The Canadian Museum of History and Nation Building: Shaping History and Identity

Umbrin Bukan, York University, umbrin@yorku.ca

Working Paper Presented at the 2021 ASN World Convention, 5-8 May 2021
Do not cite without the permission of the author.

Introduction

Modern public museums have been pivotal social institutions of modernity and are embedded within the modern nation state; they have historically played a significant and constitutive role in the nation building project. This paper critically examines the Canadian Museum of History and its role in the shaping of Canadian history and identity. It argues that although the museum is generally perceived as neutral or objective in its presentation of history it disseminates a particular understanding of what Canada and being Canadian means through multiple processes and practices, ultimately advancing the nation building project.

To examine this topic the first part of this paper analyzes the ways in which the Canadian Museum of History extends and assembles the nation through its shaping of history and identity. Having the primary responsibility of teaching Canadians about Canada by representing significant events, peoples, and objects that have shaped Canadian history and identity, the museum narrates the nation by what and how it remembers and forgets. Through an examination of the changes to the museum and its mandate under the Harper Government, this paper illustrates that the national history presented in the museum is guided by the existing and continuing conceptions of national identity as articulated by the state and its nation building project. The second part of this paper explores the making and unmaking of the national subject in the museum through its systems of inclusion and exclusion by examining the narrative of Multiculturalism in the museum, which this paper argues is primarily grounded in Anglo Canadian Identity.

Assembling the nation

National museums are essential cultural institutions that have largely been understood to be significant sites of meaning making and identity formation; they are places for states to educate and produce their citizens, and to give them the structures and meanings of national identity. As public institutions of modernity, they are organized and designed around the tenets of rationality, undeniable scientific proof, and systems of order (Bennet, 1995, p. 19). Their grand narratives are embedded in notions of linear and evolutionary history, institutions, and state-making (Aronsson, 2011, p. 31). While the concept of 'national museums', as Aronsson notes, is part of the cultural process being invariably challenged and defined by historical actors (Aronsson, 2008, p. 7), they constantly have significant space in the context of the nation state. They are trusted cultural institutions that hold authority as the repositories of arts and artifacts that belong to and represent the nation, and are further regarded as authorities of knowledge, education, preservation, and inspiration. In the case of Canada this authority is further grounded by the declaration of the Museums Act, which states that Canada's national museums, play "an essential role…in preserving and promoting the heritage of Canada and all its peoples throughout Canada and abroad and in contributing to the collective memory and sense of identity of all Canadians", and that they are "a source of inspiration, research, learning and entertainment that belongs to all Canadians and provides, in both official languages, a service that is essential to

Canadian culture and available to all" (1990, c.3). Emphasizing them as an essential service to Canadians that is enacted by law legitimizes the importance of national museums for Canadian society.

National museums, furthermore, are spaces where the intangible beliefs regarding the unique qualities of the nation are translated into a tangible and material presence (Mason, 2004, p. 18). They provide the stage for the performance of the myths of nationhood; the imaginations of its visitors are surrounded by things that make their imagination more believable through seemingly objective things and methods (Knell, 2011, p. 4). This stage of performance where the story of the nation is presented gives the nation's members not only a national story of celebration, but more importantly instructions for locating themselves within that story (Mason, 2004, pp. 18-19).

National history museums, in particular, hold such authoritative and affective positions. History itself is a discipline that is utilized for defining nations, which in turn has impressions on the conceptions held by the nation's peoples. National history museums are seen as the holders of the nation's heritage, memory, and traditions and are largely understood and accepted by all as the authority on history, particularly official versions of history and their relation to the nation's development. They are also viewed as a place that tells the tales of the nation's accomplishments and its exceptionalism (Trofanenko, 2010, pp. 270-271). They take on the role and responsibility of telling the story of the nation's past tangibly through material and visual narratives, thereby reifying the nation.

Taking on such enormous responsibility is compelling considering history is not value-free; there is never any one version of history that is told. Furthermore, like all disciplines there is a wide range of methods and approaches to history. The varied responses on the definition of political history from four distinguished historians who reviewed the Canadian Hall in the Canadian Museum of History in 1999, is a clear example of such diverse perspectives. One reviewer defined it as a history of interesting personalities, characterized by heroic acts and unfortunate events, another described it as a tracing of institutions that guide and unify civil society, the state, and public affairs, another as a recognition of politics as a part of everyday Canadians' lives, another did not define it explicitly (Dean and Rider, 2005, p. 39).

Overcoming such competing historiographies and histories presents a number of challenges for museum actors when constructing narratives and exhibitions. Such challenges, however, draw attention to the idea that museums tell and display particular versions of history. The national history that is presented in museums is part of the nation building project that works to distinguish the nation and speak of its destiny. Stories of the past and the nation's inheritance provide a means to claiming and securing identity positions. Identity claims are granted authority and legitimacy through the invocation of tradition by such established cultural institutions (Mason, 2004, p. 18). The nation's history that is presented in national history museums is selective in this regard, certain peoples and events are harkened upon. These selected events and peoples are usually centred around dramatic incidents and are used to symbolize and reassert a cohesive and singular national identity that is concrete. Physical objects accompanied by lengthy descriptions and stories that explain and tell what, how, and why happened serve as evidence, giving museums the authority and legitimacy of being the storytellers of the nation's past (Trofanenko, 2010, p. 277).

