” element of this myth is unique to Canadian settlement because it is distinct from, and often constructed in contrast to, the American myth of settlement as violent conquest.⁸³ Similarly, Sunera Thobani argues that Canada’s overarching national myth emphasises “the essentially law-abiding character of its enterprising nationals, who are present (for the most part) as responsible citizens, compassionate, caring and committed to the values of diversity and multiculturalism.”⁸⁴ Canadian nationals – which Thobani defines as inherently non-Indigenous and non-immigrant – defend the nation against the “virulent, chaotic, criminal, and sometimes even deadly” Others who threaten to undermine the order and stability of the nation-state: the Indigenous Other threatens the nation-state with its “unending demands for special treatment in their claims to land” while the immigrant Other threatens with its “backward cultural practices.”⁸⁵ Rather than controlling non-Canadian Others with violence, nationals govern them through peaceful means, in particular by regulating identities so that non-Canadians remain fundamentally outside the national sphere.⁸⁶ According to Scott See, Canadians use these attitudes to construct the country as a “peaceable kingdom” where civility and social stability dominate, especially in contrast to the violent and revolutionary United States.⁸⁷ Moreover, Canadians have maintained this myth since before Confederation despite the country’s regular participation in armed conflict both at home and abroad. In sum, the broad settler narrative of civilisational progress manifests uniquely

⁸³ Ibid., 83-110.

⁸⁴ Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 4.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 3-29.

⁸⁷ Scott W. See, “The Intellectual Construction of Canada’s ‘Peaceable Kingdom’ Ideal,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 52, no. 2 (2018).

in Canada as the myth (or the mythical theme, as I frame it) of lawful peacemaking – an especially durable narrative that has endured against a wealth of evidence to the contrary.

The theme of peacemaking requires an implicit (and sometimes explicit) belief in European, and especially British, superiority. Thobani's main argument is that Canadians use processes of racial othering to construct a national identity as "exalted subjects" who "belong[...] to a higher order of humanity" and are superior especially to Indigenous peoples and non-white immigrants.⁸⁸ Daniel Francis identifies the Mountie as the primary symbol of peacemaking and white supremacy: the Mountie used British law to tame the Wild West and its inhabitants by "subduing the fiery spirit of the Indian and making the West safe for settlement."⁸⁹ The Mountie represents the continued importance of law and order in Canadian society and is a dominant symbol at national celebrations: he embodies the superiority of British law, a willing subservience to law, and the role of law in achieving progress and civilisation.⁹⁰ Yet Canadians do not only deem British law as superior. The settler mythos conceives of the British way of life as superior, including the British race, language, morals, education, and forms of government.⁹¹ Canadians in the past were often explicit about their belief in British superiority, and Thobani argues that racialisation remains an important process in the formation of Canadian identity.⁹² Francis points out that racist attitudes persist through the continued dominance of British language, laws, education systems, and political institutions. They also manifest in attitudes towards the United States, whose national identity is based largely on the its independence from the British Empire: Canadians share an "anti-American" sentiment whereby they conceive of

⁸⁸ Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 248.

⁸⁹ Daniel Francis, *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997), 30.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29-51.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 52-87.

⁹² Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 18-23.

Americans as “headstrong, unstable, and indulgent.”⁹³ Gérard Bouchard suggests that Canadians use the ideals of “innocence and public virtue” to construct Canada as a “world model” and “morally superior” people, especially in contrast to the United States.⁹⁴ I classify this belief in the superiority of Canadian/British people and ways of life over Indigenous peoples, non-white immigrants, and American nationals as the mythical theme of white supremacy.

The peacemaker myth predicts that those groups further down the racial hierarchy – and especially Indigenous peoples – will disappear as Canada progresses toward civilisation. Canadians narrate the “peaceful” erasure of Indigenous peoples in several ways.⁹⁵ The most straightforward way to erase Indigenous peoples from mainstream consciousness is simply by ignoring them when writing narratives of national history, such as those presented in school textbooks.⁹⁶ But other narratives more explicitly construct Indigenous peoples as a disappearing race. One is the discourse of assimilation. Settlers in the 19th century presumed that Indigenous peoples were a dying race doomed to physical extinction. Settlers in the following centuries do not necessarily predict the physical extinction of Indigenous peoples, however, but rather assume that Indigenous peoples will (or should) assimilate into mainstream settler society.⁹⁷ Through assimilation, settler societies can destroy Indigenous peoples as distinct socio-cultural groups – i.e. destroy their “savageness” – without any overt violence to them as physical or biological

⁹³ Francis, *National Dreams*, 86-87.

⁹⁴ Gérard Bouchard, “National Myths: An Overview,” in *National Myths: Constructed Pasts, Contested Presents*, edited by Gérard Bouchard (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 279-281.

⁹⁵ The myth of peacemaking presumes that erasure was not a violent process. It is therefore worth distinguishing between explicit/physical violence and symbolic/epistemic violence. Explicit/physical violence entails direct harm to bodies, such as physical or sexual abuse in Residential Schools. Symbolic/epistemic violence can include non-physical acts of harm, such as the censure of Indigenous languages in Residential Schools or teaching children that they are “savages.” Settler colonial violence is both physical and symbolic. Acts of physical violence are generally downplayed in the national mythos, and settlers do not generally view acts of symbolic violence as “real” violence.

⁹⁶ Francis, *National Dreams*, 12-14, 71-72.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

beings.⁹⁸ For example, a key purpose of the Residential School system was to destroy Indigenous peoples as cultural groups by educating them as British subjects (often described as “killing the Indian in the child”⁹⁹). Another example is the White Paper, introduced in 1969 by Minister of Indian Affairs Jean Chretien, which suggested that assimilation was the most effective solution to the “Indian question”: the policy proposed abolishing the *Indian Act*, eliminating “Indian” as a distinct legal category, and applying Canadian law equally to both non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples. Another way to “peacefully” erase Indigenous peoples is to frame them as aspects of nature or wilderness. Francis explains that early settlers viewed Indigenous peoples as elements of the natural world – as part of the land to be exploited – rather than members of humanity. In other words, settlers placed Indigenous peoples so far down the racial hierarchy as to altogether deny their humanity. Settlers thereby construct a narrative of peaceful discovery rather than violent conquest by framing Indigenous peoples within the framework terra nullius¹⁰⁰: “the arrival of Europeans in America was a process of discovery and conquest [of nature], not contact [between nations].”¹⁰¹ From this perspective, one would view the erasure of Indigenous peoples as an act of environmental destruction, but not genocide or other form of human destruction. Settlers today continue to frame Indigenous peoples as “ecologically noble savages” by constructing them as stewards for the environment or as the first

⁹⁸ I do not mean that settlers have not used physical violence against Indigenous peoples in the past or present. Settlers are responsible for a great deal of physical violence against Indigenous peoples, such as physical, mental, spiritual, and sexual abuse in Residential Schools. However, this is usually ignored or downplayed in mainstream discourse in order to maintain the myth of “peaceful” elimination. See my discussion of Senator Lynn Beyak in Chapter I.

⁹⁹ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 11 June 2008, 6850-3.

¹⁰⁰ Terra nullius is Latin for “nobody’s land.” It is a legal principle that enables a state to claim an unowned/unoccupied land by occupying the territory. European colonisers and settlers used this principle to justify the occupation and possession of Indigenous lands, which they deemed terra nullius (and thereby classified Indigenous peoples as “nobody”).

¹⁰¹ Francis, *National Dreams*, 73.

environmentalists.¹⁰² Settler Canadians use these “peaceful” narratives to frame Indigenous peoples as a disappearing race while also avoiding claims that this disappearance is an act of genocide. As I noted earlier in respect to genocide, this belief in the disappearance of Indigenous peoples – whether as part of an intentional or incidental process – constitutes the mythical theme of Indigenous erasure.

The ideology of multiculturalism helps to perpetuate narratives of peacemaking, white supremacy, and Indigenous erasure. Jennifer Adese argues that multiculturalism has replaced (or supplemented) Canadian attitudes about white supremacy. She demonstrates that Canadians use multicultural language to frame settler-Indigenous relations because it implicitly reinscribes earlier myths of “white civility” while evading explicit assertions of white supremacy.¹⁰³ Likewise, Eva Mackey shows how multiculturalism reproduces the belief that Canada is a peaceful and tolerant nation. Mackey describes the “benevolent Mountie myth” which, similar to Regan’s peacemaker myth and Francis’ Mountie myth, frames the expansion and settlement of the West as a peaceful and well-intentioned process.¹⁰⁴ The benevolent Mountie myth overlaps with “the myth of national tolerance,” which Mackey identifies as “the central foundational myth of Canadian nationhood and identity.”¹⁰⁵ According to these two interlocking myths, representatives of the Canadian state encountered various Others (primarily Indigenous peoples but also unruly settlers) as settlement moved westward, and responded to these groups with tolerance and compassion (in contrast to American settlers who responded to Others with violent

¹⁰² Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992), 138-141; Paul Nadasny, “Transcending the Debate over the Ecologically Noble Indian: Indigenous Peoples and Environmentalism,” *Ethnohistory* 52, no. 2 (2005).

¹⁰³ Jennifer Adese, “Colluding with the Enemy? Nationalism and Depictions of ‘Aboriginality’ in Canadian Olympic Moments,” *American Indian Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2012).

¹⁰⁴ Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

suppression). That is, this myth frames the expansion and settlement of Canada as a peaceful process where the state acted generously toward the Indigenous Other. The myth of national tolerance persisted into the post-war period, although the national Other came to include both Indigenous peoples as well as non-white settlers as immigration patterns shifted. “Ordinary Canadians” (i.e. white Canadians) began to use multiculturalism as the dominant way to conceive of their relationship to minorities: “ordinary Canadians” respond to non-white others with tolerance and generosity.¹⁰⁶ The ideology of multiculturalism is therefore a more recent incarnation of the benevolent Mountie myth which “utilises the idea of Canada’s tolerance and justice towards minorities to create national identity.”¹⁰⁷ But this myth also marginalises the Other. Like Adese, Mackey contends that the binary between “ordinary Canadians” and the multicultural Other reproduces an hegemony of whiteness whereby the “white, heterosexual, middle-class male” becomes normalised, naturalised, and ultimately invisible.¹⁰⁸

“multiculturalism implicitly constructs the idea of a core English-Canadian culture, and that other cultures become ‘multicultural’ in relation to that unmarked, yet dominant, Anglo-Canadian core culture.”¹⁰⁹ This myth reproduces the belief in British superiority by constructing English Canada as peaceful in comparison to the “violent” Americans¹¹⁰ and tolerant in comparison to the “racist” Quebecois.¹¹¹ It also requires the continued but passive existence of Indigenous peoples to be “the colourful recipients of benevolence, the necessary ‘others’ who reflect back white Canada’s self-image of tolerance.”¹¹² According to Adese and Mackey, then,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 19-22.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 1.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 15.

¹¹² Ibid., 2.

the Canadian ideology of multiculturalism helps to support and reproduce other mythical themes, in particular the theme of white supremacy.

The frontier is a prominent theme in settler mythology, which can appear in a variety of forms – as the West, the wilderness, or the North. Elizabeth Furniss describes the frontier as a site of encounter between morally opposed forces – in particular between civilisation and savagery – and describes it not as a physical location but rather a metaphorical space where conflicts play out. Within the progressive narrative of Canadian history, agents of civilisation constantly push back the frontier until civilisation defeats savagery, law dominates over chaos, and good ultimately triumphs over evil.¹¹³ Kathleen Ward argues that the frontier emerges in the Canadian psyche as “the West,” which she describes as a primitive realm that continues to recede as it is absorbed into the civilised and lawful East.¹¹⁴

This frontier also manifests in relation to the wilderness and the North. Mackey proposes a “civilisation versus wilderness opposition” which constructs the wilderness as Other: the wilderness is a hostile and savage landscape¹¹⁵ that contrasts with, and thereby defines the boundaries of, civilisation.¹¹⁶ The wilderness provides settlers with the raw materials to build civilisation, national identity, and ultimately to re-define the settler as Indigenous.¹¹⁷ Sheelah McLean argues that the myth of wilderness erases Indigenous presence from the land, re-defines

¹¹³ Elizabeth Furniss, “Pioneers, Progress, and the Myth of the Frontier: The Landscape of Public History in Rural British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 15/16 (1996/97): 9-12; Elizabeth Furniss, *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 17-19.

¹¹⁴ Kathleen Ward, “‘The Land of Rape and Honey’: Settler Colonialism in the Canadian West,” (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2014).

¹¹⁵ Mackey explains that this conceptual landscape is fundamentally “unpeopled” in that it is void of both settlers and Indigenous peoples. This does not necessarily mean that Indigenous presence is absent from the wilderness but rather that settlers conflate Indigenous peoples with the wilderness. The myth of wilderness thereby frames both the land and the Indigenous peoples who occupy it as terra nullius. In other words, the settler imaginary reduces Indigenous peoples to sub-human status and frames them as one more natural resource to be extracted and consumed. This is another manifestation of white supremacy in settler society.

¹¹⁶ Mackey, *House of Difference*, 44-46.

¹¹⁷ See Ian Angus, *A Border Within: National Identity, Cultural Plurality, and Wilderness* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 125-134.

the landscape as a white space,¹¹⁸ and thereby “entitle[s] the white-settler society to occupy and claim originary status in Canada.”¹¹⁹ Francis suggests that encounters with the wilderness are especially productive experiences because travelling into the wilderness (via canoe trips, camping, etc.) constitutes a journey into the mythical past. The journey into wilderness and subsequent return to civilisation enables contemporary Canadians to re-experience the struggles of early settlers and thereby re-discover national identity.¹²⁰ When framed as the North, the frontier becomes a place of potential wealth and “mythical treasures”: it is “a myth, a promise, a destiny” for settler Canadians who, as civilised people, are entitled and expected to reap its vast but hidden wealth.¹²¹ Joan Sangster explains that settlers see the North as “Canada’s last economic frontier of development” which they must “liberate” with the gifts of modern civilisation.¹²² The myth of the frontier conveys that, as civilisation continues to progress, settler Canadians can and must penetrate the North and use its resources as the raw materials with which to transform the primitive landscape into a modern society. In this way, the frontier as a mythical theme – which takes several distinctive forms in Canada – helps to reproduce and perpetuate the narrative of civilisational progress.

In sum, scholars identify several mythical or narrative themes that, I suggest, are interconnected elements of Canada’s national mythos. 1) As with other settler societies, Canada has an overarching myth of progress. Time flows in a linear direction from beginning to end, and

¹¹⁸ Other scholars observe that “the North” reproduces white-supremacy and British superiority. For example, Amelia Kalant describes how the Northern climate creates superior societies: the North is a harsh climate that produces morally and physically superior people who are inclined towards social organisation; the South, in contrast, is defined by warm climates, cities, and social disorganisation, and particularly characterises the chaotic social order of the United States. See Kalant, *National Identity and the Conflict at Oka*, 29-86.

¹¹⁹ Sheelah McLean, “The Whiteness of Green: Racialization and Environmental Education,” *Canadian Geographer* 57, no. 3 (2013): 355.

¹²⁰ Francis, *National Dreams*, 128-129.

¹²¹ Francis, *National Dreams*, 152-153.

¹²² Joan Sangster, “*The Beaver* as Ideology: Constructing Images of Inuit and Native Life in Post-World War II Canada,” *Anthropologica* 49, no. 2 (2007): 193.

history moves with it by flowing from savagery to civilisation. 2) Civilisational progress culminates with the indigenisation of the settler. This teleological endpoint occurs when settler society transcends its own settler identity and, thus, concludes the settler narrative. 3) The frontier denotes the boundary between civilisation and savagery: the Western frontier is the place where law and order do not yet rule; the wilderness frontier is uncivilised terra nullius; the Northern frontier contains the raw materials necessary to transform wilderness into civilisation. 4) Eurocentrism produces an ethos of white supremacy and a belief in European, and especially British, racial superiority. Anglo-Canadians generously and benevolently offer law, which is a catalyst of civilisational development, as a gift to less civilised people. 5) Law ensures that settlement is a peaceful process. Contemporary ideologies of multiculturalism and cultural tolerance reinforce the idea that (hegemonically white) Canada is a peaceful, benevolent, and good society. 6) These themes converge to naturalise the erasure of Indigenous peoples. As civilisation and law peacefully transform the land and its inhabitants, Indigenous peoples either physically disappear or culturally assimilate into settler society. Yet settler society refuses to view Indigenous erasure as genocide for several reasons: settlers conceive of civilisational progress as a natural and inevitable process; and white supremacy denies human status to Indigenous peoples.

Many of the studies on Canadian mythology tend to focus on one or two of these themes and, in many cases, do not see these myths as inherently interconnected. For example, Stephanie Anderson defines two dominant historical narratives: a 19th and early-20th century narrative of Canadian progress from colony to independent state; and a mid-20th century narrative of Canada as a tolerant and multicultural mosaic. While acknowledging that these narratives often overlap, she does not see them as necessarily interconnected and tends to frame them as historically

situated.¹²³ In this chapter and throughout my dissertation, I provide a more comprehensive study of Canadian mythology and demonstrate that its multiple themes are fundamentally inseparable. In particular, I explain that this mythos emerges structurally from settler colonialism and its distinctive narrative form. In the following chapters, I also demonstrate how these interlocking mythical themes emerge at a variety of historical and memorial sites.

Canadians encounter and reproduce national mythology at various sites including state institutions, cultural products, and symbolic (including textual) communication. Benedict Anderson examines the history of the nation as an “imagined community” and considers how developments in temporal and spatial awareness reproduce national identity. He argues that individuals come to identify with the nation through print communications such as the novel and the newspaper, state institutions including educational systems and museums, and cultural products such as poetry and song.¹²⁴ Pierre Nora explores the myriad sites where people engage in the construction and reproduction of national memory. He contends that national cultures respond to the “acceleration of history” with a “resort to memory” which entails “the fetishism of signs, an obsession with history, an accumulation of the material remains of the national past, and to the infinite ways of expressing the national life – not only its history, but also its landscapes, its traditions, its ways of eating, and its long-gone methods of production.”¹²⁵ Nora suggests that “the principal loci, material or immaterial, in which this memory had become embodied and which, through the actions of men or the work of centuries, remained their most

¹²³ Stephanie Anderson, “The Stories Nations Tell: Sites of Pedagogy, Historical Consciousness, and National Narratives,” *Canadian Journal of Education* 40, no. 1 (2017): 15-21.

Anderson, Stephanie. “The Stories Nations Tell: Sites of Pedagogy, Historical Consciousness, and National Narratives.” *Canadian Journal of Education* 40, no. 1 (2017): 1-38.

¹²⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

¹²⁵ Pierre Nora, general introduction to Vol. 1 of *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, eds. Pierre Nora and David P. Jordan, trans. Mary Trouille (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), xviii.

specific representations and most dazzling symbols”¹²⁶ are the material, symbolic, and functional places he refers to as “les lieux de mémoire.”¹²⁷ National myth and memory is thereby reproduced in encounters between citizens and symbols. Nora suggests that such symbols can include physical sites such as “true memorials” and monuments, “natural realities” such as landscapes, rituals, institutions, as well as abstract modes of signification including emblems, artistic creations, and texts.¹²⁸ Scholars who study national memory in Canada explore how myths are reproduced at such diverse sites as literature,¹²⁹ media publications,¹³⁰ school text books,¹³¹ the proceedings of criminal trials,¹³² celebrations surrounding national holidays,¹³³ and ceremonies at the Olympic games,¹³⁴ among others. My study will contribute to this scholarship by demonstrating how Canadians also reproduce myth at national monuments, commissions, and museums.

National myths are durable – though not necessarily stable – narrative formulations that are subject to ongoing challenges and renegotiation. The myth of white supremacy, for example, has persisted for most of Canadian history although it manifests in very different ways at different historical moments: as Adese and Mackey point out above, overt racism in Canada has in recent decades been masked by multicultural ideology. See suggests that national myths are constantly threatened by socio-historical realities. In particular, he observes that the myth of peacemaking is regularly contradicted by Canada’s military involvement in the First and Second

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Pierre Nora, general introduction to Vol. 1 of *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, eds. Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 14.

¹²⁸ Nora, *Rethinking France*; Nora, *Realms of Memory*.

¹²⁹ Hulan, *Northern Experience and the Myths of Canadian Culture*.

¹³⁰ Sangster, “*The Beaver as Ideology*.”

¹³¹ Francis, *National Dreams*.

¹³² Ward, “Settler Colonialism in the Canadian West.”

¹³³ Mackey, *The House of Difference*.

¹³⁴ Adese, “Colluding with the Enemy?”

World Wars, the Korean War, the war in Afghanistan, and other armed conflicts, as well as its ongoing violence against Indigenous peoples.¹³⁵ Kalant argues that the Oka Crisis was one such event that forced Canadians to confront and reevaluate their belief in the myth of lawful peacemaking. When a golf course in Oka, Quebec announced plans to develop an area of land that is a traditional Mohawk burial ground, the community of Kanesatake began to protest. Over the course of 1990, the protest escalated into a violent and highly publicised standoff between protesters and provincial police, federal police, and ultimately the Canadian military. The Oka Crisis became a visible manifestation of the colonial violence that underlies the Canadian state yet remains mostly hidden from settler consciousness. This crisis, Kalant explains, forced Canadians to address core aspects of the national myth:

‘How,’ Canadians asked themselves over the course of what became a summer-long, three-month standoff, ‘could this be happening in a nation known for its general principles of justice, peacefulness, tolerance and respect, and for its historic “good” treatment of “its” Natives?’¹³⁶

This confrontation at least temporarily “demonstrated the capacity to cast national myths into disarray, and the potential importance of the breakdown of symbolic orders.”¹³⁷ In other words, the Oka Crisis, and especially its extensive coverage in the news media, became a site of difficult knowledge that challenged dominant narratives of Canadian peacemaking. In discussions of national myth, then, it is crucial also to consider the various sites where people contest and transform mythology. My study contributes to this research on resistance by considering how national sites work to disrupt and destabilise – as well as reinscribe – myth. Some of these sites are such new additions to the commemorative landscape that scholars have only begun to address, if at all, their role in the reproduction and resistance of the Canadian myth.

¹³⁵ See, “The Intellectual Construction of Canada’s ‘Peaceable Kingdom’ Ideal.”

¹³⁶ Kalant, *National Identity and the Conflict at Oka*, 3.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

Myth, Memory, and Difficult Knowledge at National Sites

The Canadian public encounters difficult and lovely knowledges at monuments, museums, and other national sites of history and memory. The CMHR, as one of the country's newest historical sites, has the potential to confront national and international audiences with difficult knowledge. The CMHR addresses failures and successes of human rights in Canada and around the world and provides an opportunity for visitors to reconsider their relationship with historical and contemporary events. The museum can therefore promote social change by engaging with potentially difficult knowledge.¹³⁸ However, some scholars argue that the CMHR largely fails to do so. Heather Milne argues that neoliberal pressures have forced the museum to focus on lovely rather than difficult knowledge. Neoliberal critics contend that the CMHR is valuable only to the degree it can generate capital: they assume that lovely knowledge will attract paying visitors while difficult knowledge will deter them. Milne suggests that museum staff have succumbed to this logic because of government and market interference during planning of the museum.¹³⁹ For example, the museum Board of Trustees sought “to ensure that the [Peace Forum] gallery achieve a ‘positive, optimistic tone’ and contain more ‘positive Canadian content’” rather than address Canadian complicity in past and present human rights violations.¹⁴⁰ Angela Failler observes that CMHR staff are “working hard to essentially reassure stakeholders and prospective museumgoers that the CMHR is not a killjoy museum.”¹⁴¹ She identifies several

¹³⁸ Angela Failler, Peter Ives, and Heather Milne, “Caring for Difficult Knowledge – Prospects for the Canadian Museum of Human Rights,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37 (2015); Angela Failler and Roger I. Simon, “Curatorial Practices and Learning from Difficult Knowledge,” in *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*, edited by Karen Busby, Adam Muller, and Andrew Woolford (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015); Erica Lehrer, “Preface: Thinking through the Museum,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37 (2015).

¹³⁹ Heather Milne, “Human Rights and/or Market Logic: Neoliberalism, Difficult Knowledge, and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37 (2015).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁴¹ Angela Failler, “Hope without Consolation: Prospects for Critical Learning at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37 (2015): 231.

ways that curators limit visitors' exposure to difficult knowledge: by creating a balance of "tragedy and triumph," emphasising inspirational narratives while de-emphasising narratives of horror and atrocity, and by constructing narratives of "consolatory hope" that reduce feelings of discomfort that arise from exposure to unpleasant histories.¹⁴² Failler suggests that the careful use of artistic works can create a sense of "hope without consolation" that enables transformative encounters with difficult knowledge. Amber Dean argues that the CMHR has a responsibility to represent Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) as difficult knowledge. She suggests that narratives of MMIWG are potentially difficult knowledge for settler society because they challenge celebratory national narratives by addressing systemic colonial violence within the settler state. Dean proposes representing MMIWG as difficult knowledge by including artwork from Indigenous women that addresses historical and ongoing colonial violence.¹⁴³ While some scholars remain skeptical, others are optimistic that the museum has the potential to engage the public with difficult but transformative narratives.

Despite the CMHR's potential for difficult knowledge, however, it also reproduces settler colonial narratives. In particular, scholars observe that the CMHR represents human rights within a narrative of civilisational progress. Lisa Landrum and Tom Arban describe how Antoine Predock's design for the museum leads visitors on a journey "from darkness to light," and they argue that this architecture predetermines the way visitors experience the museum and its content.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, Christopher Powell describes the museum's architecture as a narrative of enlightenment where "human rights descend, as if from the heavens, and we rise to meet

¹⁴² Ibid., 233.

¹⁴³ Amber Dean, "The CMHR and the Ongoing Crisis of Murdered or Missing Indigenous Women: Do Museums have a Responsibility to Care?" *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37 (2015).

¹⁴⁴ Lisa Landrum and Tom Arban, "Difficult Harmonies: An Ambitious Winnipeg Landmark, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights Offers a Choreographed Architectural Journey through the Complex Topic of Human Rights," *Canadian Architect* 59, no. 11 (2014).

them.”¹⁴⁵ This reproduces a narrative of civilisational progress that frames human rights as both sacred and as the culmination of civilisational achievement. Larissa Wodtke suggests that architecture frames both the museum and human rights as products of natural progress: Predock designed the museum as a natural feature of the landscape; the museum frames human rights as a development of natural law; and it situates human rights in a narrative where progress is a natural process. Wodtke argues that this reflects a preference for lovely over difficult knowledge and limits the ability of visitors to critically engage with national mythology.¹⁴⁶ Tricia Logan, former Curator of Indigenous Content at the CMHR, explains that colonial narratives limit the way museum content addresses genocide. She argues that the museum reproduces Indigenous erasure by marginalising Indigenous narratives and presenting a celebratory narrative of Canadian history. Logan reports that museum officials asked her and other curators to modify content in ways that mitigated representations of colonial violence: they asked her to replace the word “genocide” with “colonialism” to describe Indigenous experiences under the settler state; and they requested that curators balance discussion of atrocities with celebratory statements about Canadian history.¹⁴⁷ Many scholars agree that the CMHR reproduces lovely knowledge by embedding human rights and Canadian history within a narrative of civilisational progress; this narrative, consequently, mitigates the degree to which the museum explores Canada’s ongoing history of colonial violence. In my discussion of the CMHR in Chapters V and VI, I will explore

¹⁴⁵ Christopher Powell, “Transcendence or Struggle? Top-down and Bottom-up Narratives of Human Rights,” in *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*, edited by Karen Busby, Adam Muller, and Andrew Woolford (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 129.

¹⁴⁶ Larissa Wodtke, “A Lovely Building for Difficult Knowledge: The Architecture of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37 (2015).

¹⁴⁷ Tricia Logan, “Memory, Erasure, and National Myth,” in *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, edited by Andrew Woolford, Jeff Benvenuto, and Alexander Laban Hinton (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014); Tricia Logan, “National Memory and Museums: Remembering Settler Colonial Genocide of Indigenous Peoples in Canada,” in *Remembering Genocide*, edited by Nigel Eltringham and Pam Maclean (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

such issues surrounding museum architecture, progressive narratives, and the representation of genocide and colonial violence.

This dissertation introduces new case studies to a growing body of research on difficult knowledge. Difficult knowledge can catalyse social change by revealing unequal power relations and providing alternative interpretations of the past and present. Educators, curators, and researchers can therefore use difficult knowledge to challenge national mythology and construct alternative interpretations of Canadian history. While sites of public history and memory, such as the CMHR, often promote state interests, they also have the potential to challenge Canada's colonial mythology and transform settler society. Scholars have begun to explore the CMHR through the lens of difficult knowledge, though many of these studies are preliminary explorations that address proposed or earlier versions of galleries and exhibits.¹⁴⁸ And while scholars have given sustained attention to difficult knowledge at the CMHR, other sites of history and memory have not received the same consideration. This dissertation will help to fill both gaps. First, I consider how difficult and lovely knowledges operate at multiple stages of the museum's development: during the planning and advisory stages prior to opening; and in visitor experiences several years after its opening. Second, I will contrast the CMHR with two national sites: the NHM and the TRC. Neither the NHM nor the TRC have been studied through the lens of difficult knowledge. Specifically, I will consider how difficult and lovely knowledges manifest at each site and consider the particular techniques that people use to create (or avoid) transformative encounters. By understanding the way difficult knowledge operates at national

¹⁴⁸ Most of the research was conducted shortly after the museum's opening and, in some cases, before the museum was complete or open to the public. Several of the articles cited are from a 2015 special issue of *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* titled "Caring for Difficult Knowledge: Prospects for the Canadian Museum for Human Rights." Angela Failler, one of the issue's contributors, also leads the "Thinking through the Museum: Difficult Knowledge in Public" project. The project's website is available at: <http://thinkingthroughthemuseum.org/>.

sites of history and memory, I will explore its transformative potential and ability to destabilise settler mythology in Canada.

Chapter III

The National Holocaust Monument: Settled Memories on Stolen Land

The National Holocaust Monument (NHM) is a recent addition to Ottawa's memorial landscape and Canada's only national site dedicated to the genocide of European Jewry.¹ The monument originated with Bill C-442, which was introduced to Parliament in 2008 under the Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper and received Royal Assent in 2011. The NHM Development Council (NHMDC or the Council),² which is the entity responsible for fundraising and overseeing completion of the monument, led a nation-wide design competition in 2013 and 2014. It solicited applications from design teams and invited six finalists to develop their monument designs and present them at a public exhibition. In May 2014, the Council announced that Team Lord³ had won the competition with its proposal "Landscape of Loss, Memory and Survival," which represents a Star of David from above and leads visitors on a "journey through the star." Prime Minister Justin Trudeau unveiled the monument to the public in September 2017 in downtown Ottawa, across from the Canadian War Museum and a few blocks from Parliament Hill.

The parliamentary debates and design competition generated considerable discourse about the Holocaust and Holocaust memory. Proponents⁴ of the monument justify the creation of

¹ A monument called the *Wheel of Conscience* is located at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21. However, this monument is dedicated specifically to the 1939 journey of the *MS St. Louis*, a ship carrying refugees from Nazi Germany to North America. Provincial Holocaust monuments are located at the legislative buildings in both Manitoba and Alberta.

² In coordination with the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

³ Museum planner Gail Lord, photographer Edward Burtynsky, architect Daniel Libeskind, Holocaust scholar Doris Bergen, and landscape architect Claude Cormier.

⁴ By "proponents," I refer to those individuals who spoke publicly in support for the NHM. This mostly includes public representatives such as MPs and senators, design teams, members of the NHMDC, as well as individuals or institutions who published articles in the media. Notably, I rarely mention the political affiliation of proponents (i.e. Liberal, Conservative, NDP, etc.). The monument received widespread support from all political parties during debate and has mostly evaded major challenges or criticisms. As such, the NHM is very much a statist project rather

a Holocaust memorial in Canada, consider the value of Holocaust memory for Canadians, and identify a relationship between Canadian history and the Holocaust. In doing so, they contribute to the “Canadianisation of the Holocaust,” that is, the process whereby people construct the Holocaust as a Canadian event and frame Holocaust memory as an aspect of national memory.⁵ These debates offer insight into the national myth because they function to integrate Holocaust memory into Canada’s national narrative and frame Holocaust memory in a way compatible with the national mythos. This is a useful context to consider how genocide commemoration contributes to the production of difficult and lovely knowledges. When narratives of the Holocaust harmonise with the national myth, settler society is likely to interpret them as lovely knowledge; when these narrative challenge or conflict with the Canadian mythos, people will likely perceive them as difficult knowledge.

Proponents of the NHM engage with Canada’s national myth by drawing on several of its core themes: lawful peacemaking; civilisational progress; Indigenous erasure, and indigenisation of the settler. This chapter examines how each of these themes emerges in the discourse surrounding the legislation, development, and design of the monument. It begins with an exploration of the parliamentary and legal context that produced the *National Holocaust Monument Act*, wherein much of the discourse is rooted. Proponents of the monument reproduce the myth of lawful peacemaking by suggesting that state law plays a central role in Holocaust commemoration and the prevention of similar atrocities. The next two sections focus on the theme of civilisational progress. Proponents claim that the Holocaust represents an historical frontier where savagery and civilisation came into direct conflict. They furthermore frame

than a partisan one. Instead of focusing on the specific agendas of each political party, I address the settler colonial ideologies that underlie the Canadian state.

⁵ Jason Chalmers, “Canadianising the Holocaust: Debating Canada’s National Holocaust Monument,” *Canadian Jewish Studies* 24 (2016).

Canada as a civilised society and, consequently, describe it as a morally superior nation with a responsibility to protect and impose civilisation around the world. That is, supporters frame civilisational progress as the overarching narrative of both human and Canadian history.

Holocaust memory also contributes to the marginalisation and displacement of Indigenous peoples in Canada and other settler societies. The following sections address the mythical themes of Indigenous erasure and indigenisation of the settler. Settler mythology presumes that settler society will first erase Indigenous peoples and then replace them. Many proponents of the NHM disregard that Canada was founded on stolen land and, in particular, that the monument is located on land that remains unceded Algonquin territory. They aim to indigenise the settler by constructing settler society as the legitimate owners and inhabitants of the land. The design teams in particular impose settler narratives on the land and indigenise settler society by both symbolically and literally rooting Holocaust memory in the Canadian landscape. The final section considers how proponents endorse settler colonialism by linking Holocaust memory with the state of Israel and, implicitly, legitimise the displacement of Palestinians. In this chapter, I make several interconnected arguments. I contend that, apart from a few notable exceptions, proponents of the NHM fail to challenge dominant mythical themes or provide alternative narratives of Canadian history; rather, they construct a narrative of human and national history that reproduces Canada's myth and thereby reinscribes settler mythology. In other words, the NHM – as well as Holocaust memory in Canada – is for the most part lovely knowledge that reinforces dominant national and settler narratives. This narrative marginalises Indigenous peoples in mutually reinforcing ways: it erases Indigenous peoples from the Canadian landscape while, at the same time, constructing settler society as newly “indigenised” inhabitants. So while the monument ostensibly commemorates the genocide of European Jewry,

it also reflects Canada's ongoing history as a settler state founded on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands. Thus, I further argue that the Canadian state instrumentalises Holocaust memory in a way that legitimises the theft of Indigenous land while, simultaneously, suppressing Indigenous claims to land.

Lawful Order and the Origin of Holocaust Memory

Law was a central theme in the debates surrounding the NHM, in part because Parliament brought the monument into being through legal processes. Law – and especially the notion of lawful peacemaking – is an important element of Canadian mythology because it is both the force that propels civilisational progress and a defining feature of civilised societies.⁶ Many proponents of the monument frame Canadian law and Holocaust memory as interconnected systems that mutually promote and protect core Canadian values. In doing so, they reinscribe certain aspects of Canada's dominant national myth, in particular, the notion that lawful peacemaking has enabled the spread of civilisation.

Canada's national memorial to the Holocaust is a product of Bill C-442 and the *National Holocaust Monument Act* (NHMA), a legal statute brought into existence by Parliament. The idea for a national monument began with Laura Grosman while she was completing an undergraduate degree in public administration at the University of Ottawa. Grosman, who is the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors and World War II veterans, resolved to establish a Holocaust monument after learning that Canada had no national memorial site. She approached her local federal representative, Member of Parliament (MP) Susan Kadis, and proposed that the

⁶ Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 83-110; Daniel Francis, *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997), 29-51.

federal government take steps towards establishing a national monument. Kadis introduced Bill C-547, An Act to establish a Holocaust Monument in the National Capital Region, to the House of Commons as a private member's bill on 14 May 2008. The House passed the bill at first reading, but the bill died when Parliament dissolved for a general election. MP Anita Neville reintroduced the proposed legislation as Bill C-238 on 1 December 2008, which again passed first reading but also died on the table. MP Tim Uppal introduced the bill for a third and final time on 18 September 2009, this time tabled as Bill C-442. The bill received widespread support in Parliament and moved quickly through the House of Commons, the Senate, and their respective committees. On 25 March 2011, the Crown gave Royal Assent to Bill C-442 to create "An Act to establish a Holocaust Monument," or the NHMA.

The NHM is distinct from other national monuments because it originated as federal law. There are dozens of Holocaust monuments scattered across Canada in nearly every province and major city, although most are in Toronto and Montreal (there are at least a dozen in each city). The majority are located in Jewish cemeteries or at Jewish community centres and originated as community initiatives rather than formal legislation. Likewise, there are more than two dozen national monuments in the National Capital Region but, at the time of the NHM debates, none had been established through federal legislation. MP Paul Szabo points out in the House of Commons debates that parliamentary approval is not necessary to establish a Holocaust monument or any type of national memorial:

Bill C-442 is merely calling on the government to do what it could easily do administratively...[because] the National Capital Commission already possesses the authority to establish a monument without parliamentary approval. Indeed, the National Capital Commission currently is responsible for 16 monuments, including the Hungarian monument, the Canadian tribute to human rights, and the monument to Canadian aid workers. Construction is currently under way for the national naval monument. In addition, the National Capital Commission is in the planning phase for the creation of a

national monument for the victims of communism. None of these monuments required legislation to move forward.⁷

That is, the National Capital Commission does not need Parliament to pass legislation to establish a national monument and, indeed, had established all earlier monuments through bureaucratic means. Of course, other national monuments in the National Capital Region contain legal themes and address legal content, although they were not necessarily established through legislative processes. The Canadian Tribute to Human Rights (CTHR), for example, is a national monument unveiled in 1990 and, like the NHM, is located in downtown Ottawa. It engages extensively with law via the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* as well as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but was established through organisational and bureaucratic, rather than legislative, means.⁸ The NHM's origin in parliament provided public representatives with a unique context to explore national themes and consider the relationship between law and commemoration.

By focusing on the monument's origin, proponents of the NHM develop an association between Holocaust memory and Canadian law. Throughout the debates, proponents acknowledge that the monument is rooted in law and consider the significance of this relationship. Senator Jane Cordy asks the bill's sponsor, Tim Uppal, why it is necessary to establish the NHM through legislative means: "Why do we need a bill to build the [monument]? It seems to be something that a group of Canadians can get together and do...from a legal perspective, do we need a bill to build a monument?"⁹ Uppal provides a somewhat uncertain

⁷ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 22 October 2010 (Paul Szabo, Lib.), 5243; cf. Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, *Evidence of Proceedings* (3rd sess., 40th Parliament, Meeting No. 21, 2010), 9.

⁸ Canadian Tribute to Human Rights, "Spirit and Objectives" (2008).

⁹ Canada, Parliament, Senate, Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, *Evidence of Proceedings* (3rd sess., 40th Parliament, Issue No. 23, Report No. 17, 2011), 16.

response which acknowledges that parliamentary approval is unnecessary but also insists that “there are many legal aspects to it...There must be that legal connection [for national monuments].”¹⁰ MP Alexandra Mendes directly asks whether Canadians should consider the monument special because of its origin: “Why so much emphasis on this piece of legislation when administrative measures would have been sufficient?” As with Cordy, Uppal provides an uncertain response to Mendes and answers “I don’t know...When it was presented to me, I thought it was a great idea.”¹¹ These proponents perceive the NHM’s legal origin as meaningful: they emphasise its origin and consequently suggest that the NHM is somehow special. Uppal highlights the monument’s “legal connection” even though, upon interrogation, he cannot provide a definite reason why this connection is necessary.¹² Cordy and Mendes are more skeptical about this connection and question the need for legislative processes, but they do not reject the NHM or Bill C-442. This exchange exemplifies how proponents question and explore the relationship between the NHM and law even though they do not clearly describe this relationship or its significance. In doing so, they highlight the monument’s legal origin and begin to build an association, albeit undefined, between Canadian law and Holocaust memory.

Supporters of the monument argue that law plays an important role in Holocaust commemoration and the prevention of similar atrocities because it protects and promotes core national values. Proponents routinely insist that the NHM does not just commemorate the victims of the Holocaust but also reflects national values. For example, the official website for the NHM proclaims that the monument “will serve as a symbol of Canadian values and diversity, and as a

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, *Evidence of Proceedings* (3rd sess., 40th Parliament, Meeting No. 17, 2010), 7-8.

¹² In his exchange with Mendes, Uppal tentatively concludes that legislation is useful because “coming from the government, [he] believe[s] it would go quicker.”

memorial to the innocent men, women and children who perished.”¹³ Many proponents broadly identify “Canadian values” associated with the idea of ethno-cultural inclusion such as diversity, equality, multiculturalism, and tolerance. MP Ed Fast identifies a particular cluster of values and argues that the monument “reflects Canada’s long-standing values of freedom, democracy, the defence of human rights at home and abroad, and the defence of the rule of law.”¹⁴ In other words, the monument reflects the value Canadians place on law, forms of government that privilege legal processes and the rule of law such as democracy, and the importance of promoting legal principles at the international level (i.e. “defending human rights abroad”). Similarly, MPs Carole Lavallée and Michel Guimond use parliamentary debate on the NHM as an opportunity to discuss Bill C-384, which makes it a criminal offence to commit an act of mischief motivated by hatred of a specific group. Lavallée argues that this legislation “sends the message that violence motivated by hate of a group or community is not tolerated [by Canadian society].”¹⁵ While these representatives acknowledge that other measures such as education can be effective ways to counter discrimination, they nevertheless insist that law and the creation of new laws is necessary to oppose hatred and respond to acts of discrimination. These proponents suggest that Holocaust memory and law converge to mutually protect national values: on one hand, Holocaust memory promotes Canadian values, especially the value of legal institutions and practices; on the other hand, law protects values such as diversity and tolerance.

Several MPs provide explanations for the Holocaust and consider the role that state governments played in its perpetration. However, they tend to attribute the Holocaust to

¹³ National Holocaust Monument, “About the Project” (2013-2016).

¹⁴ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 27 October 2010 (Ed Fast, Con.), 5455; cf. Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2009 (Brian Jean, Con.), 7820.

¹⁵ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2009 (Carole Lavallée, BQ), 7818; cf. Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 27 October 2010 (Michel Guimond, BQ), 5453.

bureaucracy and political ideology rather than law. Uppal repeatedly states while promoting Bill C-442 that the “horrific events of the Holocaust are a stark testament to what can happen when humanity and fundamental basic rights are discarded.”¹⁶ MP Joseph Volpe states during the standing committee’s study of the bill that the Holocaust and Second World War are examples of “the evil that can be perpetrated by organized governments, or disorganized governments, that are moved by ideology.”¹⁷ Volpe acknowledges that governments are sometimes responsible for atrocities such as the Holocaust, but also suggests that these perpetrators are motivated by interested and non-objective (and, in this case, “evil”) principles such as “ideology.” Michel Guimond provides a more detailed account of the Holocaust in which he considers the role of law but ultimately identifies bureaucracy as its root cause:

The first step in the long process toward the Holocaust was the discriminatory legislation that targeted German citizens of the Jewish faith [who] were identified as such by law... The Holocaust was the first mass murder characterized by its industrial scale and its bureaucracy. Like a machine, the Nazis sought the systematic elimination of an entire people just because it existed... This mass murder was carried out by Hitler’s regime and several Third Reich bureaucrats, as well as by numerous collaborators, including individuals and states.¹⁸

Guimond begins by acknowledging that law played an important role in the early stages of the Holocaust and refers specifically to the Nuremberg Laws that the Nazis used to define and identify Jews. However, he only identifies discriminatory legislation as part of the path “toward the Holocaust” and does not suggest that law played a role in the actual murder of Jews. Rather, Guimond suggests that bureaucracy was responsible for orchestrating and perpetuating the Holocaust because its “machine”-like efficiency enabled Nazis to implement murder on such a massive scale. These supporters observe that the Holocaust had several causes related to

¹⁶ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 27 October 2010 (Tim Uppal, Con.), 5450; cf. Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 18 September 2009 (Tim Uppal, Con.), 5200.

¹⁷ Standing Committee on Transport (Meeting No. 17), 4.

¹⁸ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 27 October 2010 (Michel Guimond, BQ), 5453-54.

governments and the state, but fail to consider the role of state law: Guimond actively directs his discussion away from law, refocusing instead “industrial” and “bureaucratic” murder; and Uppal, through his reference to “basic rights,” suggests that the Holocaust was caused by an absence of law. Indeed, proponents such as Lavallée and Guimond suggest that law can be an effective prophylactic against the sort of discrimination that occurred during the Holocaust.

Framing the Holocaust as a Narrative of Civilisational Progress

Civilisational and historical progress is a narrative framework that underlies many of the debates surrounding the NHM. Historical progress – the linear temporal movement from savagery to civilisation – is central to settler colonial narratives and, in Canada, provides the basic structure of national mythology.¹⁹ Proponents of the monument implicitly rely on the idea of historical progress and explicitly reproduce its logic through the language of “savagery” (or “barbarism”) and “civilisation.” As such, it becomes a dominant historical framework that proponents use to understand the Holocaust, Holocaust memory, and the NHM.

Proponents of the NHM define the Holocaust in terms of civilisation and, in particular, frame the Holocaust as an event that is fundamentally incompatible with civilisation. Bernie Farber, CEO of the Canadian Jewish Congress, delivered an address to the standing senate committee in which he offers support for the monument on behalf of the Canadian Jewish community. During this address, he quotes the declaration of the 2000 Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust that states the “Holocaust (Shoah) fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilisation.”²⁰ While Farber describes the Holocaust as an event that conflicts

¹⁹ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 95-116; Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*.

²⁰ Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, 22.

with civilisation, other proponents explicitly define it as an event that opposes civilisation. Michel Guimond asserts that “these barbaric acts shocked the entire world”²¹ and MP Thomas Mulcair similarly claims that “people who know history know that, in terms of barbaric treatment, the Holocaust was one of the worst examples of everything that happened during World War II.”²² By describing the Holocaust as a “barbaric” event, these MPs frame it as antithetical to civilisation.

The “barbaric” nature of the Holocaust is the basis for two types of claims about Holocaust memory: denial of the Holocaust,²³ and the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Most Holocaust deniers acknowledge that Nazi policies targeted Jews to some degree during the Second World War but, rather than outright deny the Holocaust, engage in the “minimization, banalization, and relativization of the relevant facts and events, so as to cast doubt on the uniqueness or authenticity of what happened.”²⁴ Some proponents of the NHM argue that Holocaust commemoration is necessary because deniers have gained prominence in Canada and around the world. In particular, they identify former “President Ahmadinejad of Iran [who] continues to outrage people with his denial of the Holocaust...[and] there are people even in our country [Canada] who agree with him.”²⁵ Rabbi Daniel Friedman, chair of the NHMDC, briefly responds to the logic of denial in an interview with CTV Television. He argues that it is necessary to build a national memorial because “today we have people in the world who deny the

²¹ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 27 October 2010 (Michel Guimond, BQ), 5453.

²² Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2010 (Thomas Mulcair, NDP), 6982.

²³ Holocaust denial is not a mainstream belief in Canadian society or much of the Western world, and is a criminal offence in countries such as Austria, Belgium, and Israel. Denial is not formally illegal in Canada, although Canadian courts have prosecuted deniers such as Ernst Zündel under hate speech laws. Despite this, some deniers have prominent voices at the national and international level.

²⁴ Robert Solomon Wistrich, “Introduction: Lying about the Holocaust,” in *Holocaust Denial: The Politics of Perfidy*, ed. Robert Solomon Wistrich (Jerusalem and Boston/Berlin: Hebrew University Magnes Press and De Gruyter, 2012), 1.

²⁵ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2009 (Tim Uppal, Con.), 7814.

Holocaust. And as every eyewitness passes on, there's more and more chance that people will just say it didn't happen, it couldn't have happened, a nation as progressed as civilized Germany couldn't have perpetrated such atrocities."²⁶ There are several important assumptions embedded in Friedman's comment. First, he suggests that Holocaust denial is rooted in two opposing premises: that Nazi Germany was "progressed" and "civilized," and that the Holocaust was neither (i.e. it was barbaric/savage). Friedman thereby identifies an ostensible paradox in Holocaust memory, namely, that Nazi Germany was a civilised nation that committed acts of barbarity. Those who wish to reconcile this contradiction within a narrative of historical progress must concede either that Nazi Germany was not civilised, or that the Holocaust was not barbaric.²⁷ Friedman suggests that deniers prefer the second option, namely, to maintain that Nazi Germany was a "progressed and civilized" nation and thereby insist that the Holocaust was not as extreme or "barbaric" as most people claim. In other words, Friedman implies that Holocaust denial is not necessarily a product of antisemitism,²⁸ but rather emerges from a belief in historical progress in conjunction with the assumption that Nazi Germany was a civilised nation. From this perspective, Holocaust denial and Holocaust commemoration are rooted in the same underlying assumption – that is, a belief in civilisational progress.

Arguments about the "uniqueness" of the Holocaust can also emerge from a belief in civilisational progress, and in particular a belief that the Holocaust disrupted the natural order of progress. Advocates of the uniqueness position assert that the Holocaust is unlike any other historical event and, in fact, is so radically singular that individuals cannot meaningfully

²⁶ Canada AM, "National Holocaust Monument Site Announced," CTV Television, 24 April 2013.

²⁷ Alternatively, one can reject the narrative of civilisational progress, or redefine the savage/civilised binary. However, this approach is uncommon amongst proponents of Holocaust memory.

²⁸ For the relationship between antisemitism and Holocaust denial, see chapters by Milton Shain and Margo Bastos as well as Robert Solomon Wistrich in Wistrich (2012).

compare it to other historical atrocities.²⁹ According to genocide historian Dirk Moses, the uniqueness position is problematic because it reproduces hegemonic Eurocentrism by privileging the Holocaust (a European event) as sacred while framing non-European atrocities as profane.³⁰ The uniqueness position also reproduces the idea of civilisational progress. Senator Joan Fraser lists three reasons to support the NHM and notes that the “first reason is that the Holocaust is unique.”³¹ She proceeds to explain why: “The uniqueness of the Holocaust, therefore, lies not so much in its savagery as in the degree to which, over long years, the apparatus of one of the world’s most civilized countries was devoted to the extermination of an entire people.”³² Fraser invokes the idea of historical progress and suggests that the Holocaust defies its civilisational logic because Nazi Germany was both “savage” and “civilized”: the Holocaust is an historical anomaly because it entailed the simultaneous intersection of savagery and civilisation. In other words, the Holocaust is unique not just because it was “savage,” but because it was an act of savagery that occurred in “one of the world’s most civilized countries.” Fraser concludes that “we need this monument not only to honour the victims but also to remember the fact that horrors of this kind can be perpetrated even in the most civilized societies.”³³ Her conclusion warns Canadians against savagery, and especially against the danger it poses to “civilised societies.” She acknowledges that civilized societies can and do contravene the forward march of civilisation, but also suggests that transgressing this order may result in extreme violence. For

²⁹ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 195-8; Jeffrey C. Alexander, “On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The ‘Holocaust’ from War Crime to Trauma Drama,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5/1 (2002): 27-9, 51-2.

³⁰ A. Dirk Moses, “Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the ‘Racial Century’: Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 36/4 (2002).

³¹ Canada, *Debates of the Senate*, 22 March 2011 (Hon. Joan Fraser), 2081.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

Fraser, historical progress is not the unavoidable and inescapable course of history, but is rather a natural order that peacefully guides humanity towards civilisation.

Several proponents identify the Holocaust as a critical moment in humanity's progress that defines the frontier of civilisation. Farber delivered an address to the standing senate committee in which he defines the Holocaust as an important historical moment:

the Holocaust represents a watershed in human history, a period of horror that redefined the limits of the depravity of human nature, and expanded humanity's consciousness of evil. The Holocaust has become the seminal point of departure for understanding the general potential of humankind for such inhumanity.³⁴

Farber identifies the Holocaust as a major watershed because it exposed the absolute "limits" of savagery and, in doing so, provided humanity with a benchmark against which to measure progress. As such, it demonstrates the potential for humans to cause inhumanity but, at the same time, also reveals our potential for civilisation. During the same meeting, Senator Kelvin Ogilvie stated that the Holocaust "is a very important event in history to never lose sight of, and to continue to benefit society in learning lessons critical to human development."³⁵ Ogilvie similarly frames the Holocaust as a watershed in "human development," but because it taught humanity important lessons about good and evil that are critical to our ongoing progress. Together, Farber and Ogilvie suggest that the Holocaust was a manifestation of savagery and evil and that Holocaust memory, as a response to it, is therefore good and civilised. Volpe likewise frames the Holocaust as an important moment for civilisation because it "was an event unfortunate and tragic in its occurrence, but with implications that clearly define the value structure of a western democracy like our own."³⁶ While Farber and Ogilvie describe the

³⁴ Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, 21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁶ Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, *Evidence of Proceedings* (3rd sess., 40th Parliament, Meeting No. 18, 2010), 2.

Holocaust as a critical moment in human progress, Volpe identifies the trajectory of this progress and explicitly defines the structure of the ideal civilised society: it is democratic, western, and embodies the values that emerge from such a society. Overall, these proponents of the NHM frame the Holocaust as a defining moment – and sometimes *the* defining moment – in humanity’s progression from savagery to civilisation. They suggest that the Holocaust contains knowledge of good and evil that is necessary for progress: the Holocaust was an expression of absolute evil but, as such, also contains (via Holocaust memory) a new understanding of what it means to be good. In this context, the Holocaust becomes a frontier where savagery and civilisation came into direct contact, struggled against one another, and ultimately redefined new boundaries of good and evil, humanity and inhumanity, and historical progress.

Other proponents identify a relationship between the Holocaust and the development of international law. In particular, they suggest that Holocaust memory teaches humanity about the importance of law to historical progress. In an address to the House of Commons, MP Irwin Cotler contextualises the NHM debates in post-war history and explains that the Holocaust was characterised by a radical shift in law:

we meet at an important moment of remembrance and reminder, of witness and warning...We meet on the eve of the 60th anniversary of the Nuremberg Principles, the double entendre of Nuremberg, the Nuremberg of hate, the Nuremberg of jackboots, as well as the Nuremberg of judgements. On the eve of the 61st anniversary of the Genocide Convention, which we will be commemorating tomorrow, as it happens.³⁷

Cotler refers to several distinct sets of laws surrounding the Holocaust: the racist and antisemitic Nuremberg Laws that defined and regulated Jews, enacted by the Nazis in 1935 prior to the onset of the Holocaust; and the Nuremberg Principles that the Allied forces used as the basis for trying Nazi war criminals in the years immediately following the Holocaust; as well as the United

³⁷ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2009 (Irwin Cotler, Lib.), 7816; cf. Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 27 October 2010 (Irwin Cotler, Lib.), 5456.

Nations Genocide Convention that was adopted by the United Nations in 1948. He acknowledges that the Nazis used law as an instrument of oppression, but also suggests that law underwent radical transformation during the Holocaust from “jackboots” to “judgements” – from totalitarian military law to democratic judicial law. Just as Farber claims that the Holocaust “expanded humanity’s consciousness” of good and evil, Cotler suggests that it contributed to humanity’s knowledge of law, and especially our understanding of how to create good and just law. During the same parliamentary session, Lavallée suggested that international law changed radically during the Holocaust: “After the war, faced with the horror of the crime that had been committed by Germany, governments the world over agreed to incorporate into international law the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.”³⁸ Even in the early post-war years when the world still reeled from “the horror of the crime,” Lavallée suggests, it was clear to many governments that law would be the most effective way to achieve redress and prevent similar atrocities in the future. She therefore sees a direct causal relationship between the Holocaust and law, and she argues that the Holocaust led to the creation of new laws which redefined the standards of the international legal community. Cotler and Lavallée view the dissemination of Holocaust consciousness and the development of law as related processes and, for Lavallée especially, one of the earliest lessons of the Holocaust was the value of law.

Many supporters of the NHM, and especially the design teams, use enlightenment imagery to symbolise a narrative of historical progress. The NHMA states that the “national monument shall forever remind Canadians of one of the darkest chapters in human history”³⁹ and proponents often describe the Holocaust in terms of “darkness.” Several design teams use

³⁸ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2009 (Carole Lavallée, BQ), 7818.

³⁹ *National Holocaust Monument Act, Statutes of Canada 2011*, c.13, §Preamble.

enlightenment motifs in their design proposals for the monument. Team Saucier,⁴⁰ for example, proposes an environmental installation which it describes as a “geological event” that contains “a passage” for visitors to move through. Visitors pass under a large stone plinth that begins in the earth but “transforms into a large elevated platform that structures our emergence to a higher plane, the culmination of our procession...after having been plunged into and confronted by the memory of the most inhuman depths of despair.”⁴¹ This passage is both literally and metaphorically a progression from darkness to light:

In these first spaces, one discovers a darkened interior volume emblematically evocative of the terrible moment in history to which the monument is devoted. The opaque interior surfaces gradually give way to luminous space, squares of light through which the sky is seen and reflected. The visitor moves from darkness to light, metaphorically from grief to hope.⁴²

The winning design by Team Lord provides a different exploration of light and dark. Team Lord proposes an environmental installation that, from above, resembles a Star of David and leads visitors on a “journey through the star”: visitors descend into the ground as they enter the monument; there are multiple corridors along the pathway that appear to lead outwards, but most of which are dead ends; and visitors ascend from the ground as they follow the pathway up a flight of stairs and out of the monument. The corridor immediately within the entrance contains “the Contemplation Space called ‘Sky Void’...[where] people can gaze up at the open sky and the Flame of Remembrance.”⁴³ The corridor that precedes the ascending path outward “embodies the theme ‘Dead End, Fence and Corridor of Light’ from which there is hope but no escape.”⁴⁴

Whereas Team Saucier uses light and dark to represent the movement from savagery to

⁴⁰ Architect Gilles Saucier and artist Marie-France Brière.

⁴¹ Team Saucier (Gilles Saucier, Marie-France Brière, and Pierre Ouellet), “National Holocaust Monument,” *Designboom*, 4 March 2014, 1.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Team Lord (Gail Lord, Daniel Libeskind, Edward Burtynsky, Claude Cormier, and Doris Berger), “National Holocaust Monument: Landscapes of Loss, Memory and Survival,” *Designboom*, 4 March 2014, 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

civilisation, Team Lord generally uses light to symbolise the presence of hope. Overall, both designs present a progressive narrative of the Holocaust: visitors first descend into the earth and then ascend as they pass through and leave the monument; visitors move along a linear and predefined pathway; and light plays an important role in representing human development. While many proponents of the NHM reproduce a narrative of civilisational progress in the debates surrounding the monument, these design teams build progress into the aesthetic design of the monument.



Figure 1: National Holocaust Monument (facing northeast), Ottawa ON. Photo by jason chalmers, 2018.



Figure 2: National Holocaust Monument (facing southwest), Ottawa ON. Photo by Jason Chalmers, 2018.

Framing Canada As the Ideal Civilised Society

Just as civilisational progress provides a narrative framework for the Holocaust, so too does it form the basic narrative structure of Canadian history. Settler colonial narratives tend to emerge from a common set of themes and narrative structures, but they also manifest in unique ways depending on the distinct historical and geographical contexts in which they develop.⁴⁵ Proponents of the NHM construct a progressive narrative of Canadian history that frames Canada as an ideal and morally superior nation. Holocaust and memory scholar Nadine Blumer considers how this national narrative manifests at the NHM and the Memorial to the Victims of

⁴⁵ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker, *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2015).

Communism.⁴⁶ She contends that, at both memorial sites, “the Canadian nation is being extolled alongside a specific version of Canadian heritage and identity. While communism and the Holocaust are shorthand for ‘evil’ that happened ‘over there,’ Canada, by contrast, is framed as an idealized site of freedom, refuge and diversity.”⁴⁷ Civilisational progress in Canada is therefore a function of both time and place: Canadian society progresses as it moves from the past to the present; and individuals progress as they travel from “over there” to “over here.” This sort of narrative is problematic because it frames people in Canada and other parts of the (hegemonically white) Global North as inherently more civilised than people in the Global South. It is dangerous in that it reproduces ethnocentrism and justifies the perpetuation of imperial and colonial practices, namely, the imposition of Western culture and governance on non-Western peoples around the world.

Proponents suggest that the Canadian government acted in ostensibly contradictory ways before and during the Holocaust: in some cases it was discriminatory and less-than-civilised, but at other times was inclusive and civilised. Several proponents highlight incidents during this period when the state discriminated against or persecuted minority groups, including Jews. In a speech to the House of Commons, Uppal presents a list of incidents in which the Canadian government was not only complicit in the persecution of identifiable groups but actively perpetrated it:

We must remember that just because no crime so horrible [as the Holocaust] has occurred in Canada does not mean we need not concern ourselves. After all, the history of our country is not perfect: the internment of Japanese Canadians [during and immediately following the Second World War]; the events surrounding the *Komagata Maru* incident

⁴⁶ The Memorial to the Victims of Communism, also called the Tribute to Liberty, is closely associated with the NHM and has followed a similar timeline: it was founded in 2008, approved by the National Capital Commission in 2009, and was completed in 2017. Despite similar timelines, the processes for these two monuments have been very different: the Tribute to Liberty was founded through grass roots and bureaucratic processes rather than legislative ones, cost several million dollars less than the NHM, and, quite unlike the NHM, has been very controversial.

⁴⁷ Nadine Blumer, “Memorials Are Built of Public Discussion as Much as Stone,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 8 May 2015.

[in 1914]; and the treatment of aboriginal Canadians. We should not pretend that crimes against whole groups of people are something that only ever happen far away and long ago.⁴⁸

Uppal suggests that these incidents are comparable to the Holocaust because they entail state-mandated “crimes against whole groups of people,” although he also claims that these crimes are not of the same magnitude as the Holocaust (they are not “so horrible”). While Uppal identifies instances of persecution in Canada, others suggest that the Canadian government was indirectly responsible for the persecution of European Jewry during the Holocaust. Senator Nicole Eaton refers to how the Canadian government used both legislation and informal practices to deny Jewish refugees entry to Canada during the war. Eaton suggests that the Canadian state was complicit in and partly responsible for the atrocities of the Holocaust, and she concludes that “there is no question that Canada did terrible things to our Jewish friends by not letting them come here as refugees before the Second World.”⁴⁹ Uppal and Eaton use debates around the monument as opportunities to address some of the ways that Canada has failed minority groups in the past. With these examples, they suggest that, before and during the Holocaust, Canada was an imperfect society.

Other proponents balance out discussion of the nation’s wrongdoings with discussion of its successes. They point out that, despite Canada’s refusal to admit Jewish refugees during the war and its discrimination against minority groups, the country also fought the Nazis and contributed to the end of the Holocaust. In particular, proponents emphasise Canada’s role as a military actor with the Allied forces. MP Dennis Bevington, for example, claims that the monument “speaks to the conclusion of the second world war; to the role Canada played in the victory over the Axis to ensure that the Holocaust came to an end and that it would not occur

⁴⁸ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2009 (Tim Uppal, Con.), 7814.

⁴⁹ Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, 9.

again in that area of the world.”⁵⁰ Likewise, Farber agrees that the memorial “will also honour the tremendous sacrifice of the Canadian military’s role during the Second World War and its outstanding contribution to the defeat of Nazism.”⁵¹ Discourse surrounding the NHM, as I observed in the previous section, relies on a binary opposition between civilisation and savagery, good and evil, Nazis and Allies: the Nazis are “barbaric” and the Holocaust is “shorthand for evil”; the Allies, on the other hand, are therefore representative of goodness and civilisation. Supporters such as Bevington and Farber imply that Canada, as a member of the Allied forces, was a mostly civilised nation at the time of the Holocaust.

Canada’s relationship to minorities changed after the Holocaust, some proponents contend, and the nation took on a new role as “safe haven” or “refuge” to those facing persecution. A recurring theme in the NHM debates is that Canada ultimately became a permanent home for thousands of Jewish refugees after the war. Fraser describes the magnitude of Canada’s contribution to the post-war refugee crisis: “We know that after the war, and in the ensuing decades, many thousands of the survivors came to Canada...Canada took in more of the refugees after the war, I believe, than any other country, except the United States and Israel.”⁵² She continues to explain that Canada has since opened its doors not only to Holocaust survivors and Jewish refugees, but has become a haven for all people. Fraser says that, since Canada began to change its immigration policies in 1947, “many thousands have come to this country to build new lives and new hope. We now pride ourselves on being an open society. We have welcomed Hungarian refugees and the boat people and so many others.”⁵³ Contemporary Canada is a haven for all people around the world who suffer persecution and oppression. Uppal affirms that

⁵⁰ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2010 (Dennis Bevington, NDP), 6984.

⁵¹ Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, 20.

⁵² Canada, *Debates of the Senate*, 22 March 2011 (Hon. Joan Fraser), 2081.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2081-2.

Canada continues to play a role in the global community as a refuge: “Today’s Canada is a nation of hope and opportunity, a beacon to those around the world seeking to find a new home and brighter future for themselves and their families...Our society is the dream for many around the world.”⁵⁴

Narratives of Canada’s past and present together frame national history as a narrative of progress. Supporters such as Uppal, Eaton, Farber, and Fraser mutually construct the Holocaust as a pivotal moment in Canada’s historical development: Canada was a mostly, though not entirely, civilised society before and during the Holocaust, as witnessed by its various indiscretions and successes; but Canadians understood and learned from their mistakes in the wake of the Holocaust, and have since made the country a “dream” of civilisation. Volpe observes that Canadian values have improved substantially in response to the Holocaust, and suggests that the NHM represents the progress Canadians have made since the war. He claims that “the monument is a reflection...of the values of Canadians today, perhaps in part because we regret that these values weren’t as prevalent 65 years ago or earlier.”⁵⁵ Team Wodiczko and Bonder⁵⁶ uses Canada’s shift in immigration policy after the Holocaust to illustrate how national attitudes and policies have changed. In its design proposal, the team focuses on Canada’s role as a refuge and the way Holocaust survivors “re-rooted” in Canadian soil. It notes that “whereas Canada was, like many other countries at the time, reluctant to admit stateless Jewish refugees just before the war, it also soon became the permanent home for many thousands of post-war immigrants and Holocaust survivors.”⁵⁷ In other words, it suggest that Canada learned the

⁵⁴ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2009 (Tim Uppal, Con.), 7814.

⁵⁵ Standing Committee on Transport (Meeting No. 21), 36.

⁵⁶ Artist Krzysztof Wodiczko and architect Julian Bonder.

⁵⁷ Team Wodiczko and Bonder (Krzysztof Wodiczko and Julian Bonder), “National Holocaust Monument Design Competition,” *Designboom*, 4 March 2014, 6.

lessons of the Holocaust (i.e. the dangers of state-sanctioned hatred, the importance of liberal democracy, the value of law and rights), understood its own indiscretions in light of these lessons, and underwent a transformation from an exclusive to inclusive nation in its wake. The NHM is therefore an expression of both Canada's past wrongdoings and its present virtues. More importantly, the monument reflects the progress that Canada has made as a civilised nation since, and in response to, the Holocaust.⁵⁸

The voyage of the *MS St. Louis*, also called the *Voyage of the Damned*, is one of the most prominent symbols of Canada's progressive narrative. The *St. Louis* was an ocean liner carrying 937 refugees, most of whom were Jewish, who were traveling from Germany to flee Nazi persecution. In 1939, the *St. Louis* sought asylum first in Cuba, then the United States, and finally Canada, but was denied refuge in each country except for a handful of passengers with valid visas. The ship returned to Europe where several hundred passengers received asylum in other European countries but more than two hundred ultimately died in the war. Proponents of the NHM repeatedly call upon their colleagues and the Canadian public to remember the voyage as a shameful yet defining moment in Canadian history. Cotler invokes the symbolic significance of the *St. Louis*, uses its anniversary to link contemporary Canada with the history of the Holocaust,⁵⁹ and draw attention to Canadian complicity in the Holocaust. In an address to the House of Commons, he observes that "we meet on the 70th anniversary of the doomed voyage of the *St. Louis* known as 'the voyage of the damned' where those who sought to enter our country Canada and those who sought to enter the United States at the time were turned away, so that

⁵⁸ It is worth noting that this narrative also excuses Canadian society for past acts of discrimination. The idea of civilisational progress dictates that all civilised societies, including Canada, have emerged gradually from more savage ones. It implies that historical acts of discrimination and persecution can be attributed to the less-than-civilised past. Thus, the narrative enables society to relegate "uncivilised" events to the past and thereby absolve contemporary society from responsibility.

⁵⁹ Throughout the debates, Cotler uses anniversaries as a key way to connect contemporary Canada with the historical past.

those seeking a safe haven were forced back into the inferno that was engulfing Europe.”⁶⁰

Senator Mac Harb similarly uses the *St. Louis* to signify an historical connection between Canada and the Holocaust, and to suggest that Holocaust consciousness already exists amongst his colleagues. He acknowledges that many parliamentarians “are aware that Canada has its own guilt to carry. Seventy-two years ago, in June, 1939, the *St. Louis*, a German ocean liner carrying 930 Jewish refugees, was coldly turned away from the American and Canadian coasts. For far too many of those refugees, hope was lost.”⁶¹ But proponents also call attention to how the Canadian government made substantial changes to its immigration policy beginning in 1947, less than a decade after denying refuge to the passengers of the *St. Louis*, and has consequently become a haven for Jewish refugees and other persecuted people. The voyage of the *MS St. Louis* is therefore a key moment in the narrative of Canadian progress that reflects how far Canadians have come as a civilised nation.

Proponents claim that it is important to commemorate this shift in Canadian policies and attitudes, and several refer specifically to the Wheel of Conscience as an example of how public memory can embody this shift.⁶² The Wheel of Conscience is a memorial to the passengers of the *MS St. Louis* that was unveiled in Halifax in 2011, and was designed by Daniel Libeskind (who is also a member of Team Lord). The monument uses a set of four interlocking gears to represent the machinery of racial persecution: the gears read, from smallest to largest, “hatred,” “racism,” “xenophobia,” and “antisemitism.” The monument was placed in the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, the historical site where many migrants entered Canada

⁶⁰ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2009 (Irwin Cotler, Lib.), 7816.

⁶¹ Canada, *Debates of the Senate*, 17 February 2011 (Hon. Mac Harb), 1857; cf. Canada, *Debates of the Senate*, 22 March 2011 (Joan Fraser), 2081-2 and Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2009 (Irwin Cotler, Lib.), 7816.

⁶² Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 27 October 2010 (Tim Uppal, Con.), 5451; Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, 9.

during the 20th century. It therefore commemorates both the country's previous practices of excluding racialised Others as well its more recent role as a safe haven to those facing persecution. These proponents frame the Wheel of Conscience as a memorial predecessor to the NHM that demonstrates the monument's symbolic potential, especially its potential to represent Canadian history. The NHM, like the Wheel of Conscience, symbolises the nation's progress over time.

Proponents of the NHM claim that, while Canada has progressed since the Holocaust, acts of antisemitism, discrimination, and genocide continue to occur around the world. Several observe that antisemitism remains a major concern in many places, including Canada.⁶³ Mulcair warns that “anti-Semitic incidents tragically [are] on the rise around the world...[so] it is necessary to understand the reality of the worst example in world history of where religious hatred can lead.”⁶⁴ These proponents argue that Holocaust commemoration is necessary because knowledge of the Holocaust – as an extreme case of antisemitism – can contribute to the prevention of similar acts of persecution. Others refer to state-sanctioned or popular forms of hatred in general, and identify places around the world where such hatred has permeated public life. Cotler identifies three lessons of the Holocaust in an address to parliament: the responsibility to remember; the danger of state-sanctioned hatred; and the danger of inaction.

Regarding the second lesson, Cotler states:

the dangers of state-sanctioned incitement to hate and to genocide, that the enduring lesson of the Holocaust and the genocides that followed, in Srebrenica, Rwanda and Darfur, occurred not simply because of the machinery of death but because of state-sanctioned cultures of hate...And tragically, we are witnessing yet again, in our own time, a state-sanctioned incitement to hate and genocide whose epicentre is Ahmadinejad's

⁶³ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2009 (Carole Lavallée, BQ; Judy Wasylycia-Leis, NDP), 7818-9.

⁶⁴ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2010 (Thomas Mulcair, NDP), 6982.

Iran...Let there be no mistake about it. Iran has already committed the crime of incitement to genocide prohibited under the Genocide Convention.⁶⁵

By referring to several genocides since the Holocaust (Rwanda in 1994 and Srebrenica in 1995) as well as ongoing acts of genocide (Darfur and Iran), Cotler suggests that many nations around the world have failed to learn from the Holocaust. But it is noteworthy that Cotler's examples come from the Global South: while some proponents acknowledge that antisemitism still exists in Canada, Cotler implies that extreme manifestations of hatred such as genocide tend to happen elsewhere.⁶⁶ Such proponents implicate Canada in contemporary acts of discrimination, but they do not attribute serious cases of state-mandated hatred to it.

Proponents further argue that Canada is an advanced society with an obligation to protect and promote civilisation around the world. A principle of national mythology is that, while civilisational progress is an inevitable process, advanced societies can facilitate this process by sharing (read: imposing) the “generous gifts” of civilisation (i.e. police, government, education) with less-civilised people.⁶⁷ A common refrain in the NHM debates is that “Canada has a long history of promoting human rights and combating hate and discrimination”⁶⁸ and continues to have “a commitment and resolve...always to stand up against such atrocities”⁶⁹ as the Holocaust. MP Glenn Thibeault provides an especially direct statement about Canada's commitment to promote and protect civilisation:

We, as Canadians, must make it our mission to ensure that a genocidal campaign such as the Holocaust is never allowed to occur again...We need to actively work to deter and ultimately eliminate these hateful elements from sprouting up in mainstream political discourse through the refusal to accept these ideological underpinnings as anything other than the racist, anti-Semitic and bigoted positions that they are. More specifically, free

⁶⁵ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2009 (Irwin Cotler, Lib.), 7817.

⁶⁶ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission provides a useful contrast to this position. In its final report, the Commission concludes that Canada is responsible for “cultural genocide” against Indigenous peoples.

⁶⁷ Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 83; Francis, *National Dreams*, 29-51; Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 2.

⁶⁸ Canada, *Debates of the Senate*, 10 February 2011 (Hon. Yonah Martin), 1801.

⁶⁹ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 27 October 2010 (Tim Uppal, Con.), 5450.

and democratic societies, such as Canada, have a moral obligation to strongly condemn ideologies of hatred, anti-Semitism and despotism whenever and wherever they occur.⁷⁰

For Thibeault, it is not enough that Canada has challenged discrimination at the international level: it must also have a “mission” to challenge such acts “whenever and wherever they occur.” Canadians must stand up against hatred because they live in a “free and democratic society” and therefore have a “moral obligation” as democratic (read: civilised) subjects. Proponents such as Thibeault position Canada as a superior society and imbue it with the paternalistic responsibility to impose its own values on other nations and peoples.

Perhaps the most noteworthy symbol of Canadian progress is Parliament Hill and the Peace Tower, which are recurring tropes in the monument design proposals. The monument is located across from the Canadian War Museum, only several blocks from Parliament Hill and within view of the Parliament buildings. Several design teams integrate this view into their design proposals and, in particular, present visitors with a view of Parliament Hill as the culmination of their journeys through the proposed monuments. Team Klein⁷¹ proposed a monument that removes visitors from the immediate cityscape and immerses them in a solemn and contemplative space: “The Peace Tower is blocked from view throughout the processional – a reference to the many Jews denied refuge in Canada. It finally comes into sight as visitors emerge from the monument and symbolically return to a more open-minded and welcoming modern society.”⁷² Visibility of the Peace Tower throughout the monument therefore symbolises Canada’s narrative of progress from a closed to open society, the supremacy of Canadian

⁷⁰ Ibid. (Glenn Thibeault, NDP), 5454.

⁷¹ Architect Les Klein, artists Yael Bartana and Susan Philipsz, curator Chen Tamir, landscape architects Jeffrey Craft and Alan Schwartz, and Holocaust scholars Debórah Dwork and Jeffrey Koerber.

⁷² Team Klein (Leslie M. Klein, Jeffrey Craft, Alan Schwartz, Yael Bartana, Susan Philipsz, Chen Tamir, Debórah Dwork, and Jeffrey Koerber), “National Holocaust Monument National Design Competition,” *Designboom*, 4 March 2014, 3.



Figure 3: View of the Peace Tower, Ottawa ON. Photo by jason chalmers, 2018.

governance, as well as the country's global status as a safe haven. Team Lord similarly uses a view of Parliament Hill as the climax to their "journey through the star." Visitors begin their journey by descending into the monument and conclude by ascending a flight of stairs:

Alongside the stair is a photo mural of Visas and Passports of Canadian survivors, featuring Canadian documents and 'false papers' from occupied countries issued to survivors by diplomats and others who helped Jews escape to settle ultimately in Canada. Approaching the stair offers a dramatic view of the Parliament Buildings.⁷³

The symbolism of this journey is progressive and nationalistic: visitors emerge from the past horrors of the Holocaust by ascending into the present world; this journey is accompanied by documents related to Canadian immigration; and visitors confront symbols of the Canadian state as they conclude their journey and emerge into the present. This journey from the barbaric past into the civilised present is a conspicuously linear and predefined path that leads neither to an idealised civilisation nor the Western world in general, but particularly towards contemporary Canada. Nadine Blumer pointedly observes that "the redemptive narrative could not be clearer: from Nazi fascism in Europe to salvation in Canada."⁷⁴

The Erasure of Indigenous Peoples from the Canadian Landscape

There is a notable silence regarding Indigenous peoples and land in the debates surrounding the NHM. A core feature of settler mythology is that, as a nation progresses, Indigenous peoples will either assimilate into dominant society (cultural erasure) or altogether disappear from the landscape (physical erasure).⁷⁵ Indigenous legal scholar Tracey Lindberg argues that Canadians perpetuate colonial ideology largely through "silence, collusion, and

⁷³ Team Lord, 2.

⁷⁴ Blumer, "Memorials are Built of Public Discussion."

⁷⁵ Andrew Woolford, Jeff Benvenuto, and Alexander Laban Hinton, eds, *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014); Patrick Wolfe, "Nation and Miscegenation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era," *Social Analysis* 36 (1994).

complicity.”⁷⁶ She explains that Canadian lawmakers reproduce colonial attitudes – and especially a belief in settler dominance – by erasing Indigenous voices, histories, and legal authority when drafting legislation. Lindberg thus reasons that “colonial silence and complicity occupies a space in every office where law pertaining to Indigenous lands is drafted...We are all complicit [in colonial violence] if we do not address Indigenous governmental orders and authorities” during the creation of state law.⁷⁷ In other words, what the NHMA and its proponents fail to say about Indigenous peoples and land is as important as what they do say. Many of these proponents reproduce the myth of Indigenous erasure by failing to acknowledge that the monument is situated on unceded Algonquin territory or considering the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canadian society.

The NHMA makes no reference to Indigenous land and most proponents fail to address this absence of recognition. The act explains that the minister responsible for the monument will select “a suitable area of public land in the National Capital Region for the Monument to be located”⁷⁸ whereby “‘public land’ means an area of land owned by the Crown that is accessible to the public at all times.”⁷⁹ It does not acknowledge that “public land” entails lands that have been expropriated from Indigenous peoples or that the National Capital Region sits on unceded Algonquin territory.⁸⁰ Rather, the NHMA assumes both that land can be owned and that the state has a right to determine who has access to it. These assumptions persist throughout the debates surrounding the NHM. During study of the bill, for example, the standing committee debated whether or not the government should donate the land for the NHM. Volpe insists throughout

⁷⁶ Robert J. Miller, Jacinta Ruru, Larissa Behrendt, and Tracey Lindberg, *Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 168.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *National Holocaust Monument Act, Statutes of Canada* 2011, c.13, §6.b.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, §2.

⁸⁰ Government of Ontario, “The Algonquin Land Claim” (2012-2017).

that the government must donate public land if the NHM is to be a public monument. He reasons that “we need the Government of Canada to speak for all Canadians – every single one of the 32 million who have subscribed to the census and have identified themselves as legitimate inhabitants in this place.”⁸¹ Volpe frames the Canadian government as the legitimate owner of land and all legal residents of the country as “legitimate inhabitants” of place. The NHM stands in sharp contrast to the CTHR. The Tribute uses more than seventy Indigenous languages in its text, and includes the following statement in English, French, and Algonquin:

The land on which this structure stands is part of the traditional territories of the Algonquin Anishnabe people. We have occupied these lands since time immemorial. It is fitting that this symbol should stand here as a reminder of the suffering of oppressed people everywhere and of our faith in the wisdom of the Great Spirit and the promise of Life, Dignity, Freedom, and Equality for all living beings. We welcome all who come here to share in our hope.⁸²

The CTHR acknowledges that Algonquin people have a legitimate and ancestral claim to the land on which the memorial stands.

Proponents furthermore ignore the presence of Indigenous peoples in Canadian society and their experiences under the settler colonial state. Some supporters of the NHM speak of the Holocaust as a “foreign” or “alien” event that has no parallels in Canadian history. Uppal repeatedly emphasises that the Holocaust may seem distant and incomprehensible to people “privileged to live in a country like Canada...Today’s Canada and those who are honoured to call Canada home would have tremendous difficulty identifying with the deep horrors of the Holocaust. The concept of state-sanctioned killing and ethnic cleansing is completely alien.”⁸³

⁸¹ Standing Committee on Transport (No. 21), 9.

⁸² Canadian Tribute to Human Rights, “Statement of the Algonquin Anishnabe People” (2008).

⁸³ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2009 (Tim Uppal, Con.), 7814; cf. Standing Committee on Transport (No. 17), 3.

Yaron Ashkenazi, executive director of the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem, offers a similar statement to the standing senate committee:

We have to educate the younger generations with the lessons of the Shoah, the story of the Shoah in order to allow them to understand how fortunate they are living in this country, with its multicultural structure, so much tolerance and so few occasions of anti-Semitism and racism.⁸⁴

Uppal and Ashkenazi argue that Canadians have difficulty relating to the Holocaust because “ethnic cleansing is completely alien” and “few occasions of racism” exist in Canada. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) contests these claims in its final report (discussed in Chapter IV), which concludes that the “establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of [Canada’s Aboriginal] policy, which can best be described as ‘cultural genocide’.”⁸⁵ Although the focus on cultural genocide emphasises “the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group,”⁸⁶ the report also acknowledges that death rates among students were “far higher” than average for the Canadian population.⁸⁷ Claims about Indigenous genocide in Canada are not unique to the TRC,⁸⁸ and earlier government inquiries such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) conclude that “policies pursued over the decades have undermined – and almost erased – Aboriginal cultures and identities.”⁸⁹ Furthermore, the TRC explains that “intense racism” continues to exist against Indigenous peoples in Canada and documents “the systemic and other

⁸⁴ Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, 23.

⁸⁵ TRC, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the TRC* (Winnipeg: TRC, 2015), 1.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁸⁸ David MacDonald, “First Nations, Residential Schools, and the Americanization of the Holocaust: Rewriting Indigenous History in the United States and Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 4 (2007).

⁸⁹ Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, “A Word from Commissioners,” *Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (2010).

forms of discrimination Aboriginal people regularly experience in this country.”⁹⁰ From this perspective, it is possible to see state-mandated hatred as a pillar of the nation, and racism against Indigenous peoples – both institutional and popular – as deeply entrenched in Canadian society.⁹¹ For Uppal and Ashkenazi to claim that the “horrors of the Holocaust” are unfamiliar to Canadian society, they must ignore the experiences of Indigenous peoples and the conclusions of national inquiries such as RCAP. In this respect, the CTHR provides another point of contrast: by acknowledging “the suffering of oppressed people” (in the aforementioned statement of Algonquin people), the monument calls attention to the ongoing struggles of Indigenous peoples under the settler state.

When proponents do acknowledge Indigenous peoples, they frame them as an “asterisk” group who is only one of many historically oppressed populations. Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang describe the “asterisk-ing” of Indigenous peoples as a practice whereby researchers consider Indigenous groups to be of negligible size in studies of minority populations. Such researchers lump Indigenous peoples in with or defer them as secondary to other minority groups. This is problematic because it “moves Indigenous nations as ‘populations’ to the margins of public discourse” rather than address Indigenous peoples as unique groups or acknowledge that Indigenous peoples and land are central to the settler colonial project.⁹² Uppal uses this approach in the preceding quotation (in the previous section) where he refers to Canada’s past failures and

⁹⁰ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 183. The TRC proceeds to discuss the apprehension of Indigenous children by child-welfare services, inequalities in education and health, and the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the justice system.

⁹¹ *Maclean's* magazine has recently documented racism against Indigenous peoples in a series of articles. Popular and systemic racism in Canada is an ongoing problem, and discussion of it is increasingly salient in the popular media. See for example: Scott Gilmore, “Canada’s Race Problem? It’s Even Worse than America’s,” *Maclean's*, 22 January 2015; Nancy Macdonald, “Welcome to Winnipeg: Where Canada’s Racism Problem Is at its Worst,” *Maclean's*, 22 January 2015; Nancy Macdonald, “Canada’s Prisons are the ‘New Residential Schools’,” *Maclean's*, 18 February 2016.

⁹² Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 22.

lists “the treatment of aboriginal Canadians” amongst Japanese internment and the refusal of the *Komagata Maru*.⁹³ Friedman asterisks Indigenous peoples in an article for the *Canadian Jewish News* where he chides earlier governments for failing to erect a Holocaust monument. He frames the NHM as the culmination of several “righted wrongs” by the Harper government: “First it was the shift in direction in Middle East policy. Then it was the long-overdue apology to First Nations. And now, Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s government has finally righted another historic wrong.”⁹⁴ Friedman frames Residential Schools as only one of several national wrongs that have now been resolved. Moreover, he suggests that the government’s formal apology for Residential Schools was an effective resolution, that is, an appropriate and complete response for the suffering of Indigenous families under government policy.

Senator Yonah Martin conveyed an especially noteworthy example of asterisking during debate of Bill C-442 by the standing senate committee. In her address, Martin provides a brief history of commemorative monuments in the western world, lists examples of Holocaust monuments in Canada, and discusses notable monuments in the National Capital Region including the War Memorial and the CTHR. In addition to these, she also speaks about the Aboriginal Veterans Monument:

The National Aboriginal Veterans Monument is located in Confederation Park and was installed in 2001. It pays homage to the contribution of our Aboriginal men and women to Canada’s Armed Forces over the years. It reflects traditional beliefs and its highest point is the symbol of the Creator.⁹⁵

This statement contributes to the erasure of Indigenous peoples in several ways. First, Martin asterisks Indigenous peoples by classifying them (and the monument that represents them) as only one of many groups worthy of commemoration. Furthermore, the monument acknowledges

⁹³ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2009 (Tim Uppal, Con.), 7814.

⁹⁴ Daniel Friedman, “Government Has Finally Righted a Historical Wrong,” *Canadian Jewish News*, 9 June 2014.

⁹⁵ Canada, *Debates of the Senate*, 10 February 2011 (Hon. Yonah Martin), 1800.

“the contribution” of Indigenous peoples only insofar as they have served Canada as members of the armed forces. In other words, Martin emphasises the way Indigenous peoples have contributed to the settler state.⁹⁶ She elides other contributions by Indigenous peoples – and in particular the involuntary “contribution” of Indigenous land – including the Algonquin territory upon which the monument stands.

While most proponents reproduce the mythical theme of Indigenous erasure, a few call attention to the issue of stolen land. Several critics observe that the NHM – and Parliament Hill – are located on unceded Algonquin territory. The *West Coast Native News* published an article titled “National Holocaust Monument to be built on unceded Algonquin territory,” which asks: “Will Canada build a Monument for the First Nations across turtle island for the act of genocide that was forced on them?”⁹⁷ *Metro* published an article that outlines Douglas Cardinal’s criticism of the monument. Cardinal, the Métis-Blackfoot architect who designed the Museum of History (formerly the Museum of Civilization), acknowledges the importance of Holocaust commemoration but also emphasises the need to consider the centrality of Indigenous peoples in Canadian history. As Lucy Scholey reports in the article:

The unceded Algonquin land slated for the Nation Holocaust Monument would be better suited for a memorial honouring First Nations people, according to the architect of the Canadian Museum of History. While Douglas Cardinal said it’s important to commemorate the millions who died in the Holocaust, there needs to be better recognition of the First Nations people who have suffered within their own country since as far back as first European contact.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ An especially troubling aspect of Indigenous military history is its role in assimilation. The Canadian government at times required mandatory enfranchisement of status Indians who enrolled in the armed forces. Consequently, Status Indians who served in the military lost their Indian status. Martin does not mention this.

⁹⁷ *West Coast Native News*, “National Holocaust Monument to Be Built on Unceded Algonquin Territory,” 16 June 2014.

⁹⁸ Lucy Scholey, “Ottawa Needs Monument Honouring Aboriginal Suffering, Says Museum Architect,” *Metro*, 15 December 2014.

Blumer provides an especially critical response to the NHM in an article for the *Ottawa Citizen*. She challenges how the government is using the NHM and the Memorial to the Victims of Communism to construct a “redemptive” narrative of Canadian history. Blumer argues that public debate is an important aspect of national monuments, and suggests that these monuments can be starting points for conversations about Canada’s refugee policy, overseas military policies, as well as Indigenous concerns:

A well-rounded public debate on Ottawa’s new monument might result in demands for further national memorials, such as one in the capital commemorating Aboriginal victims of the residential school system, or recognition of the Holocaust memorial’s location atop traditional Algonquin land.⁹⁹

Proponents of the NHM are not entirely uniform in their beliefs. While dominant discourse surrounding the monument reproduces settler mythology, Holocaust memory does not always contribute to the erasure of Indigenous peoples or the reproduction of settler colonialism. Indeed, Cardinal and Blumer acknowledge that Holocaust commemoration is an important practice but also challenge the way many proponents use Holocaust memory to silence Indigenous narratives. Holocaust commemoration does not inherently erase Indigenous voices and, if Blumer and Cardinal are correct, can contribute to the visibility of Indigenous concerns. Such opinions are, however, in the minority and most proponents continue to ignore the presence and experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Using Holocaust Memory to Indigenise Settler Society

Progressive narratives in settler mythologies are twofold and contain both historical and existential dimensions. The historical dimension, outlined in previous sections, entails temporal movement from savagery to civilisation. The existential dimension involves the “indigenisation

⁹⁹ Blumer, “Memorials Are Built of Public Discussion.”

of the settler” wherein settler society becomes legitimate inhabitants of land and thereby transcend their settler identity.¹⁰⁰ Proponents of the NHM, and especially the design teams, frame settler society and Holocaust memory as natural features of the Canadian landscape. The monument functions to root settler memories in land and thereby contributes to the indigenisation of settler Canadians.

Proponents of the NHM frame Jewish survivors as being rooted in, and elements of, the Canadian landscape. Many proponents frame Canada as a safe haven for Jewish refugees and thereby construct contemporary Canada as an open and welcoming society. The concept of a “safe haven” applies not just to national society but also to the physical land on which Canada is situated. Ashkenazi, among others, emphasises that Holocaust survivors made Canada their home by settling permanently rather than treating it as a temporary refuge: “the monument will send a strong message to the Canadian Holocaust survivors who came here after the war and rebuilt their lives.”¹⁰¹ Farber similarly recognises that Holocaust survivors have “made extraordinary contributions to all aspects of Canadian society.”¹⁰² Team Saucier suggests that survivors were able to rebuild their lives in Canada precisely because the landscape itself was so inviting: the monument should be “grounded in a land that has welcomed Holocaust survivors and their descendants.”¹⁰³ Design teams therefore explore ways to represent this re-rooting of survivors in Canadian soil. For example, Team Lord uses trees as a symbol of both the European past and Canadian present. An article in the *Globe and Mail* describes how Team Lord’s monument “will include a forest of coniferous trees growing out of rocky ground, a nod to the

¹⁰⁰ Lowman and Barker, *Settler*, 26; Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson, “Settler Colonies,” in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2000).

¹⁰¹ Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, 23.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰³ Team Saucier, 1.

forests of eastern Europe and a living symbol of how survivors and their children have changed Canada.”¹⁰⁴ Although this symbolism acknowledges that Holocaust survivors are a relatively recent addition to Canada, it also frames them as a group who is deeply connected to land. This symbolic and discursive strategy indigenises refugees who settled in Canada after the war and, presumably, any immigrant group who has built a home here and contributed to national society.

The most direct way design teams indigenise settler society is by framing the NHM as a natural feature of the Canadian landscape. Each team aims to design a monument that in some way reflects the local or national landscape. They propose various ways to do this such as using natural features to blend the monument with its surrounding environment, symbolising certain aspects of the Canadian landscape, or framing the monument as a geological occurrence. For example, Team Klein proposes a monument that is “rooted in the earth [so] its forms emerge from the landscape” and includes “birch trees and meadow grasses symbolizing the common landscape between Canada and Eastern Europe.”¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Team Saucier explains how the “new monument is envisioned as a geological form emerging from the earth, lifting a portion of the Canadian landscape.”¹⁰⁶

Team Wodiczko and Bonder most explicitly reproduces settler colonial practices by proposing a monument that is thoroughly fused with land. The team proposes a memorial space that is sunken into the ground and immerses visitors in the earth. This design requires the excavation of soil to reveal the underlying bedrock:

In this Working Monument, we literally expose bedrock in order to anchor new meanings, stories, and memories in it – in which visitors will find themselves immersed. Conceptually and formally, our project seeks:

¹⁰⁴ Alex Bozickovic, “National Holocaust Monument Design Unveiled,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 May 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Team Klein, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Team Saucier, 1.

- To reveal the bedrock beneath the surface of the monument's designated site in order to anchor Holocaust memory in Canada's national bedrock, itself a fragment of a global geological formation.
- To provide a rich new soil for this memory and for those uprooted by the Holocaust and now re-rooted in Canada, by importing soil from all sites of former Jewish communities in Europe from which Canada's Holocaust survivors have come.
- To insert this soil into the bedrock, intermix it with the soil from other provinces and territories of Canada, and then plant groves of Aspen trees as symbolic reference to the cultivation of new life and memory in this mixture of old and new world soil.¹⁰⁷

The team proposes an explicit and literal act of settler colonialism. As a social phenomenon, colonialism entails the imposition of one social order – the stories, laws, languages, institutions, spatial organisations, etc. of one people – on another's land and the Indigenous people of that land.¹⁰⁸ In this way, all design teams reproduce settler colonialism because they propose using the NHM to physically impose settler memories on Algonquin land.¹⁰⁹ But Team Wodiczko and Bonder is clear about this intent. The designers aim to transform the land and, in particular, transform it in a way that reflects the Eurocanadian settler:¹¹⁰ they propose razing the surface of the land and “anchoring” the monument in bedrock; importing European soils and blending them with Canadian soil to “cultivate new life and memory”; and ultimately imposing settler “meanings, stories, and memories” (i.e. Holocaust memory, narratives of settlement, Canada's war and post-war national narrative) on the land. The proposed monument colonises the land by importing and imposing settler narratives, and it then indigenises these narratives by framing them as native extensions of the landscape. Both symbolically and literally, the monument is a colonial imposition on the land.

¹⁰⁷ Team Wodiczko and Bonder, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society*, 1-2.

¹⁰⁹ Indeed, nearly all monuments in the National Capital Region reproduce settler colonialism this way.

¹¹⁰ I do not claim that Indigenous peoples should not or cannot build their own monuments and memorial sites. However, I suggest there is a fundamental difference in the way Indigenous peoples and settler people commemorate on the land.

Design teams furthermore use forested areas as transformative spaces that indigenise both visitors to the monument as well as Holocaust memory. Each design team included a forested or vegetated area as part of its proposed monument design, except for Team Szylinger which nevertheless integrates trees into its design. Daniel Francis suggests that woodlands are important spaces in settler mythology because they enable settlers to re-experience their origin stories (which purportedly legitimise the occupation of land). He explains that they represent the wilderness frontier that settlers enter into, transform, and emerge from as civilised beings; he further points out that trips into the wilderness are often accompanied by the appropriation of Indigenous identity.¹¹¹ The production of this sort of origin myth or “stories of belonging” is one of the processes through which settler indigenisation occurs.¹¹² As such, encounters with forests can enable settlers to journey into the mythical past, re-discover national identity, and emerge as legitimate (and indigenised) inhabitants of the land. Design teams use forests to transform visitors and their experiences. Team Lord proposes a memorial landscape where a “northern Boreal forest” surrounds the monument. As visitors enter the forested area, they move simultaneously into the historical and mythical past: “The different species of conifer trees are combined in the landscape according to a patterned gradient that transitions from density to sparseness as one moves toward the built forms. This movement engages a leap toward a particular [contemplative] state of mind.”¹¹³ Visitors enter and pass through the forest, encounter the past horrors of the Holocaust as well as the settlement of Jewish survivors in Canada, and finally emerge from the monument with a renewed sense of national identity. Other design teams

¹¹¹ Francis, *National Dreams*, 128-34.

¹¹² Lowman and Barker, *Settler*, 58.

¹¹³ Team Lord, 2.

use forests to integrate the NHM with the landscape. Team Saucier aims to “harmonise” the monument with its natural surroundings by covering it with “free, wild, and fallow” vegetation:

Rather than simply sitting on the site as an installation, the monument carefully considers the geographical and geological setting from which it physically emerges, just as it does its geopolitical and urban context. Its natural form is continuous with its environs, notably by means of the vegetation that flows from the surrounding landscape onto the raised projection that serves as roof and lookout. The monument is resolutely Canadian, distinctly North American.¹¹⁴

Team Saucier seeks to indigenise both settler society and Holocaust memory: it designs the monument (a product of settler society) as a geological feature and thereby frames Holocaust memory as a natural part of the Canadian landscape. The designers explicitly state their intent to indigenise Holocaust memory: “The National Holocaust Monument of Canada, instead, transposes into the almost virgin and endless space of the new world – particularly on Canadian soil, so renowned for its vast landscapes – the experience of memory of the Holocaust.”¹¹⁵ In this one statement, Team Saucier simultaneously reproduces the idea of terra nullius by describing the landscape as “virgin” space and indigenises Holocaust memory by physically integrating the NHM into the landscape.

Promoting Settler Colonialism through Support of Israel

Discourses on Holocaust memory and settler colonialism also converge in debates surrounding the state of Israel. Israel was established as a Jewish state in 1948 and ultimately became home to thousands of Holocaust survivors. Consequently, promoters of Holocaust memory often frame Israel as an aspect of this memory. For example, the designers of Yad Vashem, Israel’s national Holocaust memorial, frame the Holocaust and the creation of Israel as

¹¹⁴ Team Saucier, 2.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

causally related events: the Jewish “return” to this homeland is an act of redemption for the suffering that the Jewish people endured during the Holocaust. The designers frame Israel as a safe place for Jewry to live free from the antisemitism and persecution they experienced for centuries in Europe.¹¹⁶ Yet critics also point out that Israel is a settler state. The creation and ongoing expansion of Israel has resulted in the displacement and dispossession of Palestinians from their land. Furthermore, the Israeli government exercises severe social, political, and economic control over millions of Palestinians and limits mobility within their traditional homelands. Many scholars and activists consider Israel to be a settler colonial society and thereby challenge the legitimacy of the state, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, and its oppression of Palestinian peoples.¹¹⁷ In this way, Holocaust commemoration in the state of Israel is often deeply linked to the practices and ideologies of settler colonialism. Proponents of the NHM similarly discuss Israel in a way that promotes Holocaust memory while also reproducing settler mythology.

During parliamentary debates of the NHM, proponents express support for the monument by showing approval of Israel. Several proponents claim that visits to Israel or Yad Vashem inspired their support for the NHM. Thibeault describes a recent visit to Yad Vashem: “This humbling experience evoked many emotions within me and, upon returning to Canada, it became clear to me that it was high time that the national capital region had a similar installation.”¹¹⁸ MP Jim Maloway cites a similar trip to Israel as support for the NHM but, unlike Thibeault,

¹¹⁶ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 209-81; Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 63-75.

¹¹⁷ Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?*, translated by David Thorstad (New York: Monad Press, 1973); Lorenzo Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society* (London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006); Shira Robinson, *Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel’s Liberal Settler State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Elia Zureik, *Israel’s Colonial Project in Palestine: Brutal Pursuit* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

¹¹⁸ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 27 October 2010 (Glenn Thibeault, NDP), 5454.

explicitly frames his support for Israel in terms of settler colonialism. He describes “a very inspiring visit” to Israel several decades earlier when he visited a kibbutz (an Israeli agricultural settlement). Maloway says he “was amazed to see the progress made by Israel in turning deserts into productive lands and cultivating crops in the middle of the desert.”¹¹⁹ In this brief statement, Maloway reproduces several key themes of settler mythology: he frames pre-Israel Palestine as terra nullius by describing it as an unproductive and presumably uninhabited desert (i.e. the myth of Indigenous erasure), and suggests that the use of farming to transform desert into “productive lands” is a desirable improvement (i.e. the myth of civilisational progress). Thibeault and Maloway, as well as other proponents,¹²⁰ frame Holocaust memory in relation to the state of Israel but fail to problematise ongoing settler colonial practices.

Discourse on Israel has, however, enabled productive exchanges about Canadian mythology and the potential for difficult knowledge. Farber, among others, was invited by the standing senate committee to provide a statement and respond to questions on Holocaust memory and the proposed NHM during debate of Bill C-442. A particularly rich exchange took place between Farber, who is a settler and descendent of Holocaust survivors, and Senator Lillian Dyck, who is both a member of Gordon First Nation as well as a first-generation Chinese-Canadian. Farber recounts leading First Nations chiefs on a tour of Israel, and describes a visit to Yad Vashem as the climax of this tour:

I have been to Yad Vashem, as many of you have here, and I led a tour of First Nations chiefs from Canada to Israel about four years ago. There were 30 of us altogether. I learned as much about First Nations people, I suppose, as they learned about Israel but we ended up one day at Yad Vashem. After going through the museum, we all came outside...We gathered in a friendship circle, put together by the First Nations chiefs, to remember two things: the residential schools and what happened to their children; and what happened to our children. We had this opportunity to express our pain in a way that

¹¹⁹ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 8 December 2010 (Jim Maloway, NDP), 6985.

¹²⁰ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 27 October 2010 (Tim Uppal, Con.), 5450.

I have never felt before. It was a unique coming together of First Nations people and Canadian Jews in the State of Israel.¹²¹

Senator Dyck responds to Farber's story by supporting Holocaust commemoration and promoting collaborative efforts between communities:

Mr. Farber, when you talked about the First Nations chiefs and the residential schools, I practically burst into tears. A few years back, in Saskatoon, we had the Anne Frank exhibit. That was a collaborative effort amongst various members of the community, including some from the Jewish communities as well as the Aboriginal groups. We have a lot to learn from each other. My mother was a residential school survivor. In our experiences, we have some similarities. I see the value of something like this because it educated Canadians about the darker side of humanity. People have survived, and we cannot forget. Canada is a great country. We want to ensure that anti-Semitism and racism die away. It will never die away, as you say. However, we must continue to stay on top of it, so that it cannot flourish.¹²²

This exchange simultaneously contributes to – and challenges – the myth of Indigenous erasure. In one way, it contributes to the erasure of Palestinians. Farber's story centres around a trip to Israel involving both Canadian nationals and First Nations chiefs. However, neither Farber nor Dyck discuss ongoing settler colonial practices in Israel or address the dispossession of Palestinian land. Moreover, Farber encourages Indigenous peoples in Canada to identify not with the dispossessed Palestinians, but rather with Canadian Jewry and, indirectly, with the Israeli settler state. On the other hand, Farber and Dyck challenge Indigenous erasure in Canada: they both consider that Indigenous peoples play an active role in contemporary Canadian society, and identify ways that Indigenous communities participate in relationship-building projects with settler communities. That is, Farber and Dyck generate lovely knowledge about Indigenous erasure within the Palestinian/Israeli context, but also create the potential for difficult knowledge about erasure within a Canadian context.