National history museums, then, assemble nations through the shaping of history and identity. Through their multiple practices of remembering and forgetting, inclusion and exclusion, selecting and so on they tell a past that fosters the building of the nation. Their roles

go beyond simply validating a nation's history, they contribute to the construction and maintenance of the nation state's histories and subjectivities.

The Canadian Museum of History and its Mandate

The Canadian Museum of History stands in Gatineau, Quebec, just across from the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, Ontario. Its beginnings date back to the Geological Survey of Canada in the mid-nineteenth century, which eventually led to the founding of the National Museum of Canada in 1927 which was dedicated to anthropology and natural history. In 1951 amongst calls from political representatives for greater recognition of Canadian culture and the building up of Canadian identity internationally, the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences recommended the creation of a national history museum, prompting the government to add history to the National Museum's mandate. In 1982 under Pierre Trudeau's Liberal government the museum was split into the Museum of Nature which remained in its existing building in Ottawa, and the Museum of Man, which came to be the museum that stands now. The Museum of Man opened its doors to the public in 1989 under a new name, the Canadian Museum of Civilization (Dean and Rider, 2005, p. 36). In 2012, Stephen Harper's Conservative government announced a new project that included renovating the Canadian Museum of Civilization as well as renaming it once more as the Canadian Museum of History (Aronczyk and Brady, 2015, p. 2). At this time, the museum also adopted its current mandate which reads as follows:

> The purpose of the Canadian Museum of History is to enhance Canadian's knowledge, understanding and appreciation of events, experiences, people and objects that reflect and have shaped Canada's history and identity, and also to enhance their awareness of world history and cultures (2013, c. 38, s.2).

Speaking primarily to Canadians, the museum defines its role as an enhancer of knowledge and information about Canada, Canadianness, and the world through its mandate. Such a definition reflects the paternalistic approach to history telling the museum takes in its effort to narrate the nation, while framing its responsibilities to Canadian society as neutral. It states, for example, the reason for the museum is that it works to 'enhance', what Canadians already know of Canada, what it means to be Canadian, and the world. To 'enhance' means "to improve the quality, amount, or strength of something" (enhance, n.d.). The wording suggests that as a national public institution and recognized authority on national history and heritage, the museum presents objective information from the nation's past to its citizens who already know of the "events, experiences, people and objects that reflect and have shaped Canada's history and identity". This presentation allows citizens to better understand and appreciate what they already know of Canadian history through supporting tangible objects, related events, narratives, and so on. In this vein, the museum appears to be simply presenting legitimizing material of historical events for its visitors. The events, experiences, people and objects that are presented, however, are selections from the past serving a grand narrative. The museum plays a specific part in creating and constructing this particular narrative. Rather than simply adding to what Canadians already know, it in fact imparts this narrative from a position of authority.

This position of authority makes what it teaches important, even essential. The events, experiences, people and objects that are displayed in the halls of the museum tell its visitors what is more important, and what is the 'real' or 'true' history of Canada. To 'enhance' after all also means "to improve the…value of something" (enhance, n.d.), and dating to the late thirteenth century, the word originating from Anglo-French *anhaunsen* and *enhauncer* signifies "to raise,

make higher" and "to make greater, make higher or louder; raise in esteem", and from Late Latin *inaltare* "raise, exalt" (enhance b, n.d.). In this regard, the value of what is displayed is improved and made sacrosanct by the museum. Choosing certain objects, people, places, and events reinforces and increases their importance and promotes their cultural and historical value because they are selected in the first place; what is displayed was important enough to be displayed. The museum's interpretation of history is deemed more valuable, that it is to say it is worth more, culturally, politically, and economically – especially once translated socially.

The authoritative reins lie in the hands of the museum then. The "knowledge", "understanding", "appreciation", and "awareness" that it works to enhance, are formulated by the very "events", "experiences", "people", "objects", and "world history and cultures" the museum singles out as the markers of Canadian history and identity. This selective process further includes systems of remembering and forgetting.

Remembering and Forgetting

As Anthony Smith noted, the role the past plays is crucial to the creation of the present in the construction of the nation and national identities. Continuity with the past, shared cultural bonds, and ethnic identities shape the nation and generate notions of collectivity and beliefs of distinctiveness (Smith, 1999). Remembrance "of a communal, collective past is of key importance for both the making and perpetuation of national identities" (Canefe, 2004, p. 77); it is woven into the narratives of the present. Ernest Renan illuminated forgetting as equally crucial for the nation and its identity. Forgetting alternative stories, deeds of violence, and things that can divide the nation or identities, he noted, are the essence of a nation as much as individuals having things in common. The common possession of a rich legacy of memories with such an amnesia, for him, constitute the soul of the nation (Renan, 1882).

This remembering and forgetting along with the production, reproduction, circulation and transformation of collective stories they entail, serves as the cultural memory of the nation and as a meaning making mechanism. Collective memory is not an unchanging family heirloom that is passed down from generation to generation. It is rather a selective process, where archive is turned into memory based on relevance. Things that may have been forgotten may later become relevant, and vice versa. Vital to this process of memory is mediation, which allows memory to become collective (Rigney, 2018, pp. 242-243).