¹²¹ Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, 28-9.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 31.

Yet Dyck also suggests that Holocaust memory may be a useful site for difficult knowledge and, in particular, uses it to challenge progressive or redemptive narratives of Canadian history. Farber and Dyck both propose using Holocaust memory to build relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers. They suggest that First Nations and Canadian Jewry have similar historical experiences and that these can be the basis for new connections: both suffered from racial hatred and persecution during Residential Schools and the Holocaust, respectively; both have survived as individuals and cultures in spite of this persecution; and both share an interest in the commemoration and education of these histories, especially in regards to educating youth. But the language these proponents use implies two very different approaches to relationship building. The theory of difficult knowledge posits a distinction between “learning about” and “learning from” whereby the former generates lovely knowledge and the latter difficult knowledge.¹²³ Farber employs the former approach by suggesting that Jews “learned as much *about* First Nations people” as First Nations “learned *about* Israel.” Indeed, Farber expresses strong support for the NHM but consistently reproduces dominant narratives about Holocaust memory and Canadian history.¹²⁴ In contrast, Dyck proposes that “we have a lot to learn *from* each other.” She introduces a potentially difficult reading of Canadian history by emphasising that commemorative projects, such as the NHM, should educate Canadians about “the darker side of humanity.” Dyck suggests that human nature contains both good and evil and that humanity can never eliminate either (i.e. negative aspects “will never die away”); rather,

¹²³ Deborah P. Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 117-8.

¹²⁴ Farber suggests that Indigenous peoples can (or should) play only a passive unilateral role in Holocaust commemoration. He argues that national Holocaust memorials such as Yad Vashem provide an “opportunity to express our pain” in new ways. He implies that First Nations can participate in and learn from Holocaust memory, and will therefore support the Holocaust monument. In other words, Farber suggests that First Nations can use Holocaust memory as a means to remember their own tragedies. However, he does not discuss how Jewish people can learn from Residential Schools. Indeed, it is Yad Vashem that provides the context for commemorating both the Holocaust and Residential Schools.

humanity must accept and understand both its light and dark qualities. Dyck thereby challenges redemptive narratives of history: instead of claiming that humanity progresses from evil to good, she maintains that humanity contains both extremes simultaneously. This is the same premise that underlies practices of difficult knowledge: that the human condition is composed simultaneously of multiple contradictory ways of being, and that the role of education is to embrace and explore these contradictions. By arguing that Holocaust memory can be a vehicle for the exploration of humanity's dark side, Dyck proposes the integration of difficult knowledge into commemorative practices.

Legitimising and Resisting the Theft of Indigenous Land

The NHM is a *national* site of memory in that it situates the Holocaust within – and as an aspect of – Canadian history. It reflects that Canada is a settler state, embeds settler mythology within Holocaust memory, and reinscribes many of the key beliefs that undergird settler worldviews. Many proponents rely on a narrative of civilisational progress and frame the contemporary Canadian state as its climax – as a morally superior nation with a responsibility to impose civilisation around the world. Within this narrative, Canada is a place where immigrants settle and refugees come to rebuild their lives, but is not a home where Indigenous nations have lived since time immemorial. Proponents commit a double assault against Indigenous peoples and lands: they erase Indigenous peoples from the landscape while constructing settlers as the newly “indigenised” occupants of what is now North America. In other words, they suggest that Canadian settler society is a successor to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and, therefore, that settlers are the legitimate inhabitants of land. This both undermines Indigenous claims to land while inflating settler claims. In this sense, the NHM reproduces colonial violence: it

embodies and perpetuates settler worldviews, imposes settler memories and mythologies on unceded Indigenous lands, and seeks to legitimise the theft of land by the settler state.

Debates surrounding the NHM provide insight to the way difficult and lovely knowledges function at memorial sites in Canada. Difficult knowledge resists dominant narratives while lovely knowledge, in contrast, relies upon and reproduces those narratives. Both forms of knowledge depend on the way people construct information as meaningful narratives – not the content of knowledge itself. As such, Canadian history and Holocaust memory are neither intrinsically difficult nor lovely, but can rather take either form depending on the way curators, politicians, or media frame them at sites of public memory. Public monuments such as the NHM are therefore important sites to explore how past events are debated, constructed, and contested as knowledge. In debates surrounding this monument, public representatives use Holocaust memory to reproduce core elements of the national myth and thereby reproduce settler narratives. That is, the NHM and the discourse surrounding it predominately reproduce lovely knowledge about Canadian history for settler society.

Holocaust commemoration in Canada does not necessarily contribute to the reproduction of national mythology. Most proponents of the NHM reproduce lovely narratives about Canada, but some challenge these narratives and suggest that the NHM has the potential to generate difficult knowledge. Several critics point out that the monument stands on unceded Algonquin territory and question why the state commemorates Jewish genocide in Europe but not Indigenous genocide on Turtle Island. Senator Dyck challenges progressive and redemptive narratives by proposing that Canadians use the NHM to learn about the “darker side of humanity.”¹²⁵ She suggests that the human condition contains conflicting and contradictory

¹²⁵ Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, 31.

aspects that, nevertheless, exist in simultaneity – that humanity contains both the dark and the light. Such paradoxes are the basis for difficult knowledge. According to Blumer and Cardinal, Holocaust commemoration does not necessarily result in the marginalisation of Indigenous histories and, if done properly, can illuminate Indigenous experiences of suffering under the colonial state. However, this can only happen if people engage in critical conversations about monuments, memories, and the histories they embody.

Chapter IV

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission: (Re)writing Canadian History

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC or the Commission) reflects a shift in the way Canadians conceptualise the history of Residential Schools, national history and memory, and the ongoing relationship between settler society and Indigenous peoples. The Canadian government, in collaboration with Christian churches, formally established the Residential School system with the introduction of the *Indian Act*, both of which had pre-confederation predecessors but came into full legal force in 1876. Federal lawmakers claim that these schools fulfilled the government's Treaty obligations to provide education and economic relief to Indigenous nations.¹ However, as the TRC observed in 2015, "the intent of the government's policy...was to assimilate Aboriginal people into broader Canadian society."² In 1968 and 1969, the federal government began to restructure the Residential School system by shutting down many schools and transferring others to territorial governments, and the last school closed in 1996. While many of those working within the system believed that the schools were in the best interest of the children and "aim[ed] to do something good,"³ the outcome of Residential Schools was disastrous for Indigenous communities. Pervasive abuse within schools traumatised children, and school policies harmed Indigenous cultures by suppressing languages and interrupting cultural transmission. Despite the evidence of widespread harm, policy makers in contemporary Canada, such as Senator Lynn Beyak (discussed in Chapter I), continue to

¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 55-6; Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 11 June 2008 (Stephen Harper, Con.), 6849.

² TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 57.

³ *Ibid.*, 124.

perpetuate attitudes that the school system was a “kindly and well-intentioned” institution.⁴

Prime Minister Stephen Harper suggested that former governments created and implemented Residential Schools with good intentions and, only in retrospect,⁵ does the “government now recognize...that the consequences of the Indian residential schools policy were profoundly negative.”⁶

Awareness of Residential Schools increased in mainstream society when former students began to speak openly about their experiences. In the 1980s and 90s, former students started to organise and launch lawsuits against the Canadian government.⁷ Many of these cases were combined into a large class-action lawsuit that, in 2006, resulted in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA). In addition to financial reparations, the IRSSA required the government to establish and allocate money towards a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *Schedule N* of the agreement contains the “Mandate for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission” which defines the structure, activities, and legal authority of the Commission and outlines its responsibility to create an historical record of the schools, record the statements of survivors, and hold public events aimed at commemoration and education. Prime Minister Harper also delivered a formal apology in June 2008 to former students on behalf of the federal government.⁸

The TRC was established in 2008 and completed its activities in 2015. The Commission held seven National Events and two Regional Events, conducted local hearings in seventy-seven communities, gathered more than 6,750 statements from former students and other people

⁴ Canada, *Debates of the Senate*, 7 March 2017 (Hon. Lynn Beyak), 2514.

⁵ Matthew Dorrell, “From Reconciliation to Reconciling: Reading What ‘We Now Recognize’ in the Government of Canada’s 2008 Residential Schools Apology,” *English Studies in Canada* 35, no. 1 (2009): 32.

⁶ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 11 June 2008 (Stephen Harper, Con.), 6850.

⁷ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 130-1.

⁸ Leaders from opposing federal parties, as well as representatives for major Indigenous organisations, gave statements in response to the apology.

impacted by Residential Schools, sponsored education and commemorative initiatives, and established the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR).⁹ Its final report, issued in 2015, includes six volumes on the history and legacy of the Residential School system and a list of ninety-four “calls to action” that propose ways for governments and churches to contribute to reconciliation. It also includes additional reports entitled *The Survivors Speak* and *What We Have Learned*, and a nearly four-hundred page summary entitled *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*.

The TRC has generated a massive (and growing) body of discourse. The NCTR, housed at the University of Manitoba, offers programming on Residential Schools and reconciliation and serves as an archive for the many statements, historical documents, and other items collected during the TRC’s activities. The NCTR’s website, for example, provides visitors with public access to hundreds of historical documents and video statements. The TRC has further stimulated a multitude of media, scholarly, artistic, literary, and other responses to both its activities and the history of Residential Schools. Each of these sources will provide its own interpretation of Canadian history and Residential Schools. I restrict my study, however, primarily to the final report – and mostly to *Honouring the Truth*. This report offers an internally coherent, if not complete, account of the history and legacy of Residential Schools. Furthermore, it synthesises an immense amount of information about Residential Schools to construct a coherent and unified narrative of Canadian history. That is, it is an historical and memorial document that seeks to interpret the past and explain its significance to the present.

This chapter examines the TRC from two related perspectives, namely, the role of history and its impact on myth. The first part of this analysis, which comprises the first three sections,

⁹ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 27-39.

explores the TRC's interpretation of Canadian history in its final report. The first section examines its approach to history and memory in *Honouring the Truth*. The Commission frames reconciliation as an historical and memorial process with the power to transform identities, worldviews, and relationships. This approach, I suggest, aims to generate difficult knowledge for settler society by constructing an alternative narrative of Canadian history. The second section considers the role of genocide in this narrative. By framing Canadian history as a process of genocide, this narrative has the potential to disrupt dominant myths and historical narratives. The third section outlines the specific content and structure of the TRC's historical narrative. It revolves around past, present, and future relationships between Indigenous peoples and settler society, and especially vicissitudes of respectful and harmful relationships. Unlike settler mythology, which is based on forward-moving progress, the TRC's narrative frames history as cyclical, immanent, and relational. As such, the TRC's proposed narrative of Canadian history has the potential to disrupt the myth of civilisational progress and may become difficult knowledge for settler Canadians, although this process is by no means inevitable.

The second part of this analysis, comprising the fourth section, examines how this historical narrative engages with national myth. I explore how the TRC – through its interpretation of history in its final report and related documents, and by drawing on existing critiques of the Commission – reproduces and resists four aspects of the Canadian myth: civilisational progress, white supremacy, Indigenous erasure, and lawful peacemaking. I argue that the TRC aspires to transform Canadian society by “rewriting” national history, although its ability to realise this goal is hindered especially by its relationship to law. Thus, I further argue that, while the TRC's report has potential to subvert settler narratives and national myth, it offers an interpretation of Canadian history that does not always disrupt the logic of settler colonialism.

In this way, I suggest that the TRC makes a radical proposal in *Honouring the Truth*, namely, that reconciliation entails the transformation of settler colonial identities, relationships, as well as the Canadian state. As critics have pointed out, however, its ability to achieve this sort of radical change in practice is limited.

Reconciliation As the Rewriting of History

According to the TRC's final report, truth and reconciliation entails the transformation of national history and memory in Canada. In particular, the Commission proposes "rewriting" Canadian history based on the diverse and often marginalised voices of those who experienced Residential Schools. This process is rooted in difficult knowledge and may therefore facilitate the transformation of colonial identities, worldviews, and relationships. While this vision reconciles Indigenous peoples with the Canadian state, it also aims to disrupt the colonial nature of this relationship.

The Commission describes "truth" and truth-telling as an historical process wherein people create a "new" historical record. In *Honouring the Truth*, the TRC frames truth in response to the question "when you talk about truth, whose truth are you talking about?":

by *truth*, we mean not only the truth revealed in government and church residential school documents, but also the truth of lived experiences as told to us by Survivors and others in their statements to this Commission. Together, these public testimonies constitute a new oral history record, one based on Indigenous legal traditions and the practice of healing.¹⁰

For the TRC, then, truth manifests in diverse ways that include both historical documents as well as oral statements of lived experience, and the TRC does not privilege one form of knowledge over another. Furthermore, it positions truth-telling as a process of revelation wherein people

¹⁰ Ibid., 12.

uncover something formerly unknown or hidden. Indeed, the TRC argues that marginalised – and especially Indigenous – voices are an integral part of truth-telling that must be included in the creation of a “new historical record.” This record should develop from (or as) an aggregate of experiential statements about Residential Schools:

To determine the truth and to tell the full and complete story of residential schools in this country, the TRC needed to hear from Survivors and their families, former staff, government and church officials, and all those affected by residential schools. Canada’s national history in the future must be based on the truth about what happened in residential schools.¹¹

That is, truth-telling reveals the “complete story” of Residential Schools and Canadian history through the disclosure of experiences from all the parties involved. This includes the stories of students and their families, as well as the stories of those who orchestrated and implemented the school system, such as staff and government officials. Richard Moran challenges this claim of completeness and argues that, while the TRC purports to offer a “complete” history of Residential School, it is ultimately an incomplete historiographical body. Its completeness, he suggests, is limited by its evidence-gathering practices and relationship to the colonial state, which are governed by the Commission’s mandate and the imperative not to provide legal arguments.¹² Nevertheless, the TRC frames its work as a complete historical record and uses this collection of diverse – and often marginal – voices as the basis for a new narrative of Canadian history.¹³

“Reconciliation” for the TRC is a memorial process that involves, among other things, transforming relationships with the past. In its final report, the Commission “defines

¹¹ Ibid., 15.

¹² Richard Moran, “Indigenous Literature and the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2018), 6, 24-5.

¹³ I maintain that the interpretation of history is a form of commemoration (Chapter I). It demands that people retain what is significant and filter out the rest. In this way, all acts of memory and historiography are inherently incomplete. I do concede, though, that the TRC’s claim of completeness is problematic.

reconciliation as an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships,” and focuses specifically, though not exclusively, on relationships between Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians.¹⁴ This process aims to repair relationships through a variety of means such as apologies and reparations, as well as the “revitalization of Indigenous law and legal traditions.”¹⁵ In *Honouring the Truth*, the Commission elaborates on the various approaches to relationship-building:

A just reconciliation requires more than simply talking about the need to heal the deep wounds of history. Words of apology alone are insufficient; concrete actions on both symbolic and material fronts are required. Reparations for historical injustices must include not only apology, financial redress, legal reform, and policy change, but also the rewriting of national history and public commemoration.¹⁶

In this way reconciliation requires change on many fronts, including both history and memory: “talking about” history is an important part of the reconciliation process, but this must also be accompanied by concrete transformation and the “rewriting” of history. Rewriting memory is likewise an integral part of this process: the Commissioners “believe that true reconciliation can take place only through a reshaping of a shared, national, collective memory: our understanding of who we are and what has come before.”¹⁷ History and memory are therefore essential to reconciliation because they produce narratives of the past that shape identities in the present – that is, narratives that inform “who we are.”¹⁸ In sum, then, the TRC frames “truth and reconciliation” as an historical and memorial process: it requires the creation of a new historical record based on personal stories; transforming memories and relationships with the past; and the rewriting of national history.

¹⁴ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 318.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

In *Honouring the Truth*, the TRC uses the language of difficult knowledge to frame the truth and reconciliation process.¹⁹ Difficult knowledge is a model of learning that describes education as a transformative process. Encounters with difficult knowledge cause people to have intense affective and emotional experiences, and these experiences can radically change the way people formulate identities and worldviews.²⁰ The Commission suggests in its report that those who learn about Residential Schools are likely to encounter this type of knowledge: “Teaching and learning about the residential schools are difficult for educators and students alike. They can bring up feelings of anger, grief, shame, guilt, and denial. But they can also shift understanding and alter world views.”²¹ That is, the history of Residential Schools is potentially “difficult” content that may transform perceptions and worldviews. This experience is challenging because it is accompanied by, and forces students to engage with, unpleasant emotions. However, psychoanalyst Deborah Britzman insists that emotion alone is not sufficient to constitute a difficult encounter; rather, students must simultaneously engage with conflicting and contradictory emotions to have a transformative experience.²² The Commission explains that the “process of remembering the past together is an emotional journey of contradictory feelings: loss and resilience, anger and acceptance, denial and remorse, shame and pride, despair and hope.”²³ It does not privilege specific emotions, but rather emphasises that the commemoration of Residential Schools will engage a multiplicity of emotions, many of which are contradictory.

¹⁹ It is not coincidental that the TRC engages with this language. The final report draws specifically on the work of researchers who address difficult knowledge, such as Megan Boler and Michalinos Zembylas, as well as Roger Simon.

²⁰ Deborah P. Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Towards a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 117-120; Michalinos Zembylas, “Teacher Resistance to Engage with ‘Alternative’ Perspectives of Difficult Histories: The Limits and Prospects of Affective Disruption,” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 38, no. 5 (2017).

²¹ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 291.

²² Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, 4-5.

²³ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 332.

Britzman suggests that the impact of difficult knowledge can be measured in terms of “learning about” and “learning from”: students who learn about an event acquire superficial facts whereas students who learn from an event gain insight. It is the latter type of learning that constitutes a difficult and transformative encounter.²⁴ Similarly, the TRC states that “learning *about* the residential schools history is crucial to reconciliation, but can be effective only if Canadians also learn *from* this history in terms of repairing broken trust, strengthening a sense of civic responsibility, and spurring remedial and constructive action.”²⁵ The Commission suggests that Canadians must learn the superficial details of Residential Schools history, but only because this information is the basis for gaining insight to past and present relationships in the country; that is, it maintains that people should “learn from” this history and use it to transform damaged relationships between settler Canadians and Indigenous peoples. Critics of the TRC, however, suggests that there is a gap between the TRC’s intent to produce difficult knowledge and its practice. While the TRC claims to engage with a wide array of emotional responses, Dylan Robinson observes that it sometimes privileges certain responses while suppressing others during national and community events: certain ceremonies encouraged expressions of sadness but did not offer the same attention to emotions such as anger and shame.²⁶ Although the TRC purports to use emotional engagement as a way to facilitate transformative encounters with difficult knowledge, it sometimes hindered these encounters during events.

The TRC further suggests that the history of Residential Schools can become difficult knowledge that resists colonial narratives of Canadian history. Alice Pitt and Britzman position

²⁴ Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, 117-8.

²⁵ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 291-2.

²⁶ Dylan Robinson, “Intergenerational Sense, Intergenerational Responsibility,” in *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, eds. Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 53.

lovely knowledge in opposition to difficult knowledge: lovely knowledge conforms to existing worldviews and reproduces dominant social narratives; difficult knowledge challenges worldviews and resists dominant narratives.²⁷ Whether people experience knowledge as lovely or difficult depends not on its content, but rather the way educators, artists, and institutions construct content as a meaningful narrative.²⁸ An effective way to produce difficult knowledge is therefore to develop alternative narratives of events.²⁹ The TRC takes a similar perspective in

Honouring the Truth:

Public memory is dynamic – it changes over time as new understandings, dialogues, artistic expressions, and commemorations emerge. Public memory, much like national history, is often contentious. Although public memory can simply reinforce the colonial story of how Canada began with European settlement and became a nation, the process of remembering the past together also invites people to question this limited version of history.³⁰

That is, public history and memory are by no means neutral, objective, or static readings of the past but rather dynamic interpretations that emerge from artistic and commemorative representations, among other things. There can be many interpretations of an event – over time or at a single moment – and some narratives may conflict with one another. The Commission emphasises the need to “resist and challenge the cultural understanding of settler-dominated versions of Canada’s past and its present reality.”³¹ Similarly, it also states that “unlike more

²⁷ Alice Pitt and Deborah Britzman, “Speculations on Qualities of Difficult Knowledge in Teaching and Learning: An Experiment in Psychoanalytic Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16, no. 6 (2003).

²⁸ Ava Becker, “Funds of (Difficult) Knowledge and the Affordances of Multimodality: The Case of Victor,” *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* 10, no. 2 (2014); H. James Garrett, “Why Didn’t I Know this Before? Psychoanalysis, Social Studies Education, and *The Shock Doctrine*,” *Canadian Social Studies* 45, no. 2 (2012); William Gaudelli, Margaret Crocco, and Alexandra Hawkins, “Documentaries, Outtakes, and Digital Archives in Teaching Difficult Knowledge and the Vietnam War,” *Education and Society* 30, no. 2 (2012).

²⁹ Julie C. Garlen and Jennifer A. Sandlin, “*Escape from Tomorrow*: Disney, Institutionalized Whiteness, and the Difficult Knowledge of Being,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 38, no. 2 (2016); Jessica A. Heybach Vivirito, “Confronting ‘Difficult Knowledge’: Critical Aesthetics and War in the Classroom,” (EdD diss., Northern Illinois University, 2012); Paula M. Salvio, “Uncanny Exposures: A Study of the Wartime Photojournalism of Lee Miller,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 39, no. 4 (2009).

³⁰ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 318.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 330.

conventional state commemorations, which have tended to reinforce Canada's story as told through colonial eyes, residential school commemorative projects challenged and recast public memory and national history."³² That is, the TRC frames settler narratives – which have dominated interpretations of Canadian history – as lovely knowledge. The history of Residential Schools, on the other hand, can be difficult knowledge that helps to disrupt them. In other words, Canadian history is usually framed “through colonial eyes,”³³ and one purpose of the TRC is to resist the settler gaze.

Naomi Angel and Pauline Wakeham complicate this perspective, however, by demonstrating ways that the TRC reproduces settler narratives and the colonial gaze. They note that this gaze creates a distance between white observers and racialised Others that positions Westerners as “spectators who gaze upon the plight of non-white others.”³⁴ They then use images from the TRC's canon to demonstrate how it reproduces this distance: reliance on black-and-white archival photographs to situate the schools in the distant past; use of stock photos that remove the specificity of people and place; and using images that reproduce colonial stereotypes, namely, photographs that construct students as “savage” or “modern” (they use the iconic example of Thomas Moore's “before and after” images). In other words, the TRC uses visual distance to reify constructions of otherness. However, Angel and Wakeham also observe that such photographs, when used during testimony or annotated on display, have become sites of resistance where survivors and their families unsettle the colonial gaze, for example, by providing commentary that asserts the identity and agency of portrayed individuals. While the history of Residential Schools may disrupt colonial narratives in a way that produces difficult

³² Ibid., 333.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Naomi Angel and Pauline Wakeham, “Witnessing *In Camera*: Photographic Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation,” in *Arts of Engagement* (2016), 94.

knowledge, as the TRC suggests, Angel and Wakeham demonstrate that this history can also reproduce the colonial gaze and may therefore become a site of lovely knowledge.

In sum, the TRC's final report frames reconciliation as a transformative process. The Commission explains that dominant narratives of Canadian history are rooted in colonialism, but also suggests that the history of Residential Schools can disrupt these colonial narratives. In effect, it proposes using difficult knowledge to rewrite Canadian history. This is significant because encounters with difficult knowledge are transformative experiences that can change identities, worldviews, and relationships. Notably, the TRC does not explicitly propose dismantling the Canadian state and, indeed, largely assumes its continued existence. Moran points out that the Commission does not challenge the legitimacy or sovereignty of the Canadian state and, furthermore, argues that it requires Indigenous peoples "to reconcile themselves *to*" the settler state.³⁵ From the perspective of difficult knowledge, however, the Commission suggests something much more radical in its report: it proposes reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and settler society, but also motions towards their transformation. While the TRC's vision of reconciliation as set out in *Honouring the Truth* includes the Canadian nation, this version of Canada does not necessarily resemble the contemporary settler colonial state.

My reading of the TRC contrasts with David Garneau's, who explores the language of "reconciliation" and "conciliation." While the concept of reconciliation is rooted in European epistememes and aims to restore formerly harmonious relations – relations that Garneau argues have never existed between Indigenous peoples and settler society – conciliation focuses on building respectful and harmonious relations. The TRC's use of the former concept "presses into

³⁵ Moran, "Indigenous Literature and the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission," 25, my emphasis.

our minds a false understanding of our past and constricts our collective sense of the future.”³⁶ In contrast to reconciliation, Garneau suggests that conciliatory spaces – creative spaces that invite settlers but retain Indigenous sovereignty – have the potential to transform settler colonialism. Another notable difference is that reconciliation relies on master narratives while conciliatory spaces have “no definitive story and no conclusion.”³⁷ I do not claim that relations between settler society and Indigenous peoples have ever been respectful. And, as I argue in this chapter, the TRC firmly relies on master narratives of Canadian history in its report. I do maintain, however, that the TRC’s goals – at least as the TRC describes them in its final report – are fundamentally transformative. But it is important to stress that, while the Commission’s goals and stated intent is for radical transformation, it does not always enable this in practice and in some cases may inhibit change. In some respects, then, the TRC’s vision of reconciliation bears some similarity to Garneau’s framework for conciliation. Whether or not the TRC is actually capable of such transformation is uncertain and vigorously contested; the Commission, as I argue in later sections, does have transformative potential, albeit one that is distinctly limited.

Framing Canadian History As Cultural Genocide

An effective way to produce difficult knowledge and resist dominant narratives is by reframing historical narratives. In its final report, the TRC reframes Canadian history primarily by relying on the concept of genocide. It argues that Residential Schools, in conjunction with related government policies, played an important role in the loss of Indigenous cultures and the

³⁶ David Garneau, “Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation, and Healing,” in *Arts of Engagement* (2016), 30.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

destruction of Indigenous bodies. In this way, the Commission suggests that genocide – cultural as well as physical – was both a goal and consequence of nation-building in Canada.

The TRC defines the historical relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state as “cultural genocide.” The Commission begins several volumes of its final report with a common text that outlines its central thesis.³⁸ These paragraphs define cultural genocide and apply it to the history of Residential Schools in Canada:

For over a century, the central goals of Canada’s Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as ‘cultural genocide.’³⁹

The report distinguishes between “physical genocide,” “biological genocide,” and “cultural genocide,” and defines the latter as “the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group.”⁴⁰ It further explains that the state sought “to destroy the political and social institutions” of Indigenous peoples through various means, including land seizure, restricting movement, banning language and spiritual practices, and disrupting the intergenerational transmission of culture.⁴¹

The distinction between “genocide” and “cultural genocide” is crucial to the TRC’s argument and conclusions. The report does not rely substantially on the text of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (UNGC),

³⁸ The volumes that open with this text are: *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future; What We Have Learned*; and *Canada’s Residential Schools: The History, Part 1, Origins to 1939*.

³⁹TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 1.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

which is an international treaty that establishes genocide as a crime.⁴² Unlike the TRC,⁴³ the UNGC does not explicitly distinguish⁴⁴ between physical, biological, and cultural genocide.⁴⁵ Indeed, the Commission does not argue that Residential Schools constitute “a legal wrong” and concedes that “no court has so held; nor as a Commission can we make a definitive finding on the point.”⁴⁶ In other words, the concept of cultural genocide has no weight in international law, and the TRC does not make a legal argument about Canadian culpability for the genocide of Indigenous peoples. Moreover, the TRC’s mandate specifically forbids it from drawing any such conclusions: “the Commission shall not make any reference...to the possible civil or criminal liability of any person or organization.”⁴⁷ Instead, the mandate demands that the TRC’s purpose is to “create as complete an historical record as possible of the [Residential School] system and legacy.”⁴⁸ In short, the Commission does not make a legal argument about genocide and Residential Schools but rather presents an historical argument about cultural genocide.⁴⁹

The TRC contends that the *intended* outcome of Canadian policy has been to destroy Indigenous peoples as distinct groups. Scholars such as Andrew Woolford argue that intent is not necessary for genocide to occur, particularly in settler societies, because “the notion of intent

⁴² *Honouring the Truth*, for example, only refers to the Genocide Convention in passing. See page 255 of the summary.

⁴³ The report states that the “term *cultural genocide* is not found in the *UN Convention on Genocide*.” TRC, *Canada’s Residential Schools: The Legacy*, vol. 5 of *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015), 125.

⁴⁴ Scholars have developed “cultural genocide” and other subcategories as a typology of genocide, and some suggest that international law is limited because it does not expressly include these concepts. See David B. MacDonald and Graham Hudson, “The Genocide Question and Indian Residential Schools in Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 45, no. 2 (2012); Damien Short, “Cultural Genocide and Indigenous Peoples: A Sociological Perspective,” *International Journal of Human Rights* 14, no. 6 (2010); Andrew Woolford, “Ontological Destruction: Genocide and Canadian Aboriginal Peoples,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 4, no. 1 (2009).

⁴⁵ General Assembly of the United Nations, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (New York: United Nations, 1948).

⁴⁶ TRC, *The Legacy*, 126.

⁴⁷ Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement [IRSSA], *Schedule N: Mandate for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (2006), §2.f.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, §1.e.

⁴⁹ It strongly suggests that Canada violated the UNGC, but does not outright make this accusation. See pages 124-6 of Volume 5, *The Legacy*.

hinges on our [European] understandings of group identity and group destruction.”⁵⁰

Specifically, he explains that Europeans tend to view group identity as biological while Indigenous identities are situated within relational networks. While settlers do not always intend to destroy Indigenous peoples as biological groups, Woolford argues, the process of settlement nevertheless disrupts the land-based relations that support Indigenous cultures. In contrast, the UNGC says that genocide entails “any of the following acts committed with *intent* to destroy” a particular group.⁵¹ The TRC explicitly attributes genocidal intent to the Canadian government in

Honouring the Truth:

The intent of the government’s policy, which was firmly established in legislation at the time that the Treaties had been negotiated, was to assimilate Aboriginal people into broader Canadian society. At the end of this process, Aboriginal people were expected to have ceased to exist as a distinct people with their own governments, cultures, and identities.⁵²

It refers to pre-Confederation legislation, the *Indian Act*, as well as Residential Schools as “integral part[s] of a conscious policy of cultural genocide.”⁵³ Notably, the Commission emphasises that this intent existed at the time of Treaty negotiations. As legal agreements between two or more distinct nations, treaties both presume and reinscribe the sovereignty of each participating nation. Yet the TRC insists that, during negotiation, the Canadian government already planned to eliminate Indigenous peoples as distinctive social, political, and cultural groups.

As part of Canada’s larger colonial project, the Commission observes, Residential Schools were only one aspect of cultural genocide. The TRC argues that Residential Schools were “a central element” of the erasure and assimilation of Indigenous peoples, but were by no

⁵⁰ Woolford, “Ontological Destruction,” 91.

⁵¹ United Nations, *Convention on the Crime of Genocide*, §2, my emphasis.

⁵² TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 57.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

means the only way Canadians perpetrated cultural genocide. Rather, Canadians implemented a variety of colonial policies and practices directed towards the suppression of Indigenous life and cultures. In its survey of Residential Schools history, the Commission situates national history and the school system within their “imperial context.” It explains that “starting in the sixteenth century, European states gained control of Indigenous peoples’ lands throughout the world...Millions of Europeans arrived as colonial settlers in nearly every part of the world.”⁵⁴ Colonists seized control of Indigenous lands and imposed European rule through various means: they “negotiated Treaties, waged wars of extinction, eliminated traditional landholding practices, disrupted families, and imposed a political and spiritual order.”⁵⁵ In Canada, the government directed a system of policies towards Indigenous peoples:

Residential schooling was only a part of the colonization of Aboriginal people. The policy of colonization suppressed Aboriginal culture and languages, disrupted Aboriginal government, destroyed Aboriginal economies, and confined Aboriginal people to marginal and often unproductive land.⁵⁶

The TRC’s description of the imperial context gives insight to its vision of Residential Schools and cultural genocide. On one hand, it means that Canadians must look beyond Residential Schools in the truth and reconciliation process. Jennifer Henderson and Wakeham critique the government’s apology for the way it never engages with the concept of colonialism and, thereby, frames Residential Schools as a discrete historical event rather than part of an ongoing system of settler colonialism.⁵⁷ To be sure, culture has many dimensions, and colonialism was (and continues to be) a multi-dimensional attack on Indigenous cultures. Residential Schools were one node in a much larger “network of destruction” that works to undermine Indigenous cultural

⁵⁴ Ibid., 47.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 49.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 134.

⁵⁷ Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham, “Colonial Reckoning, National Reconciliation?: Aboriginal Peoples and the Culture of Redress in Canada,” *English Studies in Canada* 35, no. 1 (2009): 2.

systems through a structure of policies and practices.⁵⁸ Accordingly, the TRC contends that truth-telling requires people to speak about more than Residential Schools, and it insists that “expanding public dialogue and action on reconciliation beyond residential schools will be critical in the coming years.”⁵⁹ On the other hand, the colonial context also means looking beyond the concept of *cultural* genocide. Residential Schools and related policies targeted many aspects of Indigenous life: language, spirituality, systems of kinship, and especially land. The Commission observes that government policy also targeted Indigenous bodies: it suggests that both the “forcible removal of children” and the “forcible sterilization of women and girls” could constitute an act of genocide, although it does not further explore government sterilisation policies.⁶⁰ While the TRC’s report focuses primarily on cultural destruction, it does not disregard physical and biological destruction.

Roland Chrisjohn, Sherri Young, and Michael Maraun suggest that the distinction between cultural and biological/physical genocide is itself a colonial construct. They demonstrate that Residential Schools constitute genocide according to most criteria of the UNGC, and they focus especially on the role schools played in cultural destruction. But they also suggest that the distinction between culture and biology is rooted in a Cartesian dualism that separates bodies from minds. Specifically, Chrisjohn and colleagues claim that neither culture nor biology are essentialised qualities that can exist in absence of one another but, rather, are indivisible traits that together constitute a person:

the dualistic separation of a culture from its biological carriers is an implicit racialism of a kind the United Nations has itself rejected. It takes culture as a kind of add-on to the ‘real’ object of concern, the biological person. But how are we to conceive of a person

⁵⁸ Andrew Woolford, “Nodal Repair and Networks of Destruction: Residential Schools, Colonial Genocide, and Redress in Canada,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 1 (2013).

⁵⁹ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 7.

⁶⁰ TRC, *The Legacy*, 125-6.

without a culture, or a culture that is peopleless? It is philosophically incoherent to assert either.⁶¹

In other words, the presumed separation of culture and biology is rooted in (now widely discredited) theories of race, namely, the belief that race exists as an inherent biological essence. When people distinguish between cultural and biological genocide, they reinscribe the racist and Eurocentric beliefs that enabled Residential Schools to flourish in the first place.

While the TRC does not explicitly state that Residential Schools were physical/biological genocide, it demonstrates a causal relationship between cultural loss and physical death in colonial contexts. The Commission devotes Volume 4 of its final report, *Missing Children and Unmarked Burials*, to “a systematic effort to record and analyze the deaths at the schools.”⁶² This volume observes that “death cast a long shadow over Canada’s residential schools”⁶³ and concludes, among other things, that “Aboriginal children in residential schools died at a far higher rate than school-aged children in the general population.”⁶⁴ It identifies several ways that the operation of Residential Schools contributed to student deaths: disease related to unsanitary living conditions and poor diet; fire resulting from poor building design and maintenance; suicide in response to abuse or neglect; and a variety of other causes connected to accidents and exposure.⁶⁵ However, it observes that student deaths were part of a larger phenomenon, and the Commission contends in *Honouring the Truth* that the “high death rates in the schools were, in

⁶¹ Roland Chrisjohn, Sherri Young, and Michael Maraun, *The Circle Game: Shadows and Substance in the Indian Residential School Experience in Canada*, revised ed. (Penticton: Theytus Books, 2006), 63.

⁶² TRC, *Canada’s Residential Schools: Missing Children and Unmarked Burials*, vol. 4 of *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015), 1.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶⁵ TRC, *Missing Children and Unmarked Burials*, 3, 22-7; TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 92-101.

part, a reflection of the high death rates among the Aboriginal community in general.”⁶⁶ It directly links these deaths to colonialism and cultural loss:

In reality, these rates were the price they paid for being colonized. Aboriginal livelihoods were based on access to the land; colonization disrupted that access and introduced new illnesses to North America. Colonial policies helped wipe out food sources and confined Aboriginal people to poorly located reserves, with inadequate sanitation and shelter.⁶⁷

In other words, settler colonialism results in (and requires) the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands and the implementation of the reserve system. Separation from traditional territories contributes to the loss of Indigenous cultures and livelihoods which, in turn, leads to poor diet, weakened immunity, and unsafe living conditions. The overall effect is poor health and consistently high death rates in Indigenous communities.⁶⁸ The TRC demonstrates that settler colonialism requires the destruction of Indigenous cultures which can, in turn, result in physical death.

The TRC uses the concept of genocide in its final report to rewrite Canadian history and challenge national myth. It argues that the Canadian government used Residential Schools and other policies to perpetrate cultural genocide – and, less explicitly, physical genocide – against Indigenous peoples. As I noted in Chapter II, Canadian mythology is rooted in the erasure of Indigenous peoples and, simultaneously, the denial of genocide. Indeed, Lorenzo Veracini argues that the intersection of “foundational traumas *and* their disavowal” can lead to heated public debates over the interpretation and meaning of national history.⁶⁹ Claims about Indigenous genocide can seriously disrupt the national mythos, which is itself the structural basis for settler

⁶⁶ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 101.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Another section of the report outlines the causal relationship between colonialism and illness: “The tuberculosis health crisis in the schools was part of a broader Aboriginal health crisis that was set in motion by colonial policies that separated Aboriginal people from their land, thereby disrupting their economies and their food supplies” (*Honouring the Truth*, 94).

⁶⁹ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 75.

colonialism. In other words, this narrative, if it enters public discourse and finds footing in the national psyche, has the potential to transform the way Canadians formulate myth, identity, and society.

An Alternative Narrative of Canadian History

In its final report, the TRC proposes reframing Canadian history in a way that centres around relationships, and especially those between Indigenous peoples and European settlers. In contrast to the dominant national narrative that is predicated on the idea of civilisational progress,⁷⁰ the Commission's alternative narrative suggests that history is compelled by the continual transformation of relational networks. It contends that Indigenous nations and European settlers initially established respectful relationships, but that the Canadian state damaged these relations by imposing colonial policies. It further maintains that reconciliation is an ongoing process whereby settler Canadians and Indigenous peoples work together to repair damaged relationships. While this narrative is problematic in that it legitimises the settler state, it also challenges some core assumptions that underlie settler mythology.

Past and Present Relationships in Canada

The TRC contends that initial relationships between Indigenous peoples and European settlers on North America/Turtle Island were based on mutual respect. Critics of the TRC such as Garneau maintain that, while there have been “moments of cooperation,” Indigenous peoples have never had an harmonious and equanimous relationship with the Canadian state.⁷¹ The

⁷⁰ Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 83-110; Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 96-102.

⁷¹ Garneau, “Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation,” 30.

Commission acknowledges in *Honouring the Truth* that the nature of early relationships is contested and explains that conciliation “is a state that many Aboriginal people assert never has existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.”⁷² Despite these objections, the TRC suggests that early relationships were mostly respectful and mutually beneficial. It cites the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples’ (RCAP) report, which

noted that for some time after settler contact, the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples had been one of mutual support, co-operation, and respect. Despite incidents of conflict, Aboriginal peoples’ acceptance of the arrival of Europeans, and their willingness to participate with the newcomers in their economic pursuits, to form alliances with them in their wars, and to enter into Treaty with them for a variety of purposes, showed a wish to coexist in a relationship of mutual trust and respect.⁷³

The Commission uses the RCAP report to highlight the role of Indigenous peoples in establishing a pattern of good relationships on the continent and in early Canada. It suggests that, from the outset, Indigenous peoples had a desire to “coexist” with early settlers and demonstrated a “willingness” to build positive relationships and engage in co-operative endeavours. Yet it also maintains that Indigenous peoples did not build initial relationships with the Canadian state or government, but rather with European settlers.

The Commission does, however, observe that these early relationships were at least partly preserved in both Indigenous legal traditions and Canadian law: “Aboriginal peoples have always remembered the original relationship they had with early Canadians. That relationship of mutual support, respect, and assistance was confirmed by the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Treaties with the Crown.”⁷⁴ That is, the “original” relationship was characterised by mutual respect between parties and recognised the sovereignty of both the British monarch and Indigenous nations. It was consequently codified in state law in the Royal Proclamation of 1763,

⁷² TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 6.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 238.

which defined the westward limit of European settlement in North America, and treaties such as the 1764 Treaty of Niagara and the Numbered Treaties. Legal scholar John Borrows supports this interpretation of Canadian history and, specifically, contends that the Royal Proclamation of 1763, in conjunction with the Treaty of Niagara, are the foundation for political relationships between First Nations and the Canadian state.⁷⁵ He demonstrates that the Proclamation was not a unilateral imposition by the Crown but, rather, a treaty between nations that recognises and entrenches the self-government of First Nations. This treaty contains a set of promises that, among other things, preserve the sovereignty of First Nations, create an alliance between First Nations and the Crown, and require consent for the settlement of First Nations land.⁷⁶ Similarly for the TRC, these documents defined the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state, imbued Canada with “legitimacy as a nation...[and] established the legal and constitutional foundation of this country.”⁷⁷

Under the nascent state, the Commission observes in its report, respectful relationships quickly began to erode. The Canadian government enacted legislation that was inherently contradictory: on one hand, it established mutual and respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples and preserved these as legal and constitutional documents; on the other hand, it enacted policies that conflicted with these laws and, as such, undermined the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians. At the time of early Treaty negotiations,

Aboriginal peoples placed a great deal of faith in the words of those speaking for the Crown that the new relationship would be a positive one for both of them. That faith was

⁷⁵ Indeed, the TRC explicitly draws on Borrows’ work in its final report. It relies primarily on his book chapter “Wampum at Niagara,” and also cites his books *Canada’s Indigenous Constitution* and *Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Indigenous Law*.

⁷⁶ John Borrows, “Wampum at Niagara: The Royal Proclamation, Canadian Legal History, and Self-Government,” in *Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada: Essays on Law, Equity, and Respect for Difference*, ed. Michael Asch (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997).

⁷⁷ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 249.

betrayed, however, by the imposition of the *Indian Act*, the development of the residential school system, and a series of other repressive measures.⁷⁸

From an Indigenous perspective, then, treaties were based on mutual trust between parties: they presumed that government officials would remain accountable for their promises and would ensure that the state fulfills its responsibilities to Indigenous peoples. The state breached this trust shortly after Confederation with policies such as the *Indian Act* and Residential Schools, both of which had pre-confederation predecessors but came into full force in 1876. These policies were especially problematic because they undermined the sovereignty of Indigenous nations by granting the Canadian government the power to define who is and is not a legal Indian, as well as the power to remove Indigenous children from their communities and educate them within a Western system. The Commission describes the broken trust as a manifestation of colonial violence:

Canada has a long history of colonialism in relation to Aboriginal peoples. That history and its policies of cultural genocide and assimilation have left deep scars on the lives of many Aboriginal people, on Aboriginal communities, as well as on Canadian society, and have deeply damaged the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.⁷⁹

While these policies denied self-determination to Indigenous nations, they had even more devastating impacts for Indigenous communities. Namely, the TRC contends that they had the effect of genocide. The UNGC defines genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part,” a particular group of people.⁸⁰ Scholars who focus specifically on the concept of cultural genocide, such as Damien Short, contend that genocide is the “social death” of a group, which can include the deterioration of group cohesion, “a loss of identity and

⁷⁸ Ibid., 268.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 237.

⁸⁰ General Assembly of the United Nations, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, Article 2.

consequently a serious loss of meaning for one's existence."⁸¹ The consequence of government policy was both (the partial or intended) social death of Indigenous nations and a "deeply damaged relationship" – a relationship that no longer resembles the "original" one built on mutual trust and respect, but rather shaped by colonial violence. The TRC proposes that the Canadian state damaged relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers, although it also suggests that the effects of this damage are uneven.

Within this narrative of changing relationships, the TRC especially constructs Indigenous peoples as traumatised subjects by framing them as victims of Residential Schools and the Canadian state. Specifically, in its final report and related documents, the Commission uses the language of "victim," "harm," "damage," and "trauma" to describe Indigenous people, communities, and cultures. This framing precedes the TRC and is found in earlier documents such as the IRSSA and the federal government's apology. The use of victim-centric language is due, in large part, to the IRSSA's origins in a legal system where plaintiffs must demonstrate that they are the subjects of harm.⁸² In the words of the TRC, the IRSSA was the result of a class action lawsuit that "involved the largest single recognition of criminal victimization in Canadian history."⁸³ *Schedule N* of the agreement acknowledges "the injustices and harms experienced by Aboriginal people" in Residential Schools and which continue in the present day.⁸⁴ In the government's apology, Harper likewise explains that "the consequences of the Indian residential schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language."⁸⁵ The Commission consistently describes

⁸¹ Short, "Cultural Genocide and Indigenous Peoples," 842.

⁸² Ronald Niezen, "Templates and Exclusions: Victim Centricism in Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22 (2016).

⁸³ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 225.

⁸⁴ IRSSA, *Schedule N*, preamble.

⁸⁵ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 11 June 2008 (Stephen Harper, Con.), 6850.

Residential Schools as harmful to students: “classroom life was foreign and traumatic”⁸⁶ and “destroyed the students’ ability to function in the school, and led many to turn to self-destruction behaviours.”⁸⁷ The Commissioners conclude that the education of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in Canada “has brought us to where we are today: to a point where the psychological and emotional well-being of Aboriginal children has been harmed, and the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples has been seriously damaged.”⁸⁸ That is, Canada’s attempted genocide has resulted in a damaged relationship, but one where Indigenous individuals and communities in particular bear the weight of this trauma.⁸⁹

The narrative presented in *Honouring the Truth* has the potential both to resist settler mythology and reinscribe it. On one hand, it demonstrates that the Canadian state inflicted colonial violence through its policies and practices, and that this violence has disproportionately impacted Indigenous peoples. As I suggested in the previous section, the public discussion of “foundational traumas” (i.e. the violent dispossession of Indigenous peoples) has the potential to disrupt and transform the national mythos. On the other hand, this narrative also reinscribes these harms and denies the agency of Indigenous peoples to some degree. The TRC explores Indigenous agency, particularly when establishing early relationships with European settlers, but also frames contemporary Indigenous people as “damaged” or “traumatized” subjects. Robyn Green observes that a focus on trauma pathologises Indigenous peoples and frames them as subjects in need of a cure. This is problematic because it invites further intervention by the state,

⁸⁶ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 77.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁸⁹ In addition to this language, the TRC also relies heavily on the notion of “survivors” – a title that emphasises the agency and resilience of individuals. However, its use of “survivor” and “victim” differ substantially. “Survivors” tend to be individuals who experienced the Residential School system (or its legacy) but ultimately lived through it. In contrast, “victim” tends to apply more broadly to Indigenous peoples in general: it includes former students who survived, students who did not survive, and Indigenous communities as a whole. That is, individuals can be survivors, but groups are victims.

reinscribes state authority, and ultimately preserves unequal relationships between Indigenous peoples and settler society.⁹⁰ However, the ongoing history of colonial violence in Canada is only one part of the TRC's narrative.

Future Relationships in Canada

The TRC provides an interpretation of Canadian history that includes not just a vision of the past and present, but also for the future. In fact, the future is especially important to this narrative because it is where people do the work of reconciliation. As previously noted, the Commission defines reconciliation as a process that can heal damaged relationships. Its mandate emphasises “the need for continued healing”⁹¹ from the legacy of Residential Schools and states that the Commission's purpose is “to contribute to truth, healing and reconciliation.”⁹² In *Honouring the Truth*, the TRC further explains that reconciliation is “about coming to terms with events of the past in a manner that overcomes conflict and establishes a respectful and healthy relationship among people, going forward.”⁹³ In this way, reconciliation is largely synonymous with healing and, especially, creating healthy relationships between the past, present, and future, as well as between people.

Throughout the report, the TRC elaborates on the different varieties of relationships that must heal for reconciliation to occur. On one hand, reconciliation requires the healing of those who have been disproportionately harmed by Residential Schools and colonial policies in Canada, namely, Indigenous peoples: “Reconciliation must support Aboriginal peoples as they

⁹⁰ Robyn Green, “Unsettling Cures: Exploring the Limits of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 27, no. 1 (2012).

⁹¹ IRSSA, *Schedule N*, preamble.

⁹² *Ibid.*, principles.

⁹³ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 6.

heal from the destructive legacies of colonization that have wreaked such havoc on their lives.”⁹⁴ But Indigenous healing alone is insufficient because these legacies are the product of relationships with – and damaged by – the Canadian state. More pressing than the need to heal individual people and communities is the need “to repair damaged trust and relationships in Aboriginal communities and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples” which “requires apologies, reparations...[and] real social, political, and economic change.”⁹⁵ That is, a lack of trust between Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians is at the heart of Residential Schools trauma, and Canadians must repair this relationship before any healing can occur. The TRC primarily focuses on reconciling relationships between Indigenous peoples and the settler state, although it also considers the importance of other relationships, including intra- and inter-Indigenous relationships, relationships to the land and environment, as well as with other-than-human persons.⁹⁶

The TRC’s discussion of medicine in *Honouring the Truth* provides insight to the reconciliation process. The Commission argues that Indigenous peoples have a need for and “the right to traditional medicines and to maintain their traditional health practices.”⁹⁷ And while it focuses on ways that the state denied traditional medicines to Residential Schools students, it also acknowledges that “students were also often denied access to ‘Western’ doctors and nurses. This double denial of health care, based in government policy, continues to this day.”⁹⁸ The TRC suggests that Indigenous people cannot heal if they rely solely on Western medicine, but also implies that Western medicine may have some bearing on Indigenous health. It concludes that

⁹⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 238.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 17-8.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 207.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

medicine is most effective when it engages with both Western and Indigenous healing practices: “Best practices for Aboriginal wellness involve a range of services from mainstream health care to traditional practices and medicines, all under community leadership and control.”⁹⁹ In other words, the healing journey of each person or community does not depend on a single path, but rather a multiplicity of pathways and practices, ranging from Western (i.e. “mainstream”) to Indigenous (i.e. “traditional”) medicines. The Commission thereby emphasises the need to establish good relationships between these systems of knowledge and the people who use them. This approach to medicine, I suggest, exemplifies the TRC’s vision for reconciliation. This vision includes – and legitimises – both Western and Indigenous epistemes. It affirms the right of Indigenous peoples to their own traditions, practices, and knowledges, but also asserts the value and validity of Western knowledge systems. Among other things, this means that the TRC does not seek to challenge European epistemes or dismantle the Canadian state. In short, the TRC’s vision of reconciliation recognises the equivalence of settler society and Indigenous peoples and aims to build healthy relationships between them.