National history museums are a key medium of national memory, serving as sites of remembrance. Being deeply intertwined with the collective memories of nations, museum arrangements represent the social memories of the "imagined communities" that Benedict Anderson spoke of. They condense and categorize history and experience, and construct and tell national narratives and official histories which conventionally highlight the prestige and glories of the past (Zolberg, 1996, pp. 76-79). Schlereth argues that notions of history in museums are not progressive, rather, much like in textbooks due to nationalist agendas histories in them become about winners, with certain narratives even leading to the skewing of dates of warfare and politics (Schlereth, 2004, p. 336). Further, the museum institution accompanied by art history, turns objects in their holdings, such as portraits and statues, into certain molds, excluding other meanings and turning them into cultural triumphs. Works of art become evidence of individual genius mediated by national spirit. Each object in a museum is labelled with attention, outlining the artists, dates, nationalities, etc. Histories become idealized as histories of high

culture, which define the nation's cultural heritage as unique (Duncan and Wallach, 2004, p. 463).

Memory is a malleable phenomenon then, and history gets replaced by it. In addition, the distilled history in museums is laid out in a poetic space where the freedom of performance writes history, leading to the replacement of history by memory and imagination (Knell, 2011, p. 11). This memory in turn becomes the official history of the nation state. National history museums, like the Canadian Museum of History, operate within and embody such processes of remembering and forgetting. For example, when the museum proposes to build on the existing "knowledge, understanding, and experience" of national history that Canadians have, there are already given experiences, events, and narratives in the past that, much like Renan alluded to, visitors come to the museum already having forgotten as part of a contemporary civic duty (Anderson, 1983, p. 200).

Certain "events, experiences, people and objects" are recalled, emphasized, or forgotten from the past by the museum, supporting a particular vision and narrative of the nation and promoting an unquestioned patriotism (Trofanenko, 2010, p. 271). The museum's mandate says that these selected moments in history "reflect…Canada's history and identity"; 'reflect' here seems to imply a mirroring back where what is seen in the museum is in the likeness or image of what in the past depicts Canada. However, to 'reflect' also implies a deflecting or absorbing of historical events, experiences, people, and objects, by the museum which serves as the medium, suggesting either a deviation from course, or soaking up of memory, where the museum either becomes a diverter of history, or becomes a vessel that takes in the history deemed noteworthy. Reflection here advocates more than deep thought; it begs the question as to the implications for such a role on the part of the medium. Even a mirroring back, after all, appears skewed much like one's image in moving water. Rather than the presentation of things from the past "that reflect and have shaped Canada's history and identity", the museum through its reflection shapes Canada's history and identity.

This shaping, as Rigney states, includes the intertwining of current issues with narratives of the past (Rigney, 2018, p. 242). The state influences which history and what kind of history is narrated for the public. The most recent renovation of the museum under the Conservative Harper government, which will be examined next, clearly illustrates this entanglement of state and museum.

The Canadian Museum of History and the Harper Government

When the Conservative Party came to power in 2006, it introduced a number of policies and utilized several cultural institutions in an effort to put forth its vision of the Canadian nation. The Harper government made deliberate and arguably aggressive efforts to reshape and re-present public symbols and representations of Canadian history and identity (Abu-Laban, 2014, p. 215) in militaristic and monarchic terms (Aronczyk and Brady, 2015). For example, it released a new $20 bill in 2012 that replaced the Aboriginal artist Bill Reid's sculpture, *Spirit of Haida Gwaii*, with an image of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial which, as the Bank of Canada explains, is "a tribute to Canada's contributions and sacrifices in military conflicts throughout its history" (Bank of Canada, n.d.). The year of 2012 also marked the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812, which the Harper government took as an opportunity to reframe as a key moment in Canadian history and as a pillar of Canadian identity. At a time of austerity, the anniversary was allocated $28 million for re-enactments, a special exhibition at the War Museum, websites, a

visit by Prince Charles to Ottawa, and much more (Aronczyk and Brady, 2015, p. 166). It also introduced a new citizenship guide, *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship,* in 2009. The new version of the guide included much more military history and information and references to the monarchy than the previous one. Riddled with historical gaps and with limited information on indigenous issues such as residential schools, the guide was criticized by many as outlining an "exceptionally narrow, conservative view of Canadian politics and society" (Jones and Perry, 2011).

While there were several such sites for this re-presenting and re-framing of Canadian history and the national narrative, perhaps the most significant one took place in the Canadian Museum of Civilization. The museum was a key space for the Harper government to convey and implement its national vision. To begin with, it was the largest and most popular museum in the country with 1.3 million visitors annually (Aronczyk and Brady, 2015, p. 166). In addition, national history museums are a medium that present citizens who want to learn and know more about the nation's past with a unitary, cohesive, and succinct story of the nation and its history. They usually reduce national history to certain incidents and events that are concrete and easily grasped symbols of the nation (Trofanenko, 2010, p. 277). They are public institutions that are not only accessible to citizens in a very real way, but they also simultaneously act as places for holidaying, pleasure, family trips, or as places of "education, study and enjoyment" as the International Community of Museums would say (ICOM Statutes, art. 3, para. 1).

In October of 2012 the Harper government announced it would be renovating and renaming the museum. It became the Canadian Museum of History, and with its transformation came its new, much more narrowed mandate, as well as a move in the focus and narrative of the museum from social history to political history (Abu-Laban, 2014, p. 216). The changes included the renovation of over 50,000 square-feet of area into a permanent new Canadian History exhibit which would tell the story of Canada's past. The changes to the museum were set to be unveiled at the same time as the 150th anniversary of Confederation.

As Aronczyk and Brady show at the onset of the project, the new museum was to reflect the Harper government's conception of Canadian culture as grounded in monarchism and militarism. While campaigns appeared around the museum which seemed to include consultations with indigenous and other marginalized peoples as well as participation by the public in the shaping of the museum and national narrative, the conservative vision was already being implemented before such consultations and participation began. Harper's cabinet had already appointed the former director general of the War Museum as the President and CEO of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and staff from the War Museum had already been transferred to the museum in 2011. Further, the museum was working around Canadian Heritage minister James Moore's vision of a united history that moved forward and was not fraught with cleavages such as Anglophone-Francophone, indigenous-nonindigenous, and East-West. There was little space for competing narratives or agendas in the reconstructions (Aronczyk and Brady, 2015). Harper's national narrative had little room for indigenous peoples and racialized minorities as well as Quebecoirs (Abu-Laban, 2014, p. 217).

As many national museums do, the Canadian Museum of History provided a space for "essentialized notions to be performed and given more legitimacy" (Knell, 2011, p. 12). While a museum works in its own right as an institution, the entanglement of the museum and the state in this project was quite clear from the beginning. The changes for the project were initiated by Moore, who took on somewhat of an unofficial lead on the project rather than the museum, boldly claiming he came up with the idea of creating the Canadian Museum of History and

suggesting ways in the media as to how he would like Canada's history to be told. He also introduced Bill C-49 amending the 1990 Museums Act. The ways in which Moore and Canadian Heritage was intervening in the operations of the museum were unprecedented and did not go unnoticed by critics. Although he could not directly interfere with matters of display in the museum, Moore was able to steer the museum in a particular direction (Aronczyk and Brady, 2015, pp. 172-178).

While it is expected that a national museum of history would include war, military, and in Canada's case monarchy, the particular objects selected for display along with the explanations that accompany them guide citizens as to what is important to national identity and the reasons for its importance; it directs them in what they need to learn about Canadian history (Trofanenko, 2010, p. 272). In addition, memorializing Canada's military history in this way, needed an inclusion of conversations around Canada's colonial past and present, which were largely ignored throughout the process (Abu-Laban, 2014, p. 217).

The approach to the redesigned museum did not substantially incorporate such meaningful discussions around issues such as inclusivity, representation of diversity, participation, and interpretation. Not only did the new mandate speak of guiding citizens as to what Canadian history was, it erased conceptions of critical interpretation and research and historical knowledge. Prior to the amendment the purpose of the museum as mandated by the 1990 Museums Act read:

> The purpose of the Canadian Museum of Civilization is to increase, throughout Canada and internationally, interest in, knowledge and critical understanding of and appreciation and respect for human cultural achievements and human behaviour by establishing, maintaining and developing for research and posterity a collection of objects of historical and cultural interest, with special but not exclusive reference to Canada, and by demonstrating those achievements and behaviour, the knowledge derived from them and the understanding they represent (1990, c.3, s.8).

This mandate was certainly much more considerable in its scope than the amended version. While the amended version's focus is on enhancing Canadians' knowledge and understanding of the things and events that have shaped Canadian history and identity, the previous mandate spoke to a larger audience and included ideas of critical understanding, research, and respect for human cultural achievements and behaviour. Rather than being circumscribed by a particular conservative agenda which aimed to shape national history and identity within a particular monarchical and militaristic framework with little room for open debate, contestation, and alternative histories, the previous mandate made room for discussions around them. These dramatic changes to the museum did not go unnoticed at the time of the proposed changes. Several critics voiced concern about the impact on the museum's role they would have. The former President and CEO of the Canadian Museum of Civilization Rabinovitch, for example, noted the elimination of the wording "developing for research and posterity" would mark a move away from knowledge production to knowledge display (Aronczyk and Brady, 2015, p. 174).

The current mandate of the museum in this regard can be read as very politically charged. The revisions to the museum under the Harper government served the Conservative vision of national identity and when the museum worked to enhance the awareness of Canada and Canadians it did so under its guidance. Of course, the conservative approach to the museum's reconstruction can be viewed as a counter response to the liberal approach of doing things which include their own version of being critical, including participation and consultation, and so on. The museum itself, then is a political entity. Far from being at an arm's length from the state, it seems to be an extended arm of the state. It embodies the state and its ideology, furthermore it presents the state in disguised spiritual form (Duncan and Wallach, 2004, p. 463).

Even as museums change, they continue to embody and perpetuate lingering conceptions of earlier incarnations; they are its palimpsests (Mason, 2004, p. 19). Whether the nation is depicted as a "Warrior Nation" (McKay and Swift, 2012) or whether a socially conscious approach is taken, the National History Museum narrates a Canadian history and identity shaped and influenced by political agendas. This shaping of history involves a vigorous process of glorifying certain events and heroes, while forgetting others, particularly those that sully the nation's image as including a past of genocide and colonialism. It continues the legacy of settler colonialism. Furthermore, this shaping of history translates into a Canadian present and future that stands amongst the leading nations of the world, as democratic, technologically advanced, and so on. The museum, then, through its representations of the nation also works to cement Canada's place in world history.