Yet the TRC also claims that reconciliation is impossible since Canadian history is an ongoing and incomplete narrative. It insists that Canadians have not arrived at a reconciliatory state and succinctly declares in its report that “we are not there yet. The relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is not a mutually respectful one.”¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, it suggests that relations may have degraded in recent years. The Commission says that the impact of Residential Schools “may be perpetuated and even worsened as a result of current governmental policies” regarding child-welfare and health-care, and that “the federal government may have lost a sense of urgency on these issues since” the IRSSA and federal

⁹⁹ Ibid., 210.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 6.

apology.¹⁰¹ For the TRC, reconciliation requires ongoing and concerted effort, especially in light of the degrading relationship between settler society and Indigenous peoples.

In fact, the TRC suggests that reconciliation will never – and can never – be complete. Keavy Martin argues that dominant interpretations of reconciliation rely on a progressive telos with “disproportionate focus on the inevitable end of the story”¹⁰² – a focus on resolution that can ultimately lead to historical amnesia. In contrast, she proposes viewing reconciliation, at least from a national perspective, as an ongoing process “without the promise of the eventual liberation from this self-critique...[as a] humbling state of neverending atonement.”¹⁰³ In *Honouring the Truth*, the Commission offers a similar perspective. It maintains that “reconciliation is not a one-time event”¹⁰⁴ because it is “an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships at all levels of Canadian society.”¹⁰⁵ Relationships are complex and dynamic: they require multiple, interacting parties; are constituted by the way people engage with each other; continue to evolve as people and contexts change; and entail a set of responsibilities that people must fulfill to sustain relationships over time. In the Commission’s words, relationships are an “ongoing” practice that people must “maintain” through active and long-term commitment. Even if settler Canadians and Indigenous peoples manage to establish good relations, it will be necessary to remain accountable to one another, fulfill responsibilities, and continuously work to build and re-build respect. In this way, reconciliation resembles Jacques Derrida’s notion of justice: it contains an “impulse, momentum...toward what is to-

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 185.

¹⁰² Keavy Martin, “Truth, Reconciliation, and Amnesia: *Porcupines and China Dolls* and the Canadian Conscience,” *English Studies in Canada* 35, no. 1 (2009): 55.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 62.

¹⁰⁴ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 262.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 243.

come” while at the same time is “not knowable or foreseeable or forehidable”¹⁰⁶ – that is, it is perpetual motion towards an impossible end that cannot be realised. From this perspective, then, reconciliation becomes a horizon: it is something we can always approach but never arrive at, has no moment of completion, and remains forever in motion.

The TRC’s report thereby offers an interpretation of Canadian history that does not entirely escape the logic of settler colonialism but, nevertheless, has the potential to disrupt national mythology. This narrative is by no means unproblematic. The TRC mitigates Indigenous self-determination by constructing Indigenous peoples as damaged subjects. Moreover, it presumes that reconciliation must happen between Indigenous peoples and settler society, and thereby frames settler society as legitimate and parallel to Indigenous nations. Yet this narrative also disrupts aspects of the Canadian mythos. In particular, it introduces a concept of historical time that can conflict with settler worldviews. On one hand, settler mythology frames time as linear progress: history moves in a straight line from beginning to end, and human societies improve gradually as time passes.¹⁰⁷ Historical progress is therefore compelled by the flow of civilisation – an essential push from savagery towards civilisation – which is a natural process and cannot be interrupted or turned back. In contrast, the TRC frames time as a relational cycle: history is the product of dynamic relationships between people that require ongoing maintenance and active engagement from everyone involved. Relationships may be healthy or harmful – every relationships has the potential for both – but can only improve when people fulfill their responsibilities to one another. The movement of history is therefore both cyclical (it is composed of recurring movement between healthy and harmful relationships) and immanent (the

¹⁰⁶ John D. Caputo, ed. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 128.

¹⁰⁷ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 96-8; Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 83-8.

quality of relationship depends on how people practice and fulfill their responsibilities at a given moment). In short, the TRC relies on an historical framework that differs from settler models in some basic respects: the direction of time (linear vs. cyclical and immanent); the force that compels history (civilisation vs. relationships); and the role of humans as the agents and objects of history (passive objects vs. active subjects). This narrative has the potential to disrupt the myth of civilisational progress and, thus, may become difficult knowledge for settler Canadians.

Using an Alternative Narrative to Resist National Mythology

In the previous section, I observed that the TRC's final report constructs a narrative of Canadian history with the potential to disrupt settler mythology. In this section, I demonstrate how this narrative resists specific aspects of the national mythos – and thereby generates difficult knowledge for settler society – while also considering ways it reinscribes settler narratives and colonial violence. In particular, I explore how the TRC identifies and engages with several mythical themes in *Honouring the Truth* and related documents: civilisational progress, white supremacy, Indigenous erasure, and lawful peacemaking. It is important to consider how the TRC engages with these themes because they persist in popular and political discourse. In her remarks to the Senate, for example, Senator Beyak not only describes the Residential School system as “remarkable works [and] good deeds” but also defends the overtly racist attitudes of Hector-Louis Langevin and Egerton Ryerson regarding “savages [and] civilized people.”¹⁰⁸ These statements rely on core aspects of the national myth, including the notion of historical progress and attitudes regarding the supremacy of Western education and governance.

¹⁰⁸ In effect, Beyak claims that Langevin and Ryerson were not racist because these attitudes were common during the 19th century. Canada, *Debates of the Senate*, 7 March 2017 (Hon. Lynn Beyak), 2514-6.

Civilisational Progress

According to the TRC's final report, settlers used the concept of civilisation to rationalise the colonisation of Turtle Island/North America and the imposition of Residential Schools. In its discussion of global imperialism, the Commission argues that European colonisers were motivated to spread civilisation around the world:

The justification offered for colonialism – the need to bring Christianity and civilization to the Indigenous peoples of the world – may have been a sincerely and firmly held belief, but as a justification for intervening in the lives of other peoples, it does not stand up to legal, moral, or even logical scrutiny... Taken as a whole, the colonial process relied for its justification on the sheer presumption of taking a specific set of European beliefs and values and proclaiming them to be universal values that could be imposed upon the peoples of the world.¹⁰⁹

At its root, the myth of civilisational progress relies on a binary opposition between savagery and civilisation.¹¹⁰ But as Frantz Fanon explains, the worlds of settler civility and Indigenous savagery are unequal – in terms of both presumed spiritual value and actual material wealth – and “opposed to each other by their very nature.”¹¹¹ Moreover, he suggests that they are engaged in a Manichean struggle between good and evil where “the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil...[as] not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values.”¹¹² As the TRC suggests in the preceding passage, settlers viewed civilisation as something that was synonymous with European culture, society, and religion. At the same time, however, settlers also constructed it as a universal force to be imposed on non-European people around the world.

¹⁰⁹TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 53.

¹¹⁰ There is a somewhat paradoxical quality to the savage/civilised binary. It presumes that all human societies are progressing from savagery to civilisation and, therefore, that people can possess varying degrees of civilisation. In this sense, savagery/civilisation are not absolute categories. However, savagery and civilisation are fundamentally incompatible and separated by a frontier. Civilisation is defined by a certain set of Eurocentric values while savagery is the absence of these values. In this way, they are oppositional and contradictory forces. So in some ways savagery/civilisation is a binary, and in others ways it is a continuum; either way, it contains two conflicting poles. Regardless, European colonisers believed (and continue to believe) that all human societies could be assimilated into this model.

¹¹¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 36.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 41.

As such, Europeans become the bearers of civilisation with both a right and a responsibility to impose it on non-European and non-Christian people “for their own benefit,” namely, to provide salvation through Christianity.¹¹³ The Commission pinpoints Residential Schools as an integral part of this project: “The schools were part of the colonization and conversion of Aboriginal people, and were intended to bring civilization and salvation to their children.”¹¹⁴ But while the Commission defines civilisation as a primary force behind Residential Schools, it also insists that this belief “does not stand up to scrutiny” and aims to challenge it.

The TRC argues that the concept of civilisational progress is not meaningful from an Indigenous perspective and, in particular, rejects the universal logic of the savage/civilised binary. The Commission argues in its report that colonised people around the world “did not need to be ‘civilized’...Indigenous peoples had systems that were complete unto themselves and met their needs. Those systems were dynamic; they changed over time and were capable of continued change.”¹¹⁵ That is, European colonisers assumed that Indigenous peoples “needed” to be colonised because their social and cultural systems did not conform to European criteria. But different people must adapt to very different conditions: Indigenous peoples have dynamic social systems that developed within their own unique contexts, respond to their own particular needs, and will continue to transform as these contexts and needs change. According to the TRC, then, all societies are inherently “complete,” and Europeans cannot meaningfully reduce non-European peoples to Eurocentric frameworks such as civilisation. The Commission also argues that settler Canadians and Indigenous peoples can build relationships only when they mutually recognise and respect the completeness of one another’s social systems: “Canadians have much

¹¹³ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 49.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

to benefit from listening to the voices, experiences, and wisdom of [Indigenous peoples]...Their knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, and connections to the land have vitally informed the reconciliation process to date, and are essential to its ongoing progress.”¹¹⁶ In short, it proposes dismantling the hierarchy of civilisation and savagery and treating both Indigenous and settler epistememes with “equal respect.”¹¹⁷

The Commission further challenges the idea that Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians are separated by a frontier. The myth of civilisation maintains that savagery and civilisation are discrete categories: they are opposing forces that remain separated by a boundary known as “the frontier.” As civilised European empires expand, they push back the frontier by transforming savage people and land into the dominion of civilisation.¹¹⁸ The TRC challenges this myth by framing national history in terms of treaties and relationships rather than categories. In its introduction to *Honouring the Truth*, the Commission states that Indigenous peoples, European settlers, and non-European settlers “all inherit both the benefits and obligations of Canada. We are all Treaty people who share responsibility for taking action on reconciliation.”¹¹⁹ It develops this idea in a later section, titled “We are all Treaty people,” which emphasises the importance of building relationships within and between communities. Treaties express a new or existing relationship between people: they are written or oral agreements between multiple parties that define the nature of their relationship and responsibilities to one another. The TRC suggests that Canada is founded on such treaties and, consequently, that every person is embedded in an existing set of relationships and shares a set of responsibilities to one another. In

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 8.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 290.

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Furniss, “Pioneers, Progress, and the Myth of the Frontier: The Landscape of Public History in Rural British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 15/16 (1997/1998): 9-12; Elizabeth Furniss, *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 17-19.

¹¹⁹ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 11.

this sense, Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians are not separated by a frontier, but rather linked through a series of Treaties. The Commission focuses primarily on the “relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples,”¹²⁰ but its mandate suggests that relationships in Canada are more complex. It says that reconciliation “will require commitment from all those affected [by Residential Schools] including First Nations, Inuit and Métis former Indian Residential Schools (IRS) students, their families, communities, religious entities, former school employees, government and the people of Canada. Reconciliation may occur between any of the above groups.”¹²¹ This presumes that the Residential Schools experience cannot be reduced to a simple binary: there are many people and groups in Canada who have each experienced the history and legacy of Residential Schools in very different ways. Reconciliation is therefore a process that happens between groups and may therefore appear as a complex network of relationships between many people. Like the myth of civilisation, the TRC preserves differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada but, unlike it, also suggests that each group is exceptionally diverse. More importantly, it insists that people in Canada – including Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians in their respective diversities – belong to an existing network of Treaty relationships.

However, some scholars suggest that the TRC reinscribes the notion of savagery by relying on a colonial idea of Indigenous victimhood. Dian Million argues that criminological and social-deviance literature throughout the 20th century has constructed Indigenous peoples as deviant in several ways: as the “anomic Indian deviant” in post-war literature, and later as

¹²⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹²¹ IRSSA, *Schedule N*, principles.

“victims” of the colonial state and “subjects of historical trauma.”¹²² Each construction reproduces the “Indian problem” by framing Indigenous peoples as damaged and powerless subjects who are in need of management by and restitution from the state.¹²³ In other words, the 19th century “anomic Indian” (or Indian savage) in need of religious salvation has since transformed into the Indigenous “traumatized victim” in need of state intervention.¹²⁴ In this way, savagery and victimhood are distinct but related concepts: they are genealogically related, both frame Indigenous peoples as deviant, and both deny Indigenous agency. As I noted in the previous sections, the TRC relies largely on this idea of Indigenous victimhood. Ronald Niezen argues that, in comparison to similar commissions, the Canadian TRC “is the most ‘victim centric’ of truth commissions” partly because it originated in the legal system and the IRSSA.¹²⁵ In particular, the IRSSA is the product of lawsuits against the federal government where the plaintiffs (former students) legally proved to be the subjects of harm, that is, victims of the Canadian government. Lisa Ravensbergen and Robinson observe that the “national narrative seems to believe that [Indigenous] collective trauma is the only thing we...think or care about,” but also emphasise that artists (and survivors) can use the reconciliation process to assert Indigenous agency and reject the victim label.¹²⁶ So while the TRC challenges the idea of civilisational progress, it does so in a way that at times frames Indigenous peoples as deviants who lack agency. The result is an image of Indigenous peoples that has tension between power and powerless, sovereignty and dependence, agency and victimhood.

¹²² Dian Million, “Trauma, Power, and the Therapeutic: Speaking Psychotherapeutic Narratives in an Era of Indigenous Human Rights,” in *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, eds. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 160.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 162-4, 171.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹²⁵ Niezen, “Templates and Exclusions,” 921.

¹²⁶ Dylan Robinson, “Acts of Defiance in Indigenous Theatre: A Conversation with Lisa C. Ravensbergen,” in *Arts of Engagement* (2016), 182.

The federal apology provides an example of this tension between agency and victimhood. In it, Prime Minister Harper observes that the history of Residential Schools is characterised “by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities.”¹²⁷ He offers an apology to survivors and their families: “we apologize for failing to protect you...you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry.”¹²⁸ In his response, Chief Phil Fontaine, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, considers the role of survivors in the reconciliation process: he states that they “courageously fought assimilation” and explains how these “brave survivors, through the telling of their painful stories, have stripped white supremacy of its authority and legitimacy. The irresistibility of speaking truth to power is real.”¹²⁹ Harper – a representative of the colonial state – relies on the victim construct: he frames Indigenous peoples as “helpless” and “powerless” victims who have little control over their lives and need “protection” by (and from) the state. In contrast, Fontaine resists this construct by framing Indigenous peoples, and especially survivors, as warriors who have “fought” against colonialism and are the driving force behind reconciliation. He acknowledges that survivors are far from powerless and, in fact, have the power to change society simply by speaking their truths. While Harper draws heavily on the myth of civilisational progress and Indigenous deviance, Fontaine challenges it by focusing on Indigenous agency and resilience.

In sum, the TRC resists the notion of civilisational progress by challenging the savage/civilised binary and the idea of the frontier. Settler society, which uses a progressive narrative as the basis for national mythology, may encounter the Commission’s critique as

¹²⁷ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 11 June 2008 (Stephen Harper, Con.), 6850.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* (Chief Phil Fontaine, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations), 6854.

difficult knowledge. However, the TRC also relies on a construction of victimhood that may reproduce lovely knowledge for settlers about Indigenous peoples as traumatised victims.

White Supremacy

The TRC explains that Residential Schools, and Canadian history in general, were shaped by the idea of racial (and especially European) superiority. Settler mythology is pervaded by the belief that European, Christian, and white people are inherently superior to Indigenous peoples. The TRC states in *Honouring the Truth* that colonialism and national history have been compelled by the idea of European and settler supremacy:

The ‘civilizing mission’ rested on a belief of racial and cultural superiority. European writers and politicians often arranged racial groups in a hierarchy, each with their own set of mental and physical capabilities. The ‘special gifts’ of the Europeans meant it was inevitable that they would conquer the lesser peoples...Through a civilizing process, Europeans could, however, raise the people of the world up to their level. This view was replaced in the nineteenth century by a racism that chose to cloak itself in the language of science, and held that the peoples of the world had differing abilities. Some argued that, for genetic reasons, there were limits on the ability of less-developed peoples to improve. In some cases, it was thought, contact with superior races could lead to only one outcome: the extinction of the inferior peoples.¹³⁰

This excerpt explains several key features about the construction of racial superiority in settler colonial contexts. First, colonisers tend to naturalise the idea of race – and racial hierarchies – by using science to suggest that racial attributes are embedded in the genetic, physical, and mental capabilities of different people. As such, settlers presume that Europeans are ontologically superior to non-Europeans and, therefore, that the European domination of inferior peoples is an “inevitable” process. However, this excerpt also reveals some ambiguity about the telos of conquest and civilisation. Prior to scientific racism, some Europeans believed that Indigenous peoples could be “raised up” to a civilised state while, in the later scientific era, many believed

¹³⁰ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 50.

that racial differences were inherent and that non-European peoples would therefore face extinction. This suggests that colonisers also naturalise the idea of genocide by suggesting that certain racial groups will die away as a natural consequence of historical progress, regardless of whether or not Europeans actively engage in their destruction. Moreover, this ambiguity is consistent with the intent of Residential Schools, which sought to civilise Indigenous children through Western education but also treated them as inferior to European settlers. Residential Schools hinged on the premise that Indigenous peoples could be civilised but, due to the inherent limitations of race, only to a certain degree.

Indeed, the Commission further states that the Residential School system “was based on racist assumptions about the intellectual and cultural inferiority of Aboriginal people – the belief that Aboriginal children were incapable of attaining anything more than a rudimentary elementary-level or vocational education.”¹³¹ It identifies ways that Indigenous children were treated differently than – as inferior to – settler children. For example, the “missionary staff, particularly in the early years of the system, were extremely hostile to Aboriginal culture”¹³² and disparaged Indigenous peoples outside as well as inside the classroom.¹³³ Likewise, the Commission notes that there was a lack of regulation regarding discipline in the schools which “meant that [Indigenous] students were subject to disciplinary measures that would not...be tolerated in schools for non-Aboriginal children,”¹³⁴ such as severe corporal punishment, public humiliation, or imprisonment. School staff and wider settler society maintained a belief in white supremacy, but perhaps more significantly, also translated this belief into concrete practices that directly impacted the lives of Indigenous children.

¹³¹ Ibid., 192.

¹³² Ibid., 127.

¹³³ Ibid., 83-7.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 104.

The TRC challenges white supremacy in its final report by arguing that Indigenous peoples are not inherently inferior but, rather, are constructed as deviants by settler society. For example, the Commission observes in *Honouring the Truth* that Indigenous people are more likely to be convicted of criminal offences and sentenced to prison than non-Indigenous people, and are “dramatically overrepresented” in the prison system.¹³⁵ Yet it further explains that criminal deviance is a product of “systemic bias in the Canadian justice system” against Indigenous peoples.¹³⁶ The Commission contends that

Violence and criminal offending are not inherent in Aboriginal people. They result from very specific experiences that Aboriginal people have endured, including the intergenerational legacy of residential schools. It should not be surprising that those who experienced and witnessed very serious violence against Aboriginal children in the schools frequently became accustomed to violence in later life.¹³⁷

That is, Residential Schools taught students about violence and abuse by exercising it against Indigenous cultures, identities, and bodies. Students learned from this and continued to perpetuate this knowledge throughout their lives and within their communities. In short, criminal deviance did not originate with Indigenous peoples, but rather with the colonial state.¹³⁸ The Commission explains that the reconciliation process therefore functions in part to reveal the way identities – both settler and Indigenous – are constructed within a system of colonial violence: settler society especially must learn how “identities and family histories have been shaped by a version of Canadian history that has marginalized Aboriginal peoples’ history and experience.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 217.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 217-8.

¹³⁸ Roger Epp follows a similar line of thought to invert language of the “Indian problem” and suggest, instead, that Canada has a “settler problem.” Likewise, Chrisjohn and colleagues claim that Residential School Syndrome is a disease that belongs, not to survivors, but settlers. Rather than pathologise Indigenous peoples, which has been the dominant practice throughout Canadian history, this approach maintains that settler society is the source of personal and social ills. Roger Epp, “We Are All Treaty People: History, Reconciliation, and the ‘Settler Problem’,” in *Dilemmas of Reconciliation: Cases and Concepts*, eds. Carol A. L. Prager and Trudy Govier (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2003), 228; Chrisjohn et al., *The Circle Game*, 101-4.

They need to know how notions of European superiority and Aboriginal inferiority have tainted mainstream society's ideas about, and attitudes towards, Aboriginal peoples."¹³⁹ The TRC aims to teach Canadians about the legacy of white supremacy, the way settler colonialism reproduces white supremacy and racialised identities, and ultimately use this knowledge to "reject[] the racism embedded in colonial systems."¹⁴⁰

One way that settler society expresses white supremacy is by constructing Indigenous peoples as unreliable or untrustworthy truth-tellers. White supremacists use the idea of mental inferiority to devalue the speech of purportedly "inferior" peoples and, indeed, settler Canadians tend to frame Indigenous peoples as not credible subjects. The TRC documents in its report ways that settlers discredit Indigenous peoples as truth-telling subjects and how these attitudes continue to persist today. For example, they observe that one school principal framed Indigenous peoples as "natural liars."¹⁴¹ In its discussion of the legacy of Residential Schools, the Commission considers how the federal government has responded to allegations by former students of sexual and physical abuse. It notes that "Crown counsel refused to prosecute without corroboration in the form of physical evidence" and explains that the Crown's position "betrays an unwillingness to take the evidence of Aboriginal people as being worthy of belief. At best, the refusal to prosecute without corroboration was based on a belief that the denial of [school officials] would be sufficient to create a reasonable doubt about guilt."¹⁴² In other words, the Crown does not consider Indigenous testimony to be credible and considers it to be less reliable than the testimony of (presumably white) school staff members. By and large, the TRC challenges these racist beliefs: it reveals that these beliefs are embedded in Canadian society, and

¹³⁹ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 239.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 290.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 212-3.

explicitly rejects this racism. More broadly, the TRC's very purpose is to show that Indigenous testimony is a valuable – and necessary – part of truth-telling about Canadian history.

Critics of the TRC suggest that it may reproduce white supremacy by inadvertently framing Indigenous peoples as untrustworthy truth-tellers. Sue Campbell observes that the Commission may create conditions that enable challenges to the legitimacy of survivor memory and testimony.¹⁴³ She differentiates between three kinds of testimony: natural testimony, when people relate information based on personal experiences; legal testimony, which treats testimonies as evidence and requires an atmosphere of doubt; and political testimony, where people, and especially marginalised people, speak about the significance of past events. The interpretation of testimony is especially volatile because it requires both speakers and witnesses, and it “places the responsibility on potential witnesses to respond appropriately.”¹⁴⁴ The TRC relies mostly on natural and political testimony but, due to its legal origins and an existing “firewall of distrust” about Indigenous peoples,¹⁴⁵ Campbell argues that witnesses may misperceive survivor testimonies as legal testimonies. Settler witnesses may expect or demand a degree of skepticism about testimonies and thereby use the truth-telling process as a venue to discredit survivors as reliable truth-tellers.¹⁴⁶ Anna Cook likewise suggests that the TRC may delegitimise certain testimonies, particularly those that express “felt knowledge.” She addresses the way survivor testimony is “*heard* as meaningful, legitimate and self-affirming political expression” by settler witnesses.¹⁴⁷ The TRC allows survivors to speak about their “felt colonial

¹⁴³ Sue Campbell, “Challenges to Memory in Political Contexts: Recognizing Disrespectful Challenge,” in *Our Faithfulness to the Past: The Ethics and Politics of Memory*, eds. Christine M. Koggel and Rockney Jacobsen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁴⁶ Campbell, “Challenges to Memory in Political Contexts.”

¹⁴⁷ Anna Cook, “A Politics of Indigenous Voice: Reconciliation, Felt Knowledge, and Settler Denial,” *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 36, no. 2 (2016): 73.

experience,”¹⁴⁸ but it does not always validate these experiences by situating them within an ongoing history of colonialism¹⁴⁹ or by enabling the subpoena of perpetrators. The mostly settler audience does not “hear” Indigenous testimony as a meaningful challenge to settler knowledge and narratives, can “dismiss [testimony] as apolitical non-knowledge,” and ultimately maintains ignorance about Canada’s colonial history by refusing to validate the testimony of survivors as “expressions of *ongoing* colonial violence and land dispossession.”¹⁵⁰ To be sure, the TRC does not challenge the credibility of survivors. Rather, it is vulnerable to attacks because it retains an ambiguity between personal, political, and legal testimonies, and because its truth-telling format requires Indigenous peoples to speak primarily to a settler audience. To avoid reproducing racist beliefs, the TRC must therefore foster an environment of trust and “consider ways to broaden public understanding of testimony as truth-telling about the past.”¹⁵¹

While the TRC challenges formulations of white superiority, it is also vulnerable to attacks from settler society that can reinscribe supremacist attitudes. The Commission explains in its report that the principle of white supremacy is the foundation for both the Residential School system and the settler state. Furthermore, its methodology – which relies on the testimony of survivors – is rooted in the premise that Indigenous peoples are trustworthy truth-tellers. As such, the TRC may challenge myths of racial superiority and generate difficult knowledge for settler Canadians. But as Campbell and Cook point out, its testimonial format can also enable settlers to reproduce lovely knowledge about the unreliability – that is, the inferiority – of Indigenous peoples.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Cook observes that political spokespersons often position Residential Schools and Canadian colonialism as past events, rather than as an ongoing historical process. However, the Final Report does address the colonial context and its ongoing “legacy.”

¹⁵⁰ Cook, “A Politics of Indigenous Voice,” 76.

¹⁵¹ Campbell, “Challenges to Memory in Political Contexts,” 177.

Indigenous Erasure

As noted in previous sections, the TRC claims that the government's intended purpose for Residential Schools, as well as other government policies, was to erase Indigenous peoples from the Canadian landscape. Among other evidence, it cites Indian Affairs Deputy Minister Duncan Campbell Scott, who declared that "our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department."¹⁵² The Commission's discussion of cultural genocide in *Honouring the Truth* emphasises this process of erasure. It explicitly states that the government used Residential Schools to eliminate Indigenous cultures and identities: "Residential schools were a systematic, government-sponsored attempt to destroy Aboriginal cultures and languages and to assimilate Aboriginal peoples so that they no longer existed as distinct peoples."¹⁵³ The government sought to do this specifically by destroying students' identities and replacing them with Western ones: "The objectives of the schools were to strip away Aboriginal children's identities and assimilate them into Western Christian society."¹⁵⁴ The TRC supports these claims by showing that practices within schools targeted distinctly Indigenous aspects of students' identities. The Commission describes how school officials cut students' hair upon arrival or as punishment, forced students to exchange their traditional or home-made clothing for European attire, separated siblings from one another, and assigned numbers to students in place of names.¹⁵⁵ These practices were paired with other attacks on Indigenous cultures, especially through the prohibition and suppression of Indigenous languages.¹⁵⁶ Each practice erased a

¹⁵² Cited in TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 57.

¹⁵³ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 200.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 42-5.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 83-7.

distinct aspect of student identity (physical identity, kinship relations, name, and language) and replaced it with an aspect of European culture that could be understood and governed by school staff.

The TRC concedes that the state's attempt to erase Indigenous identity was partly successful and, in many respects, Residential Schools have damaged Indigenous communities. In its final report, the Commission speaks about the "ravages of colonialism"¹⁵⁷ and confirms that "although Aboriginal peoples and cultures have been badly damaged, they continue to exist."¹⁵⁸ It addresses some ways that cultural and physical erasure have occurred. *Honouring the Truth* focuses substantially on the way schools aimed to suppress Indigenous languages, and concludes that language loss has been one of the most severe outcomes of the school system: "Many of the almost ninety surviving Aboriginal languages in Canada are under serious threat of extinction" and, without active effort to restore them, "what the residential schools failed to accomplish will come about through a process of systematic neglect."¹⁵⁹ In this sense, cultural loss is a very real and ongoing issue, and many nations may fully lose their languages if they do not take action to restore them and prevent future loss. The Commission also suggests that the state has partly succeeded in the physical erasure of Indigenous bodies. Volume 4 of the TRC's report, *Missing Children and Unmarked Burials*, focuses on the students who have either died at or disappeared from Residential Schools and remain largely unidentified. It observes that the government did not record names for nearly one-third of the children who died at schools (approximately one thousand students), the burial places of many children are unknown, and many school cemeteries remain abandoned or neglected today.¹⁶⁰ In other words, not only did Residential Schools

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 16.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 202.

¹⁶⁰ TRC, *Missing Children and Unmarked Burials*, 1-2.

contribute to an inordinately high rate of death among students, but the government has successfully erased hundreds of student identities by failing to record their names, and it threatens to erase their memory by leaving burial sites forgotten or in disrepute. To combat further loss, the Commission has developed a registry of student deaths and cemeteries that aims “to properly honour the memory of the children who died in Canada’s residential schools.”¹⁶¹

Despite the past and ongoing “ravages of colonialism,” Indigenous peoples have survived and maintain a sense of agency in their lives. Representatives from Indigenous organisations responded to the federal apology, and Indigenous resistance and survival were recurring themes in these responses. Eva Mackey suggests that the government’s apology contributes to the erasure of Indigenous voices by rejecting the “dialogic relations” of an apology – that is, by assuming Indigenous peoples would accept the apology and initially refusing to allow responses in Parliament.¹⁶² Despite this – or, perhaps, because of it – representatives used the apology as an opportunity to affirm the robustness of Indigenous culture. Beverley Jacobs, President of the Native Women’s Association of Canada, affirms that “we have our language still, we have our ceremonies, we have our elders,” but also recognises that it is necessary to protect and “revitalise” Indigenous ceremonies and traditions.¹⁶³ Several leaders responded in their mother tongues both to affirm their identities and show that their cultures have endured. For example, Mary Simon, President Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, explains that she “spoke first in [her] Inuit language because [she] wanted to illustrate to you that [her] language and culture are still strong.”¹⁶⁴ Fontaine insists on the futurity of Indigenous peoples in Canada and says that “we

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁶² Eva Mackey, , “The Apologizers’ Apology,” in *Reconciling Canada* (2013), 55-6.

¹⁶³ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 11 June 2008 (Beverley Jacobs, President of the Native Women’s Association of Canada), 6856.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., (Mary Simon, President Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami), 6855.

bear witness today in this House that our survival as first nations [sic] peoples in this land is affirmed forever.”¹⁶⁵

The Commission adopts a similar tone that emphasises the continued presence, resistance, and agency of Indigenous peoples. In its conclusion to the history of Residential Schools in *Honouring the Truth*, the TRC notes that “despite being subjected to aggressive assimilation policies for nearly 200 years, Aboriginal people have maintained their identity and their communities. They continue to assert their rights to self-governance.”¹⁶⁶ That is, Indigenous peoples have managed to retain distinct cultures, identities, and social cohesion within their respective nations despite living in an “aggressive” environment that aims to destroy them. Moreover, they are active agents who actively assert their cultures and identities. The Commission identifies several ways that Indigenous peoples have assumed agency in their lives and played a significant role in the Canadian political process. During the decline of Residential Schools, they “were establishing effective regional and national organizations” to resist the colonial state:

In the courts and the legislatures, they argued for the recognition of Aboriginal rights, particularly the right to self-government. They forced the government to withdraw its 1969 White Paper that aimed at terminating Aboriginal rights, they placed the settling of land claims on the national agenda, ensured that Aboriginal rights were entrenched in the Constitution, and saw the creation of...Nunavut.¹⁶⁷

The Canadian government has sought to deny the rights of Indigenous nations as distinct peoples, force their assimilation into settler society, and expropriate Indigenous land. But as the TRC points out, Indigenous peoples have successfully resisted each attack by the state – as evidenced by the inclusion of distinct rights in the constitution, the government’s abandonment

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., (Chief Phil Fontaine, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations), 6854.

¹⁶⁶ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 134.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 130.

of the White Paper, and the creation of an Inuit-majority territory. And while the TRC documents cases of resistance, it also contributes to this resistance. In its hearings and reports, the Commission resists the erasure of Indigenous culture by “giv[ing] equal weight and greater voice to Indigenous oral-based history, legal traditions, and memory practices.”¹⁶⁸ It also established the NCTR as “a cultural space that would serve as both an archives and a museum to hold the collective memory of Survivors and others whose lives were touched by the history and legacy of the residential school system.”¹⁶⁹ This centre will help preserve the past and protect against further loss by creating a distinctly Indigenous space to retain “historical and newly created documents and oral statements...and make them accessible for the future.”¹⁷⁰

Several scholars, however, suggest that the TRC may represent Indigenous peoples in a way that erases certain aspects of identity. As previously discussed, Angel and Wakeham consider the role of photography at TRC hearings and how it renders Indigenous peoples and experiences visible to the settler public. They note that the visual rhetoric of human rights photography relies on images of overt physical violence and atrocity, such as Holocaust photography. The imagery of Residential Schools, which tends to depict orderly classrooms and tidy children, does not employ this rhetoric. As such, these images can attenuate colonial violence in Canada and “may be mobilized to aid and abet settler Canadians’ denial of human rights violations” in regards to Residential Schools.¹⁷¹ Robinson addresses the way speakers and witnesses frame Residential Schools narratives by including (and excluding) particular expressions of emotion and affect. He observes that participants at TRC events construct a hierarchy of emotional responses by privileging “productive” grieving practices, such as those

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 319.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 314.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Angel and Wakeham, “Witnessing *In Camera*,” 96.

surrounding sadness, while failing to address other emotions, such as anger and shame.¹⁷² David Gaertner demonstrates that the TRC frames its “Aboriginal principles of witnessing” as pan-Indigenous although these principles derive specifically from the traditions of the Coast Salish people. In doing so, the Commission normalises one particular approach to witnessing and constructs an “official definition” that neglects other complementary, or contradictory, perspectives. That is, the TRC in some respects ignores the diversity and regional specificity of Indigenous traditions and thereby risks mitigating the difference between the hundreds of distinct Indigenous peoples.¹⁷³ To use the words of Angel and Wakeham, the TRC contains “a tension between exposure and concealment, privacy and spectacle”¹⁷⁴ or, I would add, between erasure and presence. As these scholars point out, this tension makes Indigenous peoples visible in many ways. However, it also threatens to erase important aspects of Indigenous experience: Canada’s history of colonial violence, certain emotional and grieving responses, and difference within and between Indigenous traditions. As Peter Morin succinctly states in his embodied performance of land, “my truth and reconciliation is not invited.”¹⁷⁵ While the TRC validates certain truths and certain kinds of reconciliation, it also erases those that do not fit within its mandate.

The TRC challenges the colonial logic of Indigenous erasure but, in some ways, may also reinscribe it. The Commission’s report explains that the purpose of Residential Schools and Canadian policy has been to erase Indigenous peoples as distinct groups. One of the TRC’s goals, then, is to resist erasure by framing Indigenous peoples as contemporary agents who continue to play a role in national history. Yet critics also suggest that its format can limit the

¹⁷² Dylan Robinson, “Intergenerational Sense, Intergenerational Responsibility,” 52-4.

¹⁷³ David Gaertner, “‘Aboriginal Principles of Witnessing’ and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada,” in *Arts of Engagement* (2016).

¹⁷⁴ Angel and Wakeham, “Witnessing *In Camera*,” 111.

¹⁷⁵ Peter Morin, “this is what happens when we perform the memory of the land,” in *Arts of Engagement* (2016), 69.

degree to which this occurs. Scholars such as Robinson and Gaertner point out that, while the TRC increases the visibility of certain aspects of Indigenous or Residential Schools experiences, it can also erase or mitigate other aspects of this experience.

Lawful Peacemaking

The TRC frames law as the basis for the Canadian state and Residential School system. Its final report identifies some of the key ideas that European explorers used to justify colonialism and claim ownership of Indigenous lands, referring specifically to the Doctrine of Discovery – the legal principle through which the church granted land title to the political powers that “discovered” and occupied a new territory – and the related doctrine of terra nullius. Tracey Lindberg defines the Doctrine of Discovery as a set of legal and philosophical principles that affirm the superiority of Eurocanadian settlers and, thereby, legally inscribe the inferiority of Indigenous peoples.¹⁷⁶ She demonstrates that settlers have and continue to use these principles in constitutional documents, treaty-making, legislation, and case law to legitimise the theft and occupation of Indigenous land. While this doctrine was not integrated into Canadian law as explicitly as in other colonial contexts, Lindberg observes, “the assumption of authority under Discovery indisputably informs the development of policy and legislation” in past and contemporary Canada.¹⁷⁷ According to this Doctrine, the TRC explains in *Honouring the Truth*, “Indigenous people simply occupied, rather than owned, the land” and “true ownership...could come only with European-style agriculture.”¹⁷⁸ The Commission further observes that the Doctrine remains relevant today as the legal foundation for the Canadian state and its presumed

¹⁷⁶ Robert J. Miller, Jacinta Ruru, Larissa Behrendt, and Tracey Lindberg, *Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 93-4.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁷⁸ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 50.

entitlement to the occupation and extraction of Indigenous lands: “the Doctrine of Discovery underlies the legal basis on which British Crown officials claimed sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and justified the extinguishment of their inherent rights to their territories, lands, and resources.”¹⁷⁹ It also became the legal basis for government policies that regulated Indigenous peoples, such as the *Indian Act* and “residential schools [which] were established in the shadow of these ideas.”¹⁸⁰ In his response to the federal apology, Jack Layton explicitly acknowledges the legal origin of the schools and observes that the “laws consciously enacted in this House put the residential schools into place and kept them going for years.”¹⁸¹

Throughout its report, the TRC frames Canadian law as a violent and oppressive force that the Canadian government uses to suppress Indigenous peoples. An important aspect of Canadian national mythology is that settlers used law and order to *peacefully* transform the savage wilderness and establish a new nation.¹⁸² The TRC challenges the notion of the Canadian peacemaker and, instead, suggests that settlement, and particularly the imposition of Residential Schools, was a violent process. The Commission speaks about the “abusive and coercive nature of the residential school system,”¹⁸³ refers to government policies towards Indigenous peoples as “hostile,”¹⁸⁴ and comments on the “violence” inherent in the Residential School system and larger Canadian society.¹⁸⁵ It identifies state law as the source of this violence: “Canadian law was used by Canada to suppress truth and deter reconciliation. Parliament’s creation of assimilative laws and regulations facilitated the oppression of Aboriginal cultures and enabled

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 245.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 51.

¹⁸¹ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 11 June 2008 (Jack Layton, NDP), 6854.

¹⁸² Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 83; Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 4.

¹⁸³ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 111.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 83.

¹⁸⁵ For example, see TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 226 and 272.

the residential school system.”¹⁸⁶ This law, and its imposition by the Canadian government, is largely responsible for damaged relationships. The TRC observes that it has perpetuated social inequalities, does not serve the interests of Indigenous peoples, and, consequently, “many Aboriginal people have a deep and abiding distrust of Canada’s political and legal systems because of the damage they have caused. They often see Canada’s legal system as being an arm of a Canadian governing structure that has been diametrically opposed to their interests.”¹⁸⁷ The Commission insists that, if Canadians wish to achieve reconciliation, they must transform state law in a way that does not perpetuate unequal relationships: “Until Canadian law becomes an instrument supporting Aboriginal peoples’ empowerment, many Aboriginal people will continue to regard it as a morally and politically malignant force. A commitment to truth and reconciliation demands that Canada’s legal system be transformed.”¹⁸⁸

The TRC furthermore challenges Canada’s legal foundation by suggesting that state legitimacy comes, not from imperial and colonial doctrines, but rather from Treaty relationships. In *Honouring the Truth*, the Commission observes that European settlers “may have [had] a sincerely and firmly held belief” in their right to claim and colonise Turtle Island/North America, but also insists that their rationale for doing so “does not stand up to legal, moral, or even logical scrutiny.”¹⁸⁹ It specifically challenges the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius: “Doctrine of Discovery cannot serve as the basis for a legitimate claim to the lands that were colonized, if for no other reason than that the so-called discovered lands were already well known to the Indigenous peoples who had inhabited them for thousands of years.”¹⁹⁰ While the TRC does not

¹⁸⁶ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 255.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 258.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 53.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

claim that Indigenous peoples own the land, it does suggest that they have lived on this land much longer than European settlers and, as such, cannot be subject to laws imposed by the settler state.¹⁹¹ It rejects colonial legal doctrines as valid claims to land ownership and suggests that the Canadian state, as founded on this doctrine, is an illegitimate institution. Instead, the TRC argues that Canada is legitimate only insofar as it establishes relationships with Indigenous nations through Treaties. It asserts that the “Royal Proclamation of 1763, in conjunction with the Treaty of Niagara of 1764, established the legal and political foundation of Canada” by building relationships with Indigenous nations, and that Canada can only exist within these relationships “based on mutual recognition and respect.”¹⁹² The Commission thus argues that “all Canadians [must] understand that without Treaties, Canada would have no legitimacy as a nation. Treaties between Indigenous nations and the Crown established the legal and constitutional foundation of this country.”¹⁹³ This provides insight to my earlier observation, namely, that reconciliation is a process that occurs between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state. For the TRC, the Canadian state is a legitimate political institution only when it rejects the colonial law on which it is founded, recognises the self-determination of Indigenous nations, and fulfills its treaty responsibilities. That is, the TRC may not seek to dismantle the Canadian state although it does aim to transform it, especially in regards to the source of its legitimacy. While Moran suggests that the TRC’s vision of reconciliation occurs within the contemporary settler state,¹⁹⁴ I contend that the Commission proposes something much more radical.

¹⁹¹ The Commission implies that land cannot be claimed or owned. It suggests that many people can occupy the same territory but are legitimate inhabitants only insofar as they build good relationships with one another, as well as with the land. In other words, legitimacy is derived from good relationships rather than from universal legal principles.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 249.

¹⁹⁴ Moran, “Indigenous Literature and the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” 6-7, 25.

In contrast to Canadian law, the TRC frames Indigenous legal traditions as peaceful practices that focus on healing relationships and creating harmony between people. Val Napoleon and Hadley Friedland explain that, while healing is an important part of Indigenous law, it is only one of many aspects. In particular, they contend that it is the only aspect of Indigenous law permitted within the state because it does not undermine the state's monopoly on violence – that is, because healing is a peaceful practice. As such, they warn against reducing Indigenous law to healing practices both because it is an incomplete understanding of these traditions and because it reinscribes supremacy of the settler state.¹⁹⁵ Despite this, the TRC's final report claims that Indigenous legal traditions are important to the reconciliation process because they emerge from established “approaches to resolving conflict, repairing harm, and restoring relationships”:

Traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders have long dealt with conflicts and harms using spiritual ceremonies and peacemaking practices, and by retelling oral history stories that reveal how their ancestors restored harmony to families and communities. These traditions and practices are the foundation of Indigenous law; they contain wisdom and practical guidance for moving towards reconciliation across this land.¹⁹⁶

In other words, Indigenous peoples base their law on the premise that “conflict and harm” will arise within and between communities, but also that people can use ceremony and peacemaking practices to resolve them. As such, the Commission pairs together Indigenous “legal traditions and peacemaking practices” to suggest that law, peacemaking, and cultural tradition are inseparable from one another.¹⁹⁷ According to the TRC, then, Western law can result in violence when people use it to impose static and abstract legal principles upon individuals and

¹⁹⁵ Val Napoleon and Hadley Friedland, “Indigenous Legal Traditions: Roots to Renaissance,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Criminal Law*, eds. Markus D. Dubber and Tatjana Hörnle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 237-9.

¹⁹⁶ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 16.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

communities; Indigenous law, in contrast, is a set of dynamic practices that help to restore harmonious relations between people and, thus, are conducive to peace. In one way, the Commission emphasises the value of Indigenous legal traditions and frames them as a peaceful alternative to state law; but at the same time, as Napoleon and Friedland suggest, the Commission also positions these traditions largely within the purview of state recognition.

Ultimately, the TRC provides a complex and nuanced discussion of law that often resists the myth of lawful peacemaking but, at other times, relies on it. Perhaps most obvious is that the Commission does not challenge law itself as problematic but rather certain expressions of it; it suggests that law is neither inherently good nor bad – peaceful nor violent – but is a tool that people use to harm relationships or heal them, depending on one’s practices and intentions. Throughout its report, the TRC draws a distinction between Canadian state law and Indigenous legal traditions: settlers have historically used the former to perpetuate oppression while Indigenous peoples have traditionally used the latter to build harmonious relationships. The TRC does not challenge the idea of lawful peacemaking because, indeed, some (i.e. Indigenous) legal practices help create or restore harmony between people. It does, however, challenge the myth of the *settler* peacemaker and, in a way, inverts it. The myth of the “benevolent peacemaker” positions the settler peacemaker in contrast to the lawless “savage,” and suggests that European settlers used British law to transform Turtle Island/North America and its Indigenous inhabitants into a civilised nation.¹⁹⁸ The Commission reformulates this myth in a way that frames the settler state as a perpetrator of violence – i.e. the way government officials used policy to implement a “dangerous and violent” school system¹⁹⁹ – and suggests that Indigenous peoples have the legal practices necessary to bring peace to the continent. In other words, it proposes an alternative

¹⁹⁸ Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 83.

¹⁹⁹ TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 57-61.

myth: the myth of settler violence and the Indigenous peacemaker. Santiago Slabodsky argues that the reversal of civilised/barbaric identities, rather than their deconstruction, can be useful critiques that “simultaneously acknowledg[e] the world created by the dualism and explor[e] the colonized identity as an alternative to the reified asymmetry.”²⁰⁰ However, he also considers that this approach does not transform identities and may “ratify the agenda imposed by polar identities.”²⁰¹

The Commission furthermore suggests that law, depending on its particular expression, can either contribute to reconciliation or hinder it. Several of its ninety-four calls to action specifically propose the creation of new state laws. For example, the 14th “call[s] upon the federal government to enact an Aboriginal Languages Act,”²⁰² and the 4th “call[s] upon the federal government to enact Aboriginal child-welfare legislation that establishes national standards for Aboriginal child apprehension.”²⁰³ These proposals also insist, however, that these “are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities”²⁰⁴ and that the new legislation must “affirm the right of Aboriginal governments” to self-determination.²⁰⁵ So while the TRC recommends the creation of new laws, it also emphasises that the government must develop them in a way that preserves the self-determination of Indigenous nations and limits the authority of Canadian law. According to the 47th call to action, new legislation can only contribute to reconciliation if the “federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments [also] repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and lands, such as the

²⁰⁰ Santiago Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism: Triumphal Failures of Barbaric Thinking* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 10.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁰² TRC, *Calls to Action* (Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), call to action 14, 2.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, call to action 4, 1.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, call to action 14, 2.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, call to action 4, 1.

Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*.”²⁰⁶ In short, the creation of new laws necessarily requires the revocation of old ones, and these recommendations are only effective when paired with one another. If the Canadian government implements some recommendations (4 and 14) but not others (47), it will undermine Indigenous self-determination and further damage relationships between Indigenous peoples and settler society. The problem is that the state can use these recommendations to appear, but not actually become, legitimate. The state may appear to increase its legitimacy by complying with some of the Commission’s recommendations (i.e. 4 and 14), but does not actually gain legitimacy unless it also transforms its legal foundations (47). From the TRC’s perspective, it is necessary to implement every call to action; from the perspective of the Canadian state, it is possible to gain degrees of ostensible legitimacy by complying with some calls to action.

It is unsurprising that the TRC does not reject the need for law in Canadian society since it is a product of the Canadian judicial and legal system. These legal origins have created limitations to the Commission’s authority. The mandate gives the Commission authority to receive statements and gather documents related to Residential Schools, but also says it “shall not hold formal hearings, nor act as a public inquiry, nor conduct a formal legal process.”²⁰⁷ Furthermore, the mandate denies subpoena powers to the Commission²⁰⁸ and insists that the Commissioners “shall perform their duties...[without making] any reference in any of its activities or in its report or recommendations to the possible civil or criminal liability of any person or organization.”²⁰⁹ The Commission must gather statements and provide recommendations *unless* those statements or recommendations accuse or “make reference” to

²⁰⁶ Ibid., call to action 47, 5.

²⁰⁷ IRSSA, *Schedule N*, §2.b.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., §2.c.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., §2.f.

criminal activities by individuals or institutions. Scholars have suggested that this limited legal authority may undermine the reconciliation process. Jennifer Llewellyn points out that the mandate assigns the TRC with responsibility to uncover and disseminate truth about Residential Schools, but does not give it the legal or judicial mechanisms necessary to achieve reconciliation. Without this authority, it may be unable to “bridge the gap between truth and reconciliation.”²¹⁰ Dale Turner argues that the mandate does not acknowledge the “inherent rights of Aboriginal self-government” and that, within the context of TRC activities, Indigenous rights come from the Canadian state rather than their own nationhood. Like Llewellyn, Turner also concludes that reconciliation will likely be impossible so long as the mandate fails to incorporate and respect Indigenous sovereignty.²¹¹

Overall, the TRC offers an alternative and nuanced understanding of law in its final report that does not conclusively challenge or reinscribe the myth of lawful peacemaking. It resists several core aspects of this myth in its report and calls to action: it challenges the state’s constitutional legitimacy, frames state law as a violent force, and validates Indigenous legal traditions. It does not so much transform the myth of lawful peacemaking, however, as invert it. Furthermore, it does not challenge law as a basis for social and national order and, in fact, emphasises the importance of law to Canadian society. As such, the TRC may disrupt narratives of the settler peacemaker but not the underlying myth of lawful peacemaking.

²¹⁰ Jennifer Llewellyn, “Bridging the Gap between Truth and Reconciliation: Restorative Justice and the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” in *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*, eds. Marlene Brant Castellano, Linda Archibald, and Mike DeGagné (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008).

²¹¹ Dale Turner, “On the Idea of Reconciliation in Contemporary Aboriginal Politics,” in *Reconciling Canada* (2013).

Transformative Potential and its Limits

While the TRC's final report frames reconciliation as a transformative process, the Commission's ability to actualise this change is limited. In this report, the Commission views its role as historical and memorial, and in particular, to "rewrite" dominant narratives of Canadian history. Most indicative of its transformative intent is the way the TRC engages directly with the framework of difficult knowledge. The theory of difficult knowledge is a pedagogical framework designed specifically to understand how historical and memorial narratives transform identities and worldviews. The Commission frames the history of Residential Schools as potentially difficult knowledge that can disrupt and unsettle dominant national narratives (i.e. lovely knowledge), and this technique has the potential to challenge settler mythology in several ways. First, *Honouring the Truth* constructs a narrative of Canadian history that relies on the concept of genocide. While settler colonialism is predicated on the genocide of Indigenous peoples, its mythology is rooted in the denial of this act; claims of Indigenous genocide therefore have the potential to disrupt settler mythologies. Furthermore, the report also resists settler models of time as linear and progressive by, instead, constructing an historical narrative that frames time as cyclical, immanent, and relational.

Its limitations and potential are most clearly reflected in – and largely a product of – the Commission's relationship to law. While the TRC is rooted in state law through the IRSSA, this agreement also specifies that it has no authority to make legal claims or act in a legal capacity. For this reason, the Commission can make explicit arguments about the sociological category of "cultural genocide" but can only offer indirect claims about the legal category of "genocide" as defined by the UNGC. It is therefore unsurprising that the TRC has an ambivalent attitude towards law in its final report. The Commission does not challenge law itself – only certain

manifestations of law – while suggesting that other legal traditions have the potential for peacemaking. In this way, it does not disrupt the myth of lawful peacemaking or its underlying logic; in fact, it reinscribes this myth by turning it on its head. But at the same time, the TRC is also critical of colonial law in its report. It challenges the state's legal foundation – the Doctrine of Discovery – and claims that Canada is legitimate only when it respects the Treaties and self-determination of Indigenous peoples. This vision, if realised, could fundamentally transform the Canadian state and its relationship to Indigenous nations. Yet the TRC, as governed by the IRSSA, has little power to actually implement these changes.

In practice, then, the TRC does not always disrupt settler colonial mythology. The Commission challenges the concept of savagery in its final report, for instance, but ultimately fails to transform it. The TRC explains in the report that the Residential School system was founded on the belief that Indigenous peoples are inferior savages who need to be civilised (or erased, or erased through civilisation) by European education, religion, and language. It then challenges these assumptions by framing Indigenous peoples as contemporary historical agents, credible truth-tellers, and by demonstrating that Indigenous societies are inherently complete. However, critics of the TRC also observe that it can erase the complexity of Indigenous experience, pathologises Indigenous peoples as traumatised victims, and remains vulnerable to attacks that may discredit Indigenous people as truth-tellers. As such, the TRC's potential to disrupt settler narratives and national mythology in Canada is limited.

Chapter V

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights: Setting the Stage for Difficult Knowledge

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) is a site of public history that explores the common thread between human rights, the Holocaust, as well as national and international history. It began as an initiative of businessman Israel Asper to build a Holocaust museum in his hometown of Winnipeg. Asper, through his philanthropic organisation the Asper Foundation, offered high school students the Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program that sent them to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. To facilitate this program, he sought to establish a similar museum in Winnipeg that would take a distinctly Canadian perspective on the Holocaust. In 2003, the foundation entered into partnership with municipal and federal governments, which promised to provide land and funding. By this point, planners had decided that the museum would address the subject of human rights more broadly with partial focus on the Holocaust. The federal government announced in 2007 that it would establish the CMHR as a Crown corporation and national museum governed by the *Museums Act*, and it would contribute substantial funding to construction of the museum and its operating costs.¹ The CMHR became the first national museum established outside of Canada's National Capital Region.²

The government established two advisory committees to determine how the museum would, in the words of the amended *Museums Act*, “explore the subject of human rights, with

¹ Catherine D. Chatterley, “Canada’s Struggle with Holocaust Memorialization: The War Museum Controversy, Ethnic Identity Politics, and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 29, no. 2 (2015); 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).

² The Canadian Museum of Immigration was designated as a national museum shortly afterwards, in 2011, at Pier 21 in Halifax. As such, it was the first national museum to actually operate outside of the National Capital Region.

special but not exclusive reference to Canada.”³ In 2007, the Minister of Canadian Heritage established the Advisory Committee on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (MCH) and mandated it to provide recommendations on, among other things, “the scope and content of the proposed Museum.”⁴ The committee held public consultations that included twenty-six focus groups across thirteen cities and distribution of an online questionnaire. The following year, it released the *Report to the Minister of Canadian Heritage on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights*, which included a list of seventy-eight recommendations. Based on these recommendations, another advisory body formed in 2009 with “the capacity and authority to acknowledge conflict, provide a balanced perspective and acknowledge and manage controversy” surrounding the museum and its content.⁵ The Content Advisory Committee’s (CAC) consultations were more extensive than those organised by the MCH: it went on a “story-gathering” tour of Canada that included nineteen cities, bilateral meetings with 472 experts, and meetings with 1222 people that included public roundtables. It delivered the *Content Advisory Committee Final Report to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights* in 2010, which provided forty-eight recommendations on the principles and values that would sustain the museum, people’s stories about human rights, and certain themes that the museum should address. In September 2014, the CMHR opened its doors to the public.⁶

The advisory committees considered how to present content within a Canadian context, but also how to frame national history.⁷ On one hand, the committees determined what ideas and

³ *Museums Act, Statutes of Canada* 1990, c.3, §15.2.

⁴ Advisory Committee on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, *Report to the Minister of Canadian Heritage on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights* (Ottawa: Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2008), Transmittal Letter from the Chair.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶ Visitors only had access to four galleries during the official opening in September 2014. The remaining galleries opened in November 2014.

⁷ In this chapter, “advisory committees” refers to the MCH and CAC and their respective reports.

stories the museum would share – specific instances of human rights violations, ways people have defended their rights, social activism and government action. For example, both committees emphasise that the museum should include the histories and experiences of Indigenous peoples, while only the CAC concludes that the museum should focus on the Holocaust. On the other hand, and more importantly, they considered how the museum should frame this content for visitors. The CAC in particular discusses “the role of history” at the museum,⁸ various approaches to viewing history, and how to interpret past and current events through a “human rights lens.”⁹ It also situates Canada in global and local contexts and engages in “thoroughgoing reflection on the nature, experience, and values of Canada.”¹⁰ The MCH and CAC played an active role in the writing and interpretation of history: they developed a framework for the museum that would help people interpret historical events and make these histories meaningful in people’s lives. In this way, they structure the CMHR partly as a receptacle for history – as an institution that documents the past and present for visitors – but also as an institution that participates in the construction of history and memory.

The present chapter focuses primarily on the intentions that underlie the CMHR: the museum’s goals and purposes, its approach to subject matter, and the role it will play in public life in Canada and around the world. It is necessary to consider how advisory committees have framed the CMHR and defined its scope, although it is also important to consider how museum staff continue to shape and transform these intentions. The MCH and CAC, as well as the *Museums Act* and other related policies, largely established the museum’s role prior to its opening. Yet the CMHR is a public institution that addresses both historical past and present

⁸ Content Advisory Committee, *Content Advisory Committee Final Report to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights* (Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada, 2010), 70.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

realities, and its content and perspectives will evolve as government policies change, new social movements emerge, and history continues to unfold. In other words, the CMHR is a living institution that continues to transform not only its perspectives on human rights and Canadian history, but also its own role in Canadian society. While one purpose of the advisory committees was to initiate public consultation and relationship building, the MCH acknowledges that “the CMHR is (and will remain) a work in progress” that must continue to engage in these processes.¹¹ To address this dynamic aspect of the museum, I draw on interviews conducted with curators and researchers at the CMHR. These conversations complement the reports by exploring the museum’s founding principles in more detail and considering the way perspectives, concerns, and approaches have evolved since the museum’s opening.

In this chapter, I explore how the CMHR engages with Canadian history and mythology. The first section considers advisory committees’ general approach to museum content and the way curators mediate this content for the public. Advisory committees seek to frame at least some content as difficult knowledge that encourages visitors to actively engage in the interpretation of history. Curators create an environment that can help visitors to have difficult encounters with new narratives: they frame the CMHR as a critique of traditional museums; create spaces of rest and reflection; and engage extensively with the creative arts. The potential for difficult knowledge is limited, however, by the need to make exhibits broadly accessible to the general public and the fact that public perceptions of human rights issues are constantly changing. In the remaining sections, I explore how the CMHR generates difficult knowledge about national mythology. The committees engage most extensively with the theme of Indigenous erasure, which they resist by including Indigenous peoples as contemporary agents.

¹¹ Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 13.

Although the museum seeks to render Indigenous peoples and land visible, it also reproduces this myth by erasing (or mitigating) Indigenous self-determination and histories of colonial violence. Advisory committees engage with other aspects of national mythology – in particular the themes of civilisational progress and lawful peacemaking – which they both reproduce and resist to varying degrees. I contend that the CMHR engages with Canadian mythology in a way that is intended to generate difficult knowledge. While it often resists national myth in a way that challenges dominant interpretations of history, it does not always do so successfully and, in some cases, relies on the logic of settler colonialism. I argue that, in this way, the museum creates the potential for difficult knowledge, although whether this potential is realised depends primarily on the way visitors encounter and interact with content.¹²

The Intent and Potential for Difficult Knowledge

The CMHR has the potential to generate difficult knowledge about Canadian history. Difficult knowledge transforms individuals and groups by challenging their worldviews and, in particular, operates by pitting narratives against one another to reveal inherent contradictions in the human condition. Advisory committees and curators for the CMHR propose framing the museum in a way that nurtures difficult knowledge and enables visitors to have transformative encounters.

Advisory committees for the CMHR suggest that curators should develop content in a way that addresses, and responds to, the worldviews and narratives of museum visitors. The theory of difficult knowledge rejects cumulative models of learning in favour of those based on interference. Whereas cumulative models presume that new knowledge is incrementally added

¹² The following chapter explores visitor experience.

onto old knowledge, interference models propose that new knowledge interacts with existing knowledge. When people encounter difficult knowledge they do not simply assimilate new facts into an existing body of knowledge, but rather experience a new perspective of oneself and the world.¹³ As such, theories of difficult knowledge are not concerned with facts but primarily with worldviews, personal and collective narratives, and interpretive meaning. The CMHR's advisory committees likewise suggest that the museum should target the narratives and worldviews of visitors. In its report on the museum, the MCH observes that the "history of human rights is not an insignificant exercise relegated to memorizing dates and events that have taken place in the past. It is more appropriately about gaining a more intimate understanding of ourselves, from where we have come and how we arrived at this point."¹⁴ While the committee does not dismiss the importance of historical facts, it suggests that they lose meaning when removed from a narrative framework. Rather than focus on the details of past events, museum planners should therefore consider how visitors use history to construct a sense of self and a sense of continuity through time and place. The CAC suggests that curators should focus on the way visitors construct identities and worldviews as Canadians. Speaking about its cross-country consultations, the CAC states that it "beg[an] to build this unique national museum on what was in the hearts and minds of Canadians with regard to the content of human rights."¹⁵ It further says that "according to the *Museums Act*, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights...contributes to Canadians' collective memory and sense of identity."¹⁶ That is, the CAC consultations explored the emotional and intellectual identities of Canadians and used these as the basis for

¹³ Deborah P. Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 1-6.

¹⁴ Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 2.

¹⁵ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

developing museum content. In this way, the CMHR and its content emerge from the worldviews of Canadians, but also aims to shape these identities and worldviews.

The advisory committees propose that the CMHR should function as a catalyst for social change. Theorists contend that difficult knowledge is an effective approach to education because it contains a transformative potential. Deborah Britzman argues that when people encounter and engage with difficult knowledge, they experience a crisis – and consequently a radical transformation – of the self.¹⁷ Feminist, antiracist, and other anti-oppression scholars propose that difficult knowledge also operates at the collective level and may be a useful tool to facilitate social and political change.¹⁸ Both advisory committees for the CMHR argue that the institution must promote change both for individual visitors as well as national and global societies. The CAC reports that human rights “require advocacy and society’s ongoing engagement, which will hopefully lead to action and transformation.”¹⁹ The MCH agrees that the museum must be a catalyst for change, and claims that “success [for the museum] is about changing minds and changing lives – all for the purpose of making this a better country and a better world.”²⁰ Indeed, in its first recommendation the MCH advises that the “CMHR will have to be more than a passive presenter of objects and ideas. It will have to offer visitors the opportunity to experience

¹⁷ Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, 117-20.

¹⁸ Terry Carson and Ingrid Johnston, “The Difficulty with Difference in Teacher Education: Toward a Pedagogy of Compassion,” *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 46, no. 1(2000); Adrienne S. Chan, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Lisa Moy, “Metaphoric Representations of Women of Colour in the Academy: Teaching Race, Disrupting Power,” *Borderlands* 13, no. 2 (2014); Patricia Ann DeYoung, “Thriving on Difficult Knowledge: Poststructuralist Pedagogy and relational Psychoanalysis (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2000); Yuha Jung, “Post Stereotypes: Deconstructing Racial Assumptions and Biases through Visual Culture and Confrontational Pedagogy,” *Studies in Art Education* 56, no. 3 (2015); Jeannie Kerr, “Western Epistemic Dominance and Colonial Structures: Considerations for Thought and Practice in Programs of Teacher Education,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 3, no. 2 (2014); Eric C. Sheffield, “Toward Radicalizing Community Service Learning,” *Educational Studies* 51, no. 1 (2015); Michalinos Zembylas, “Theorizing ‘Difficult Knowledge’ in the Aftermath of the ‘Affective Turn’: Implications for Curriculum and Pedagogy in Handling Traumatic Representations,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 44, no. 3 (2014).

¹⁹ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, iii.

²⁰ Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 57.

personal transformation and a personal call to action.”²¹ In other words, an institution that aims to educate the public about human rights should not present information in an impersonal and matter-of-fact way, but must rather frame content in a way that makes it personally and socially meaningful to those who encounter it. As a consequence, museum content will have the potential to transform visitors and the communities they are a part of. The committees therefore suggest that the CMHR can be successful only if it plays an active role in the shaping and re-shaping of Canadian society, and a museum that maintains the status quo may therefore be considered a failure.

The CMHR can help visitors have transformative encounters, according to the advisory committees, by representing conflict and controversy in its galleries. The transformative potential of difficult knowledge emerges from the way it pits two or more opposing narratives against one another. Alice Pitt and Britzman explore two kinds of knowledge: lovely knowledge, which people experience as comforting because it fits easily into one’s existing view of the world; and difficult knowledge, which creates discomfort as it disrupts one’s dominant worldview. Learning occurs when difficult knowledge interferes with a person’s lovely knowledge and forces them to reformulate a new worldview and sense of the self.²² For the advisory committees, the CMHR must actively engage with such conflicts and remain open to controversy. In one recommendation, the MCH advises “that the CMHR acknowledge conflict, as thoroughly and clearly as it is able to do, even if it is offensive to some.”²³ Another recommendation from the CAC concludes that the “Museum should embrace the complexity of

²¹ Ibid., 4.

²² Alice Pitt and Deborah Britzman, “Speculations on Qualities of Difficult Knowledge in Teaching and Learning: An Experiment in Psychoanalytic Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16, no. 6 (2003).

²³ Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 6.

human rights and avoid oversimplification and easy answers; it should not shy away from conflict, or attempt to erase differences of opinion or perspectives.”²⁴ That is, the representation of conflict should be a core theme at the museum, and curators can achieve this by inviting “offensive” and “complex” discussions of history and human rights. But while they insist that the museum should not “erase differences of opinion,” these committees do suggest that such tension is not necessarily desirable. At times, the committees refer to the need to “bridge over conflicts,”²⁵ “manage controversy,” or “reaching shared agreements”²⁶ concerning human rights issues. In this respect, the advisory committees do not always see conflict as beneficial or embrace it for its own inherent value, and they suggest that the museum may actually help to resolve such controversies. Regardless, they acknowledge that conflict will be inevitable and that the museum should therefore accommodate it for its productive qualities.

Curators at the museum likewise emphasise that it embraces controversy and suggest that these conflicts emerge from a tension between opposing historical narratives. While speaking with curators, I asked if and how the museum engages with difficult knowledge. Jeremy Maron, who curates content on genocide and mass atrocities, said that the museum achieves a balance of stories by “looking at things that are very uncomfortable and do disrupt some of these comforting, lovely narratives of the historical past, while also looking at positive aspects as well.”²⁷ The museum thereby enables conflict by representing both lovely and difficult knowledge about national and world history: it presents “comforting” narratives that likely do not challenge the way visitors view history,²⁸ but also includes contrasting ones that can interrupt

²⁴ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 61.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁶ Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 7.

²⁷ Jeremy Maron, interview with Jason Chalmers (Winnipeg MB, 25 September 2017).

²⁸ Such narratives might showcase historical events that emphasise contemporary Canadian values, for example, such as women’s enfranchisement.

the way visitors interpret the past. Karine Duhamel, the Curator for Indigenous Rights, used the museum's recent and ongoing collaboration with Shoal Lake 40 First Nation to illustrate how the institution invites controversy. The city of Winnipeg dammed the river system around Shoal Lake in the early 20th century to divert water for the city's use. As a result of this, the community of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation has been forced onto an island (the land was previously a peninsula) that is accessible only by ferry in the summer and ice road in the winter, and it has been placed on a boil-water advisory since 1997. The CMHR, which gets its water from Shoal Lake like the rest of Winnipeg, has received criticism for the way in preaches human rights yet remains complicit in the exploitation of this First Nations community and its resources.²⁹ Duhamel explained that the museum is now working with the community on a project³⁰ to “acknowledg[e] that the water that flows in the museum and through the city of Winnipeg comes from Shoal Lake 40 First Nation.”³¹ She notes that “we are willing to subvert our own narrative...We are willing to challenge what we're doing here. And this is one of the examples of doing that.”³² The museum does not resolve this conflict but rather highlights and invites controversy surrounding this issue. In this way, the museum both embraces narrative conflicts but also becomes a site that enables such conflicts to emerge and develop.

The conflicts that underlie difficult knowledge function to highlight inherent and irreconcilable contradictions within the human condition. Britzman insists that learning and difficult knowledge – and, in fact, all human experience – is embedded in a network of opposing and conflicting extremes. While the tension between the psychic and social worlds is perhaps

²⁹ Wab Kinew, “Human Rights Museum Needs to Act on First Nations Right to Water,” *CBC News*, 10 July 2014; Erwin Redsky and Cathy Merrick, “For Our First Nations, New Museum a Monument to Hypocrisy,” *Globe and Mail*, 25 September 2014.

³⁰ Staff have yet to determine the particular form that this project will take.

³¹ Karine Duhamel, interview with Jason Chalmers (Winnipeg MB, 26 September 2017).

³² *Ibid.*

most evident in education, all experience is rooted in such conflicts: attachment and loss, love and hate, life and death. It is impossible to reconcile these extremes because a person cannot be reduced to one or the other, but is rather characterised by the tension between them. Encounters with difficult knowledge occur when a person vacillates between extremes and, in doing so, becomes aware of the contradiction and irreconcilability of their humanity.³³ Throughout its report, the CAC points out that human rights are characterised by such tensions. In a discussion of women's rights and the rights of cultural groups, the committee observes that "some of the sharpest tensions in the domain of human rights in Canada today derive from the apparent conflict between assertions of freedom of religion and values such as gender equality, and the protection of children from abuse."³⁴ Human rights are a "universal, indivisible, and not static"³⁵ set of principles whereby the defense of one right might result in the infringement of another. The committee suggests that there may not be any way to resolve some of the conflicts between children's rights, women's rights, and freedom of religion. Elsewhere, the CAC suggests that "the collective/individual question" may be one of the most challenging dilemmas in human rights. It explores this question in relation to Quebecois society and points out that collective rights regarding religion, culture, and language can sometimes be at odds with the rights of the individual.³⁶ It acknowledges that "individual rights often require a realization of collective rights," but also considers that "the rights of an individual who does not share the characteristics or aspirations of the collective will not necessarily be vindicated only by giving pre-eminence to

³³ Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, 4-6.

³⁴ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 48.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, iii.

³⁶ In Quebec, collective rights reflect that Quebec is a distinct society in Canada and seek to preserve this distinctiveness by protecting primacy of the French language, Catholic religion, and other aspects of culture. These collective rights conflict with the rights of sizable minorities within Quebec that do not share the dominant culture. Language laws, for example, demand that all commercial signage prominently features the French language. These laws, however, infringe on the rights of individual business owners who wish to present their business using another language.

the rights of the collective.”³⁷ That is, the CAC frames humanity as a complex and contradictory state of being and suggests that, as an aspect of this condition, human rights can be equally paradoxical. Human rights, as a set of conflicting extremes, can therefore create the context for encounters with difficult knowledge.

Learning from difficult knowledge is an act of meaning-making that, for the advisory committees, requires visitors to actively engage with and interpret museum content. Whether people encounter difficult knowledge depends on personal and environmental factors: whether people are open to contradictions and alternative narratives; how they experience these conflicts within the self; the way educators and curators represent information; and the way visitors make sense of those representations. In short, difficult knowledge is an interpretive process that depends on the way information is constructed as a meaningful narrative by both educators and learners.³⁸ The MCH emphasises that meaning within the CMHR emerges from the interaction between museum content and visitor experience. As such, museum staff must take special care when selecting objects and language to use in the galleries:

All texts and objects need to be interpreted by the visitors including historical benchmarks and achievements...Because these objects and texts are socially constructed, and not universally shared and understood, visitors ought to be placed in an appropriate learning environment that will engage and stimulate their reflection and thinking. Such a constructivist mode of learning from the subject-matter necessitates interactive museum exhibits that put visitors in charge of their education.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid., 38.

³⁸ Ava Becker, “Funds of (Difficult) Knowledge and the Affordances of Multimodality: The Case of Victor,” *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* 10, no. 2 (2014); Julie C. Garlen and Jennifer A. Sandlin, “*Escape from Tomorrow*: Disney, Institutionalized Whiteness, and the Difficult Knowledge of Being,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 38, no. 2 (2016); H. James Garrett, “Why Didn’t I Know this Before? Psychoanalysis, Social Studies Education, and *The Shock Doctrine*,” *Canadian Social Studies* 45, no. 2 (2012); William Gaudelli, Margaret Crocco, and Alexandra Hawkins, “Documentaries, Outtakes, and Digital Archives in Teaching Difficult Knowledge and the Vietnam War,” *Education and Society* 30, no. 2 (2012); Julia Anne Rose, “Rethinking Representations of Slave Life at Historical Plantation Museums: Towards a Commemorative Museum Pedagogy,” (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 2006); Avner Segall, “Making Difficult History Public: The Pedagogy of Remembering and Forgetting at Two Washington DC Museums,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 36 (2014).

³⁹ Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 29.

In other words, visitors are not the passive recipients of information, nor are curators the neutral mediators of truth; rather, both are active participants in the creation of knowledge. Visitors help to create meaning by “interpreting” and “reflecting” on the significance of objects, texts, ideas, and histories. Likewise, curators must present ideas and objects in a way that creates a productive “learning environment” and enables visitors to do the personal and often difficult work of education. In this way, the MCH suggests, learning happens in the space between the museum and its visitors only when both are actively engaged. On one hand, “museums and their content are active agents in shaping the knowledge, opinions, and identities of visitors. The objects, artefacts, texts, exhibits, and structure of the museum convey particular meanings to visitors.”⁴⁰ On the other hand, “personal experiences, prior knowledge, opinions, and imagination all affect the ways in which visitors create meaning(s).”⁴¹

Curators at the CMHR observed that encounters with difficult knowledge depend largely on the willingness of visitors to engage with its content. I asked Jodi Giesbrecht, the Manager of Research and Curation, whether staff use difficult knowledge at the museum, to which she responded: “Yes, definitely. I think there are challenging stories and difficult knowledge woven throughout every gallery – and every story. One issue that we debated a lot early in the development phase was how [to] balance stories that are really difficult with stories that are more inspirational. It’s kind of a false dichotomy to characterise issues in that way because, with most of the stories or exhibits that we have, there are both elements.”⁴² Giesbrecht used the example of antiracism activist Viola Desmond and pointed out that Desmond’s story highlights both racial

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 34.

⁴² Jodi Giesbrecht, interview with Jason Chalmers (Winnipeg MB, 26 September 2017).

tension in Canada as well as resistance to it.⁴³ She explained that “within that story there are different ways of approaching or interpreting issues that are challenging – or not – depending on how you interpret the story.”⁴⁴ Visitors who perceive Canada as a welcoming and tolerant society can therefore find both difficult and lovely knowledge in Desmond’s story: Canada’s history of racism might become difficult knowledge while resistance to this racism may be lovely knowledge. This discussion gets to the core of difficult knowledge: ideas and events are neither intrinsically difficult nor lovely, but instead become one or the other only when people encounter them in a particular way. Every object, text, idea, or historical event has the potential to become difficult – or lovely – knowledge for the museum visitor. As with the case of Viola Desmond, the same event – and, in fact, the same narrative of that event according to Giesbrecht – can contain both difficult and lovely knowledge simultaneously.

Ways of Representing Difficult Knowledge

There is no straightforward or clearly defined way to represent difficult knowledge at museums. Educators and curators can never create difficult encounters and, at most, they can only create an environment that encourages people to engage with potentially difficult knowledge. Advisory committees for the CMHR designate the museum as a place where difficult encounters can occur while curators help to realise this potential. They seek to facilitate this sort of encounter in several ways: by conceiving of the CMHR as an “idea museum” that differs from traditional museums; including spaces of rest and reflection; and engaging with the creative arts.

⁴³ Viola Desmond, a black woman from Halifax, was arrested in 1946 for sitting in a whites-only section of a theatre (officially, she was charged and convicted for tax evasion). She fought the charge but the court upheld the original conviction. Many people saw (and continue to see) the court’s decision as an endorsement of racial segregation. In 2010, Desmond was granted a posthumous pardon.

⁴⁴ Giesbrecht, interview.

However, curators have also observed that there are limitations to the museum's ability to engage with difficult knowledge.

An “Idea Museum” as Difficult Knowledge

According to the advisory committees, the CMHR is an “idea museum” that approaches content and curation from a different perspective than other museums. The CAC explains that “from the beginning, the Canadian Human Rights Museum was envisaged as an ‘idea museum’ – that is, its content would be derived from ideas. Artifacts, archival materials, and works of art would be displayed in support of ideas and stories, not collected as an end in and of itself.”⁴⁵ Thus, the CMHR is not just a new museum; it also belongs to a new *genre* of museum that focuses on the representation of conceptual objects such as “ideas and stories” rather than material artefacts. The MCH explains that stories and objects have a unique relationship in an idea museum, and curators must select artefacts differently than in other museums: “both objects and exhibits are essential in conveying ideas. Practically speaking, idea museums are not ‘artifact-rich’: the emphasis is on telling a story that is enriched with artifacts rather than exhibiting an artifact and complementing it with a story.”⁴⁶ That is, most museums have extensive collections of physical and historical artefacts, and use these as the basis for galleries and exhibition spaces; curators select which artefacts to display and then use stories to weave them together into a coherent narrative. In an idea museum, however, the process is reversed. Curators begin by selecting themes, stories, and narratives as the primary content in a gallery or exhibition, and then use artefacts to supplement that story.⁴⁷ The notion of an idea museum is a

⁴⁵ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 1.

⁴⁶ Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 9.

⁴⁷ Giesbrecht explained that the design process at the CMHR is “opposite” to traditional museums: “A lot of museums will look at their collections and say ‘We want to display these objects. What story are we going to tell

novel framework that distinguishes the CMHR from many other museums. The CAC argues that the CMHR “is of a different character” than most museums⁴⁸ while the MCH similarly describes it as “a new concept for a museum”⁴⁹ and recommends that the “CMHR must, of necessity, both respect traditional museum practices and move beyond it.”⁵⁰

The MCH elaborates on traditional museums and frames the CMHR as an institution that should challenge traditional curatorial practices. It explains that traditional museums are elitist institutions and, prior to the 19th and 20th centuries, “curators have developed museum exhibits for educated elite with little or no concern for students and the general public.”⁵¹ While curators now target content to the general public, museums still maintain an elitist profile whereby the “typical” museum visitor in Canada is white, educated, and affluent.⁵² That is, museums are designed for and supported by those who benefit from hierarchical social relationships.⁵³ Yet the MCH also stresses that the CMHR needs to resist traditional approaches to the museum. It provides a recommendation about “Challeng[ing] Existing Museum Practices and Assumptions” and proposes that, “at the risk of generalizing, if it is a traditional museum practice or habit, it should be closely scrutinized for its value, meaning and applicability to the unique role and challenges of the CMHR.”⁵⁴ As an idea museum, the CMHR has a distinct set of goals and challenges that other museums do not necessarily share. This does not mean that curators should

about them?’ We approach things in the opposite way. We start with an idea or a concept or an issue and say ‘We want to look at the refugee crisis.’ And then [we ask] ‘How are we going to tell that story?’ We approach it from completely the opposite way.” Giesbrecht, interview.

⁴⁸ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 5.

⁴⁹ Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 11

⁵³ The MCH states: “The typical museum visitor profile in North America...suggests that museum experiences may be most valued by sections of society that may share (ideologically, materially and culturally) in the dominant social relationships of stratified society.” Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 11.

⁵⁴ Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 12.

entirely discard traditional museum practices, but rather that they should “closely scrutinise” all practices and only use those that serve the museum and its content. For the MCH, museum staff must therefore maintain a critical perspective and use it to “challenge” all curatorial practices – especially dominant practices that emerge from “traditional” museums.

Duhamel suggested that the CMHR not only critiques traditional museums but actively eschews some of their basic premises. She observed:

Traditionally, people look at museums as places of authority. They really want for museums to tell them what the story is...We're really trying not to do that...We're trying to be an un-museum, in a sense. We're not providing this very top-down, omnipresent narrative of the nation. We're providing a very confusing tapestry of things, which we place some responsibility on our visitors to make sense of, in whatever way that they can make sense of it.⁵⁵

Traditional museums, Duhamel suggests, are authoritative institutions that adopt an official voice and use it to dictate national narratives from the top-down, that is, as objective and coherent interpretations of history and identity. The CMHR does not assume this sort of authority and, instead, does the reverse: it presents “perspectives and stories” from individuals and groups,⁵⁶ and asks visitors to interpret these stories and use them to construct (or not) their own narratives.⁵⁷ For Duhamel, the CMHR does the opposite of what many visitors expect from museums (especially national museums) and, in this sense, is an “un-museum.” In this way, the CMHR has the potential to generate difficult knowledge about museums and curatorial practices: idea museums can challenge the dominant (read: lovely) practices and perspectives of traditional

⁵⁵ Duhamel, interview.

⁵⁶ Following this, Duhamel said, “at times we present facts, but mostly we present perspectives and stories. And so we don't see ourselves as super authoritative in the sense that we want to highlight what are some of the issues in human rights. But we don't want to tell you what to think about them.” Duhamel, interview.

⁵⁷ An example of this approach is how the museum includes video testimony in its exhibits. The *Breaking the Silence* gallery includes video testimonies with people who survived genocide and other atrocities. *Indigenous Perspectives* includes interviews with Indigenous artists and scholars. *Canadian Journeys* enables visitors to record their own video testimonies, or watch the testimonies of other visitors. While these videos are edited and selected by museum staff, they nevertheless enable people and communities to tell their own stories.

museums, require visitors to experience museums spaces in new ways, and ultimately force people to reconsider what it means for a museum to be a museum.

Curators suggest that, by challenging mainstream views of the museum, the CMHR ultimately resists – and generates difficult knowledge about – dominant social structures such as settler colonialism. The CAC acknowledges that “there is no trust between museums and First Peoples” because museums have historically (and contemporarily) stolen sacred items and reified Indigenous peoples as objects of the past.⁵⁸ Julia Peristerakis, a curator at the CMHR who has worked extensively with Indigenous content, pointed out that museums have traditionally functioned as apparati of empire. She considered that “museums have been colonial institutions, and we’re also a federal museum. We’re already starting in a really problematic position. So how do we undo that work [of colonialism]? What does it look like to undo that work?”⁵⁹ The purpose of museums has been to serve colonial empires and nation states and, indeed, the CMHR is itself an institution created and authorised by the Canadian settler state. Yet curators also want to “undo” the work of colonisation, Peristerakis explained, by using what some curators previously referred to as “decolonizing methodologies.”⁶⁰ She described several ways that CMHR staff sought to decolonise the museum: dispersing Indigenous content throughout the museum; framing Indigenous peoples as agents; and leaving some Indigenous content uninterpreted. So while the CMHR resists the purposes and practices of the traditional museum, it also resists the social structures from which it originates, namely, settler colonialism and the nation state. Visitors to the CMHR may therefore encounter difficult knowledge about museums as colonial institutions and about Canada as a settler state.

⁵⁸ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 31.

⁵⁹ Julia Peristerakis, interview with Jason Chalmers (Winnipeg MB, 27 September 2017).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Comforting Spaces in an Uncomfortable Museum

Difficult knowledge is a powerful but demanding force: it asks people to confront uncomfortable ideas and new ways of seeing the world, and, if effective, can transform individuals and society. According to Britzman, encounters with difficult knowledge are also inherently traumatic events that elicit powerful emotional responses from people.⁶¹ People can therefore be especially resistant to this sort of encounter.⁶² Some prefer to remain ignorant to new ideas and will simply refuse to acknowledge or engage with difficult knowledge⁶³; others may find new perspectives – and especially histories of violence – so overwhelming that they are unable to respond. For this reason, advisory committees suggest that spaces of quiet reflection can create an inviting – and productive – environment for visitors. The CAC recommends that the “Museum should be attentive to the wellbeing of visitors, through the provision of places to rest, be quiet, and reflect, and by having support services available in the event that the exhibits trigger emotional responses.”⁶⁴ These spaces can fulfill several needs of visitors who encounter potentially difficult content. Visitors can use these spaces to “reflect” on and digest difficult encounters they have had, and thereby use these as transformative spaces to learn from their experiences. Furthermore, they can become a place of refuge for visitors who are feeling overwhelmed or having an especially strong emotional response – that is, if they have encountered content that is too traumatic or difficult to process. There is of course a risk that visitors will use these spaces as a crutch: some people may focus only on lovely content and use such spaces as an escape when they do encounter potentially difficult ideas. For visitors who do

⁶¹ Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, 117-20; Pitt and Britzman, “Qualities of Difficult Knowledge.”

⁶² Michalinos Zembylas, “Teacher Resistance to Engage with ‘Alternative’ Perspectives of Difficult Histories: The Limits and Prospects of Affective Disruption,” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 38, no. 5 (2017).

⁶³ Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, 118.

⁶⁴ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 63.

wish to engage with uncomfortable ideas, however, such spaces can be essential to an effective/affective encounter with difficult knowledge.

Curators at the CMHR agree that including reflective or contemplative spaces in the museum is an effective way to help visitors process difficult content. Maron observed that visitors can have powerful emotional responses particularly when they encounter content on the Holocaust or other genocides. He recounted an experience he had while visiting Auschwitz as part of March of the Living. After visiting the main camp, the tour guides asked his group to talk about the experience and describe what they felt. He recalled that “everyone was just [silent]. People were not wanting to talk. You’re just emotionally shocked into silence.”⁶⁵ The content was so overwhelming for visitors – including Maron – that they were unable to respond. Maron stressed that this is a legitimate museological approach to the representation of atrocities but also explained that it is not the approach that CMHR curators take. He continued: “Auschwitz is an absolutely fantastic museum in terms of representing what happened, and maintaining that space as an historical site. But what we’re hoping for visitors [to the CMHR] is to not get that sense of emotional exhaustion. We want our visitors to go through *Examining the Holocaust* [gallery] and feel a sense of vigilance and maybe even a sense of discomfort.”⁶⁶ Difficult knowledge requires a substantial amount of emotional and intellectual labour from visitors. But if they become too “emotionally exhausted” from this content, Maron suggests, they may be unwilling or unable to do the work necessary for a transformative experience. While curators at the CMHR want visitors to experience a certain amount of discomfort from museum content, they do not want visitors to become incapacitated by it.

⁶⁵ Maron, interview.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Consequently, museum staff seek to frame content in a way that invites visitors to engage with new and uncomfortable ideas but does not repulse them. Britzman explains that education is a somewhat contradictory process because “the demand [of learning and difficult knowledge] can be felt as too much or too little. The demand can come too early and too late.”⁶⁷ In other words, education requires a careful balance of lovely and difficult knowledges: knowledge must be subtle enough to invite engagement but also profound enough to enable transformation. Curators spoke with me about the challenge of finding and maintaining this balance. Maron explained that “one of the things that I frequently think about is the caution to not horrify...[and] to make sure that the material is widely accessible for individuals in terms of previous awareness and knowledge.”⁶⁸ Museum content should be accessible, understandable, and above all “not horrifying” to most museum visitors, even when it deals with the sort of extreme violent histories that Maron curates. Giesbrecht explained that:

Some visitors can confront difficult knowledge and process and engage [with it]. And some want to walk right away. So we also think about: What’s that entry point? Those visitors who might just want to walk away – how can we offer some kind of entry point for them to allow themselves to experience content they might have thought they were not comfortable [with]?⁶⁹

People cannot encounter difficult knowledge at the CMHR if they do not enter the museum and confront its galleries. While curators acknowledge that some people will simply ignore potentially difficult knowledge or refuse to engage with it, they ultimately hope to design a somewhat comfortable and inviting space that people want to enter. Curators therefore create “entry points” to the museum and difficult topics so that visitors feel welcomed into the discussion but also retain a sense of openness to new and potentially uncomfortable ideas.

⁶⁷ Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, 11.

⁶⁸ Maron, interview.

⁶⁹ Giesbrecht, interview.

Engaging with the Creative Arts

Although the CMHR, as an idea museum, focuses largely on the representation of concepts and narratives rather than objects and artefacts, it also places substantial emphasis on artistic creations in their many forms.⁷⁰ The CAC reports that its encounters with the arts were a highlight of its consultations:

At times, our long and often exhausting days were brightened by people who chose to speak to us about the arts, through the arts. There were those who showed us examples of visual art, videos of dance, and who sang to us, reminding us of the enduring power of art in all its forms to speak a language of human rights that could transcend barriers and cultures.⁷¹

The arts, artistic creations, and performances thereby have the potential to play a significant role at the museum in several ways. According to the MCH, the public often view museums as “dusty, boring and intimidating” institutions, and advisory committees hope to distance the CMHR from this view of the traditional museum.⁷² Art is a particularly powerful force that can introduce an element of excitement into museums and break up what, for many visitors (indeed, even for advisory committees!), can be a dull or tedious experience. Furthermore, artistic creations are expressive subjects that can “bridge barriers” and thereby facilitate communication between people. The CAC includes several sections in its final report on the arts and their place at the CMHR: one section documents ways people spoke about the arts or through the arts during consultations,⁷³ and another outlines the unique role that creative arts can play in the museum.⁷⁴ The committee recommends that the “Museum should use the arts to illustrate the richness of the human soul and of reflections, its dark zones, and the multiple ways in which human beings

⁷⁰ Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 9-10.

⁷¹ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 10.

⁷² Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 11.

⁷³ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 57-9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 67-8.

transcend their realities and thereby seek survival. Artists in the Museum should be representative of the diverse regional, ethnic, and racial identities of Canadian artists.”⁷⁵ For the committee, it is important to include the arts at a human rights museum because they emerge from the “human soul” and reflect the complexities of human experience. On one hand, the arts reflect our common humanity and enable people to move beyond their differences. On the other hand, art emerges from the artist’s specific location in time and space (i.e. “diverse identities”) and thereby allows people to assert their own unique personal and cultural identities. Such complexities and contradictions in the human condition are a core aspect of difficult knowledge, which operates primarily by highlighting these tensions while never resolving them.

Advisory committees explain that the arts contain a transformative impulse that can facilitate encounters with difficult knowledge. The CAC describes art in narrative terms and speaks about the potential for “art as story: There are countless examples of the ways in which people have expressed themselves through the arts as a way of telling their story and relating their experiences.”⁷⁶ Art enables people to use aesthetic, communicative, and “emotional visceral”⁷⁷ frameworks to interpret events and make sense of their experiences. In other words, it is an effective way for people to situate their experiences within a larger narrative, make them meaningful, and then communicate this to others. Art does not just enable people to express their experiences within the world, however, but can also shape those experiences. The CAC explains that:

Art can and often has been decisive in changing the way people think and feel. Artists provide critical social commentary on the world in which we live. By creating new configurations, art pushes at the edge of semantic availability, enabling new meanings to

⁷⁵ Ibid., 63.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 58.

be imagined, and hence new possibilities for identification. The arts play an important role in contesting and complicating categorizations of peoples and their histories.⁷⁸

Art functions by “pushing at the edge of semantic availability,” that is, by stretching meanings, constructing new meanings, and creating new interpretive possibilities for the signs and symbols that people use to describe and explain the world. By doing this, artists provide “commentary” about the world, but they can also offer new ways of viewing the world and new possibilities of being within it. Difficult knowledge functions in the same way: by using alternative interpretations of the world to challenge and transform the dominant narratives, beliefs, and meanings that people assume to be true. Art therefore has the potential for difficult knowledge in that artists can use it to “contest and complicate” lovely perspectives of history and, in doing so, transform narratives, people, and ultimately the world itself. One example from the CMHR is *Trace*, by Anishinaabekwe artist Rebecca Belmore. *Trace*, which is permanently installed in the museum’s *Indigenous Perspectives* gallery, represents a massive blanket composed of thousands of clay beads created by local people. This artwork resists the settler myth of Indigenous erasure, which frames Indigenous peoples as historical artefacts who either lack contemporary existence or are doomed to future erasure (I discuss this myth in more detail later in the chapter). For example, *Trace* draws on Indigenous cultural themes and reflects “the depth of Indigenous history”:⁷⁹ beading, blankets, community, and most importantly land (via the use of clay from underneath Winnipeg). Moreover, this piece was designed for the museum and is a clear expression of both past and contemporary indigeneity. In other words, this artwork generates “new possibilities for identification” by disrupting core elements of settler mythology.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁷⁹ Object label, *Indigenous Perspectives*, “Rebecca Belmore,” Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB.

Limitations of Difficult Knowledge

While the CMHR has the potential to generate difficult knowledge, curators have acknowledged that there are limitations to this potential. Some of the most significant limitations pertain to the accessibility of museum content as well as the shifting discourses around its subject matter. The *Museums Act* states that the CMHR, as a national museum, “belongs to all Canadians and provides, in both official languages, a service that is essential to Canadian culture and available to all.”⁸⁰ Curators observed that, in some ways, the need to be accessible to the general public limits the CMHR’s ability to generate knowledge. Maron considered that “one of the biggest challenges [for curators] is the fact that you’re developing content for the Canadian public and the international public more broadly.”⁸¹ This is a challenge because it requires curators to “make sure that the material is widely accessible for individuals in terms of previous awareness and knowledge. [It also requires] navigating these within the constraints of the fact that you’re dealing with a certain amount of text, a certain number of images, a certain amount of artefacts that you can use to tell the story.”⁸² Giesbrecht reflected on the challenges of condensing an immense amount of information into a coherent and digestible exhibit: “For any one exhibit you look at, there’s obviously probably a whole gallery that could be developed on that one issue...How do we really convey an issue knowing that we have a hundred words, two objects, and maybe three minutes of film?”⁸³ Museum visitors come from a wide variety of backgrounds and personal experiences, have different education, range greatly in age, and have various commitments to human rights and social justice. Each exhibit should present content in several formats, multiple languages, and write all text at a ninth grade reading level.

⁸⁰ *Museums Act, Statutes of Canada* 1990, c.3, §3(b).

⁸¹ Maron, interview.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Giesbrecht, interview.

Furthermore, visitors will likely spend no more than a few hours at the museum, and may only spend a few minutes in each gallery or with each exhibit. Complex issues in human rights – out of both practical necessity and the need to appeal to a broad audience – will necessarily be reduced in size and complexity. Difficult knowledge, however, depends largely on a depth of knowledge and the degree to which people are able (and willing) to engage with it. When visitors cannot engage with ideas in depth, they may find it more challenging to have a difficult encounter.

Curators must also frame complex and potentially difficult ideas in more accessible ways. Because all text must be written at no more than a grade nine reading level, it is necessary for curators to simplify some of the more complex ideas that the museum engages with. This often means translating abstract concepts into concrete and relatable examples. Giesbrecht explained that “we maintain a certain reading level for accessibility purposes. So often we have to convey things like ‘intersectionality’ or ‘difficult knowledge’ without using any of those words, because that bumps us way beyond our grade level.”⁸⁴ Duhamel explained that this limits the way that curators can talk about colonialism at the museum: “You don’t say ‘settler colonialism’ to eight graders – I know, I used to be a classroom teacher. You talk about land, you talk about residential schools, you talk about expropriation, you talk about languages going extinct.”⁸⁵ These curators suggest that concepts such as “intersectionality” or “settler colonialism” have a special potential to generate difficult knowledge, for example, because they can highlight histories of violence or systemic inequality in Canadian society. Explicitly using this language, however, may be alienating for some visitors and incomprehensible to others. Curators need to frame abstract concepts in a more accessible way: they need to represent complex ideas in a

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Duhamel, interview.

concrete way that is rooted in examples and experiences. Giesbrecht and Duhamel explain that, while the ideas are still present in each exhibit, visitors may have to do more work to interpret content and put it together in a way that becomes difficult. When visitors are primarily responsible for the interpretation of content, it is certainly possible that they will construct it as difficult knowledge. However, it is also likely that they will interpret it in a way that is consistent with their existing worldview, that is, as lovely knowledge.

Another limitation to difficult knowledge is that discourses surrounding the CMHR's subject matter are constantly shifting. While the museum includes substantial content on past events, it also focuses largely on contemporary debates. The conversations surrounding current issues tend to evolve rapidly, but curators require time – months or even years – to develop and install new content. As a result, museum content can lag behind debates in the public, media, and politics. Duhamel and Peristerakis both noted that the museum has begun to lag in regards to its content on Residential Schools and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC was established in 2008 and released its final report in 2015 – largely overlapping with the time when the CMHR was finalising content and opening to the public. During this time, and especially since release of the TRC's final report, Canadian settler society has become increasingly aware of Residential Schools and their ongoing legacy. Duhamel also pointed out, however, that the principle of reconciliation has changed from being a radical idea to “a buzzword that's not grounded necessarily in action.”⁸⁶ When we spoke in 2017, she observed that “the conversation about reconciliation, in two years – which is even shorter than the typical amount of time that it takes to develop an actual show – has shifted. Whereas in 2015, to be a proponent of reconciliation was a counter-narrative in a sense. In 2017, it's not so...And that

⁸⁶ Ibid.

could change again.”⁸⁷ The way visitors experience content in the CMHR can change dramatically over even a short period of time. Peristerakis observed that the language curators use in exhibits on Residential Schools can have a different impact on visitors, depending on whether they visited when the museum first opened or several years later. She reflected on the early years of content design and recalled that “looking back, in 2012, those were different narratives [about Residential Schools] than are happening now. Or at least I hope that’s the case. Saying [in an exhibit] ‘the forceful or aggressive assimilation of Indigenous peoples was the intent of the residential school system’ maybe doesn’t seem as narrative disrupting now. But at the time [it was disruptive].”⁸⁸ Speaking about Residential Schools, especially as a “forceful” or “aggressive” process, was likely to disrupt national narratives and challenge museum visitors when the museum first opened. Since then, this has become mainstream knowledge and, in some respects, little more than a political “buzzword.” In short, what was likely to produce difficult knowledge when the museum opened is, several years later, likely to be lovely knowledge for visitors.

The Myth of Indigenous Erasure

The CMHR consistently and explicitly engages with the theme of Indigenous erasure. The myth of Indigenous erasure presumes that the disappearance of Indigenous peoples from the land is an inevitable process that either has already occurred or will occur in the future. This can entail the physical erasure of Indigenous bodies from Turtle Island or cultural erasure through practices of assimilation.⁸⁹ Advisory committees for the CMHR challenge this theme in several

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Peristerakis, interview.

⁸⁹ Daniel Francis, *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997), 12-4, 71-6; Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan,

ways: they consider the particular role of Indigenous peoples in settler colonial contexts; acknowledge that Indigenous peoples are contemporary actors who exercise agency; and include Indigenous people as staff and in museum content. However, they also contribute to Indigenous erasure, particularly by reinscribing the legitimacy and futurity of the settler state and society, and by framing Indigenous peoples as an “asterisk” group (that is, as one of many minority groups without a special or unique position).⁹⁰

Resisting Erasure

Advisory committees emphasise that Indigenous peoples have a unique position in Canada and other settler societies. Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang point out that Indigenous peoples and land are essential to the creation of settler states and societies “because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital [by] disrupt[ing] Indigenous relationships to land.”⁹¹ Indigenous peoples are not just “an additional special (ethnic) group or class” but rather a unique group(s) that is central to the settler colonial project.⁹² As such, any discussion of colonialism, decolonisation, or the creation and development of settler states must (re)centre Indigenous peoples and land. Advisory committees to the CMHR echo this sentiment in their reports, although perhaps not to the degree that Tuck and Yang would require. In its mission statement, the MCH acknowledges that “it is also important to note that Aboriginal people are neither recent immigrants nor an ethno-cultural group. They are unique in Canada.”⁹³ One section of the committee’s online survey asked respondents to identify possible topics or issues

2010), 76-86; Patrick Wolfe, “Nation and Miscegenation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era,” *Social Analysis* 36 (1994).

⁹⁰ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹³ Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 11.

for the museum, and the MCH subsequently reports that “Aboriginal/First Nation issues were uppermost in the issues mentioned.”⁹⁴ The CAC likewise observes that “no other story called forth more frequent exhortations to take the long view [of history] than that of the Indigenous Peoples in Canada,”⁹⁵ and it addresses the centrality of Indigenous peoples and lands throughout its final report. The committee includes sections on the “distinctive constitutional space” of Indigenous peoples,⁹⁶ their unique role in national history,⁹⁷ and “the place of Indigenous peoples” in Canada and national museums.⁹⁸ The committee further acknowledges that Canada was founded on the “theft of land and resources by settler communities from Indigenous nations”⁹⁹ and that the CMHR, as an occupant of this land, “should develop proper protocols for the grounds at the Forks upon which the Museum is located.”¹⁰⁰

The CAC further recognises that Canada is a colonial state that suppresses Indigenous ways of being and seeks to erase Indigenous peoples. The committee suggests that “the Museum should see the experience of Indigenous peoples at and after contact within the framework of colonialism, which places that experience not only in a historical frame, but also in a global context that remains as relevant today as it was a hundred or more years ago.”¹⁰¹ It focuses especially on the role of the Canadian state and notes that the “oppression of Indigenous Peoples in Canada is the result of over two centuries of official policy.”¹⁰² That is, colonialism is a global phenomenon that disproportionately impacts Indigenous peoples, and Canada is deeply

⁹⁴ Ibid., 34-5. While “Aboriginal/First Nation issues” was at the top of the list, only 16.1% of respondents selected this issue.

⁹⁵ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 40.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 22-3.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 40-2.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 72-3.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 70.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 61-2.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰² Ibid.

implicated in perpetuating colonial violence. Throughout its report, the CAC refers to policies such as the *Indian Act*, Residential Schools, and eugenics, as well as broader colonial processes such as the “theft of land” and “destruction of languages, cultures, spiritualities, and families.”¹⁰³

In an especially critical statement, the committee says:

Indigenous rights under Treaties, and rights to land and to self-determination, remain unfulfilled. Instead, many Indigenous Peoples have been subject since Confederation to the totalized control, and segregation, imposed under the *Indian Act*, which is still in effect today. They grapple with colonialism, which manifests itself in many ways. The relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the land, which is fundamental to Indigenous law, value systems, and well being, has been under assault for over 200 years, and remains so today.¹⁰⁴

The CAC acknowledges that Canada is a colonial state and that its colonial practices are part of both historical and contemporary realities. It further observes that colonialism is a multifaceted structure that attacks and suppresses Indigenous ways of being at many different sites. But particularly noteworthy about this statement is that the CAC explicitly refers to Canada as a totalitarian (i.e. “totalized control”) and apartheid (i.e. “segregation”) state. Indeed, the committee acknowledges that South Africa’s apartheid pass system was based on one developed by the Canadian government under the *Indian Act*.¹⁰⁵ While the committee frames Canada as a leader in human rights,¹⁰⁶ it also finds Canadian policy comparable to the policies of oppressive totalitarian regimes.

As an extension of the colonial state, committees suggest, the CMHR has a responsibility to (re)build damaged relationships with Indigenous peoples and restore Indigenous self-determination. The CAC reports that, during its consultations, “we heard particularly from Indigenous Peoples, who were unanimous (as were many non-Indigenous people) that the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 40-1, 70-1.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰⁶ For example, see the CAC’s report, pages 31-2.

relationship between Canada and Aboriginal Peoples is a critical and ongoing chapter in the Canadian human rights story.”¹⁰⁷ Canada’s colonial practices and policies have, both in the past and the present, damaged relationships with Indigenous peoples. Establishing good relationships requires work from the Canadian government, but also from the museum. The committee recommends that the “Museum should identify as a priority the development of a relationship of trust with Indigenous peoples”¹⁰⁸ which it can do, in part, “by recognizing Canada’s colonial history, as it has resulted in a loss of relationship between Canada and Aboriginal peoples.”¹⁰⁹ Representing and recognizing colonialism at the museum is an important place to begin, although the CAC understands it will require more than this to establish good relationships. The committee observes that Indigenous women are especially susceptible to the impacts of colonial violence, and that “for these women, winning full equality may not be a matter of going forward, but of returning to the honoured and powerful place women held before having that status taken away from them by colonial measures.”¹¹⁰ That is, while good relationships require substantial effort from the Canadian government and its institutions, such as the CMHR, the state alone cannot achieve such harmony. Colonial violence is created when the state imposes its will on Indigenous peoples and land; the state can alleviate this violence only when it stops imposing colonial policies, relinquishes absolute authority, and acknowledges the limits of its own sovereignty. In other words, building good relationships between the Canadian state and Indigenous peoples requires the restoration of Indigenous self-determination.