Museum subjectivities: Making and Unmaking the National Subject

Museums and subjectivities

Who, what, how, and when is excluded and included in the Canadian Museum of History additionally plays a great part in the making and the unmaking of the national subject. "National museums are implicit in the construction of national identities, and the ways in which they voice or silence the difference can reflect and influence contemporary perceptions of identities within the national frame" (McLean, 2005, p. 1). The museum constructs and formalizes certain narratives of identity that include and define who a Canadian is, what it means to be Canadian, and how Canadians should behave. Through its processes of inclusion and exclusion, narratives of shared historical experiences are assembled, and are further continuously interpreted and appropriated for the purposes of formulating a continued national identity and narrative of national consciousness. Identities are negotiated in order to create a cohesive and unwavering national identity despite the existence of complex and varying demographics, histories, and ethnic groups within Canada, primarily through Multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism in the Canadian Museum of History

An official policy of Canada, Multiculturalism is articulated as more than just a political instrument for the management of Canadians, it is also a social reality, and a guiding principle for its society. Furthermore, it recognizes the acceptance of diversity as not only legitimate but as integral to Canadian society (Dewing, 2013, pp. 1-2). It presents the Canadian self-image as a pluralist mosaic (Mackey, 2002, p. 50) and both frames and defines Canadian citizens. At face value the policy can sound ideal even utopic, however in its formulation and implementation it is deeply problematic, as while it glosses over power relations and cultural stratification and strengthens the deep ethnic and racial tensions in Canada, it presents the nation as a neat package of community, association, tolerance, and harmony.

More importantly, its underlying assumptions are rooted in the hegemonic cultures that led to its genesis, first English and then French. Although multiculturalism as a policy indicates a certain equality – the 1971 policy for instance stated that no one ethnic group takes precedence over another – it ultimately holds on to this binary cultural identity of the founding fathers as its heritage and continued tradition. A prime example of this continuity is the biculturalism 'new comers' are subjected to through bilingualism. They encounter the survival of the two European

nations through language (Bannerji, 2000, pp. 91-92). The policy was called *Multiculturalism Within Bilingual Framework* during its implementation after all, which while it attempted to stamp out significance of any one culture, due to its attention to language, forever emphasized and formalized the two cultural categories of English speaking and French speaking as holding precedence. While changing the discourse of Canada as a nation organized by language and culture rather than along racial or ethnic lines as was intended, allowed at its formulation the repudiation of racial exclusions, they were simultaneously smuggled back in through the contradictory operation of language and culture (Haque, 2012, p. 6). Multiculturalism as it stands today is rooted in this formulation. This precedence is hardly balanced of course; the scale tips to the side of English. And while "Aboriginal" is included as a founding peoples in certain occasions and policy instruments such as the Harper government's citizenship guide for example, the official designation of national languages suggest that such recognition is largely symbolic and concessional.

Acting as a pillar in its ideological state apparatus, Multiculturalism represents the idea of a universal Canadian based on shared liberal values. The underlying dominant national narrative, however, remains fixed. The official category of "visible minority" which emerged from the policy is a clear example. Himani Bannerji notes the absurdity of the term, questioning what 'visible' connotes. All forms of existence except for air have visibility, she ponders, all peoples are visible, but what is it that makes visible minorities more visible than others? The implication is that some are *more* visible than others she concludes (Bannerji, 2000, p. 181). The central visibility of difference is cast against white Anglo-Canadian culture. "Visible minority", then, not only formally entrenches the 'true' identity of Canadians as originating from white settler history, the one against which all others are measured, but it also emphasizes differences, thereby including 'other Canadians' into the nation through exclusion. In this way, non-white citizens are not a part of the nation's imagination. Furthermore, the category contradicts multiculturalism in its lumping of all these 'other Canadians' into one definitional category; in its homogenizing of multitudes into one category, it works to create one faceless and colourful category of cultures that is defined as the 'them' juxtaposed against the 'true' 'us' of the nation.

These 'visible minorities' further hold a hyphen in their named identity – the hyphen of Canadianness, which simultaneously emphasizes the attachment and the difference, and more importantly the distance to the authentic 'Canadian' identity. As Mackey notes the *Canadian*-Canadian is simply the Canadian (Mackey, 2002, p. 3). Difference, then is the different than the White Anglo-Canadian, the core or hegemonic culture which is the point of departure from which to measure and understand difference or diversity. "If Canada is the 'very house of difference'" Mackey says, "it contains a family with a distinct household head" (Mackey, 2002, p. 12). Canadian identity is shaped by this distinct household head, which asserts itself politically, economically, and socially.

Of course, there have been significant challenges to such narratives of representation by indigenous peoples and other minority groups. Canadian identity politics is hardly static. Continuity is accompanied by contestation at many turns. Nonetheless, dominant culture is a hegemonic force that continues to shape and define Canadian identity and social life, and its "dominance lies in its ubiquity and its flexibility; its ability to be continually modified in order to deflect or incorporate challenges to its legitimacy" (Furniss, 1999, p. 15). For example, under the Harper government along with the symbolic changes in the national narrative through cultural institutions, symbols, and so on, austerity measures resulted in budget reductions for Statistics Canada, the agency responsible for getting a better understanding of Canada's linguistic and

cultural trends, which as Abu-Laban argues, may reflect the Conservative government's attempt to avoid the complexity and diversity of Canada (Abu-Laban, 2014, p. 216).