The CMHR seeks to represent the contemporary reality of Indigenous peoples rather than frame them as an extinct or disappearing people. The CAC spoke with Indigenous people and

¹⁰⁷ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 10.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

communities during its consultations, and reports that the “Aboriginal people who shared with us were very clear that they wanted to be included in the Museum as contemporary people with a vibrant heritage in this country, rather than as artifacts of the past.”¹¹¹ These respondents acknowledged that settler institutions such as the CMHR tend to frame Indigenous peoples as “artifacts of the past,” that is, as objects preserved from a bygone era that are no longer relevant. This framing does not reflect the realities of Indigenous people who belong to “contemporary” and “vibrant” nations, and the museum must take care to represent them in this way. The committee therefore recommends that as “constitutional actors in their own right, Indigenous Peoples may justly require that the Museum do more than simply view them through an anthropological or cultural lens...Indigenous Peoples have a contemporary reality and identity, protected by the Constitution, not just a historical one.”¹¹² For the CAC, then, the CMHR should avoid using anthropological lenses to frame Indigenous peoples as Others, cultural products, or as objects of curiosity to entertain the visitor.¹¹³ Instead, it must acknowledge that Indigenous peoples are legitimate political actors with both past and contemporary realities in Canada and, as such, play an active role in the ongoing history of the country.

Advisory committees insist that the museum should respect the agency of Indigenous peoples by enabling them to tell their own stories. The CAC discusses the “mobilization of Indigenous traditions and community-based initiatives” in Canada and identifies some of the ways that Indigenous people have exercised agency within their own lives and national affairs.¹¹⁴ For example, it refers to the TRC and Qikiqtani Truth Commission, a campaign by students in

¹¹¹ Ibid., 73.

¹¹² Ibid., 28.

¹¹³ Audra Simpson describes how colonial empires have used anthropology to define, know, and govern the Indigenous Other. Audra Simpson, “On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, ‘Voice’ and Colonial Citizenship,” *Junctures* 9 (2007).

¹¹⁴ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 41.

Attawapiskat for a new school, and educational programs rooted in Indigenous knowledges.¹¹⁵ And while the CMHR represents Indigenous peoples as having agency, it also respects that agency by encouraging Indigenous people to speak on their own behalf. In regards to the way the museum represents “Aboriginal issues” and “reconcil[iation],” the MCH recommends that it “will be essential that Aboriginal people be engaged in telling their own stories.”¹¹⁶ Peristerakis explained specifically how curators attempted to fulfill these recommendations in part by conducting interviews with Indigenous authors. Visitors can watch clips from these interviews with Métis author Maria Campbell, Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred, and Innu poet Joséphine Bacon at interactive booths in the *Indigenous Perspectives* gallery. Peristerakis explained the intent of this exhibit:

Instead of putting [Indigenous perspectives of land] in our own words...we did oral history interviews with each author, and I chose clips that elaborated on some of the stuff they talk about in those films. It was letting these Indigenous authors *in their own voices*, through the oral tradition, explain and elaborate *their own personal* [experience and connection to the land].¹¹⁷

Rather than have the museum impose its own authoritative voice on the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous people, curators used these booths to enable Indigenous voices to emerge and allow Indigenous people to speak on their own behalf. Yet Peristerakis also pointed out that this means individual people must speak to their own experiences and that they do not necessarily speak as representatives of the communities they belong to. Respecting the self-determination of Indigenous peoples at the museum means both allowing people to speak for themselves, and also recognising the limits to which any one person can speak for another.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 41, 50.

¹¹⁶ Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 36.

¹¹⁷ Peristerakis, interview.

An effective way to respect self-determination is to involve Indigenous people in the operation and curation of the museum. The MCH provides several recommendations about engaging with Indigenous people and communities, among them:

18. Aboriginal Engagement – Ensure that Aboriginal people have substantive involvement in the planning and implementation of the CMHR.
19. Staffing – Ensure that Aboriginal individuals are recruited as CMHR staff, in both management and non-management positions.
20. Collaboration and Partnership – In addition to governance and staff involvement, provision must be made for Aboriginal involvement in the CMHR’s exhibits, programs and services. This must go beyond consultation and involve direct participation in the design, content and delivery of public offerings.¹¹⁸

That is, the CMHR must consult Indigenous communities during development of the museum, as well as involve them in a way that goes “beyond consultation.”¹¹⁹ It should directly involve Indigenous people at every level of operation including planning and design, management, and the delivery of museum programming.¹²⁰ On one hand, this means recognising that Winnipeg and the Forks are Indigenous spaces and, in a way, also designating the museum as an Indigenous space, or at least as a space where Indigenous people and settlers work with one another in non-combative ways. The CAC recommends that “relationships with the Museum’s local communities are important and should be fostered [and include] the First Nations of Manitoba and the treaty areas encompassed within Manitoba (and extending beyond its borders).”¹²¹ On the other hand, it means recognising that indigeneity constitutes diverse peoples around the world and shapes identities both locally and globally.¹²² Thus, the committee also

¹¹⁸ Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 11.

¹¹⁹ The museum has and continues to work with Indigenous peoples in the design of content and programming. The CAC included several Indigenous members (and consulted with Indigenous communities), although the MCH apparently did not. I discuss the museum’s engagement with Indigenous peoples in Chapter VI, particularly in regards to design of *Indigenous Perspectives* and operation of the Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour.

¹²⁰ The CAC included members from First Nations communities, while it seems that the MCH did not include any Indigenous people in its membership.

¹²¹ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 62.

¹²² Francesca Merlan, “Indigeneity: Global and Local,” *Current Anthropology* 50, no. 3 (2009).

recommends that “steps should be taken to include Indigenous Peoples from outside of Canada” as both visitors and through “initiatives such as artist-, writer-, and scholar-in-residence programs.”¹²³ Pervasive and ongoing engagement with Indigenous people at the museum, the committees suggest, will impact both how the museum operates and the content that it presents to visitors.

In accordance with the advisory reports, curators have designed content in a way that challenges national mythology and the myth of Indigenous erasure, specifically by re-inserting Indigenous people into national history. When speaking with Duhamel, I asked about the narratives presented at national museums. She recalled one borrowed exhibit that she helped to curate at the CMHR that had a substantial focus on Canadian history.¹²⁴ Although the exhibit was already designed, it was necessary to make changes and adapt it specifically for the mandate and purpose of the human rights museum. She described some of these changes:

It had essentially obscured or completely erased Indigenous people from [Canadian history] when we took the show. So my job was to write them back in, and to find moments and ways to [include Indigenous people]...There might have been only two [passing mentions of Indigenous people]. So we reframed the show. We reprinted all of the panels, and we sourced new artefacts.¹²⁵

This is a vivid example of how curators resist Indigenous erasure. The CMHR initially received an exhibit that reproduced the logic of erasure and, in a way, virtually finished this project by “completely” eliminating Indigenous people from its historical narrative. Curators viewed this as problematic and tried to counteract it by reprinting text panels, including new artefacts, and ultimately “reframing” the show in a way that re-inserted Indigenous people into Canadian history. In other words, the museum began with an exhibit rooted in national mythology – and

¹²³ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 61.

¹²⁴ To maintain the confidentiality of others who worked on this exhibit, I cannot identify this exhibit or discuss it in greater detail.

¹²⁵ Duhamel, interview.

especially the myth of Indigenous erasure – but changed those elements that were most embedded in settler colonial logic. Duhamel not only challenged national mythology within this exhibit, but did so in an intentional way that suggests the museum’s purpose is partly to unsettle this mythos.

Reproducing Erasure

The CMHR reproduces the myth of Indigenous erasure in subtle ways that Tuck and Yang refer to as “settler moves to innocence.” Moves to innocence entail “strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege.”¹²⁶ Settlers often deny their role in the perpetuation of colonial violence – and thereby deny responsibility for colonial oppression – by “decenter[ing] settler perspectives” or “deflect[ing] settler identity.”¹²⁷ Indeed, advisory committees for the CMHR do not assume Indigenous peoples have disappeared or will disappear – either physically or culturally – from North America/Turtle Island. They do however affirm that Canada is a legitimate and sovereign state while, simultaneously, mitigating Indigenous self-determination. They also lessen the degree to which settler society has persecuted, and benefited from, Indigenous peoples and land. In this way, the CMHR ostensibly renders Indigenous peoples visible, but does so in a way that erases Indigenous self-determination and histories of colonial violence.

One way to produce difficult knowledge about Indigenous erasure is to suggest that the Canadian state derives its legitimacy from the Treaties rather than from its constitution. Canada’s national myth presumes that Euro-Canadian settlers used law, and especially British law, to

¹²⁶ Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is not a Metaphor,” 10.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2, 11.

peacefully transform a savage continent into a civilised society. This belief positions Canadian law as superior to other legal traditions and thereby suggests that Canada's constitution is the highest law in the land.¹²⁸ In other words, national mythology “peacefully” erases Indigenous peoples through the civilising process and, consequently, erases the legitimacy of Indigenous law. As I argued in Chapter IV, the TRC creates potentially difficult knowledge by contending that Canada and its constitution gain legitimacy from the Treaties negotiated between the settler state and the Indigenous nations of Turtle Island. That is, the Canadian state is neither inherently legitimate nor does it derive legitimacy from the constitution, but is legitimate only when it respects Indigenous self-determination and fulfills its commitments defined in the Treaties.¹²⁹ In this way, the TRC challenges the supremacy of Canadian law but also resists Indigenous erasure by emphasising the ongoing presence and self-determination of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island.

The CAC, in contrast to the TRC, affirms the supremacy of constitutional law and frames it as the basis for relationships between Canada's “peoples.” The CAC claims that “we derive from the Constitution a large part of our understanding of who the ‘peoples’ of Canada are, and what the relationship of those peoples is to the Canadian state. Canada's Constitution gives certain groups a place in the very structure of the state.”¹³⁰ The committee gives the constitution its implied support, although it does not outright claim that Canada derives legitimacy from the document. It suggests that the constitution is the basis for the Canadian state, defines the structure of the state, and also defines the different peoples of Canada and their relationship to

¹²⁸ Francis, *National Dreams*, 29-51; Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 83-110.

¹²⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 249-54.

¹³⁰ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 22.

one another.¹³¹ It furthermore claims that Canada's "constitutional order provides an established place to Quebec and First peoples, that the Constitution has recognized, since Confederation, both individual and group rights, and that the modern Constitution is based on the equality of women and men."¹³² That is, the CAC argues that the constitution both preserves human rights and is rooted in (i.e. "based on") these rights.¹³³

While this approach to constitutional law does not necessarily erase the presence of Indigenous peoples, it does erase Indigenous self-determination to some degree. In the above statements, the CAC suggests that the constitution, the state, and human rights are all bound together and mutually interdependent. According to this logic, the CMHR must preserve the constitution as part of its mandate, which is to protect and promote human rights in Canada and around the world. The CAC and CMHR are, to be sure, critical of the state and its constitution, but also frame them as necessary to the defense of human rights. In effect, the CAC takes a constitution-oriented position towards the Canadian state and its legitimacy as a political actor. It argues that the constitution establishes and defines relationships in Canada, and in particular that the constitution "provides an established place to" Indigenous peoples.¹³⁴ This is in sharp contrast to the TRC, which suggests that the Treaties create a place for settlers and the Canadian state.¹³⁵ This approach to human rights and Canadian law subtly reproduces several aspects of

¹³¹ The CAC refers specifically to English/Protestant society, French/Catholic society, and Indigenous peoples as the "peoples" of Canada.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 27.

¹³³ The CAC report explains that "within [the constitution], we find the grammar and vocabulary of rights discourse, but we also find the architecture of a constitutional order that itself has implications for human rights." Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 21-2.

¹³⁴ The CAC says that "because of s. 25 of the *Canadian Charter* and s. 35 of the *Constitution Act*, 1982, the Treaties between the Crown and Aboriginal Peoples have the status of constitutional instruments, as do other guarantees of Indigenous rights, such as the *Royal Proclamation* of 1763." That is, the Canadian constitution validates and legitimises Treaties with Indigenous nations, and not vice versa. Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 22.

¹³⁵ That is, while the TRC argues that the constitution gains legitimacy from the Treaties, the CAC suggests that the Treaties gain legitimacy from the constitution.

national mythology: it affirms the supremacy and necessity of Canadian law; and it reproduces the logic of Indigenous erasure by minimising the role of Indigenous peoples as self-determining political actors.

The CAC furthermore frames settler society as inevitable inhabitants of North America/Turtle Island who will remain on the continent without changes to (or reflection upon) the status quo. The committee discusses the way that Canada has excluded Indigenous voices in politics and law, and it concludes:

We therefore must begin by acknowledging the place of Indigenous peoples as the first founding peoples of this land. Their contributions are reflected in the record of relationships and subsequent agreements, some codified as sacred treaty documents, that welcomed settlers to every area of this country. We also acknowledge that the First Peoples have suffered greatly for their many acts of generosity to those who came after and acknowledge that between 50-100 million Indigenous Peoples in North America have lost their lives to some form of colonialism. Although the record is full of incidents of the wrongful taking of land and resources as well as Aboriginal lives, it is not the ethnocide and genocide of Indigenous nations that must ground the work of respectfully including the First Peoples in the Museum. Being victimized does not bring to the visitors of the Museum any hope. Aboriginal teachings share that they are not victims but rather survivors, warriors, and teachers.¹³⁶

This statement reveals several assumptions about the inevitability and perpetuation of settler society. First, it suggests that settlers are legitimate occupants of the continent. Rather than emphasise that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people are Indigenous – that is, people who emerge from the land – it rather focuses on their role as “the first founding peoples.” This implies that Indigenous nations were only the first of many people who would ultimately come to occupy what is now North America, and that the arrival of subsequent “founding peoples” was an inevitable event. Indeed, the committee says that Indigenous peoples “welcomed” European settlers to North America/Turtle Island and acted out of “generosity” towards them; that is, it suggests that settlers were invited by Indigenous peoples to share the continent and, as such,

¹³⁶ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 72.

became legitimate occupants of the land. Second, the CAC dissociates settler society from the crimes perpetrated against Indigenous peoples. The committee concedes that Indigenous peoples have been “victimized” but also insists that it is better to focus on their role as “survivors, warriors, and teachers.” Likewise, it concedes that Indigenous peoples experienced “ethnocide and genocide” but argues that this should not “ground” the museum’s perspective of them. While this approach emphasises the agency of Indigenous peoples, it also reframes the discussion in two significant ways: it directs discussion away from the crimes against Indigenous peoples; and, in doing so, it orients away from the perpetrators. In other words, it claims that Indigenous peoples “suffered” from colonial violence, but not that settlers caused this suffering.¹³⁷ Indeed, the preceding quotation repeatedly mentions the violations against Indigenous peoples (i.e. “the First Peoples have suffered greatly”), but never mentions the perpetrators except as “some form of colonialism.” The CAC does not erase Indigenous peoples – and in some ways encourages the museum to focus on Indigenous agency – although it does mitigate the crimes perpetrated by settler society against them.

From this perspective, Indigenous cultures and traditions become “contributions” to the settler state. The committee suggests that Indigenous cultures have value and recognises that “Aboriginal peoples have lives that are worth celebrating.”¹³⁸ When it discusses this value in more detail, however, it focuses largely on the degree to which cultures have impacted the development of Canadian law. In its discussion of the constitution and the “peoples of Canada,” the CAC reports that:

¹³⁷ This seems to be the default way to talk about genocide in settler colonial contexts. It is fascinating how many Canadian politicians, journalists, academics, etc. lapse into the passive voice when discussing crimes against Indigenous peoples. Rather than say “settler society perpetrated genocide against Indigenous peoples,” we often talk about how “Indigenous peoples were victims of genocide.”

¹³⁸Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 72.

Its long disregard for the rights of Indigenous Peoples has deprived Canada of the contributions that Indigenous law and knowledge might have made to the development of our understanding of human rights in this country. While we give weight to the constitutional bargain underlying the confederation of the provinces, we have never implemented in our policies, jurisprudence, or governance the constitutional bargain underlying Canada's major treaties with Indigenous Peoples. Had that bargain been fulfilled, it would have enriched our understandings of human rights and human dignity... The loss to us of the intellectual and legal knowledge of Indigenous Peoples has impoverished our discussion and debate about the goals of human rights and how to realize them.¹³⁹

The committee acknowledges that Canada has systematically excluded Indigenous peoples from the development of Canadian law and governance and that the Treaties remain unfulfilled. The state's disregard for Indigenous legal traditions has "impoverished" Canadian law, and rights law in particular; consequently, Canada can be "enriched" by engaging with Indigenous knowledge and approaches to law. Perhaps most noteworthy is that Canada's failure to respect Indigenous legal traditions is a "loss to us" – that is, to the Canadian settler state. Rather than suggest that Indigenous legal traditions have their own inherent value or are crucial for self-determination, the CAC suggests that Indigenous law is useful because it can contribute to the quality of state law and the understanding of human rights. In other words, the CAC does not really discuss the value of Indigenous legal traditions: it discusses the value of appropriating these traditions to benefit the state and settler society. Again, this does not necessarily erase Indigenous peoples, although it does erase their independence as nations by assimilating them into the settler state.

While the MCH and CAC often acknowledge the particularity of Indigenous peoples in Canada, at times they erase this particularity by framing Indigenous nations as "asterisk" groups. Tuck and Yang argue that settlers, and especially settler researchers, frame Indigenous peoples as "asterisks, as footnotes into dominant paradigms" by including them as one of many

¹³⁹ Ibid., 23.

marginalised or minority groups.¹⁴⁰ This practice “erases and then conceals the erasure of Indigenous peoples within the settler colonial nation-state” by disregarding their unique role and experiences within colonial states, and by eliding the way colonial violence specifically targets Indigenous peoples and lands.¹⁴¹ The CAC regularly asterisks Indigenous peoples in its final report. For example, the committee often discusses Indigenous peoples and Quebec alongside one another and frames them as “founding peoples” that remain significant minorities.¹⁴² Yet it generally does not distinguish between these groups or acknowledge that Quebec, like Anglophone Canada, is a settler society that benefits from the theft of Indigenous land and the genocide of Indigenous peoples. From the CAC’s perspective, Indigenous peoples and Quebecois society are equal as minority groups. A particularly poignant example comes from the way people described the “loss of home” during CAC consultations:

One of the CAC members observed during our process that, at times, he found the frequently recurring sense of loss of home in the stories we heard, to be overwhelming. Indeed, the stories of loss are legion. Some of the themes included people being taken away from home and familiar surroundings, exiled to Sierra Leone, in the case of Black Loyalists, or Louisiana, in the case of Acadians; and people torn from their homes, farms, and businesses and placed in concentration camps during World War I and World War II, in the case of Japanese-Canadians and those of Italian or Ukrainian origin. The settlement of Canada hastened the confinement of Indigenous Peoples on small reserves, their traditional territories lost to them forever. Indigenous children were taken to residential schools or seized by child welfare authorities, and women were exiled from their families and communities for ‘marrying out.’¹⁴³

The report further discusses the way Inuit, people with disabilities, refugees around the world, and the residents of Africville suffered a “loss of home.” The CAC asterisks Indigenous peoples by framing them as just one of many groups to suffer loss without considering the particular conditions surrounding that loss. Specifically, it does not explain that the settlement of North

¹⁴⁰ Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is not a Metaphor,” 22.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 22-6, 40.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 54.

America/Turtle Island and the founding of Canada was precisely what caused the loss of home for Indigenous peoples.¹⁴⁴ Nor does it consider that many of these groups – refugees, Acadians, immigrants of Japanese or Ukrainian descent – ultimately created a home in Canada at the expense of Indigenous peoples. In other words, the CAC does not explain that people created homes in Canada by displacing Indigenous peoples from their homes. The committee also minimises the harm perpetrated by settlers against Indigenous peoples. It concedes that settlement “hastened” development of the reserve system but does not acknowledge that Canada *created and perpetuated* the reserve system through the *Indian Act*. Likewise, it claims without qualification that Indigenous territories are “lost forever.” It does not admit, however, that Indigenous territories remain in the same place as always (the only difference is that settlers now occupy them) or that they are “lost” only as long as settlers continue to ignore their responsibilities to Indigenous peoples and refuse to return the land.¹⁴⁵ Although the CAC acknowledges elsewhere that Indigenous peoples play a particular role in settler colonial contexts, it elides this particularity in discussions surrounding Quebec and the “loss of home.” Further problematic is how the committee ignores the role that settlers play in the perpetration of colonial violence.

Reproducing and Resisting Other Mythical Themes

The CMHR engages with other aspects of national mythology, in particular the themes of civilisational progress and lawful peacemaking. Settler mythology frames history as linear and progressive: humanity began as savage, but becomes increasingly more civilised as time passes

¹⁴⁴ It does discuss land theft elsewhere, as I discuss earlier in the chapter, but not in respect to this section of the report.

¹⁴⁵ The implication, it seems, is that the land is “lost forever” because settlers will never return it.

and history moves forward.¹⁴⁶ In Canadian mythology, law is both a catalyst and product of human progress that settlers use to peacefully transform North America/Turtle Island into a civilised society.¹⁴⁷ Canadians therefore value law, defer to its authority, and develop a repertoire of national symbols to represent the supremacy of law.¹⁴⁸ Advisory committees for the CMHR engage with these themes in a way that can either resist or reproduce them, and the history of the Holocaust plays an important role in respect to both themes. In Chapter III, I argued that proponents of the National Holocaust Monument frame the Holocaust as a crucial moment in the history of civilisation – the frontier where savagery and civilisation met. Similarly, advisors to the CMHR frame the Holocaust as a defining moment in the historical development of human rights.

Civilisational Progress

Advisory committees suggest that human history is a dynamic process that evolves over time but does not necessarily flow towards a teleological endpoint. The CAC maintains that Canada’s history of human rights and rights violations will play an important role at the CMHR, and it proposes representing history through a “reflective” lens. The committee explains that a “reflective view of history also guards against the common tendency to characterize historical wrongs as happening in ‘the bad old days,’ when many people were unenlightened, discriminatory, and incapable of recognizing the impact of their practices.”¹⁴⁹ The committee acknowledges that people often view history as linear and progressive, and that this perspective enables them to relegate wrongdoings to the “unenlightened” people of the past. The CAC seeks

¹⁴⁶ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 96-8.

¹⁴⁷ Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 83.

¹⁴⁸ Francis, *National Dreams*, 29-51.

¹⁴⁹ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 71.

to challenge this sort of progressive perspective of history. For example, it contends that people in the past (as well as those in the present) had a sense of justice, were aware of their social contexts and responsibilities, and were not simply “ignorant of their own circumstances or incapable of resisting” injustices.¹⁵⁰ Accordingly, advisory committees tend to frame history as an evolution. The MCH reports that “history provides us with the lessons of hindsight, the maturity of time, the wisdom of experience, the accumulated knowledge of previous generations and the capital of historical precedents. All of this is seminal to the evolution of human rights over the centuries.”¹⁵¹ This evolutionary view of history and human rights is distinct from a progressive one: evolution, like progress, presumes that history is dynamic and that circumstances change over time; unlike progress, however, evolution does not imply that history flows in a particular direction or towards a specific goal. To be sure, the committee suggests that the past, present, and future are all causally related but not necessarily in a teleological way. Past events provide people with the “wisdom of experience” to make informed decisions about the present and future. That is, the committees suggest that human history can be an intentional process and is at least partly guided by the decisions and actions of people in the past and present. However, they also imply that history does not inherently march towards a specific endpoint, and that past events do not necessarily dictate what the future will look like.

At times, however, the advisory committees lapse into the language of “progress” and rely on a progressive framework of history. For example, the MCH reports that “our recent past has recorded considerable progress with respect to the protection of civil and political rights”¹⁵² while the CAC insists that “Canada has certainly progressed in the human rights protections

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 2. For discussion of “evolution” elsewhere, see the MCH report page 4, and CAC report page 25.

¹⁵² Ibid., 3.

offered to residents of this country.”¹⁵³ The CAC also considers how to “move beyond” the damage caused by rights violations and asserts that “it is our firm belief that this shared commitment to healing and moving forward must be at the core of the museum.”¹⁵⁴ In this way, the committees rely on a progressive model of history, especially in respect to the history of human rights. Moreover, they contend that this sort of “forward” (i.e. progressive) movement should be a foundational principle for the museum.¹⁵⁵

A useful example is how the CAC uses a progressive narrative to frame the relationship between past and present rights violations. It begins in a way that appears to challenge progressive narratives of history:

The Museum should also guard against presenting historical exhibits that suggest rights violations were a relic of times gone by, and that Canadian society has only evolved and improved over time. While there has been progress in some areas in some eras, human rights violations of the past continue to have resonance in today’s world.¹⁵⁶

It then offers ways to think about how rights violations resonate in the present: it discusses the “problematic legacies” of rights violations, that “historical abuses cause damage that continues,” and the way contemporary systemic inequalities persist “because of historical injustice.”¹⁵⁷ On its surface, this statement suggests that the violation of human rights continues to be relevant in present-day Canada. What is especially noteworthy, however, is that the CAC also suggests that contemporary human rights issues emerge largely from the “legacies” of past violations. In other words, human rights violations are located in the past – at least in Canada – although they

¹⁵³ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 70.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁵⁵ It is worth noting that the advisory committees sometimes frame “evolution” as synonymous with “progress.” So while they do provide alternate perspectives of history, they often retain an implicit belief in progress. Also see the MCH report page 4, and CAC report page 71.

¹⁵⁶ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 71.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

continue to have implications for the present moment.¹⁵⁸ For the CAC, the development and protection of human rights is an ongoing process, although it is also a history with a clear trajectory and teleological endpoint, namely, the elimination of human rights violations.

The Holocaust plays an important, albeit debated, role in the history and development of human rights. It is a widely held belief that the Holocaust was impetus for the development and recognition of human rights. Indeed, Samuel Moyn notes that “high-profile” politicians, journalists, and scholars “see human rights as an old ideal that finally came into its own as a response to the Holocaust, which might be the most universally repeated myth about their origins.”¹⁵⁹ In his study of the historical development of human rights, Moyn demonstrates that this understanding of human rights history is inaccurate and, moreover, that it reproduces a progressive narrative of history. He argues that the emergence of human rights as a transnational ideology is linked to the collapse of earlier “utopias,” such as communism and post/colonialism. Moyn thus explains that “contrary to conventional assumptions, there was no widespread Holocaust consciousness in the postwar era, so human rights could not have been a response to it.”¹⁶⁰ James Walker affirms this perspective in his study of Jewish activism and early rights law in Canada. Following activism from 1931 through the 1950s, he demonstrates how Canadian Jewish groups worked in coordination with other minorities to push for the creation of anti-discrimination legislation. Walker’s analysis reveals that the emergence of anti-discrimination laws (though not always using the language of “human rights”) began well before the systematic persecution of European Jewry. Moreover, he shows that human rights law in Canada was not a response to the widespread shock of the Holocaust, but rather a product of ongoing and

¹⁵⁸ This perspective implies that Canadians have moved beyond the violation of human rights and have since entered an historical era that needs only to deal with the legacies of past violations.

¹⁵⁹ Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Bellknapp Press, 2010), 6.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

concerted activism by racial minorities.¹⁶¹ As Moyn and Walker demonstrate, then, the Holocaust did not instigate the emergence of human rights.

Despite this, the CAC frames the Holocaust as a pivotal moment in the development of human rights that functioned largely as a catalyst for historical progress. The committee reports that “many of the people we spoke to left little doubt about the centrality of the Holocaust to the contemporary experience of human rights, or about how essential it is for the Holocaust to anchor the Museum.”¹⁶² This is because many people who attended consultations “recognized the Holocaust as the inspiration for the creation of post-World War II instruments and machinery for safeguarding human rights.”¹⁶³ Both advisory committees frame Canada as a progressed – or at least progressing – nation, especially in respect to the development and protection of human rights. In these quotations, the CAC further claims that the Holocaust, and international responses to it, were impetus for the creation and development of many of those mechanisms that have enabled Canadians to protect human rights. The Holocaust, it suggests, therefore represents a significant moment in the history of human rights and should play a central role at the CMHR. The CAC discusses the causal relationship between the Holocaust and human rights in a section on “the foundation of modern international human rights discourse,” which explains that

the human rights culture of the last half of the 20th century has been strongly influenced by post-Holocaust developments at the United Nations...This premise [that human beings have inherent dignity and worth] arises directly out of the genocide of six million Jews and millions of others during the Holocaust. The Holocaust caused an international recognition of the concept of our common humanity.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ James W. St.G. Walker, “The ‘Jewish Phase’ in the Movement for Racial Equality in Canada,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 34, no. 1 (2002).

¹⁶² Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 42.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

The committee sees a direct causal relationship between the Holocaust and the creation of human rights: the Holocaust enabled people to develop a sense of universal and common humanity – accompanied by a belief that humans have inherent dignity and worth – which inspired the creation of national and international mechanisms to protect this humanity and remedy the violation of rights. From this perspective, the Holocaust is the historical point that separates two eras of human history: a pre-Holocaust world that lacks a sense of common humanity, and therefore lacks a framework for human rights; and a post-Holocaust world that believes in universal humanity and its inherent value. Furthermore, the CAC draws on the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) to describe the Holocaust as “barbarous acts,”¹⁶⁵ suggesting that it was an event that is incompatible with or opposed to civilisation.

The CAC also frames the Holocaust as a catalyst for the creation of laws to protect the newfound sense of humanity. The CAC outlines the causal thread that connects the Holocaust to the emergence of international and domestic laws: it explains that “the great wrong of the Holocaust...set the foundation for the *Universal Declaration [of Human Rights]*”;¹⁶⁶ and then that “the advent of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* after the Holocaust had a positive effect on Canada’s domestic human rights policies, accelerating the passage of anti-discrimination legislation.”¹⁶⁷ While the committee concedes that some laws had already “begun to emerge” in Canada prior to the War,¹⁶⁸ it also maintains that the Holocaust played a substantial role in stimulating the creation and passing of the UDHR and subsequent domestic policies. The CAC further addresses the significance of this new legislation:

Before the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, individuals were recognised as objects but not subjects of international law...The reaction to the Holocaust, and the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, changed that. A whole sequence of international human rights treaties and instruments was developed, national constitutions and domestic laws rooted in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* that...granted rights to individuals, not just states.¹⁶⁹

In other words, the Holocaust stimulated a shift in the way people conceive of humanity, but it also changed the way people conceive of the state, the individual, and especially the legal relationship between them. This shift in consciousness was manifested as law – as the UDHR, the “treaties and instruments” of state relations, constitutions, as well as domestic anti-discrimination laws. According to the committee, then, the pre-Holocaust world was not necessarily lawless or void of state governance, although it did lack the legislation necessary for the recognition of common humanity and the protection of human rights; only in the post-Holocaust world does law have the capacity to play such a significant role in human affairs.

Lawful Peacemaking

The CMHR views law as an effective remedy for human rights violations and places it, and especially Canadian law, in high esteem. The CAC describes law as “a powerful response to the violation of rights and the denial of human dignity”¹⁷⁰ because it has the potential to illuminate human rights issues in several ways. The committee explains that, when people seek out law as a remedy for their human rights complaints, they are in effect “appearing in two courts: the court of law and the court of public opinion.”¹⁷¹ This renders a human rights issue visible to public and legal audiences:

Very often, the best way to bring home the awful reality of widespread human rights violations is to confront the public with one or a few cases. Litigation allows for the details of a narrative to become public and well known...A court decision cuts through

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 69.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

the bafflegab...When the sovereign is wearing no clothes, a court is professionally bound to say so.¹⁷²

That is, when a person wins in the court of law, they receive formal recognition of their grievance and possible compensation for their suffering; when they win in the court of public opinion, they gain public recognition, and may spur the government to enact laws that can respond to similar grievances in the future.¹⁷³ Legal action can “cut through” the confusing and convoluted arguments surrounding a human rights issue and reveal its true nature. In this way, the committee suggests, law is one of the best tools for the protection of human rights because it is possible to lose in one “court” but win in the other. Moreover, it claims that Canadian law in particular is useful in the formulation and defense of human rights. The CAC explains that Canada played a significant role in drafting international human rights legislation such as the UDHR, the Land Mines Treaty, and the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.¹⁷⁴ It reports that the “strength of Canada’s legal system has also contributed to our effectiveness internationally. We were told of Canada’s role in the establishment of the International Criminal Court, and were reminded that Canadian-trained officials are sought after for international human rights tribunals and courts.”¹⁷⁵ The CAC contends that Canadian law is an effective solution to rights violations, not just domestically, but globally as well. In this sense, it frames Canadian domestic law as an intellectual export to share with other nations and increase Canadian influence around the world.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Canada initially voted against the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and, at the time of the CAC report, did not support it. It was only in 2016 – nearly a decade after it was adopted by the UN – that Canada finally adopted the declaration.

¹⁷⁵ Content Advisory Committee, *Final Report*, 32.

Yet the CAC is also critical of law and concedes that it is not a solution to every human rights issue. The committee acknowledges that “there is no necessary connection between law and equality, justice, or human dignity. Some of the most repressive systems in history have had their legal systems put in place by elected governments.”¹⁷⁶ It considers that state governments have used law to establish and protect oppressive regimes, and refers specifically to Nazi Germany, South Africa during apartheid, and Canada’s Indigenous policies (via the *Indian Act*). The committee concludes that “what the law protects, and how it protects, gives us an idea of the level of society’s commitment to safeguarding rights, and to which rights it is committed.”¹⁷⁷ That is, state law is neither inherently good nor does it intrinsically lead to justice, but rather reflects the values and ideologies of the society that has created it: in a just society, then, law will become a tool of justice; in an unjust society, law can undermine equality and human dignity. For this reason, the CAC points out the need to develop other mechanisms to defend rights:

When we go to the law in search for justice, we often find that the law is an incomplete remedy. Rights law...focuses on past harms and not on preventing future harm...As such, a human rights strategy should not focus entirely on the law...But a human rights strategy that ignores the law abandons a viable technique. Relying on the law in every case is a recipe for failure, but avoiding the law in every case means giving up on one way to succeed.¹⁷⁸

From this perspective, law is not always an absolute or complete solution to human rights violations, and it must be supplemented by other practices. For example, the committee argues that rights law is only effective when the state nurtures a human rights culture amongst the general public.¹⁷⁹ However, the committee insists, law has an inherent potential to protect human rights and is, at times, necessary: people should always consider law as a response to rights

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 69.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 69-70.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 26, 67.

violations, and it is a great risk to dismiss law outright. While the CAC acknowledge law's limited potential for justice, it nevertheless places a great deal of faith in its inherent value and assigns law an important role in the defense of human rights. The committee frames law as a force that is necessary for the maintenance of social order and stability in Canada and, as such, ultimately reinscribes the myth of lawful peacemaking.

Knowledge that Flows

Advisory committees for the CMHR seek to establish a museum that represents and engages with difficult knowledge – yet they also recognise that there is no definite way to do this. The MCH and CAC have largely defined the purpose and scope of the CMHR, the approach that curators should take to museum content, and the way content will shape visitor experiences. While difficult knowledge depends partly on the specific events the curators choose to include in the museum's galleries and exhibits, more significant is the way they frame these events and construct a meaningful narrative of history. As one curator observed, the same event – in fact, the same narrative of that event – can simultaneously contain both difficult and lovely knowledges for those who are willing to engage with it. As the committees recommend, curators have taken strides to increase the potential for difficult knowledge at the CMHR: they have used works of art and strategic spaces to create an environment that enables visitors to have transformative experiences. They have created sites and moments throughout the museum where visitors must interpret and engage with alternative and potentially difficult historical narratives. Ultimately, difficult knowledge is not a science but an art: curators must use the creative tools at their disposal – artefacts, testimonies, interactive displays, gallery spaces – to convey a particular

understanding of the world. It is a mutual act of meaning-making whereby advisors define the intention, curators interpret and represent the world, and visitors interpret that representation.

According to the MCH and CAC, the CMHR places a great deal of responsibility on visitors to play an active role in their own education. It is the visitor who determines which galleries to explore, how much time they will spend with each exhibit, and in how much depth they will engage with museum content. In many cases, it is the visitor who must interpret content in a way that makes it coherent and meaningful (or not). And, ultimately, it is the visitor who decides to enter the museum. Whether difficult knowledge manifests at the CMHR depends largely upon the people who enter it: how they perceive the world, their commitment to transformative encounters, and willingness to engage with new ideas. An exhibit that is difficult knowledge for one person is just as likely to be lovely knowledge for another. This is one of the biggest limitations, but also greatest potentials, for difficult knowledge. A museum exhibit cannot be difficult knowledge for everyone, and even a well designed exhibit does not ensure that every visitor will have a transformative encounter. This does mean, however, that every exhibit may become difficult knowledge for someone.

While the advisory committees challenge certain aspects of national mythology, they do not necessarily provide an alternative narrative of Canadian history. As I demonstrated in Chapter IV, the TRC challenges dominant settler narratives by presenting an alternative interpretation of history. Unlike the TRC, the CMHR does not provide visitors with an alternative narrative and, instead, frames information in a way that requires visitors to construct their own view of history. Curators achieve this in part by refusing to give the museum an authoritative voice. While traditional museums often impose overarching narratives from the top down, the CMHR encourages visitors to build narratives from the bottom up. Visitors will

gradually encounter many different voices as they move through the galleries: as personal testimonies, through artistic works, in artefacts or historical and legal documents. These become the building blocks that people will use to create a sense of history and memory. In this way, it is impossible either to confirm or deny that the CMHR produces difficult knowledge about Canadian history and national myth, because it depends on the particular experiences of unique visitors.

I have suggested that it is possible to interpret the CMHR, at least through its advisory reports, in a way that challenges dominant settler mythology. Advisory committees have proposed many steps to ensure that the museum does not reproduce the myth of Indigenous erasure, and curators have sought to realise these recommendations. Likewise, they also challenge the myths of civilisational progress and lawful peacemaking, albeit not as systematically. But it is also possible to interpret some of this in a way that is consistent with settler narratives and national mythology – that is, as lovely knowledge. There are noteworthy limitations to difficult knowledge at the CMHR. Curators often need to simplify complex ideas or histories in a way that, for some visitors, can mitigate the potential to generate difficult knowledge. A more demanding issue is that Canadian history and national mythology are, in fact, living things that continue to shift and transform as time continues. As curators pointed out in respect to Residential Schools and the TRC, dominant narratives are always in flux which means that alternative narratives and difficult knowledge must also change with the flow of time. A narrative that is difficult for Canadians today might be lovely knowledge for the next generation – and significant shifts in discourse can take place in only a few short years. Difficult knowledge, therefore, is only effective if it acts as a counterpoint that continues to evolve in

response to the ebb and flow of history and memory. The CMHR can only generate difficult knowledge if it, too, continues to change over time.

Chapter VI

Inside the Canadian Museum for Human Rights: A Difficult Encounter

In the previous chapter, I considered the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) from the perspective of the advisory committees and curators who shaped the principles that guide the museum and its content. This chapter considers how these principles translate into the material body of the museum, how this shapes visitor experiences within, and whether the museum enables difficult knowledge in practice. In its preliminary report on the museum, the Minister of Canadian Heritage's Advisory Committee (MCH) observes that "visitor experience is now seen as a key factor in assessing the public role of museums, as well as their contribution to societal knowledge building and critical thinking."¹ Yet there are many kinds of visitor experience. As Janice Rieger reminds us in her disability-oriented reading of the museum, encounters with the CMHR are embodied experiences that are shaped by specific identities and can vary widely between people.² The following analysis is therefore a product of my personal experiences with the museum and its subject matter, conversations with museum staff and encounters with other visitors, physical perception of museum spaces, and responses to its content. In other words, when I talk about visitor experiences of the CMHR, I am referring primarily to my experiences as a visitor to the museum.

This chapter explores how Canadian mythology and difficult knowledge emerge throughout the CMHR's galleries, exhibits, and architectural design. While previous chapters explored these subjects thematically, the present chapter follows the structure of the museum

¹ Advisory Committee on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, *Report to the Minister of Canadian Heritage on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights* (Ottawa: Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2008), 25.

² Janice Rieger, "Doing Dis/ordered Mapping/s: Embodying Disability in the Museum Environment" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2016), 1-4.

itself. I draw primarily on those mythical themes that are most explicit at the museum (discussed in Chapter V, and based on my review of national mythology in Chapter II): Indigenous erasure, civilisational progress, lawful peacemaking, and settler indigenisation. The following analysis begins by addressing the CMHR as a physical space and considering the significance of its location at the Forks in Winnipeg, as well as Antoine Predock's architectural design. I then turn to the content and experience of the museum's galleries and exhibits, with particular focus on the *Indigenous Perspectives*, *Canadian Journeys*, *Examining the Holocaust*, and *Breaking the Silence* galleries. To give a sense of my overall movement through the museum and its architectural journey, I intersperse my discussion of gallery content with consideration of the building's structure and design. Finally, I consider how programming can shape the way visitors experience and interpret the museum. I argue that, while the CMHR is situated within a physical form that reproduces lovely knowledge, it is nevertheless a site of difficult knowledge and transformative encounters. In particular, I contend that the CMHR creates difficult knowledge by encouraging visitors to actively interpret content and, thereby, construct alternative narratives of Canadian history. The museum's potential to facilitate difficult encounters is shaped by several factors. The museum's architectural design is likely to reproduce lovely knowledge about Canadian mythology because its "darkness to light" motif relies on a narrative of progress. In contrast, some galleries and exhibits are likely to generate difficult knowledge for settlers because they explore challenging parts of national history, and especially because curators frame content in a way that enables visitors to participate in the interpretive process. One of the most effective ways to engage visitors in the interpretation of museum content is through specially designed guided tours, such as the Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour. Thus, I further argue that museum

programming – and especially programming that includes expressions of Indigenous self-determination – is crucial to the resistance of national mythology.

Approaching the Museum

The Forks has played an important role in human encounters for millennia and is a place of mythical, historical, and social significance. Located approximately at the centre of Turtle Island, it is the place where the Assiniboine River flows into the Red River in what is today the city of Winnipeg. Since time immemorial, many Indigenous nations have lived, travelled through, and engaged with one another at this crossroads, and it is part of the traditional territory for Cree, Assiniboine, Ojibwa, Dakota, and Métis nations. The Forks, largely because of its geographic centrality and ongoing role as a hub of Indigenous activity, has more recently become a site of colonial encounters between European settlers and Indigenous peoples. Settlers used it as an outpost during the fur trade when they first arrived in the area in the 1730s, and the Hudson’s Bay Company later established forts as the area continued to grow as a commercial centre. Shortly after Confederation, the Canadian state and local Indigenous nations codified their relationship in Treaty 1, which preserves relationships between Canada and First Nations in Winnipeg and much of southern Manitoba, and the *Manitoba Act*, which encompasses relations between Canada and the Métis nation.³ As Manitoba joined Confederation and the flow of commerce increased in western Canada, settler industry and immigration increasingly came to dominate activity at the Forks. In 1974, Parks Canada designated the Forks as a National Historical Site, and it has since become a major tourist destination in Winnipeg that features

³ Adam Gaudry argues that the *Manitoba Act* of 1870 effectively legislates the Manitoba Treaty, which established nation-to-nation relations between Canada and the Métis nation. Adam Gaudry, “Are the Métis Treaty People?” (lecture, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg MB, 6 January 2016).

boutiques, restaurants, and entertainment. When construction crews began work on the CMHR in 2009, it was here – at the northern intersection of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers – where the museum began to take shape.⁴

The CMHR occupies a contested site with multiple meanings and a long history of colonial violence. Jessica Jacobson-Konefall observes that the Forks plays an important role in both Indigenous and settler histories, and that management has used these histories to frame the site as a past and present “meeting place.” However, she warns against equating its significance as an Indigenous place with its role as a colonial site, and contends that “it is disingenuous to equate this indigenous history with capitalist development of a disused rail-yard...into a tourist centre.”⁵ While the Forks may be a “meeting place” for both Indigenous peoples and settlers, it has served widely different purposes and meant very different things to each: it is a place of mythical significance for Indigenous people but also a site of industrial and commercial significance for settlers. Dirk Moses suggests that these tensions extend to the CMHR itself, by virtue of its location at the Forks. He explains that settler states are rooted in “foundational violence and [an] enduring logic of elimination”⁶ – that is, settler societies seek to displace, exterminate, and ultimately replace Indigenous peoples. The museum, Moses argues, becomes a symbol of colonial violence and Indigenous genocide. While the CMHR is built on one of “Manitoba’s richest archaeological site[s] of Indigenous heritage,”⁷ the museum has lacked

⁴ Sarah E. Cooper, “The Meeting Place: Examining the Relationship Between Colonialism and Planning at The Forks, Winnipeg” (MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 2009), 43-51; Jessica Jacobson-Konefall, “Digital Modalities of Sited Memories: Athavale and Blackhorse’s Animated Territories,” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 8, no. 3 (2012): 268-70; Laura Peers, “The Ojibwa, Red River, and the Forks, 1770-1970,” in *The Forks and the Battle of Seven Oaks in Manitoba History*, eds. Robert Coutts and Richard Stuart (Winnipeg: Manitoba Historical Society, 1994).

⁵ Jacobson-Konefall, “Digital Modalities,” 269.

⁶ A. Dirk Moses, “Protecting Human Rights and Preventing Genocide: The Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the Will to Intervene,” in *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*, eds. Karen Busy, Adam Muller, and Andrew Woolford (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 59.

⁷ *Ibid.*

transparency regarding its archaeological assessment of the site prior to construction of the building. Moses points out that this “is a metaphor for...the logic of elimination: one building was erected on the remains of previous communities, just as one society replaced another.”⁸

Although many people perceive the CMHR as a symbol for Canada’s “commitment to the articulation and defence of human rights,”⁹ it also represents the process of nation-building and settler colonial expansion in Canada.

Regardless of its social significance, the CMHR is a conspicuous building that punctuates the landscape. The massive structure rises high above the Manitoban prairie and stands out against the less spectacular architecture surrounding it. While the Forks is home to a handful of other buildings such as the Children’s Museum and the Forks Market, these are all relatively short structures that are dwarfed by the museum. The curvilinear design of the CMHR also contrasts with the blocky angles of the city’s commercial core, which begins several blocks away. The only piece of architecture that seems to resonate with the museum is the nearby Esplanade Riel, a pedestrian bridge that crosses the Red River and, with its spire and cables, gradually tapers into the sky.¹⁰ But despite its dissonance with the surroundings – or perhaps because of it – the museum demands the attention of onlookers. Predock, the museum’s architect, “was inspired by Canadian landscapes – vast prairie skies, northern lights, and snow and ice – as well as by Canadian cultures,”¹¹ and combines these qualities to create an interesting and unique structure. Its exterior has four main components: the roots, the cloud, the mountain, and the tower. The entire structure rests on four “roots” that “ground the building to the land,”¹²

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰ The bridge is named in honour of Louis Riel, the Métis political figure who led the Red River Rebellion and the North-West Rebellion.

¹¹ Peter C. Newman and Allan Levine, *Miracle at the Forks: The Museum that Dares Make a Difference* (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing, 2014), 108.

¹² Ibid., 109.



Figure 4: Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the Esplanade Riel, Winnipeg MB. Image courtesy of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, reproduced with permission.

three of which are covered in prairie grasses while the fourth is equipped with seating and functions as an amphitheatre. Perched on top of these are “the cloud” and “the mountain” which, together, comprise the body of the museum. The cloud is perhaps the most captivating aspect of the building, with its vaulted windows that wrap around the museum’s exterior and reflect the changing Winnipeg skies. These windows fold gracefully over top of one another in a way that “is meant to symbolize the wings of a white dove, the symbol for peace, embracing the building.”¹³ The mountain, a rocky outcropping made of limestone from nearby Tyndall, Manitoba, complements the smooth contours of the cloud with its sharp angles and hard features.

¹³ Ibid.

Finally, the Tower of Hope emerges abruptly from the main body and, in a way that mimics the Esplanade Riel, ascends several storeys above the museum. Much like the steeple of a church, it becomes the architectural focal point – the climax – that sits resolutely above the museum and invites people to engage with the content inside.

While this unique architecture contrasts with much of its surrounding environment, it also harmonises with the national mythos. Canadian mythology, like national mythology in other settler societies, relies on a particular narrative of settlement: settler society first arrived on North America, gradually molded the wilderness in its own image, and in doing so, became (or will become) the legitimate and native occupants of the land. As Moses explains above, settlers seek first to displace and then replace Indigenous peoples in a way that situates settler society as the successor to the land's earlier Indigenous inhabitants. Thus, the climax of the national narrative is the “indigenisation of the settler”¹⁴ whereby settler society “becomes so deeply established that it is naturalized, normalized, unquestioned and unchallenged.”¹⁵ As discussed in Chapter III, the National Holocaust Monument indigenises Canadian society by framing the memorial as a natural feature of the landscape. Similarly, Predock designed the CMHR as an aspect of the Canadian landscape that emerges from the earth. In his online portfolio, Predock suggests that certain features of the building are intended to create, or reflect, a relationship between the museum and the land. For example, he describes the entrance as “an ancient geological event [that] symbolically recognizes the earth as the spiritual centre for many indigenous cultures.”¹⁶ He furthermore explains that the “heart of the building, the Great Hall, is carved from the earth

¹⁴ Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson, “Settler Colonies,” in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 369.

¹⁵ Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker, *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2015), 26.

¹⁶ Antoine Predock, “Canadian Museum for Human Rights.”

evoking the memory of ancient gatherings at the Forks of First Nations peoples, and later, settlers and immigrants.”¹⁷ Predock frames the museum as an “ancient” part of the landscape that is “carved from the earth,” and also acknowledges that land plays a central role in Indigenous ways of life. However, he makes little distinction between Indigenous relationships with land and settler relationships to it, and rather suggests that “settlers and immigrants” are successors to First Nations peoples and their traditions. For example, Predock observes that Indigenous peoples have traditionally used the Forks as a meeting place, but also that the CMHR participates in this tradition in a way that also includes settlers.

It is “the roots,” however, that most clearly embody the museum’s connection to land. The CMHR’s website outlines how the “Museum is grounded by four massive stone Roots, symbolizing humanity’s connection to earth. Prairie grasses grow atop three of the Roots.”¹⁸ Predock further describes this exterior design as “a timeless landmark for all nations and cultures...set in a field of sweet grass.”¹⁹ The roots connect the museum – and, by extension, human rights and humanity – to the land. But they do not just connect it to land in an abstract sense, but rather to a very particular piece of land that is a traditional home for Cree, Assiniboine, Ojibwa, Dakota, and Métis, and which is encompassed by Treaty One and the *Manitoba Act*. In other words, they connect it to Indigenous land. However, this design implies that humanity in general – “all nations and cultures” – is connected to this land and, presumably, has a claim to it. This approach is problematic because it undermines Indigenous claims to the land while bolstering settler claims. Moreover, the architect appropriates sweet grass – an

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Canadian Museum for Human Rights, “Architecture.”

¹⁹ Antoine Predock, “Canadian Museum for Human Rights.”

indigenous plant and sacred herb to many Indigenous nations – to cover these roots and integrate the museum into the surrounding landscape.²⁰

Entering the Museum

Visitors do not so much enter the museum as they are consumed by it. The building is impressive against the Winnipeg skyline from a distance, although it is only up close that one gets a sense of its full magnitude. As I approach the main entrance, I follow a pathway that narrows inward and slopes downward from street level towards the base of the building. While I descend, limestone walls slowly rise up and engulf me. The transition from the bright, spacious prairies is complete as I pass through the main doors and enter a cavernous space full of rocky features. From here, it is possible to visit the gift shop and bistro, or purchase a ticket and begin my journey. In effect, the building removes visitors from the surrounding landscape and cityscape, and visitors begin a journey that is enclosed and self-contained.

The CMHR leads visitors on a “journey from darkness to light” as they proceed through each of its galleries. Predock explains that “I think of my buildings as processional events, as choreographic events; they are an accumulation of vantage points both perceptual and experiential.”²¹ The museum is an event that does not just present visitors with information and

²⁰ Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson explain that settler indigenisation occurs when settlers “mimic” and “appropriate” the symbols and identities of Indigenous peoples. In this way, the museum appropriates an element of Indigenous culture (sweet grass) and uses it to frame the building as an Indigenous feature of the landscape. While this design is not inherently problematic, its colonial origins are: the project was initiated by settlers, designed by a settler architect, and remains the domain of the settler colonial state. It is not an expression of indigeneity but, rather, an expression of settler colonialism that seeks to indigenise settler society. The Métis-Blackfoot architect Douglas Cardinal is an interesting counterpoint to Predock. Cardinal has designed several national museums, including the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, Quebec, and the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. His designs begin as an expression of indigeneity, even if they ultimately become national institutions. Predock’s designs, on the other hand, are expressions of colonialism that indigenise settler societies and ideas. Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson, “Settler Colonies,” in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 369.

²¹ Antoine Predock, “Body/Motion.”

exhibits but, rather, creates an experience in space and time. The feature that proponents most widely advertise about the museum – apart from the fact that it promotes human rights – is how the architecture guides visitors from “dark to light.” The first page of the visitor’s guidebook, for example, describes how

The Museum offers a journey from darkness to light. You enter the Museum at ground level, into a space that has a subterranean feel. You gradually work your way higher on a series of inclined ramps that reveal more and more daylight...The unique architecture parallels a human rights journey – it requires some effort and has a few twists and turns, but can be very rewarding to complete.²²

The website, which refers to this journey several times, further elaborates that the “visitor’s experiential journey is an upward one, progressing from ground to sky, darkness to light – a metaphor for the struggle toward fully realized human rights for all.”²³ No one seems to explain precisely what is wrong with darkness, though the implication is that light is somehow superior to it.²⁴ The visitor’s journey through the museum is both literal and symbolic: visitors begin at the bottom, in dim spaces with few windows, and move upwards toward more illuminated areas; but they also begin with a vague (or absent) idea about human rights and, through “struggle” with the content in each gallery, arrive in an enlightened world where rights are recognised and protected.

This enlightenment narrative reproduces the myth of civilisational progress. Civilisational progress presumes that humanity gradually advances from savagery to civilisation over time and, therefore, constructs history as linear, progressive, and anthropocentric. It is the narrative structure that underlies Canadian mythology and shapes other aspects of the national myth,

²² Canadian Museum for Human Rights, *Visitor Guide* (Winnipeg: Canadian Museum for Human Rights, n.d.), 1.

²³ Canadian Museum for Human Rights, “Architecture.”

²⁴ The binary – and hierarchy – between darkness and light is a well-established trope in Western intellectual and religious traditions. Darkness generally represents ignorance and evil while light, in contrast, represents knowledge and goodness. However, the CMHR uses this trope without exploring its cultural origins. In other words, the play of darkness/light is a Eurocentric framework that the museum does not challenge.

including the parallel narratives of Indigenous erasure and the indigenisation of the settler.²⁵ Similarly, Predock's design structures the visitor's movements through space as a progressive experience. The route through the museum is linear in that visitors begin in a hall at the base of the building that is "carved from the earth,"²⁶ follow a series of predetermined pathways through and between galleries, and ultimately arrive at their final destination in the Tower of Hope. This linear movement is progressive in several ways. Spatially, the slow ascent from bottom to top and "ground to sky" makes this journey literally progressive.²⁷ Furthermore, the visitor's spatial and metaphorical movement "from darkness to light" frames their experience of the museum as progress. The aspect of this journey that most clearly reflects the idea of civilisational progress, however, is the way it mirrors "the struggle toward fully realized human rights."²⁸ That is, Visitors begin at the bottom where human rights – and therefore humanity – are not yet fully formed, and gradually progress towards the top where they emerge as full humans with fully realised rights. In other words, this journey follows a narrative of civilisational progress based on the concept of human rights.

Before construction began on the CMHR, advisory committees observed that its design was problematic. While the design competition began in late 2003 and concluded in 2004, construction did not begin until early 2009. As a result, the MCH provided its list of recommendations after the design was selected but before construction started. The committee

²⁵ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 96-101.

²⁶ Predock, "Canadian Museum for Human Rights."

²⁷ Larissa Wodtke suggests that this combination of enlightenment and nature-based metaphors frames Indigenous peoples and land as the less-enlightened objects of a historic past: while the land is an important starting point, it is ultimately something that humanity progresses beyond. Larissa Wodtke, "A Lovely Building for Difficult Knowledge: The Architecture of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37 (2015): 215.

²⁸ Canadian Museum for Human Rights, *Visitor Guide*, 1.

discussed the architectural plan and offers several recommendations in its report, although it also expresses some reservations:

Some respondents placed importance on the building design as an essential component to the museum's overall success...At the same time, some respondents have cautioned against sacrificing content and flexibility for an iconic yet unworkable building design. There was a perception that final decisions have been made with respect to the building design and therefore some expressed concern and criticism that having a site and potential building design already chosen was tantamount to putting the cart before the horse...The disadvantage [to monumental architecture], however, is an unbalanced focus on the building often at the expense of programs and services...Additionally, the Advisory Committee noted that the proposed design does not provide flexibility for easy expansion in the future.²⁹

While the MCH acknowledges that architectural design can play a role in attracting visitors, it also provides several concerns with the architecture. It suggests that Predock's design may be "unworkable" because it does not provide opportunities for the museum to expand or change its gallery space as it evolves or, perhaps, as perceptions of human rights change. The committee also considers that this design may encourage an "unbalanced" focus on the building instead of the content inside. If visitors place more emphasis on the building than content, they may, in effect, use the architectural design as a lens with which to interpret its galleries and exhibits. The MCH does not say that the CMHR's design will reproduce national mythology, although it suggests that its architecture may provide the dominant interpretation of the museum. In other words, visitors may interpret its content – human rights and human history – through the lens of progress.

Indigenous Perspectives

From the outset of this journey, the CMHR reminds visitors of its location on Indigenous land. As a settler state, Canada has a "logic of elimination" whereby it seeks to remove

²⁹ Advisory Committee, *Report to the Minister*, 51.

Indigenous peoples from the landscape, and this logic is preserved in the national psyche as the myth of Indigenous erasure.³⁰ As I note in Chapter V, advisory committees consistently engage with this myth and provide several recommendations for how to challenge it. Curators have implemented many of these recommendations throughout the museum, and visitors learn about the significance of Indigenous land even before entering the galleries. After descending into the main entrance of the museum – and before following the ramp up to the first gallery – visitors enter a large foyer (Buhler Hall). The hall is sparsely arranged with some benches, a maquette of the building, and a few installations on the surrounding walls. One installation entails a bronze cast of a footprint that was preserved on the Forks more than seven centuries ago and was uncovered during archaeological excavations. It is accompanied by a plaque with the title “Ancestral Land”:

The land beneath this museum has always been, and will continue to be, home to Indigenous peoples. This footprint was preserved by water and earth. It connects us to Indigenous ancestors who followed the waterways here, to the centre of the continent, for peacemaking, dialogue and trade. This footprint reminds us that Indigenous peoples continue to be connected to these ancestral lands.³¹

This installation challenges erasure by acknowledging Indigenous peoples and the significance of their relationship to the land. It explains that Indigenous peoples have a long history in Winnipeg and at the Forks – one that precedes Euro-Canadian settlement – and that this history will continue into the present and future. This is not just a place where Indigenous peoples have passed through, but has and continues to be a “home” to many.³²

³⁰ Daniel Francis, *National Dreams: Myth, Memorial, and Canadian History* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997), 12-4, 71-6; Moses, “Protecting Human Rights and Preventing Genocide,” 59; Patrick Wolfe, “Nation and Miscegenation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era,” *Social Analysis* 36 (1994).

³¹ Wall text, *Bonnie and John Buhler Hall*, “Ancestral Land,” Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB.

³² The authorship for this plaque is unclear, and I suspect this can lead to some problematic interpretations. In particular, it does not clearly specify who constitutes “us”: the “us” can presumably refer to any museum visitor – regardless of whether they are Indigenous, a settler, or a visitor from abroad – or even the museum itself. However, the museum resolves some of these ambiguities through its programming, such as the Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour, and clarifies that “us” refers to Indigenous peoples.

The *Indigenous Perspectives* gallery directly engages with themes of indigeneity and land. It follows immediately after the museum's introductory gallery, *What Are Human Rights?*, which broadly explores the concept of human rights over history but never directly answers the question.³³ In this way, visitors encounter *Indigenous Perspectives* early in their journey through the museum, and it provides a framework to consider content in later galleries. It feels unlike any other gallery, and it is certainly the warmest in the museum: it has wooden floors, a window that overlooks the Red River, and access to a terrace where Elders can smudge or conduct other ceremonies. These features resulted from consultations with Elders who felt that the gallery was too sterile and wanted to integrate natural elements.³⁴ The centrepiece of this gallery is a circular theatre that plays a film about human rights from an Indigenous, and primarily Anishinabek, perspective. In this film, several generations of speakers stand outdoors and talk about the rights and responsibilities that emerge from their relationships to the land. Each visitor has a different perspective of the film: the film is projected in a circle around the interior of the theatre, benches likewise position visitors in a circle, and the film represents speakers and scenery from multiple perspectives simultaneously. Unlike the films that play in other galleries – where visitors face in the same direction and watch a flat screen – there is no such universal perspective in *Indigenous Perspectives*. Artwork also contributes to the gallery's atmosphere: there are pieces of

³³ The first gallery asks visitors to consider the definition of “human rights” but never provides a direct answer. Rather, it provides a multiplicity of interpretations. On one wall, the gallery presents a chronology of events from diverse cultural and social contexts that purportedly document human rights over time (for example, the establishment of the Code of Hammurabi, the teachings of Jesus, or the civil rights movement). The opposite wall displays a video where people discuss their own perspectives on and interpretations of human rights. The gallery does however privilege particular (and Eurocentric) interpretations, for example, by including a massive wall panel that proclaims “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” In this way, the *What Are Human Rights?* gallery frames human rights as a set of principles that are diverse and contested but nevertheless universal and inherent to all human beings. In fact, this approach is consistent through the CMHR: *Indigenous Perspectives* presents an Indigenous understanding of human rights; *Protecting Rights in Canada* defines them in terms of the constitution; and *Turning Points for Humanity* focuses on the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and other international law. From the beginning of my journey through the museum, I am never offered a singular or overarching definition of rights but, rather, am asked to participate in the act of interpretation.

³⁴ Karine Duhamel, interview with Jason Chalmers (Winnipeg MB, 26 September 2017).

collaborative work surrounding the outside of the theatre, a seven-metre tall beaded “octopus bag” by Métis artist Jennine Krauchi, and the installation piece *Trace* by Anishinaabekwe artist Rebecca Belmore. *Trace*, which was created with the help of local volunteers, is composed of thousands of fist-sized “beads” that were formed from “raw earth from deep beneath the city of Winnipeg.”³⁵ When presented together, these beads become a massive blanket that drapes down over several gallery levels and “honours the memory of the original inhabitants of the land upon which this museum stands.”³⁶ For visitors who are willing to engage with this gallery, *Indigenous Perspectives* can become a compelling expression of place and lived indigeneity.



Figure 5: *Indigenous Perspectives*, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB. Image courtesy of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, reproduced with permission.

³⁵ Object label, *Indigenous Perspectives*, “Rebecca Belmore,” Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB.

³⁶ Ibid.; Lee-Ann Martin, “Rebecca Belmore’s *Trace*: Hands of Generations Past and Those that Will Come,” 12 March 2014.

Notably absent from the gallery is any discussion of colonial violence. There is little direct commentary on the *Indian Act*, the reserve system, Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop, or other colonial practices and policies implemented by the state. Curators explained that this framing was intentional: *Indigenous Perspectives* focuses exclusively on Indigenous ways of life while other galleries, particularly the following *Canadian Journeys* gallery, deal with forms of colonial violence. The significance of this distinction is clear: Indigenous peoples are a diverse group(s) with complex ways of life that are rooted in their relationship to the land, and they cannot (and should not) be defined by the crimes that settler society has committed against them. Karine Duhamel, the Curator for Indigenous Rights, discussed the rationale for this decision and explained that “you can’t understand the violations if you don’t understand the original rights.”³⁷ *Indigenous Perspectives* explores the definition and meaning of Indigenous rights, which it frames as being “interconnected, reciprocal, and renewing,” and most importantly, land-based.³⁸ That is, it frames Indigenous rights as an interconnected set of principles that emerge from the land and are embedded in land-based ways of life. They are therefore reciprocal in that they entail the right (and responsibility) to land, to live in relation to the land (i.e. to be Indigenous), and sustain the traditions and practices that emerge from land-based ways of life (i.e. they both come from the land and give to it).³⁹ With this foundational knowledge, visitors can proceed to subsequent galleries and learn about violations and how they are “grounded in the idea of the dispossession of land.”⁴⁰ In this way, the *Indigenous Perspectives* gallery resists framing Indigenous peoples through a lens of recognition, that is, it resists viewing indigeneity only in

³⁷ Duhamel, interview.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ In one video clip on the interactive booths, Taiaiake Alfred discusses the reciprocity of “rights” and “rites.” Rites include those practices, ceremonies, and traditions that emerge from the land and sustain land-based ways of life. Indigenous peoples have a right to preserve these ceremonies and a responsibility to perform them.

⁴⁰ Duhamel, interview.

relation to and from the perspective of the Canadian state.⁴¹ The CMHR may function largely within the politics of recognition – for example, how it frames gay rights within the context of (state-recognised) marriage⁴² – but nevertheless frames Indigenous peoples (in this gallery, at least) in their own terms and with their own voices.

While *Indigenous Perspectives* deals exclusively with Indigenous land and ways of life, it is not the only gallery to address these topics. Julia Peristerakis, a curator who helped develop Indigenous content in the museum, explained that *Indigenous Perspectives* is important because it frames Indigenous peoples as agents and explores “the value of Aboriginal rights and concepts that aren’t dictated by the state.”⁴³ However, she also explained that curators did not want to give the impression that “this [*Indigenous Perspectives*] is the Indigenous part of human rights, and...here’s everybody else.”⁴⁴ Rather, they wanted to ensure that Indigenous themes resonate throughout the entire museum and, indeed, the CMHR does have Indigenous content in every gallery. For example, the final gallery, *Inspiring Change*, seeks to engage visitors with both museum content and human rights activism. It encourages visitors to complete cards with phrases on them such as “Inclusion is...,” “I am inspired by...,” or “I will...,” which they can post on a wall with similar cards completed by other visitors. While many cards are deliberately vague, one directly asks what “Reconciliation is...”⁴⁵ Even though it is a simple installation in terms of content, it nevertheless asks visitors to reflect on Indigenous rights, their violations, and how these rights can be restored. Of course, many galleries deal with rights violations, and much

⁴¹ For a discussion of recognition and indigeneity, see Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2014).

⁴² Heather Milne, “Human Rights and/or Market Logic: Neoliberalism, Difficult Knowledge, and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37 (2015): 119.

⁴³ Julia Peristerakis, interview with Jason Chalmers (Winnipeg MB, 27 September 2017).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ During my first visit to the museum, I chose to fill out this card. My statement read “Reconciliation is...returning land.”

of the Indigenous content addresses colonialism and the way settler states have persecuted Indigenous ways of life. But for visitors who do engage with *Indigenous Perspectives* prior to visiting later galleries, curators hope it will provide a useful framework for considering Indigenous experiences and original rights.

The *Indigenous Perspectives* gallery is a powerful expression of Indigenous agency. It feels different from other galleries largely because it is different: not only did its design emerge from consultations with Elders, but it enables Indigenous storytellers to explore Indigenous worldviews using their own voices. As a settler, I feel that this gallery allows me to encounter ideas, perspectives, and worldviews that differ radically from my own. In this respect it is a challenging gallery for me to engage with, and I expect (or hope, at least) that it will be as difficult for other settlers who arrive at the museum with a strictly Western perspective on rights.

Canadian Journeys

After an initial exposition of key themes and ideas in *What Are Human Rights?* and *Indigenous Perspectives*, visitors proceed to a gallery that emphasises the Canadian dimension of the CMHR. A short ramp with a spectacular view separates it from the previous galleries: on one side is a massive concrete slab that peers back into the depths of the museum; on the other side, a towering pane of windows that shows an impressive but thin slice of Winnipeg. Visitors are at the bottom of a chasm where, above, they can see a series of criss-crossing alabaster ramps that will lead them through the museum. From here, they enter the spacious and elaborate *Canadian Journeys* gallery. The core of this gallery is eighteen niches dispersed around its circumference, each of which focuses on an aspect of human rights in Canadian history: some document historical events like the October Crises in Quebec, social and political issues such as migrant

farm workers, movements such as those surrounding same-sex marriage, among other issues. Each niche contains an array of text, images, film, and artefacts that tell a story about the violation or recognition of rights. The gallery has a variety of other media installations for visitors to engage with: a theatre that loops film in seeming perpetuity; digital touch screens that explore human rights stories; an interactive projection that uses body heat to visualise social networks between visitors; and a booth where visitors can record their own human rights story, or watch the stories recorded by others.

Canadian Journeys constructs a narrative of national history, but one that is not necessarily progressive or linear. Upon entry, a panel introduces the gallery and explains that “there have been steps and missteps on the road to greater rights for everyone in Canada. This panorama of experiences reflects continuing efforts to achieve human rights for all.”⁴⁶ The gallery concedes that Canada does not have a perfect human rights record and focuses on the recognition and protection of rights, as well as their violation. However, it frames these “steps and missteps” as part of a larger trajectory “on the road to greater rights for everyone.” In this way, the gallery presents Canadian history and human rights within an overarching – and implicitly progressive – telos. Content within it, however, does not necessarily contribute to this impression. Jodi Giesbrecht, the Manager of Curation and Research, discussed the unifying narrative in *Canadian Journeys*: it “is organised thematically so visitors get snapshots of different issues and different debates, different events, different people. But it’s not organised in a chronological march through time.”⁴⁷ Peristerakis described the gallery as “a patchwork quilt of stories” that together create an impressionistic idea of Canadian history.⁴⁸ It is a collection of

⁴⁶ Wall text, *Canadian Journeys*, “Canadian Journeys,” Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB.

⁴⁷ Jodi Giesbrecht, interview with Jason Chalmers. Winnipeg MB, 26 September 2017.

⁴⁸ Peristerakis, interview.

stories cobbled together in a way that does not necessarily create a sense of temporal or spatial continuity, other than the fact that they are all Canadian and each addresses some aspect of human rights. On the digital touch screens, visitors can choose to explore any of these stories in greater detail or can choose from a selection of other stories not included in the niches. The screens enable visitors to arrange and select from these stories based on “period,” “topic,” or “space” (i.e. where the story is located amongst the niches). It is therefore possible to arrange these stories as a chronology of events, although this is certainly not the only meaningful way to do so. While the gallery clearly identifies “rights for all” as a goal that Canadians and the CMHR strive for, it does not specify how the country’s mixture of failures and successes fits into this teleological ideal. However, the *Canadian Journeys* gallery does develop a national narrative in one direct way: it nurtures a sense of Canada and Canadian identity, and suggests that human rights are central to this national framework.

The gallery frames the violation of Indigenous rights as an important part of Canadian history. Of the eighteen niche exhibits, four deal exclusively with Indigenous rights: “A Nation Reclaimed: Asserting Métis Rights,” “Land and Lifeways: Land Rights in the North,” “From Sorrow to Strength: Aboriginal Women and the Right to Safety and Justice,” and “Childhood Denied: Indian Residential Schools and their Legacy.” In the theatre, a film plays on the history and legacy of Residential Schools, also titled “Childhood Denied.” The niche on Residential Schools features school desks, images of children in class, a quotation from Duncan Campbell Scott about the “Indian problem,” and a brief description of the school system. It reports that “from the 1880s to the 1990s, thousands of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children were torn from their homes and sent to Indian Residential Schools. Canada’s government used these schools, run by Catholic and Protestant churches, to try to assimilate Aboriginal children into the

dominant culture.”⁴⁹ It acknowledges that the Canadian government and churches apologised for the schools, but also asserts that “Aboriginal families continue to be affected by the schools’ legacy and by government policy,” with specific reference to ongoing apprehension by child welfare agencies.⁵⁰ The description is brief and sometimes ambiguous, but also frames the national narrative in several ways. While Residential Schools are an important aspect of Canadian history, the exhibit is vague about precisely who is responsible: the introductory sentence uses the passive voice to declare that Indigenous children “were torn” from their families, but does not say who did the tearing; the following sentence explains that the Canadian government was in some ways responsible, although only by providing a motive for the schools.⁵¹ But it also frames Residential Schools as an ongoing issue. It notes that the school system was in effect for more than a century and, even though it has since ended, it is unresolved and continues to negatively impact many lives. The exhibit furthermore implies that the government continues to apply similar racist policies. The narrative is open-ended and demonstrates that this “misstep” does not exist just in the past but also in the present. The CMHR shows that Residential Schools and the violation of Indigenous rights plays an important role in Canadian history, although it is partly up to visitors to determine how it fits into this narrative.

There is real but limited potential for the *Canadian Journeys* gallery to generate difficult knowledge about national mythology for settlers. It resists Indigenous erasure by centring Indigenous rights within Canadian history. It also avoids imposing a progressive telos on history

⁴⁹ Wall text, *Canadian Journeys*, “Childhood Denied: Indian Residential Schools and their Legacy,” Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ The film on Residential Schools is somewhat more direct. Near the beginning, the narrator says that “for more than one hundred years, over 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children are taken from their homes by the Canadian government.” However, it mitigates state and government responsibility in other ways: it focuses primarily on the testimony of survivors, but not on the actions of perpetrators; and it displaces responsibility onto the churches that operated the schools. Film, *Canadian Journeys*, “Childhood Denied: Indian Residential Schools and their Legacy,” Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB.

by instead framing it as an impressionistic “patchwork” that does not obviously follow a chronology of events. Erica Lehrer points out that the CMHR explores several ways that Indigenous rights were violated but that these cases “are not tied together in the context of the larger processes of nation building in which they are implicated.”⁵² For example, while the museum addresses the theft of land, it does not implicate settler visitors in this process by showing how they benefit from Indigenous dispossession.⁵³ Amber Dean argues that the museum can frame Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) as difficult knowledge if curators use it to implicate the Canadian state in the reproduction of systemic and ongoing colonial violence.⁵⁴ The niche exhibit on MMIWG points out the “disturbing frequency” of violence against Indigenous women and girls, identifies it as a “tragic pattern of violence and indifference,” and acknowledges “bias in the media and the justice system” that perpetuates violence and prevents resolution.⁵⁵ *Canadian Journeys* presents content in a way that enables visitors to construct either difficult or lovely knowledge about Canadian history. While the introductory panel implies that the gallery contains some sort of overarching narrative that links the various niches, films, and exhibits, the content inside does not clearly delineate how these exhibits are linked or what their relationship is to the larger narrative. Visitors can assemble this content in a way that challenges progressive or celebratory narratives – that is, as potentially difficult knowledge – by focusing on the centrality of Indigenous oppression to nation building. As Lehrer and Dean point out, however, visitors can also construct this narrative in a way that does not implicate settlers or the Canadian state in ongoing colonial violence. In short, it is

⁵² Erica Lehrer, “Thinking through the Canadian Museum for Human Rights,” *American Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2015): 1202.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1197.

⁵⁴ Amber Dean, “The CMHR and the Ongoing Crisis of Murdered or Missing Indigenous Women: Do Museums have a Responsibility to Care?” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37 (2015).

⁵⁵ Wall text, *Canadian Journeys*, “From Sorrow to Strength: Aboriginal Women and the Right to Safety and Justice,” Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB.

certainly possible to encounter and interpret this gallery as difficult knowledge, but it is by no means inevitable that such knowledge develops.



Figure 6: “From Sorrow to Strength,” *Canadian Journeys*, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB. Photo by jason chalmers, 2016.

Visitors who approach *Canadian Journeys* with a somewhat critical eye, such as myself, can experience an increasing awareness of difficult knowledge. My initial sense of the gallery – based largely on the introductory panel – was that it reproduced national narratives and settler mythologies. As I explored each exhibit in more depth, however, I began to see opening points that allowed me to create alternative narratives of Canadian history. The only narrative element I could not seem to resist was the gallery’s uncritical assumption of Canada: it problematised celebratory narratives of Canadian history, but never seemed to challenge the underlying fact of Canadian identity. In effect, I found a degree of difficult knowledge in the gallery because I was

looking for it, and while this is encouraging, it means that visitors who seek comforting and lovely narratives might find them just as readily.⁵⁶

A Winding Journey

By the time I leave *Canadian Journeys*, I have a good sense of my path through the museum's narrative of human rights. I arrived here by following a ramp of glowing alabaster, and can see another that will lead to the next gallery. From this vantage, I look up to see many such ramps passing through the gallery space at different angles and heights. Some cut through, others curve around, and some pass by the edges of the mostly open area above me. It is obvious that I will eventually travel along these ramps as I continue my journey, although I have little sense of where they will lead. It will be a winding journey that twists up many levels and passes through many galleries.

As a result, I revisit galleries along the way. One curator suggested that "you encounter things in a different way as you go along."⁵⁷ This is certainly true of content and themes such as Residential Schools, for example, which features exhibits in four separate galleries. But it is also true of space. From one perspective I look up at bridges I will cross; from another, I look down at bridges I have crossed. From *Canadian Journeys* I see a jumble of intersecting paths, but will later look down from these paths with a new view of the gallery. I will repeatedly look back on *Canadian Journeys* and reflect on the stories and themes it presented – only then I will do so in

⁵⁶ In this respect, there is a certain degree of confirmation bias in my encounter and analysis of the CMHR (or in any encounter of the museum). The analysis is based on my experience as a museum visitor, yet my experience as a visitor is informed by my status as a researcher. I do not think that this is problematic, however, and rather see it as a necessary part of research on difficult knowledge, identity and experience, and decolonisation. As I explain in Chapter I, pure objectivity in research is neither possible nor desirable. Moreover, difficult and lovely knowledges are products of subjective experience; I can only speak about difficult and lovely knowledge in relation to a particular person which, in this case, is me.

⁵⁷ Jeremy Maron, interview with Jason Chalmers (Winnipeg MB, 25 September 2017).

light of the stories and ideas I have since encountered along the way. Ideas may return at unexpected times, become a reminder of past experiences, and possibly transform into something altogether different. In this way, the CMHR leads visitors through a dialogue with itself.



Figure 7: Alabaster ramps, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB. Photo by jason chalmers, 2016.

This design – where visitors encounter several perspectives of each gallery as they proceed – is conducive to difficult knowledge. Duhamel explained that “we’re not providing this very top-down, omnipresent narrative of the nation.”⁵⁸ In respect to this intersecting architecture,

⁵⁸ Duhamel, interview.

the museum does not allow visitors to view its galleries from a universal perspective. This is precisely what is required for difficult knowledge: to encounter multiple narratives or perspectives of an event that conflict with and challenge one another. While the MCH warns against an unbalanced focus on architecture to the detriment of content, in this case the building may help illuminate important aspects of its subject matter. In particular, this multi-perspectival approach suggests that gallery content – like the building itself – cannot be viewed from a universal perspective or circumscribed by a singular overarching narrative.

The Garden of Contemplation

A series of serene, reflective spaces structure the rhythm of my journey through the museum. Encounters with difficult knowledge can elicit powerful emotional responses,⁵⁹ and as I observed in Chapter V, the CMHR seeks to create quiet spaces where visitors can work through these kinds of experiences. Such spaces can help visitors engage with difficult knowledge by providing moments to reflect on their experiences and digest some of the more challenging content. On the other hand, some visitors may use these places to escape from potentially difficult encounters with museum content. The museum includes several reflective spaces. For example, galleries are often separated by long, softly lit ramps that provide a contemplative view of the surrounding city and landscape, or inwards of the building's architecture. The ramps offer a respite from content and, eventually, become a familiar environment that gives structure and unity to the visitor's journey. I found that these regularly occurring, reflective spaces allow the

⁵⁹ Deborah P. Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 117-20; Alice Pitt and Deborah Britzman, "Speculations on Qualities of Difficult Knowledge in Teaching and Learning: An Experiment in Psychoanalytic Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16, no. 6 (2003); Aparna Mishra Tarc, "'I Just Have to Tell You': Pedagogical Encounters into the Emotional Terrain of Learning," *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 21, no. 3 (2013).

museum to pause briefly between galleries – and invites visitors also to take a pause from content.

One such space is the *Garden of Contemplation*, which is a brief detour from the main path that joins with the *Protecting Rights in Canada* gallery. The *Garden* comes at a major juncture in the museum: after the galleries that introduce human rights and explore Canadian issues; and immediately before the galleries that deal primarily with the Holocaust, genocide, and other mass atrocities. Visitors may need this moment to pause and collect themselves before proceeding to different, and potentially more challenging, subject matter. When visitors arrive at the *Garden*, they enter a pseudo-natural environment surrounded by columns of basalt rock, lush plants, and pools of reflective water. The *Garden* is situated in the spacious and inviting atrium, accessible to elevators, surrounded by office space, and underneath the glass dome of the architectural “cloud.” There is plenty of sunlight during the daytime and, in fact, it is the first stop along the journey where visitors can see the outdoors through more than a sliver of window. Predock describes how the “space of the Garden functions as a purifying ‘lung,’ reinforcing the fundamental environmental ethic that grounds the building.”⁶⁰ The space provides an environment to pause, relax, and reflect on the first half of the museum before moving onto the remainder, and I used it on several occasions to take notes and develop some preliminary ideas about the CMHR.

While the *Garden of Reflection* is a place for quiet meditation, it also invites controversy into the museum. As discussed in Chapter V, an ongoing controversy surrounding the museum is its relationship with Shoal Lake 40 First Nation.⁶¹ The city of Winnipeg diverts water from Shoal Lake for treatment and subsequent use as its clean drinking water. Not only does the First Nation

⁶⁰ Predock, “Canadian Museum for Human Rights.”

⁶¹ Lehrer, “Thinking through the Canadian Museum for Human Rights,” 1195-7.

community fail to benefit from the appropriation of its resources, but this diversion has contributed to water contamination and placed the community on a boil-water advisory for two decades. Residents of Winnipeg and visitors to the CMHR are complicit in the extraction and appropriation of Indigenous resources, and they benefit in a tangible way from the exploitation of Shoal Lake. In this sense, the water that flows through the *Garden's* reflective pools can be both a symbol of settler colonialism – the way resources flow from Indigenous communities to settler society – as well as a very literal expression of this process. These interpretations are not readily accessible to visitors and, upon my visits to the museum, the *Garden* did not implicate the museum or its visitors in the colonial exploitation of water from Shoal Lake. However, Duhamel told me that staff are working with Shoal Lake 40 First Nation on a project for the *Garden* that acknowledges the source of the museum's water.⁶² The project was still in process during my most recent visit to the museum in September 2017, although curators were engaging with the community in other ways, such as a t-shirt carried by the gift shop that reads “Winnipeg? got water? thank Shoal Lake No. 40.” A particularly effective – and for some scholars, necessary – way to generate difficult knowledge is to implicate people in human rights violations and other acts of injustice.⁶³ A collaborative project that acknowledges the role of Shoal Lake could implicate the CMHR and its visitors in settler colonialism and the ongoing violation of human rights. In this way, the *Garden of Contemplation* may be a space to help visitors work through difficult experiences, but it can also be the source of such difficulties. This type of engagement with potentially difficult knowledge is not inherent to the museum, however,

⁶² Duhamel, interview.

⁶³ Nurit Cohen-Evron, “Students Living within Violent Conflict: Should Art Educators ‘Play it Safe’ or Face ‘Difficult Knowledge’,” *Studies in Art Education* 46, no. 4 (2005); Dean, “The CMHR and the Ongoing Crisis of Murdered or Missing Indigenous Women”; Patricia Ann DeYoung, “Thriving on Difficult Knowledge: Poststructuralist Pedagogy and Relational Psychoanalysis,” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2000).

but is rather contingent upon if and how the museum and its curators invite these controversies into exhibition spaces.



Figure 8: Shoal Lake No. 40 t-shirt, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB. Photo by jason chalmers, 2017.

Examining the Holocaust

The mood changes dramatically as visitors approach and enter *Examining the Holocaust*, which deals primarily with the Nazi genocide of European Jewry and other marginalised groups. Light gets dimmer, windows are absent, and the surroundings shift to black. Walls begin to narrow inward and the entire pathway seems to collapse in on the visitor. The soundtrack

alternates between two conflicting worlds: either the vibrant sounds of bustling shtetl life, or rhythmic marching of the jackboots that stomped it down. The mood inside the gallery remains dim, and panels along the perimeter walls provide a mostly chronological account of the policies and events that led to the Holocaust. These panels divide the road to genocide into three phases: “Abuse of State Power,” during which the “Nazi state dominated every aspect of German society”;⁶⁴ “Persecution,” whereby “the Nazis played on existing prejudices to portray certain groups as threats to the German nation,” with specific mention of Romani, homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and people with disabilities;⁶⁵ and finally “War and Genocide” which entailed “a systematic annihilation of Jews across Europe.”⁶⁶ In the centre of the gallery is a glass-walled theatre that evokes the shards of broken glass that covered the streets of Germany after Kristallnacht.

The theatre plays a film that frames Canadian history through the lens of the Holocaust. The film, called “Canada, Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust,” explores Canada’s history of antisemitism before and during the war, and the way these attitudes were reflected in government policy (i.e. the government’s refusal to accept Jewish refugees). In this way, it has the potential to implicate the state and its citizens – or at least Canadians of the past – in the atrocities that occurred in Europe. As I demonstrated in Chapter III, this history can become lovely knowledge if Canadians view it as part of the nation’s progress towards becoming a civilised society. However, it can become difficult knowledge if it implicates visitors in antisemitism or other forms of racial hatred.⁶⁷ Whether the film becomes difficult or lovely knowledge depends largely

⁶⁴ Wall text, *Examining the Holocaust*, “Abuse of State Power,” Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB.

⁶⁵ Ibid., “Persecution.”

⁶⁶ Ibid., “War and Genocide.”

⁶⁷ Curators can implicate visitors in antisemitism and racism by framing these as contemporary – rather than past – issues. They could then demonstrate ways that Canadians are complicit in ongoing forms of racial inequality.



Figure 9: Ramp to *Examining the Holocaust*, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB. Photo by Jason Chalmers, 2016.

on the visitor's experiences, how they view the world, and how they encounter and interpret museum content. Jeremy Maron, a curator who works with content on genocide and mass atrocities, hopes that the film stimulates difficult encounters by “disabus[ing] a simplistic understanding of history...[and exploring] uncomfortable aspects of our own history.”⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Maron, interview.

However, he also recognises that whether or not content becomes difficult depends partly on the audience. Maron, a scholar who has extensively researched Canadian responses to the Holocaust, said that he was initially surprised when visitors began to express their astonishment after watching the film. Based on these varying responses to the film, he reflected on the personal nature of difficult knowledge: “Everyone has their own lovely knowledge. For myself, that film [“Canada, Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust”] didn’t disrupt anything. But for the visitors who [did not know this history], this is a very uncomfortable thing to think about.”⁶⁹ Discomfort or shock does not necessarily create a difficult encounter or become difficult knowledge, although it has the potential to do so. Rather, these moments of shock become opening points that expose visitors to new ideas, explore their relationship to difficult histories, and possibly consider different perspectives of the world. Whether these moments translate into difficult knowledge depends on the way visitors either assimilate new ideas into their lovely knowledge or allow them to become part of a challenging and transformative encounter.

A series of personal encounters in *Examining the Holocaust* illuminate the varying potential for difficult knowledge. On each visit, I would linger around the gallery to re-read or re-watch the exhibits, take notes, and sometimes watch other visitors as they encountered content. During my first visit to the museum in 2016, I sat in the theatre with two or three other visitors quietly watching “Canada, Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust.” A woman entered the gallery while speaking on her cell phone and telling a long and rather loud story about her trip to Winnipeg. Perhaps because the rest of the gallery was so crowded (*Examining the Holocaust* is one of the smaller, but also busier, galleries), she decided to use the theatre as her own private phone booth. She entered the theatre, took a seat, and continued with her conversation. When I

⁶⁹ Ibid.

realised that the story was far from over, I leaned towards her and said, “I don’t think this is the appropriate place to take a phone call.” She abruptly stood up, left the theatre, and walked to the next gallery without comment. On my following trip to the museum a year later, I witnessed a rather different experience in the gallery. The film played as I wandered around the gallery and read various panels of text. When it ended, the half-dozen people who had been watching the film got up and left the theatre in silence. As a group of them proceeded to the next gallery, I overheard one woman exclaim to another, “I never knew that about Canada!” Canada’s history of antisemitism was apparently new information for her. These episodes exemplify Maron’s contention that difficult knowledge depends largely on one’s personal response to new ideas: while the first woman resisted an encounter with difficult knowledge, the second woman was much more willing to engage with challenging narratives.⁷⁰

Perhaps the most exceptional, though easily overlooked, feature of *Examining the Holocaust* is the way it integrates Indigenous content. Along one side of the theatre are several interactive touch screens that feature an exhibit called “Raphael Lemkin: Defining Genocide.” The exhibit explores the concept of genocide primarily through the unpublished research of Raphael Lemkin, the Polish-Jewish lawyer who developed and defined genocide as a legal category. It describes genocide as “attempts to destroy an entire people” and examines three

⁷⁰ Like Maron, I am familiar with Canada’s history of antisemitism and did not find anything difficult about this film. It was therefore fascinating to witness contrasting responses that differed so much from my own. The woman on her cell phone almost certainly failed to encounter difficult knowledge and, moreover, showed resistance to it: she made no effort to engage with gallery content, and her distracting phone call actively prevented other visitors from engaging with content. In contrast, the woman who expressed surprise at the film was more likely to have a difficult encounter: she watched the film and engaged with it in a meaningful way by making a connection between this history and her own experiences of Canada. Yet difficult knowledge always depends on the way people resolve (or not) new narratives into an existing worldview, and expressing shock at a particular event does not necessarily result in a transformative encounter with difficult knowledge. As Deborah Britzman observes, people can use hope and courage to create a sense of continuity between previous knowledge and new knowledge. This approach enables people to assimilate new ideas into existing dominant narratives, resist the complexities and discontinuities of difficult knowledge, and ultimately reproduce lovely knowledge. Difficult knowledge is often possible – though rarely inevitable – and it is up to museums and visitors to work together to open up spaces that enable people to engage with challenging ideas.

modes of group destruction that emerge from Lemkin's work: "physical methods" of genocide, "biological methods," and "cultural methods."⁷¹ The exhibit uses a comparative framework to show how these genocidal methods materialise in each of five case studies: the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, the Ukrainian Holodomor, the Spanish conquest of the Americas, and the colonisation of Tasmania. So, for example, when visitors select "biological methods," they can see how these methods of destruction were used in each of the five cases. This design is significant because of the way it represents the genocide of Indigenous peoples in colonial contexts. First, it shows that colonialism and Indigenous genocide are central to how Lemkin formulated the idea of genocide. The exhibit furthermore places two instances of Indigenous genocide – the Spanish conquest and Tasmanian genocide – alongside three European examples and suggests that they are all structurally similar: while each occurred in different places and at different times, the modes of destruction were the same. That is, it demonstrates that colonisers used each mode of destruction – cultural, biological, and physical – in their attempts to exterminate Indigenous peoples. In contrast, for example, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) contends that Residential Schools were "cultural genocide," but does not explicitly say that they were physical or biological genocide.⁷² And finally, this exhibit explicitly links colonialism with genocide in its discussion of the Spanish conquest by explaining that Lemkin "found that colonization and genocide are closely linked. He saw that when colonizers take over other lands, they destroy the lives of the people living there."⁷³ The exhibit resists the myth of Indigenous erasure by including Indigenous content but, more importantly, explicitly

⁷¹ Digital text, *Examining the Holocaust*, "Raphael Lemkin: Defining Genocide," Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB.

⁷² Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 1. Also see my discussion in Chapter IV.

⁷³ Digital text, *Examining the Holocaust*, "Raphael Lemkin: Defining Genocide."

shows that settler and colonial states use genocide as a way to facilitate the erasure of Indigenous peoples.

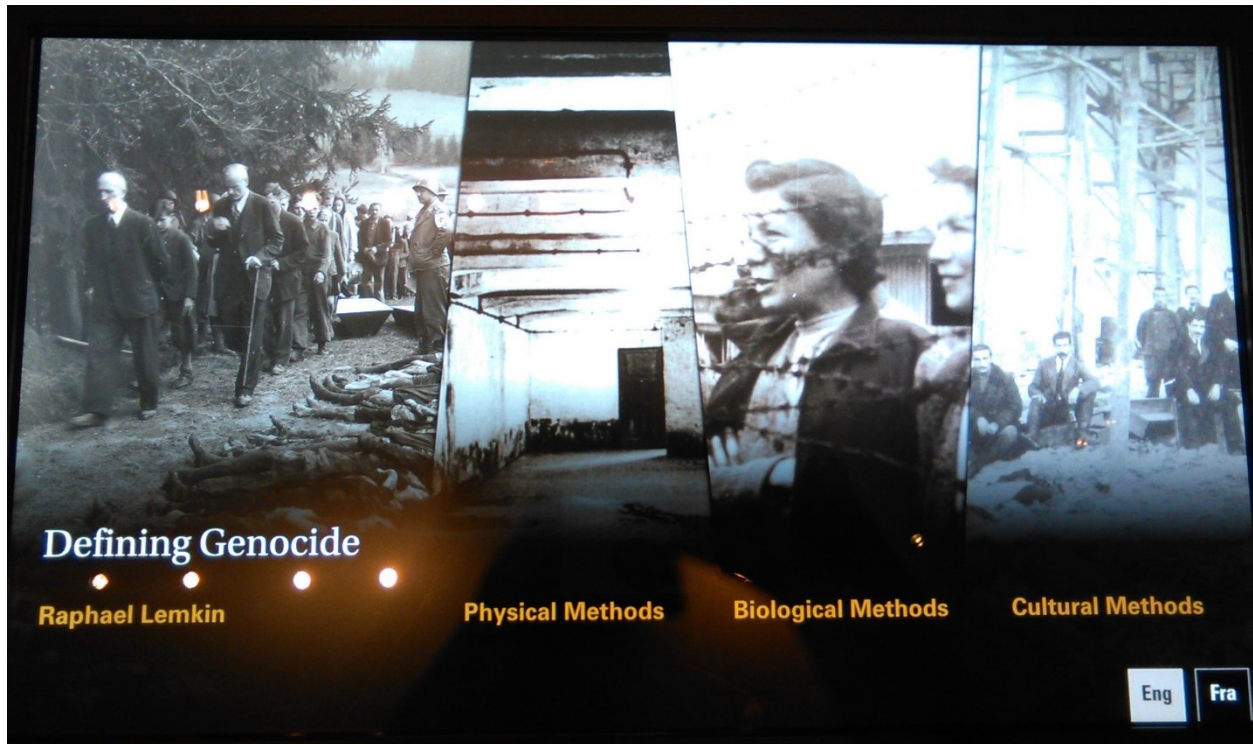


Figure 10: “Defining Genocide,” *Examining the Holocaust*, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB. Photo by Jason Chalmers, 2017.

As an historical gallery, *Examining the Holocaust* has limited potential for difficult knowledge. Britzman explains that difficult knowledge requires “the learner’s attachment to, and implication in, knowledge” because people experience it “as a critique of the self’s coherence.”⁷⁴ The ramp to the gallery removes visitors from the present moment and transports them in time and place to Europe in the 1930s. The gallery implicates past Canadians in the persecution of European Jewry, although this does not necessarily mean that it challenges lovely narratives of

⁷⁴ Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, 117-118.

Canadian history. For example, Canada's history of antisemitism is central to discussion of the National Holocaust Monument but, nevertheless, reproduces the myth of civilisational progress (Chapter III). While *Examining the Holocaust* is an effective historical documentation of the past, it is unclear how this past is implicated in the present – or how it implicates visitors. Yet there are openings for difficult knowledge. In particular, the gallery uses Lemkin's research to situate Indigenous genocide alongside the Holocaust in a way that does not frame either as being unique or of greater significance. Regardless of these limitations and potentials, however, *Examining the Holocaust* is only a precursor to the following galleries that explore the implications of genocide for the present day.

A Prescribed Journey

As I leave *Examining the Holocaust* and proceed through the latter half of the museum, the journey seems less mysterious. Initially, the pathway appeared perplexing and unpredictable as I travelled from one gallery to the next: it weaves through the museum and seems to twist the visitor into a serpentine knot. But despite the twists and turns, it is increasingly easy to predict, and I develop an overall sense of the architectural trajectory. For example, the trajectory is clearly an ascent – away from the earth and towards the sky. As the pathway corkscrews upwards, I pass through the same chasms and gallery spaces several times, but always at a greater height. I only look down on ramps I have already crossed; I never look up at them. And this ascent is paired with a gradual movement into the light. There is minimal exposure to sunlight in the beginning stages of my journey, and slivers of window only occasionally introduce a view of the sky. As my journey continues, I occasionally pass through the massive atrium that provides a panoramic view of the prairie sky. In short, Predock's motif "from

darkness to light” becomes increasingly apparent, and my journey through the architecture feels very much like a process of enlightenment.

Despite how the alabaster ramps meander through and between each gallery, another thing is clear: there is only one route through the museum. Or, at least, there is only one path that visitors are likely to take. Technically, there are many routes through the museum: elevators allow people to skip ramps and jump easily between levels, or visitors can take an elevator to the top of the museum and then proceed down the ramps. But these options are less obvious (it is easier to follow illuminated ramps than seek out partly obscured elevators), and the visitor’s guidebook uses colourful arrows (on a greyscale map) to lead visitors up the ramps from bottom to top.⁷⁵ Furthermore, museum advertising – on its website, in the visitor’s guidebook, and other promotional materials – consistently refers to the “darkness to light” narrative. For example, the website describes the “visitor’s experiential journey [as] an upward one, progressing from ground to sky, darkness to light.”⁷⁶ It further describes one’s “ascent through the Museum...[along] a stunning series of ramps clad in pale alabaster,” while only parenthetically mentioning that “elevators are also available.”⁷⁷ Shortly after the museum’s opening, architectural critic Lisa Landrum observed that Predock’s design creates a clear narrative that can be difficult for visitors to deviate from. She explains that, regardless of the content visitors encounter in each gallery, one’s route through the museum becomes a “choreographed architectural journey” where “a sense of hope prevails.”⁷⁸ There are many possible routes through the museum – and thus, many possible narratives to experience – although one

⁷⁵ Canadian Museum for Human Rights, *Visitor Guide*, 8-20.

⁷⁶ Canadian Museum for Human Rights, “Architecture.”

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Lisa Landrum and Tom Arban, “Difficult Harmonies: An Ambitious Winnipeg Landmark, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights Offers a Choreographed Architectural Journey through the Complex Topic of Human Rights,” *Canadian Architect* 59, no. 11 (2014): 22 and 28.

interpretation of this building dominates over others. The visitor's trip through the CMHR may be a winding journey, but it is also unwavering and linear.

Breaking the Silence

Examining the Holocaust leads into an exhibition space that includes two long galleries. One gallery, *Turning Points for Humanity*, examines the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and subsequent pieces of international human rights legislation. On the other side of a partition is *Breaking the Silence*, which addresses cases of genocide and mass atrocities from around the world and across human history. The content in *Breaking the Silence*, along with *Examining the Holocaust*, has generated substantial controversy for the museum. Minority ethnic groups (particularly Ukrainian-Canadian groups)⁷⁹ feel that the museum privileges the Holocaust as the archetypal genocide while relegating other genocides to a lesser status. The result was an “Oppression Olympics” whereby groups competed for recognition of their respective genocides in the museum, with some seeking recognition as equal to or greater than the Holocaust.⁸⁰ Olena Hankivsky and Rita Dhamoon argue that this creates a “hierarchy of suffering” that reproduces dominant power structures by relying on “the logic of white supremacy and colonialism, and participating in the structure of complicity that legitimates settler colonialism and the

⁷⁹ Karyn Ball and Per Anders Rudling document the history of tensions between the Jewish-Canadian and Ukrainian-Canadian communities. Tensions emerged when the Jewish community opposed the immigration of alleged Ukrainian war criminals to Canada. They were exacerbated because each community had a radically different interpretation of World War II history and, especially, Ukrainian complicity in the Holocaust. In regards to the CMHR, these tensions manifested as a “competitive victimology” whereby Ukrainian-Canadian organisations lobbied for the equal (or greater) recognition of the Ukrainian Holodomor. Karyn Ball and Per Anders Rudling, “The Underbelly of Canadian Multiculturalism: Holocaust Obfuscation and Envy in the Debate about the Canadian Museum for Human Rights,” *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 20, no. 3 (2014).

⁸⁰ Ball and Rudling, “The Underbelly of Canadian Multiculturalism”; Hankivsky and Dhamoon, “Which Genocide Matters the Most?”; 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).

dispossession of Indigenous land.”⁸¹ The gallery space itself is not as dramatic or unique as some of the other galleries, especially in comparison to *Indigenous Perspectives* or *Examining the Holocaust*. It feels as though, rather than create a gallery specifically for the purpose of examining genocide, designers put *Breaking the Silence* in this space simply because it was available. The gallery’s centrepiece is a long table that stretches most of the length of the gallery and is equipped with digital touch screens, which visitors can use to learn about more than a dozen atrocities. Along one length of wall is a series of booths where visitors can select one of several atrocities and hear survivors speak about their experiences. On the opposing wall is a set of six glass cases that focus on those atrocities that the parliament of Canada has formally recognised as genocide. Set into the wall that adjoins *Breaking the Silence* and *Turning Points for Humanity* is a theatre that shows a film, “Covering the Holodomor: Memory Eternal,” which explores the international media’s coverage of the Holodomor.

The table exhibit provides visitors with a comparative framework for understanding genocide and mass atrocities. On the table’s surface is a set of interactive touch screens, each of which displays a map of the world and a timeline that spans from the 16th century to modern day.⁸² Scattered across the map and timeline are more than a dozen points, each of which corresponds to a particular atrocity (the number of items is increasing as curators develop content and add to the exhibit). Some of these points correspond to well-known atrocities already addressed elsewhere, such as the Holocaust and Holodomor, although many correspond to ones that visitors may not have encountered such as the Japanese comfort women system, the Ethiopian Red Terror, and the Mayan genocide in Guatemala. Visitors can select specific cases

⁸¹ Hankivsky and Dhamoon, “Which Genocide Matters the Most?,” 912.

⁸² It is worth noting that this time period overlaps with the era of European colonialism. While the exhibit does not explore the significance of this timeline, it is one location where interpretations can highlight possible connections between colonialism and genocide.

and learn about each one at multiple levels of detail. The exhibit structures each atrocity in a similar way by examining them according to a set of four phases: the “buildup,” or the events and conditions that preceded the atrocity; the “violation,” which entails extreme acts of persecution directed at particular groups; “denial and distortion,” whereby perpetrators try to justify, minimise, or obscure their actions; and finally “breaking the silence,” which occurs when survivors, activists, and courts resist the denial of perpetrators and reveal the severe rights violations.⁸³ In this way, the exhibit frames all atrocities according to a similar model and creates a distinct narrative of genocide: they begin with a confluence of social and historical factors, followed by rights violations and their denial, but are ultimately revealed and achieve some sort of resolution. This narrative provides a simplified and hopeful understanding of violations that may be problematic. It presumes that the truth about mass atrocities and their perpetrators is always exposed, people will acknowledge these crimes for what they are, and that they eventually achieve some kind of resolution. It also presumes that people can easily identify rights violations once the truth is revealed and that it is possible to predict such violations based on the historical conditions. However, this approach avoids creating a hierarchy of atrocities. Like the Lemkin exhibit in *Examining the Holocaust*, the table exhibit suggests that there is a structural similarity between these events by showing that each follows a comparable arc. As a consequence, it neither implies that any one atrocity is more significant or unique than any other, nor does it frame one example (such as the Holocaust) as being the prototype for how we understand the others.