Multiculturalism is another central theme in the Canadian Museum of History. The national narrative of Canadian Multiculturalism including its democratic and liberal concepts of acceptance, tolerance, equality, understanding, freedom, and even refuge is a consistent theme in Canadian domestic politics; it is the celebrated face of Canada. And although the Harper government attempted to valorize patriotic citizenship over multicultural citizenship (Abu-Laban, 2014, p. 216), Multiculturalism remained a guiding ideology during the renovation of the Canadian Museum of History. During the research and construction phases of the Canada History Hall, themes of diversity, inclusivity, and multiculturalism were repeatedly emphasized as central to Canada's national narrative and therefore to the designing of the History Hall. There was even an *Explore and Discuss Series – Multiculturalism in Canada: Secularism and Reasonable Accommodation* event held around the same time.

In an interview during the History Hall's construction the Lead Architect, Douglas Cardinal, for example, described the importance of the History Hall by noting that the narrative of Canadian history in it would start with illustrating the First Peoples inhabitation, history, and culture, then went on to say:

> It will show how the French and the English relationship with the land and with the Indigenous Peoples shaped and reshaped our whole Canadian society, as well as the many people that came from countries around the world, who also shaped our destiny and have made a great contribution in shaping this country, where multiculturalism thrives. Indeed, respect and tolerance is something we share as Canadians. Canada's story is important to other nations of the world because it sets a fine example of how people of different races, creeds and cultures can thrive together in diversity and produce a culture of dignity and respect for all of its citizens (Laberge, 2015).

Multiculturalism was ideologically embedded in the very design of the History Hall then. Its values of tolerance, dignity and respect, thriving, diversity, harmony, and so on were stressed in the making of the museum and are presented through the representation of Canada's past, present, and future. The Canadian subject is formulated as such. Different peoples are included in certain ways into the national narrative all under a rubric of supposed uniformity that has within it inherent inconsistencies and problems.

The Modern Settler Multicultural Canadian Subject

The museum's national historical narrative works to create the modern settler multicultural Canadian subject. This subject is represented in the museum as productive, democratic, tolerant, etc., values that are grounded in the liberal tradition and colonial legacy of 'discovery' and its conceptions of the transformation of a vast, empty land into a productive and developed nation. The Canadian History Hall, for example, portrays Canada as neatly and teleologically emerging from a barren land into a multicultural nation that sits at the forefront of the world. A consistent rearticulation and reassertion of Anglo-Canadian culture and subjectivity as the 'true' or 'authentic' identity is credited for both this progression and international standing.

Before entering the Canadian Museum of History, the visitor is first welcomed to the flowing concrete building by multiple gigantic looming banners reading "WELCOME TO YOUR HISTORY" and "ENTREZ DANS VOTRE HISTOIRE" at its entrance. Inside, the museum has four levels. The Lower level consists of the Grand Hall, which includes the world's largest collection of totem poles, the First Peoples of the Pacific Northwest exhibition, the First Peoples Hall, the Canadian Stamp Collection exhibition, and the Treasures from Library and

Archives Canada gallery, as well as a Resource Centre, Café, and salons. The Main level has the Canadian Children's Museum, two spaces dedicated for special exhibitions, as well as a café, bistro, the gift shop, and theatres. Levels three and four comprise the Canadian History Hall, which Lisa Leblanc, the Director of Creative Development and Learning of the Canadian History Hall Project, described as "the most extensive exhibition on Canadian history ever produced" (Leblanc, 2016). The Hall exhibits Canada's history from its beginnings to the present. Level three includes Gallery 1: Early Canada, and Gallery 2: Colonial Canada, and level four has Gallery 3: Modern Canada on it.

If a visitor starts at the 'beginning' of the museum, that is from the lower level, they follow the course of Canadian history as beginning with indigenous peoples and their place in Canada's story. The visitor then ascends higher to the Canadian History Hall which starts once more at the beginning, chronologically telling the Canadian tale from the beginnings of human history, then moving on to the history of the founding fathers which is presented gloriously asserting and embodying conceptions of the Canadian subject. Samuel de Champlain's display in Gallery 1, for example, illustrates this well. A shrine like cove presents his story in Canadian history at the beginning of a long hallway. The display is made up of dark colors and dim lighting with an unbroken recorded voiceover of a man speaking French in a deep tone, the ambience evokes sacral, mysterious, and grave sentiments. The design demands attention: one knows one is learning of something important. The visitor is introduced to de Champlain first through text. A large reprint of his signature begins his story with an accompanying description titled "A New Approach", in which he is credited for making "possible the establishment of a permanent presence in North America", the introduction goes on to say that while encounters with First Peoples in Canada were marked by "disregard…of Indigenous rights and interests", de Champlain was different as he "built alliances and nurtured positive relationships". His position in Canadian history is then marked by a dismantling of his identity into his contributions to the nation. The visitor taking in the whole display at first, is prompted to read, from left to right, like a graphic novel, the five huge drawings which encircle the cove reading "L'observateur/The Observer", "Le diplomate/The Diplomat", "Le soldat/The Soldier", "Le cartographe/The Cartographer", "Le fondateur/The Settler", before moving closer to read and look at the objects and accompanying texts beneath each representation. Here is depicted the legend of a national hero from the 1600s, who was different than the violent colonialists before him. Embodying all the elements of a good and true Canadian subject, he was a discoverer, an explorer, a trader, educated, kind, caring, patriotic, technologically advanced, politically wise, and was pivotal in the making of the nation. The visitor then winds their way towards modern Canada, where values of democracy, robust political participation, technological advancement, complex economies, and of course diversity, inclusivity, and so on are laced throughout.

The design of the museum propels the visitor forward towards advancement and development, upwards and onwards, towards greater progress and prosperity. Throughout the Hall images of a timeline bar accompany displays situating peoples, places, and events in history; visitors not only move their body forward they are also visually reminded they are moving forward in time. With the advent of European intervention Canada is propelled and flourishes in a world of technology, mobility, rationality, science, democracy, secularism, and productivity. At the same time Canadian identity advances towards a greater level of acceptance, toleration, equality, and unity in the Canadian settler interpretation of multiculturalism. Advancement is not limited simply to technology, politics, democracy, and production, but also

to national consciousness and social awareness. Canada becomes a pillar of modernity; and Canadians the vessels that embody and propel it.

In addition, the Canadian subject is constructed as one who is worldly. The museums mandate, for example, states its purpose is "also to enhance [Canadians'] awareness of world history and cultures". The ways in which the visitor looks at world history and culture, however, are shaped by the museum. Their awareness of world history and cultures is enhanced through the multiple museum processes discussed above. In this way, the modern Canadian subject becomes knowing of the world but must look at the world through "Canadian eyes", which are determined by the museum's lens.

The processes of remembering and forgetting, and inclusion and exclusion paint a narrative that gets disseminated into the general public and asserts meanings and understandings of what, who, how, why, and when a Canadian is. Visitors learn about Canada's past, and they also learn what is deemed important and how they belong in and to the nation state. The museum, in this regard, is a great part of being a Canadian subject. As Trofanenko notes, knowing the history of a country is a necessary part of being the citizen of that country. This history is one that both reaffirms and highlights the uniqueness of the nation (Trofanenko, 2010, p. 270). National museums play the role as relatively accessible and likelier public places for citizens to visit to learn about the history and identity of the nation, it is the place where routine school visits are conducted for this very purpose. "As state institutions [museums]…have a monopoly or the power to formally define citizen membership through representation – but definitions become fixed in the process of exhibition" (Ashley, 2005, p. 11).

Conclusion

The museum's mandate suggests it works with the existing knowledge visitors have about the nation, which is most certainly the case as museums function as dreamscapes. That is to say that just as museums are part of a larger physical landscape – which includes the Parliament buildings across the river, the surrounding hub of museums including the War Museum, the capital city, and the bridge (symbolic and material) between Ottawa and Quebec – they are also part of a larger cognitive landscape. The experience of the national history museum is not simply the objects, artifacts and narratives that are in the museum, it includes the memorized images that the citizen brings with them (Dickinson, et. al, 2006, pp. 29-30). These memorized images and understandings of the nation from films, textbooks, poetry, etc., as well as the everyday mundane representations of the nation that are constantly and unconsciously bombarded on them (Billig, 1995), become part of the visitor's experiences. The visitor's body moves through the museum as in a dream comprised of what they see and what they bring with them (Dickinson, et. al, 2006, pp. 29-30). These spaces embody the national narrative, and further create a shared sense of belonging and allegiance to the nation.

The boundaries of the museum in this regard are not clear. The visitor's experiences begin before they enter the museum, and they continue on once they leave it. What they bring in with them enhances their understanding of what they are given, and the history they are given helps them frame their many experiences and images of the nation into a cohesive, succinct, and understandable one. What they are given further holds greater truth and legitimacy as it comes from a place of authority. As mediums of the nation's history, they are the presenters and performers of the national memory.

The Canadian Museum of History advances the national project building the Canadian nation navigated by the state. Visitors that come to the museum are led to believe they are seeing and experiencing an objective representation of Canada and the world. However, they are not. The authority museums have gained are largely from its claims of moral authority derived from its advancing of knowledge, research, and so on, however they are guided by particular ideologies (Knell, 2011, p. 5). "[M]useums were created to represent the values and attitudes of the dominant cultural group within society…they can be seen as a tool of the dominant socio-economic group, controllers of the state, seeking to reinforce their values by promulgating them among the ruled" (Macdonald and Alsford, 2007, p. 279).

That is not to say that national history museums cannot be a possible space of inquiry and representation of plurality, and a space for expression without antagonism. Perhaps a reimagining of the museum's purpose is a good starting point. For instance, there have been calls for public history museums to have a historical inquiry as a mandate, where museums rather than simply celebrating history move toward public interpretation of past events regardless of their implications or how it may present the museum and the nation state (Trofanenko, 2010, p. 271; Kirsehnblatt-Gimblett, 2000, p. 9).

Works Cited

Abu-Laban, Yasmeen (2014). The politics of history under Harper. *The Canadian Committee on Labour History*. Issue 73, Spring 2014. Pp. 215-217.

Anderson, Benedict (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso.