The exhibit represents Residential Schools in a way that resists national mythology. The Canadian myth frames colonisation as an act of “lawful peacemaking” facilitated by the

⁸³ Digital text, *Breaking the Silence*, “Table Exhibit,” Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB.

application of British law, rather than as an act of violent conquest whereby Europeans imposed their own social patterns on Indigenous peoples.⁸⁴ One way to challenge this myth is to show that the settlement of Canada, and especially settlers' actions towards Indigenous peoples, was a violent process. The exhibit includes Residential Schools as one of its atrocities and situates the school system within the same four part structure of “buildup – violation – denial and distortion – breaking the silence.” In this way, it frames Residential Schools as an act of genocide comparable to others such as the Holocaust or Cambodian genocide. The language used in the exhibit frames the schools as violent institutions:

The arrival of Europeans to North America had devastating effects on Indigenous peoples, disrupting traditional ways and countless lives through disease, violence and colonization. The situation worsened in 1883 with the creation of the residential school system. Through coercive and sometimes violent measures, Indigenous children were torn from their communities, culture, land and language, and forcibly sent to government-funded and church-run schools. Many were abused physically, emotionally and sexually. Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people argue that this school system was a form of genocide.⁸⁵

While the exhibit is vague regarding exactly who “tore” children from their homes, “forcibly sent” them to Residential Schools, or abused them – like the Residential Schools exhibit in *Canadian Journeys* –⁸⁶ it clearly shows that violence was deeply embedded in the schools. The exhibit frames colonisation as a process that disrupted culture and lives, describes the schools as “coercive” and “violent” institutions, and explains that both the schools and their colonial context had “devastating effects” on Indigenous peoples. Duhamel explained that curators remediated this text in 2016 to emphasise colonial violence and make the language “a little more

⁸⁴ Francis, *National Dreams*, 29-51; Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 83.

⁸⁵ Digital text, *Breaking the Silence*, “Indian Residential Schools in Canada,” Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB.

⁸⁶ This description similarly uses the passive voice throughout in a way that mitigates Canadian responsibility for Residential Schools.

stronger and direct.”⁸⁷ For example, while the previous text stated that children were removed from their families through “various measures,” the modified text refers to “coercive and sometimes violent measures.” Curators are aware that these exhibits have the potential to challenge dominant narratives and, in some cases, have modified content in a way that does so.



Figure 11: Table Exhibit, *Breaking the Silence*, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB. Photo by Jason Chalmers, 2017.

While the exhibit does not explicitly state that the Residential School system was genocide, it acknowledges that there is a legitimate basis for such arguments. Settler societies tend to see the erasure of Indigenous peoples as the inevitable consequence of civilisational

⁸⁷ Duhamel, interview.

progress. In other words, settler mythologies do not frame the genocide of Indigenous peoples as genocide.⁸⁸ *Breaking the Silence* resists this aspect of national mythology by including several cases for genocide. The text explains that there is a credible and convincing argument for genocide by acknowledging that “many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people argue that the school system was a form of genocide.” The exhibit presents two such arguments in its “breaking the silence” section. One item, titled “Cultural Genocide,” includes a brief description of the TRC and explains that the Commission “concluded that residential schools amounted to cultural genocide.”⁸⁹ The other item displays an article published in the *Toronto Star* titled “A Canadian Genocide in Search of a Name,” by Phil Fontaine, Michael Dan, and Bernie Farber. The article includes the definition of genocide from the United Nations Genocide Convention, which is based largely on the work of Raphael Lemkin, and uses it to contend that Residential Schools constitute genocide. The authors conclude that “Canada engaged in a deliberate policy of attempted genocide against First Nations people” and propose that the “time has come for Canada to formally recognize a sixth genocide, the genocide of its own aboriginal communities.”⁹⁰

A series of six glass cases against one wall of the gallery recognise genocide in a different – and somewhat more problematic – way. The exhibit, called “Canada Speaks Out,” explains that “concerned Canadians have influenced parliament to recognize five mass atrocities as genocides...Through such official recognition, Canada speaks out as a nation. It exposes and condemns horrific crimes that have been hidden, minimized or denied.”⁹¹ Five of the six cases

⁸⁸ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 76-86; Wolfe, “Nation and Miscegenation.”

⁸⁹ Digital text, *Breaking the Silence*, “Indian Residential Schools in Canada.”

⁹⁰ Phil Fontaine, Michael Dan, and Bernie M. Farber, “A Canadian Genocide in Search of a Name,” *Toronto Star*, 19 July 2013; Digital text, *Breaking the Silence*, “Indian Residential Schools in Canada.”

⁹¹ Wall text, *Breaking the Silence*, “Canada Speaks Out,” Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg MB.

each prominently feature a genocide formally recognised by parliament:⁹² the Armenian genocide, the Holodomor, the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and the Srebrenica genocide. Conspicuously, though not surprisingly, absent from the exhibit is discussion of Residential Schools or other ways settlers have persecuted the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island (which the TRC has ruled as genocide). Curators have left the sixth case “deliberately empty” so that it can be “a discussion piece [that] allows for us to engage people in a conversation about genocide” and atrocities that are not recognised by parliament.⁹³ Duhamel suggested that the empty case can provide visitors with an opportunity to discuss the genocide of Indigenous peoples in Canada, and particularly to consider Residential Schools and settler colonialism as markers of genocide.⁹⁴

The “Canada Speaks Out” exhibit is problematic because, in the context of *Breaking the Silence* and surrounding galleries, it can create a hierarchy of atrocities. An integral component of Canadian mythology is a belief in white supremacy, which is made possible by constructing a hierarchy of human and less-than-human persons based largely on race.⁹⁵ In this way, settler colonialism relies on the reproduction of social hierarchies. *Breaking the Silence* has the potential to resist or reproduce such hierarchies. The content *within* each exhibit resists hierarchies by applying the same interpretive framework to each atrocity and giving them equal consideration. This is the case with “Canada Speaks Out,” the table exhibit, or the “Raphael Lemkin: Defining Genocide” exhibit in *Examining the Holocaust*. However, a hierarchy begins to emerge *between* galleries and exhibits. The Holocaust is the only genocide that occupies an

⁹² This exhibit is partly problematic because it frames the Canadian settler state as an authority with the power to declare which atrocities qualify – and are thereby legitimised – as genocide.

⁹³ Duhamel, interview.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Francis, *National Dreams*, 29-87; Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 248.

entire gallery; the five genocides in “Canada Speaks Out” receive official recognition by the state; while the remaining atrocities on interactive touch screens are less prominent and require visitors to actively seek out content. In effect, the Holocaust (a European event) is dominant; the five genocides (four of which are European or Eurasian) have a secondary, though still important, status; and all remaining genocides, including the genocide of Indigenous peoples, are subordinate.

Breaking the Silence has multiple openings for difficult knowledge, although these depend largely on the interpretation of content. The gallery frames genocide in a way that can challenge national mythology, and especially the myths of lawful peacekeeping and Indigenous erasure. In particular, it frames Residential Schools as comparable to other genocides, and includes several arguments that classify it as genocide. The empty case in “Canada Speaks Out” can be an opening point for difficult discussions about Residential Schools, although this interpretation of the exhibit was not clear to me until Duhamel pointed it out. While the gallery risks creating a hierarchy of genocide, this interpretation is by no means inevitable. This suggests that the gallery requires interpretation – either by engaged visitors, or through museum guides – before its content becomes either difficult or lovely knowledge.

The Tower of Hope

My journey through the CMHR concludes in the Tower of Hope. The final set of galleries focus on human rights activism: the youth-oriented *Actions Count* gallery, another called *Rights Today* that addresses contemporary rights struggles, and *Inspiring Change*, which asks visitors to consider (and publicly post) their personal commitments to human rights. After exploring the extreme violation of rights, these galleries are a breath of hope that “spark a

personal commitment to positive social change.”⁹⁶ And the Tower of Hope is the final but potent dose of optimism. As visitors leave *Inspiring Change*, they arrive at the base of the tower – the top of the cloud – and decide whether to take the stairs up or the elevator. I walk up the stairs, which spiral upwards around the edge of the tower. Apart from the steel girders that support it, the tower is mostly transparent: it is enclosed in glass windows, and even the railings that surround the stairs are clear. I feel exposed and dreamy, as though there is nothing between me and the sky, and that I am somehow floating a hundred meters above the ground. And the view from the top is spectacular. The lookout includes benches and gives visitors a 360-degree panoramic view of Winnipeg. There are no exhibits here – no text, no descriptions, no images or artefacts – only a bird’s-eye view of the rolling landscape and the massive prairie sky. It is the end of my journey and the finale to my exploration of human rights. Between the absence of exhibits and the ethereal dreaminess of the view, the Tower creates the feeling that I have somehow transcended human rights struggles and reached a higher plane of being. Reflective spaces such as this are essential to difficult knowledge, as I have argued, because they allow visitors to digest challenging content. Yet, as Britzman warns, an uncritical reliance on hope may ultimately reproduce lovely knowledge.

The Tower of Hope does not just conclude the journey, but also becomes a climax of the “dark to light” narrative. The journey has been winding, with some fascinating and unexpected encounters along the way. But it was apparent from the outset – and increasingly clear as I ascended each ramp – that it was also predetermined and linear. Predock designed the museum as a journey of progress and hope: he explains that “the Tower of Hope is a peaceful beacon for humanity...[that] speaks to the life-affirming hope for positive changes,”⁹⁷ while the CMHR

⁹⁶ Canadian Museum for Human Rights, *Visitor Guide*, 21.

⁹⁷ Predock, “Canadian Museum for Human Rights.”

website describes the tower as “a beacon of enlightenment, the goal of the human rights journey.”⁹⁸ That is, the tower is a guiding light that signals our goals and directs the flow of human history. Moreover, it becomes a symbol of enlightenment: a place where visitors are drenched in light as they complete their emergence from the earth. It is not just a beacon that people see from afar – not just a point of light on the horizon – but a place that visitors actively climb toward and, ultimately, arrive at the end of their journey, reborn as enlightened beings.

While the CMHR consistently frames the visitor’s experience as a journey of enlightenment, this is not the only way to interpret one’s movement through the museum. Larissa Wodtke argues that the museum’s architecture creates “symbolic narratives of hope, enlightenment, and progress” that reproduce dominant historical narratives and “naturalizes Canada’s national mythology.”⁹⁹ She further contends that, because the museum has limited pathways between galleries, it is unlikely that visitors will interpret the museum in a way that disrupts these overarching narratives.¹⁰⁰ However, Wodtke accepts that alternative interpretations are possible and explores how visitors can subvert narratives of progress and hope. For example, she observes:

Despite the relatively prescriptive path of progress toward the Tower of Hope, visitors must eventually descend back to the roots of the building, essentially retracing their steps; notably, visitors do not exit whilst at the pinnacle of hope...In other words, visitors could experience the same place in a different temporal context, perhaps seeing their descent back to the exit as an acknowledgement of the limitations of hope and mastery.¹⁰¹

This descent can challenge progressive narratives by disrupting the linearity of one’s journey through the museum: while visitors move in a line from beginning to end, they must ultimately return to where they started. It further disrupts the sense of hope and enlightenment because, by

⁹⁸ Canadian Museum for Human Rights, “Architecture.”

⁹⁹ Larissa Wodtke, “A Lovely Building for Difficult Knowledge”, 208 and 213.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 222.

taking the elevator back to Buhler Hall, visitors are plunged into darkness as they descend. Wodtke's discussion is a useful illustration of why difficult knowledge is difficult. Lovely knowledge is problematic partly because it provides people with an accessible and pervasive hermeneutic: it is embedded in the way we perceive and interpret the world, but it is also embedded in many of the cultural artefacts that compose the world. The CMHR is one of those artefacts – an extension of lovely knowledge and dominant narratives. Difficult knowledge is therefore difficult because it means deviating from what is lovely, straying from what is obvious, and actively seeking out the pathways that we do not easily see. It is no easy task to resist the mythical patterns that exist around and within us, though it is possible with effort and guidance.

The Potential of Programming

Visitors to the CMHR are not passive recipients of knowledge but, rather, agents who actively explore, engage with, and interpret museum content. Curators pointed out that many exhibits and galleries lack interpretation and that some ideas, such as genocide, appear differently as visitors move through the museum. Giesbrecht explained that visitors encounter the concept of genocide via multiple “entry points”: for example, one exhibit enters the concept of genocide by focusing on its origins, another through its definition, and others through various cases, responses, and forms of resistance. By approaching genocide from a variety of different perspectives, visitors are able to make connections between events that happened in different times and places: “We hope that visitors are looking at the assets, and the images, and the text as presented there, and making those connections...It's a process of visitor discovery. We're hoping that they take the knowledge from [one exhibit] and apply it to the other stories that they

encounter in the museum.”¹⁰² In this way, the museum places a great deal of responsibility on visitors to make sense of the content they encounter.

This means that visitors may not find the content they are looking for or interpret it as curators intended. During my earlier trips through the museum, I tended to focus on the film and wall panels in *Examining the Holocaust* but overlooked the “Raphael Lemkin: Defining Genocide” exhibit. Peristerakis later told me that curators had included Indigenous content in each gallery, and I asked where to find it in *Examining the Holocaust*; she explained that it was part of the Lemkin exhibit. She reflected on the significance of this sort of missed encounter: “It’s so easy to miss things...I think we’re still trying to decide if that’s on us, or if that’s with people not giving themselves enough time, or maybe with some preconceptions about what we’ve done and missing all that other work we’ve done.”¹⁰³ Visitors can miss content for many reasons – exhibit design, lack of time, preconceptions about the museum – although with some guidance they can find what they are looking for and, perhaps, encounter content that they would not have found otherwise.

Guided tours and other programming can aid visitors in interpretation and provide them with opportunities to engage with difficult knowledge. Whether exhibits become lovely or difficult knowledge depends on the way curators frame content and visitors interpret it, but not necessarily on the content itself. Many visitors may prefer to go through the museum unaccompanied, interpret content on their own, and encounter either difficult or lovely knowledge in their own way – depending on which they hope to find. However, this is not the only way to encounter museum spaces. Duhamel suggested that tourism and programming has a

¹⁰² Giesbrecht, interview.

¹⁰³ Peristerakis, interview.

special potential to generate difficult knowledge because interpreters can help convey difficult ideas to specific audiences:

I think the best opportunity that we have for [difficult knowledge] is probably through our programming. That's where that kind of stuff tends to come through, whether it's an MMIWG event, whether it's a Bentwood Box ceremony event, which we have had, whether it's a theatre production, which we've hosted that too. This space can become a vehicle for talking about these difficult knowledges. But it's much easier to do it from a programming perspective than it is in gallery.¹⁰⁴

For example, she pointed out that tour guides can help illustrate the relationship between *Indigenous Perspectives* (which focuses on original rights) and *Canadian Journeys* (which focuses on the violation of those rights) because it is “a complicated narrative and people don't always make that connection.”¹⁰⁵ Programming creates a balance between visitors and curators that does not impose authoritative interpretations of museum content, nor does it require visitors to interpret content on their own. Rather, it opens up a dialogue between content, interpretive guides, and visitors. For example, guides can provide an interpretation of exhibits that visitors might not have otherwise considered, and visitors can consider, engage with, and respond to these ideas; alternately, visitors can present their interpretations while guides and other visitors respond. Skilled guides can work within their particular groups to gently but deliberately lead visitors towards challenging perspectives of human rights and Canadian history.

The CMHR offers several forms of programming that can facilitate this sort of dialogue. On some days, the museum may host public lectures or film screenings that address human rights issues, as well as theatrical productions or musical performances. It also features regular workshops where visitors can participate in a variety of activities such as Cree or Métis beading, Haudenosaunee games, Japanese origami, or learning to write Braille. The most regular forms of

¹⁰⁴ Duhamel, interview.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

programming at the museum are guided tours: visitors can take a guided tour through the galleries, download a self-guided tour to their phones, or participate in one of several content-specific tours, such as those that focus on the building's architecture or Métis rights. These tours do not specifically seek to generate difficult knowledge about Canadian history, for example, although they do create the sort of interpretive spaces that enable it to emerge.

Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour

The Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour is one of the most unique programs that the CMHR offers.¹⁰⁶ It is a regularly occurring tour that usually runs three times a week during non-peak visiting hours (evenings and weekends). Elders Circle Seven, a group of Elders from local Anishinabek, Cree, and Dakota nations, developed the tour as a way to share Indigenous teachings and worldviews with visitors. The Elders selected and trained guides specifically for the Spirit Tour and offered the tour to the museum as a gift. In it, guides share the Seven Sacred Teachings and the teachings of Grandmother Turtle with visitors, and they encourage participants “to think about human rights in new ways by showing the way in which First Nations teachings call on each of us to take responsibility for how we live and treat each other.”¹⁰⁷ The tour provides a distinctly Indigenous perspective on human rights and the CMHR by “exploring how the symbolism in the building's architecture profoundly relates” to these teachings.¹⁰⁸ Guides point out that aspects of the museum's architecture resemble the physical

¹⁰⁶ What I can share about this tour is limited. The Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour is an exercise in Indigenous self-determination that draws on distinctly Indigenous teachings. These are not my teachings to share. However, it is also a public tour that the museum promotes on its website and in printed materials. I draw on these materials, rather than what is shared during the tour itself, in my discussion. I hope this enables me to speak about the tour in a way that does not infringe upon Indigenous self-determination.

¹⁰⁷ Canadian Museum for Human Rights, *Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour* (Winnipeg: Canadian Museum for Human Rights, n.d.), 6.

¹⁰⁸ Canadian Museum for Human Rights, “Elders Partner with Museum to Launch Mikinak-Keya (The Spirit Tour),” 10 December 2014.

attributes of certain animals, for example, how the “exterior glass and tower can be seen to symbolize the wings and vision of an eagle” or that “patterns in the basalt stone bear a striking resemblance to the back of a turtle.”¹⁰⁹ Each of these animals, in turn, represents one of the Seven Sacred Teachings. For example, the buffalo represents respect and teaches humans to “give, serve, share, and honour all forms of life,” while the beaver represents wisdom and teaches us to “use your gift to serve humanity and build a peaceful world.”¹¹⁰ The Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour situates human rights within a network of relationships between humans, animals, museum spaces, and Indigenous teachings: it uses the museum to demonstrate that the human and animal worlds are intimately interconnected, and that the Seven Sacred Teachings can help maintain good relationships between these worlds and with one another.

The tour transforms the concept of human rights by framing the museum from an Indigenous perspective. On one hand, the Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour decentres the idea of “humanity.” The CMHR generally frames human rights as an inherent set of qualities that humans possess as either individuals or groups.¹¹¹ The Spirit Tour, in contrast, focuses on the animal world and other-than-human persons, and it demonstrates that humans can learn by observing the way animals build relationships within their environments. From this perspective, rights are not something that emerge from within human beings, but are rather qualities that we can observe in and learn from other-than-human persons. On the other hand, the tour also decentres the notion of “rights.” The museum often frames human rights as distinct things that belong to people. However, the tour focuses on building healthy relationships between humans and other-than-human persons, and suggests that the key to healthy relationships is acting in a

¹⁰⁹ Canadian Museum for Human Rights, *Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour*, 7.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹¹ The *What Are Human Rights?* gallery, for example, includes a massive panel that reads “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

respectful way towards one another. That is, the tour does not focus on the rights of individuals (which we are entitled to receive) but rather on the responsibilities between people (which we are expected to give). In sum, the Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour decentres both the notion of *human* rights as well as human *rights*, and it interprets the museum in a way that differs from traditional Western perspectives. Instead, the Spirit Tour interprets and transforms human rights in a way that perhaps translates as “other-than-human responsibilities” or “building respectful relationships.”

During the tour, guides re-interpret the museum in a way that can generate difficult knowledge, especially for visitors who are settlers. Difficult encounters occur when one worldview interferes with another: when the dominant (lovely) way of perceiving the world is disrupted by an alternative or subversive (difficult) worldview. These encounters may transform the way people perceive themselves, the world they live in, and the relationships between them.¹¹² The Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour has the potential to interfere with and transform dominant Canadian worldviews in several ways. First, it can disrupt national mythology by challenging the myth of Indigenous erasure. The tour frames Indigenous peoples as contemporary and vibrant agents, but more importantly, transforms the museum into a space where Indigenous people exercise that agency. But, by transforming the CMHR, it also disrupts dominant narratives about human rights and other museum content. The dominant approach to human rights is rooted in a European worldview that sees rights as anthropocentric, individualistic, and essential. The Spirit Tour, in contrast, uses an Indigenous worldview to frame human rights within a context of land-based relationality. Visitors who take this tour may

¹¹² Britzman, *Lost Subjects*, 117-20.

therefore encounter difficult knowledge about Canada history, human rights, as well as their relationship with other-than-human worlds.

However, encounters with difficult knowledge are personal experiences, and each person will engage with it in a different way. For me, the Spirit Tour did not necessarily challenge my sense of national mythology or human rights, but rather my perception of the museum itself. Before the tour, I was quite skeptical of the CMHR because I viewed it as a statist institution and, therefore, as an expression of settler colonialism. It is easy to see the museum in this way because it is a national museum where the Canadian state has played a significant role in shaping its design, contents, and interpretation. During the tour, however, Indigenous Elders and guides resist colonial narratives, assert Indigenous self-determination, and ultimately transform the museum into something else: an Indigenous space with Indigenous meanings. I was shocked by the malleability of the museum and its meanings, as well as the ostensible ease with which guides transformed gallery space. In other words, the Spirit Tour was a difficult encounter for me, not necessarily because of the ideas it shared, but because it revealed the potential to transform the museum into something radically different, even if only briefly. Previously, I saw the museum as a fixed structure of concrete and steel, and presumed that its meanings were similarly fixed; during the tour, those meanings began to deteriorate and enabled me to see the CMHR as a radically different, and temporarily decolonised, place.

The key to this shift in meaning was the voices who speak at the CMHR. At national museums, the state can easily assume an authoritative voice that frames the museum, interprets its content, and determines how visitors will interact with its galleries and exhibits.¹¹³ In Canada,

¹¹³ Avner Segall, "Making Difficult History Public: The Pedagogy of Remembering and Forgetting in Tow Washington DC Museums," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 36 (2014); Amy Sodaro, "Politics of the Past: Remembering the Rwandan Genocide at the Kigali Memorial Centre," in *Curating Difficult*

or in any settler colonial context, this can lead to a museum that reproduces dominant national narratives and settler colonial mythologies. During the Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour, the state's voice recedes while Indigenous Elders and guides come to the forefront and interpret the museum in their own way. It was when these voices changed that the museum and its meanings were transformed.

Interpretive Openings in Contested Spaces

The CMHR is a contested site where multiple meanings, perspectives, and historical narratives engage in dialogue with each other. On one hand, it is a state institution that aims to publicly promote and protect human rights, with a particular focus on Canada's role in this process. On the other hand, it is a place where many groups compete for recognition and inclusion: Ukrainian and Jewish communities compete for recognition of their respective genocides; Shoal Lake 40 First Nation publicly criticises the museum for its complicity in rights violations; settler society imposes its own narratives on Indigenous land while Indigenous groups try to reclaim authority over museum spaces. Curators, activists, media outlets, local and national interest groups, and visitors all converge upon the museum in a way that generates not just one but many different interpretations of human rights, settler colonialism, and Canadian history and identity. In other words, while the museum itself does play some role in knowledge production, it is perhaps more appropriate to view it as a site where knowledge production emerges from a multivocal dialogue. This knowledge is neither intrinsically lovely nor difficult, but rather contains the potential to become either or both.

My experience and analysis of the CMHR demonstrate that it is a site of difficult knowledge. On the surface, it appears to be a site of lovely knowledge that reproduces problematic aspects of national history and mythology; indeed, my initial impression of the museum was that it is a site of lovely knowledge that reproduces dominant narratives. But my encounters with the building and its galleries, engagement with its core content, and interviews with museum staff revealed interpretive openings that allowed difficult knowledge to emerge. This was especially the case with the Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour, during which the tour guide not only challenged dominant narratives of Canadian history but also dominant readings of the museum. My perception of the museum itself – what it means and represents – was transformed in a way that may be described as an encounter with difficult knowledge. There are, however, limitations to this potential. An encounter with difficult knowledge is always a personal process and people do not find difficult knowledge in the same experiences. My experience of difficult knowledge was not immediate but, rather, the outcome of ongoing and directed effort to find interpretive fissures in museum content. Visitors are more likely to encounter difficult knowledge when they put time and effort into their visit and actively engage with content in an intentional way. Visitors who passively encounter museum content are less likely to discover new interpretations of human rights or Canadian history. Yet there are some concrete factors that shape visitors' experiences of the museum.

The museum's architecture is, perhaps, the greatest hindrance to generating difficult knowledge about national mythology. Predock designed the building so that it leads visitors on "a journey from darkness to light," and the museum's promotional materials reinscribe this narrative. This design is problematic because it reproduces several core aspects of Canada's national myth. From the outside, the museum appears to be a geological occurrence that emerges

from the land and, as such, indigenises settler society. Inside, it guides visitors through a linear and progressive journey that mirrors the myth of civilisational progress. Visitors have few opportunities to interrupt this narrative. The museum's architect and promotional materials explicitly and directly interpret architecture in a way that does not allow visitors to participate in the interpretive process. Visitors who explore the museum without the intent to challenge its narrative will likely encounter it as lovely knowledge, and even those who do try to disrupt this narrative may find it to be especially challenging. Of course, this does not mean it is impossible to resist narratives of enlightenment and civilisational progress – only that it will be difficult for most visitors, and may be especially challenging for those who do not have an experienced guide to aid them in the process.

In contrast to its architecture, content throughout the CMHR's galleries and exhibits often encourages visitors to engage with difficult knowledge and resist national mythology. Curators have framed much of the museum's content in a way that allows visitors to be actively involved in the interpretive process. Many of the museum's exhibits provide information about past and contemporary events, although they do so in a way that requires visitors to engage with this content and arrive at their own conclusions. For example, curators do not provide an exclusive definition of genocide or clearly state which atrocities qualify as genocides. Instead, they provide multiple perspectives on the subject by exploring the origins of genocide, national and international responses to various genocides, and by applying comparative frameworks to different atrocities, some of which are recognised as genocide and some of which are not. Likewise, the museum never clearly says whether Residential Schools constitute an act of genocide, but rather explains various positions on the issue and provides several arguments that frame Residential Schools as genocide. Moreover, curators have included a series of interpretive

openings throughout the museum where visitors can explore challenging ideas and, potentially, engage with difficult knowledge. In the “Canada Speaks Out” exhibit, for example, the empty case invites visitors to consider atrocities that have not received official recognition by the state or within the museum. While the *Garden of Contemplation* is primarily a site of reflection and relaxation, it will also become a place that invites visitors to critically reflect on their complicity in settler colonialism and the exploitation of Indigenous resources. And curators regularly invite visitors to consider the role of Indigenous land at the Forks and across Canada. These interpretive openings have a potential to disrupt Canadian mythology by encouraging visitors to consider and resist some of its core themes such as Indigenous erasure, lawful peacemaking, or white supremacy. In this sense, the CMHR’s approach to national mythology and difficult knowledge is quite different than the TRC’s (Chapter IV). The TRC constructs an alternative narrative of Canadian history that is unified and coherent, and then relays this pre-assembled narrative through its final report. This narrative challenges dominant narratives and myths and, in this way, generates potentially difficult knowledge. The CMHR, in contrast, does not present visitors with an alternative narrative of history but rather encourages them to construct their own.

The voices at the museum play an important role in constructing historical narratives and determining whether visitors will encounter difficult or lovely knowledge. When the settler state is the dominant voice, it will likely frame the museum and its content in a way that emphasises Canadian values and reproduces national mythology. State voices emerge regularly throughout the museum, such as in “Canada Speaks Out,” which legitimises certain atrocities while silencing others (notably, Indigenous genocide). When other voices emerge, however, they can provide different and potentially conflicting interpretations of content in a way that unsettles national mythology. Of particular importance are Indigenous voices. The erasure of Indigenous

peoples is a core feature of Canada's national myth, and resistance to this myth must be achieved through Indigenous presence. The inclusion of Indigenous (and other non-state) voices must not be an act of recognition – it is not, for example, a matter of including some state-sanctioned exhibits on Indigenous history. Rather, the state must relinquish control over the museum and its meanings while empowering Indigenous people to speak with authority and self-determination. Those parts of the museum that I found most challenging as a settler entailed expressions of indigeneity: the *Indigenous Perspectives* gallery and the Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour. During these encounters, I was encouraged to consider national history and myth, human rights, and the museum itself from a radically different perspective. One way to achieve this sort of transformative encounter is through tourism and programming. While many of the museum's exhibits are more or less permanent – much like the building itself – their meanings remain fluid. Guided tours can enable a diversity of voices to emerge within the CMHR, but they can also create dynamic spaces wherein visitors, guides, and content enter into conversations with one another and find new meanings and interpretations. These sort of spaces – spaces of dialogue, diversity, and reinterpretation – have the potential to become sites of difficult knowledge where visitors can produce new or challenging narratives of history and memory.

Chapter VII

Conclusion: Sites of Struggle

In this dissertation, I explore the way Canadians engage with national mythology at sites of public memory. It focuses on three distinct sites that together comprise a memorial network: the National Holocaust Monument (NHM); the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC); and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR). For this study, I consider how each site frames the history and memory of genocide as either difficult or/and lovely knowledge. My analysis has several purposes. First, it seeks to understand how people construct historical narratives at memorial sites. In addition, it explores the relationship between national mythology, memory, and settler colonialism. In particular, this study considers how memory functions as an aspect of settler colonialism and, especially, how Canadians use memorial sites to reinscribe settler mythologies, identities, and relationships. Finally, it shows how the same memories can become sites of resistance that destabilise settler colonialism.

The CMHR, TRC, and NHM are ideal case studies because they embody several themes central to my dissertation. First, each is a *national* site of history or memory. The NHM is a national memorial established by an Act of Parliament, the TRC is a court-enforced commission intended to examine Canadian history, and the CMHR is a national museum governed by the *Museums Act*. As such, they can shed light on the structures and practices of Canadian identity, history, memory, and myth. Second, each site addresses the history and memory of genocide, in whole or in part, and specifically the Holocaust or Residential Schools. Genocide is central to Canadian history and identity in several ways: the genocide of Indigenous peoples was/is a crucial part of nation-building and development of the settler state; many settlers, including my own family, came to Canada because of genocides that happened elsewhere; and the history,

memory, and denial of genocide is a core part of national mythology. It is possible to gain a better understanding of national identity in Canada by examining the way memory is structured around the concept of genocide. Third, these sites engage with histories that have the potential to generate difficult knowledge. Deborah Britzman suggests that histories of violence, and especially genocide, are likely to facilitate transformative encounters with difficult knowledge.¹ A comparison of these cases can therefore demonstrate effective – and ineffective – ways of representing violent histories as difficult knowledge. Fourth, they are sites of contested memory. Memorial struggles, as I argue in the introduction, are a structural feature of both settler colonialism and Canadian society. Moreover, contested sites are also sites of resistance, that is, places where marginalised narratives subvert dominant ones. The NHM, TRC, and CMHR are places where people compete over the interpretation and significance of historical events and, in particular, put two distinct narratives of Canadian history into opposition with one another. A study of these sites can help to understand both settler colonialism and ways of disrupting it. In sum, these sites engage with similar aspects of history and memory, although they do so in different ways. A comparative study of the CMHR, TRC, and NHM can provide insight to the role of myth and memory in Canadian society.

Memorial networks reveal a great deal about settler colonialism. Theorists argue that the study of networks, rather than individual sites, can illuminate the larger set of power relations in which memorial struggles occur. For example, it is possible to view museums as “networked spaces” that comprise a multiplicity of geographic, discursive, technological, and other sites.² This perspective can help to frame memory as a product of power relations, understand the larger

¹ Deborah P. Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 117-20.

² Nadine Blumer, “Expanding Museum Spaces: Networks of Difficult Knowledge at and beyond the Canadian Museum for Human Rights,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37 (2015), 128.

contexts in which memory occurs, and reveal alternative ways of representing museum content.³ In particular, memorial competitions are shaped by colonial contexts. When interest groups compete for recognition of their respective histories, these groups reproduce the sort of hierarchies that sustain oppressive power relations such as patriarchy and white supremacy.⁴ That is, memory – and especially the struggle over memory – is produced within a much larger matrix of power; in settler states such as Canada, then, memory is embedded within a network of colonial practices, places, relationships, and identities. This network of sites and power relations is part of the “colonial mesh.”⁵ According to this concept, settler colonialism is a complex network of sites that operate at multiple levels: cultural and social institutions at the macro level; smaller bureaucratic institutions and organisations at the meso level; and individuals and local communities at the micro level. Among other things, the colonial mesh can include: cultural myths and national narratives; museums, monuments, commissions, policies, pedagogical practices; as well as the people who create these, and the people who encounter them. In short, memorial networks and colonial mesh are overlapping systems that, to some degree, constitute one another. To study a network of memorial sites is to feel the textures, contours, and architecture of the colonial netting.

Genocide Commemoration and Difficult Knowledge

The NHM, TRC, and CMHR bring memorial struggles into plain view and, in doing so, create an environment where people can disrupt (or reinscribe) settler mythology. My main

³ Blumer, “Expanding Museum Spaces.”

⁴ 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* 46, no. 4 (2013).

⁵ Andrew Woolford, “Discipline, Territory, and the Colonial Mesh: Indigenous Boarding Schools in the United States and Canada,” in *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, eds. Andrew Woolford, Jeff Benvenuto, and Alexander Laban Hinton (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014).

research question asks how sites of genocide memory reproduce or resist settler mythology in Canada. I argue that they are points of rupture that force Canadians to confront national mythology and struggles over the interpretation of history and memory. Myth and memory are structural elements that continually shape the contours of Canadian society. Yet they are also uneven across space and time: they may be more tangible at some moments and places, and less so at others. National sites – especially those that address the history and memory of genocide – are fault lines that allow these structures to emerge into public life. Not only does myth and memory become highly salient at these locations, but so do the struggles surrounding their interpretation, meaning, and significance. People are forced to confront these struggles and, moreover, are required to respond. It is the way that people respond to this flow of memory that determines whether it will reproduce or resist national mythology.

This response can be framed in terms of difficult and lovely knowledge. My main research question, when rephrased in the introduction, focuses on specific techniques of resistance: Do the NHM, TRC, and CMHR generate difficult knowledge or lovely knowledge about national mythology? This is a more challenging question to answer because, as I have demonstrated, each of these sites do both: the NHM reproduces many themes central to the national myth, although critics of the monument also use it to draw attention to Indigenous dispossession; and while the TRC and CMHR both disrupt dominant national narratives in some respects, they also reproduce themes such as civilisational progress or lawful peacemaking. Indeed, difficult knowledge does not submit to positivist analysis: it is possible to consider which sites have the potential to stimulate a difficult encounter, although it is virtually impossible to classify a particular event, narrative, or memory as difficult knowledge with certainty.

I contend, therefore, that these sites have the potential to generate both difficult and lovely knowledges. To be sure, all knowledge has the potential to be difficult and lovely: whether knowledge becomes difficult or lovely depends on the people who engage with it and how they do so. It is also worth emphasising that Indigenous histories, narratives, and perspectives are especially likely to generate difficult knowledge about Canadian mythology, although they are by no means intrinsically difficult. That is, Indigenous knowledge is likely to be difficult for settlers – largely because settler mythology is rooted in the presumed erasure of Indigenous peoples – but may not be difficult for Indigenous peoples. On one hand, there are the people involved in the creation and development of these sites. Politicians established the NHM to celebrate the settlement of Jewish refugees, as well as other European migrants, on North America/Turtle Island. In other words, the monument commemorates settler histories and is the product of settler society, so it is unremarkable that the memorial reproduces lovely knowledge about the national myth. People involved with the TRC and CMHR, however, seek to provide Canadians with a critical view of national history, and often do so from an Indigenous perspective. The TRC's final report draws extensively on the experiences of Residential School survivors and, in fact, is the product of decades of Indigenous activism. Similarly, advisory committees and staff at the CMHR strive to include Indigenous peoples in both museum content and at all levels of its operation, which they achieve in part by offering guided tours such as the Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour. It is not surprising that these sites can generate difficult knowledge about settler mythology.

On the other hand, there are the people who encounter and experience these sites. Encounters with difficult knowledge are shaped by a variety of subjective factors, including a person's identity and prior experiences, willingness to engage with new ideas, and ability (or

inability) to integrate these ideas into an existing worldview. This is why, in Chapter VI, I gave an example of what a difficult encounter might look like. I walked through the CMHR multiple times in search of difficult and lovely knowledges, and only participated in the Spirit Tour towards the end of my visit to the museum. I was therefore caught off-guard by the tour, and it was some time afterwards – after digesting and reflecting on my experiences at the museum – that I began to understand it as a difficult encounter. But this encounter could not be expected, is not necessarily difficult for others, and cannot be measured. Difficult knowledge cannot be separated from the people who create and experience it. Furthermore, it is important to consider those risks involved in the presentations and production of difficult knowledge, especially when used to disrupt colonial identities and worldviews. In particular, certain content (i.e. histories of colonial violence) may be difficult for settlers, but not necessarily for Indigenous people: it can in fact be harmful and traumatising in unproductive ways for Indigenous viewers. When using difficult knowledge to disrupt oppressive relations, curators and educators must therefore be aware of the effect of knowledge on different audiences and take precautions not to reinscribe unequal power relations.

While difficult knowledge is by no means inevitable, curators, designers, and commissioners can nevertheless increase the likelihood that people will encounter it at sites of history and memory. This dissertation therefore explores the particular techniques through which difficult knowledge operates. Based on my analysis, I identify two distinct ways of generating difficult knowledge: by promoting subversive counter-narratives; and by providing people with uninterpreted, or partially interpreted, narratives of national history. This study demonstrates that the TRC and CMHR have potential to generate difficult knowledge about the national myth, although they do so in very different ways. In its final report, the TRC introduces readers to an

alternative narrative of Canadian history that is coherent and unified. This narrative can disrupt dominant interpretations of history and, when placed in opposition to dominant narratives, has the potential to disrupt existing worldviews and subvert national mythology. This approach is useful because it requires minimal interpretive work: readers can engage with an existing narrative and use it to challenge, and possibly replace, dominant ones. The risk, however, is that people may reject the entire narrative if they find it too difficult or object to one or more of its basic premises. The CMHR, in contrast, provides visitors with a substantial amount of information about Canadian history but also expects them to interpret this content. This approach requires more effort from visitors because it asks them to engage with museum content, critically reflect upon it, and then interpret it in a meaningful way; only then can visitors construct new interpretations of history and use these to resist dominant narratives and myths. This approach is risky because it means that visitors, especially those who do not take the effort to critically explore museum content, are just as likely to produce lovely knowledge as difficult knowledge. It may be especially effective, however, because it enables visitors to view history from their own unique perspectives and construct memory in a way that is personally meaningful – a process that is crucial for difficult encounters. That is, people may be more invested in history when they are personally involved in its interpretation and the creation of memorial narratives.

National Identity and Decolonising Methodologies

The TRC, CMHR, and NHM are productive sites that both embody and generate Canadian identity. This dissertation explores the role that memorial sites play, and memorial struggles more broadly, in the production of identity. These sites, I argue, cultivate identity by enabling people to engage with, re-enact, and institutionalise national myth and memory. The

introduction theorises the structure of settler societies and the power dynamics of memory in Canada – particularly competition between memories of the Holocaust and Indigenous genocide – and posits that national society is composed of and sustained by struggles over history and memory. I now suggest that memorial sites are places where these struggles erupt into public awareness and demand a response. So in one sense, these sites institutionalise struggles over history and memory: memory is embedded in policies and reports, debates and public controversies, educational materials and curated content, as well as physical architecture and monumental space. Yet people also re-enact memory at these sites, either in a way that reproduces and affirms the supremacy of national myths and dominant narratives, or in a way that resists the supremacy of certain myths. In other words, they are performative sites where people engage with national myth and, thereby, assert or resist Canadian (or settler, or Indigenous, etc.) identity. Yet they are also contested sites where identities, memories, histories, and myths are perpetually changing.

Through the ongoing production and negotiation of identity, they can also become places of resistance. One of my goals in this dissertation is to understand how commemoration can unsettle national mythology and destabilise settler colonialism. I contend that memorial sites can help disrupt settler colonialism by transforming identities. To briefly summarise the relationship between myth, memory, and identity: national mythology is an interpretive lens and ideological basis for Canadian society; it shapes the way people interpret historical events and, therefore, construct memory; the performance and practice of memory becomes the basis for individual and collective identities; people assert their identities by re-enacting and reproducing mythology; and all of these processes coalesce to provide the structural basis for settler colonialism. In this way, the CMHR, TRC, and NHM are performative sites: identities exist only so long as the

performance continues and, the moment it stops, they begin to dissolve. One way to resist settler colonialism, then, is to interrupt the performance of settler identities. This can be a laborious process, since identities are embedded in a massive and interconnected network of practices, institutional sites, bureaucratic organisations, cultural narratives, and more. This is both a detriment and an advantage: on one hand, people must disrupt the entire system in order to resist a single identity; on the other hand, people can undermine the entire system, or at least send shockwaves through it, simply by disrupting identity. One way to disrupt national identity and resist settler colonialism, I suggest, is to challenge national mythology at places such as the NHM, CMHR, and TRC.

The theory of difficult knowledge can be a useful tool for decolonising museums, monuments, and other sites of history and memory. Methodologies are theoretical frameworks that people use to determine what information can be known, which information is meaningful, how knowledge is transmitted between people, and how knowledge can be acquired and analysed.⁶ Decolonising methodologies are those frameworks that provide a critical perspective of knowledge systems with the intent to challenge and disrupt colonialism, Eurocentrism, and other forms of domination. The theory of difficult knowledge can help to critique the power dynamics involved in memory production and, therefore, has the potential to function as a decolonising methodology. First, while developed as a pedagogical and psychoanalytic framework, the theory of difficult knowledge also operates as a methodology in that it identifies which information is meaningful (i.e. narrative interpretations of history, events, situations, etc.) and how this information is transmitted and processed (i.e. through traumatic encounters with alternative or suppressed narratives). Second, the primary goal of the theory and practice of

⁶ Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 76.

difficult knowledge (and, indeed, the purpose of all education according to it) is to disrupt dominant worldviews and transform individual and collective identities. Specifically, difficult knowledge operates by disrupting *dominant* narratives and, for many of the scholars who use it, can work to destabilise oppressive structures such as patriarchy, white supremacy, and settler colonialism. As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, the theory of difficult knowledge is a useful tool for the study of memorial sites because it exposes ideologies that are usually invisible or unconscious. In particular, I demonstrated how the CMHR and TRC use difficult knowledge to illuminate – and in some ways resist – settler mythology. Scholars, curators, educators, politicians, commissioners, architects, and other people who publicly engage with history and memory can use practices of difficult knowledge to challenge the national myth – that is, by giving voice to suppressed histories, memories, or narratives and enabling these to undermine dominant cultural narratives.

Indigenous self-determination is a crucial part of the decolonising process in Canada and other settler societies. In each case study, I demonstrated that one of the best ways to generate difficult knowledge about Canadian history and national mythology is to engage with Indigenous peoples and perspectives. For example, I encountered difficult knowledge at the CMHR when confronted with the Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour, which disrupted both my perception of human rights and the museum itself. Critics of the NHM engage with potentially difficult knowledge by inviting discussion of Indigenous peoples and land; the TRC generates difficult knowledge by providing Indigenous interpretations of Canadian history; and the CMHR resists the myth of Indigenous erasure by including Indigenous peoples as agents within the museum. Indeed, I argued that the CMHR is most likely to facilitate difficult encounters when it enables Indigenous people to speak in their own voices, such as in the *Indigenous Perspectives* gallery or the

Mikinak-Keya Spirit Tour. By involving Indigenous peoples as agents, these facets of the museum not only resist the myth of Indigenous erasure but also transform settler interpretations of human rights. To be clear, Indigenous narratives are not inherently difficult, since difficult knowledge depends principally on the people who encounter it and what they deem to be lovely knowledge. They are, however, especially effective at resisting Canadian mythology and settler colonialism, since these are so deeply rooted in the erasure of Indigenous voices. It is noteworthy, then, that these sites only allow for Indigenous self-determination in a limited way: the TRC is governed by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, which places significant restrictions on the conclusions it can reach; and curators, researchers, and guides at the CMHR always operate within the confines of a national museum, which is governed in part by state law. Unsurprisingly, then, they also have a limited potential for difficult knowledge.

Memorial Struggles in Settler Societies

Holocaust memory has the potential to silence histories of Indigenous genocide, although this is by no means inevitable and may reflect the interests of the settler state. For my case studies, I specifically selected the NHM, TRC, and CMHR because they address the history and memory of either the Holocaust or Residential Schools. In the introduction, I reviewed scholarship on memorial struggles in settler societies, and especially on the interaction between memories of Indigenous genocide and the Holocaust. While some scholars suggest that the Holocaust is a screen memory or “conceptual blockage” that eclipses the visibility of Indigenous genocide,⁷ others focus on the way “multidirectional memory” creates a productive and mutually illuminating dialogue between the Holocaust, Indigenous genocide, and other histories of

⁷ A. Dirk Moses, “Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the ‘Racial Century’: Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 36, no. 4 (2002).

violence.⁸ So what does my study reveal about the interaction between memories of the Holocaust and Indigenous genocide? The NHM and TRC are useful cases because, for the most part, they do not explicitly situate their subject matter within a comparative or multidirectional framework. Proponents of the NHM rarely engage with other histories of violence. Supporters occasionally address histories of Indigenous genocide and colonial violence, although they usually do so in a way that asterisks – and thereby marginalises – Indigenous peoples. A few critics use Holocaust memory to draw attention to issues related to Indigenous peoples and land, although these cases are rare and exceptional. Ultimately, I argued that proponents of the NHM instrumentalise Holocaust memory in a way that erases histories of colonial violence and legitimises the theft of Indigenous land. That is, they do not engage in multidirectional or relational dialogue with other histories of violence – and especially violence against Indigenous peoples and land – but rather use the Holocaust to silence these histories. In sum, Holocaust memory can and does contribute to the marginalisation of Indigenous peoples, the reproduction of settler colonialism, and the perpetuation of Indigenous genocide. However, this says more about the way political functionaries use Holocaust memory to promote state interests than it does about Holocaust memory per se – it is unsurprising that the settler state uses Holocaust memory to justify its own existence.

The TRC, on the other hand, shows that Holocaust memory does not necessarily influence all discussions of Indigenous genocide. The Holocaust is a dominant global narrative that shapes both national memory and the way people conceptualise other histories of violence around much of the world.⁹ The national public in settler societies such as Canada and Australia

⁸ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 12-6.

⁹ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, trans. Assenka Oksiloff

view the Holocaust as the prototypical or paradigmatic case of genocide and, therefore, use it as the basis for classifying and legitimising other mass atrocities.¹⁰ While the TRC draws extensively on the concept of genocide, it does not appear to do so in a way that is influenced by the history or memory of the Holocaust. The commission distinguishes between different modes of genocide (physical, biological, and cultural), frames genocide as a complex and multidimensional process of collective destruction, and argues that state oppression of Indigenous peoples constitutes an act of “cultural genocide.” Interestingly, it does not rely substantially on the United Nations’ – and therefore legal – definitions of genocide. The TRC’s emphasis on cultural, rather than physical, destruction suggests that it does not invoke popular definitions of genocide that are influenced by Holocaust memory. Moreover, the TRC does not draw on the history and memory of the Holocaust or rely on comparisons with it. That is, it is fully possible to discuss genocide in depth and at length – and specifically the genocide of Indigenous peoples – in a way that is not directly shaped by the legacy of the Holocaust. Most notable, then, is that it is possible to legitimise Indigenous experiences of colonial violence without invoking – in either a competitive or multidirectional way – the language of or comparisons to the Holocaust.

The CMHR, in contrast to the NHM and TRC, practices multidirectional memory by situating the Holocaust and Indigenous genocide in relation to one another. In concept, the museum frames genocide in a way that reinscribes the Holocaust’s privileged and paradigmatic status: creators initially conceived of the CMHR as a Holocaust museum; advisory committees

(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); David B. MacDonald, *Identity Politics in the Age of Genocide: The Holocaust and Historical Representation* (London: Routledge, 2008).

¹⁰ Tony Barta, “After the Holocaust: Consciousness of Genocide in Australia,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 31, no. 1 (1985); Rowan Savage, “The Political Uses of Death-As-Finality in Genocide Denial: The Stolen Generations and the Holocaust,” *Borderlands* 12, no. 1 (2013); Tricia Logan, “Memory, Erasure, and National Myth,” in *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, eds. Andrew Woolford, Jeff Benvenuto, and Alexander Laban Hinton (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014).

recommend that the Holocaust should play a central role in museum content; and it includes an entire gallery devoted almost exclusively to the Holocaust. Indeed, exhibits such as “Canada Speaks Out” use state recognition to legitimise certain genocides (i.e. the Holocaust and four others) while implicitly delegitimising – or at least marginalising – other atrocities. In practice, however, the CMHR often uses multidirectional memory to examine the Holocaust and other histories of violence. Despite the museum’s noted limitations, curators try to situate the Holocaust, Indigenous genocide, and other atrocities within a relational framework, and they are often successful in doing so. The Raphael Lemkin exhibit in *Examining the Holocaust* and the table exhibit in *Breaking the Silence*, for example, apply the same conceptual framework to both the Holocaust and Residential Schools, as well as the Spanish conquest of the Americas, the colonisation of Tasmania, and other genocides. These exhibits situate multiple atrocities within a non-hierarchical framework that can reveal similar structural processes and, thereby, legitimise both histories.

Holocaust memory is not necessarily a conceptual blockage that marginalises Indigenous suffering under colonialism – but neither does it necessarily encourage multidirectional dialogue between histories of injustice. When studying memorial struggles in settler colonial contexts, it is important to consider that memories are not all equal: some memories, such as the Holocaust, are pervasive cultural narratives that influence the way people interpret history; other memories, such as Residential Schools or other cases of Indigenous genocide, are suppressed within the national mythos. This power differential impacts the type of dialogue that emerges between memories. In cases such as the NHM, it enables state actors to marginalise Indigenous peoples and lands while reproducing dominant social structures, namely, settler colonialism. At places like the CMHR, however, people can use these memories both to elucidate one another as well as

critique Canadian history. Multidirectional memory, like difficult knowledge, depends largely on the people who are involved in commemorative practices and the interpretation of history. It is therefore crucial to approach histories of genocide in an informed and intentional way, and to put forward the effort to understand the nuanced similarities and differences between diverse histories of injustice. Genocide memory in Canada is deeply rooted in settler colonialism and is often a tool that the settler state uses to reproduce its core mythology. Yet these memories, when approached in the right way, can also become a radical impulse that works to unravel this myth and bring about its transformation.

To conclude my observations, it is worthwhile to stress that history and memory are parts of an ongoing dialogue that involves a multiplicity of sites and intersecting narratives. As I observed in the introduction, Canadian society is embroiled with controversy over the meaning and significance of historical events: while Senator Lynn Beyak defends the Residential Schools system as “remarkable works [and] good deeds,”¹¹ others denounce the system as a program of cultural genocide.¹² This sort of controversy, while especially salient in respect to the history and legacy of Residential Schools, surrounds other memorial sites and historical narratives. Through my analysis, I examined the way memorial sites come to embody these struggles, that is, how they simultaneously represent multiple histories and the conflicts between them. In this way, history and memory *are* struggle – each memorial site cannot be separated from the controversies that surround it. To put it in terms of the controversy surrounding Residential Schools, Canadian memory is a product of neither Beyak’s narrative of Residential Schools nor the TRC’s alternative interpretation; it is, rather, a product of the struggle between these two (as

¹¹ Canada, *Debates of the Senate*, 7 March 2017 (Hon. Lynn Beyak), 2514.

¹² Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the TRC* (Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 57.

well as other) competing narratives. From this perspective, the study of memory and myth entails the exploration of complex and dynamic networks: networks that include many sites, the different narratives each produces, how these work together to reproduce certain ideas, and how they conflict to challenge other ideas. The meaning of history does not so much reside in the particular events that happened, nor in the narratives that people construct around them, but rather in the struggles we engage in concerning how to interpret the historical past within the present moment.

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