Aronczyk, Melissa and Miranda J. Brady (2015). Branding history at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. *Canadian Journal of Communication Corporation*. Vol 40. pp. 165-184.

Aronsson, Peter (2008). Comparing national museums: Methodological reflections. *NaMu IV. Tema Q* (Culture Studies), Linkoping University, pp. 1-20.

Aronsson, Peter (2011). Explaining national museums: Exploring comparative approaches to the study of national museums. *National Museums: New Studies form Around the World*, Simon Knell, Peter Aronsson, Arne Bugge Amundsen (Ed.'s). New York: Routledge, pp. 29-55.

Ashley, Susan (2007). State authority and the public sphere: ideas on the changing role of the museum as a Canadian social institution. *Museums and Their Communities*. Sheila E. R. Watson (Ed.). Routledge. pp. 485-501.

Bank of Canada (2021). *$20 Polymer Note*. Bank Notes Past and Present. Frontiers. Bank of Canada. <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/banknotes/bank-note-series/frontiers/20-polymer-note/>.

Bannerji, Himani (2000). *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*. Canadian Scholars' Press.

Bennett, Tony (1995). *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. Routledge.

Billig, Michael (1995). *Banal Nationalism*. Sage Publications.

Canadian Multiculturalism Act. 1985. R.S.C., c. 24. (Cad.).

Canefe, Nergis (2004). Communal memory and Turkish Cypriot national history. *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory*. Maria Todorova (Ed.): New York University Press: pp. 77-103.

Dean, David and Peter E. Rider (2005). Museums, nation and political history in the

Australian National Museum and the Canadian Museum of Civilization. *Museum and Society*. 3(1). pp. 35-50.

Dewing, Michael (2013). Canadian Multiculturalism. *Legal and Social Affairs Division Parliamentary Information and Research Service.* Library of Parliament. Publication No. 2009-20-E.

Dickinson, Greg, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki (2006). Spaces of remembering and forgetting: The Reverent Eye/I at the Plains Indian Museum." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*. Routledge. Vol. 3 (No.1). pp. 27-47.

Duncan Carol and Alan Wallach (2004). The Universal Survey Museum. *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts.* Bettina Messias Carbonell (Ed.) Blackwell Publishing: 51-71.

Enhance. (n.d.) in *Cambridge English Dictionary*. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/enhance>

Enhance b. (n.d.) in *Online Etymology Dictionary*. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/enhance>.

Furniss, Elizabeth (1999). *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Haque, Eve (2012). *Multiculturalism Within a Bilingual Framework: Language, Race, and Belonging in Canada.* University of Toronto Press

International Council of Museums (1993). *ICOM News.* International Council of Museums. Vol. 46-50.

Jones, Esyllt and Adele Perry (2011). *People's Citizenship Guide: A Response to Conservative Canada*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. (2000). The Museum as a Catalyst. *Paper Presentation at Museums 2000: Confirmation or Challenge*, Vadstena, Sweden.

Knell, Simon (2011). National museums and the national imagination. *National Museums: New Studies from Around the World.* Simon Knell, Peter Aronsson, Arne Bugge Amundsen (Ed.'s). New York: Routledge, pp. 3-29.

Laberge, Eliane (2015). *Behind-the-Scenes of the Canadian History Hall Project with Architect Douglas Cardinal.* Canadian Museum of History. <https://www.historymuseum.ca/blog/behindthe-scenes-of-the-canadian-history-hall-project-with-architect-douglas-cardinal/.>

Laberge, Eliane (2017). *A Conversation with Dr. David Morrison*. Canadian Museum of History. <https://www.historymuseum.ca/blog/a-conversation-with-dr-david-morrison/>.

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

Mackey, Eva (2002). *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*. University of Toronto Press.

Macdonald, George F. and Stephen Alsford (2007). Canadian museums and the representation of culture in a multicultural nation. *Museums and their Communities.* Sheila E.R. Watson (Ed.). Routledge. pp.'s 276-292.

Mason, Rhiannon (2004). Nation building at the Museum of Welsh Life. *Museum and Society*. Pp. 18-34.

McKay, Ian and Jamie Swift (2012). *The Warrior Nation: Rebranding Canada in an Age of Anxiety.* Toronto: Between the Lines.

Mclean, Fiona (2005). Guest editorial: Museums and national identity. *Museums and Society*. Vol. 3 (1). Pp. 1-4.

Museum's Act, 1990. S.C., c. 3 (Cad.).
Renan, Ernest ([1882] 1990) "What is a Nation?" Martin Thom (trans.) in *Nation and Narration*. Homi K. Bhabha (Ed.). Routledge. Pp. 8-23.
Rigney, Ann (2018). Remembrance as remaking: memories of the nation revisited. *Nations and Nationalism*. Vol 24(2). Pp. 240-257.
Schlereth, Thomas J. (2004). Collecting ideas and artifacts: Common problems of history museums and history texts. *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*. Bettina Messias Barbonell (Ed.). Blackwell Publishing: 3535-347.
Trofanenko, Brenda M. (2010). The educational promise of public history museum exhibits." *Theory and Research in Social Education*. 38:2. Pp. 270-288
Zolberg, Vera. L. (1996). Museums as contested sites of remembrance *Theorizing Museums*. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Ed.'s). Blackwell Publishers. Pp.69-83.