

# **RECONCILIATION IN CANADIAN MUSEUMS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since the late 1980s, Canadian museum personnel have been actively engaged in collaboration with Aboriginal communities on issues to do with exhibition design and collections management. Despite these collaborative successes, tensions between museum employees and Aboriginal community members are commonplace, indicating that problems still remain within the relationships that have developed.

This thesis examines the implications of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada for the future of museum practice. It argues that unresolved colonial trauma is preventing those in the museum field from moving past an initial phase of relationship-building to a successful era of partnership. When viewed through the lens of trauma, the museum field is heavily influenced by denial on the part of museum personnel as to the extent of violence committed against Aboriginal peoples at Indian Residential Schools and the resulting level of dysfunction present in current relationships between Aboriginal communities and non-Aboriginal museum employees. I provide a revised account of Canadian history, which includes the aspects of colonialism that are most often censored, in order to situate these problems as part of the historical trauma that is deeply embedded in Canadian society itself.

John Ralston Saul's concept of the Métis nation is used as a framework for reconciliation, portraying Canada as a country that is heavily influenced by its Aboriginal origins despite the majority belief that the national culture has been derived from European social values. As a response to this proposition, the Circle is presented as the primary Canadian philosophical tenet that should guide both museum practice and Canadian society in the future.

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\*Unless otherwise noted, graphic design by Lyza Heyden, 2013.

## PREFACE

When I began work as a tour guide at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology (MOA), I was a twenty year-old anthropology student and only two years out of the public high school system. That year, my introduction to Northwest Coast art and museum studies became intimately connected to the subject of Canada's Indian residential school system, as several months after I began work at the museum, MOA hosted the travelling exhibit, *Where are the Children?: Healing the Legacy of the Residential Schools* (Legacy of Hope 2013). While I do remember the sheer emotion of the exhibit's opening and the inspiring speeches made by residential school survivors, what most impacted me at the time was a sense of anger and betrayal at the government curriculum that had omitted such an important part of Canadian history from my education. At twenty years old, it was the first time that I had heard about residential schools, and I was shocked at my own ignorance.

In 2002, the exhibit itself was deemed by most of the student staff to be extremely unsuccessful. Barring the opening, there were virtually no other Aboriginal visitors to the exhibit, and tourists would spend around thirty seconds in the gallery before losing interest and leaving. Primarily a photographic exhibit, it was easy to view the photos of school children as positive commemorations without realizing that they actually portrayed a very dark chapter in Aboriginal history. While text panels described the different aspects of life at school, including the abusive nature of the school system (TRC 2012a, b), most visitors were not reading panels to begin with. Those of us at the museum agreed that the exhibit seemed to be awkwardly avoiding the subject instead of exploring it, although we could not describe in what way. We similarly avoided it in our tours. Many of us considered it a responsibility to be political and often spoke of contemporary land claims and the impact of the Indian Act (see Jacobs and Williams 2008; Milloy 2008) when speaking to visitors. Yet, we did not speak about residential schools.

Despite our hesitancy, we also recognized the importance of this particular exhibit for Canadian museology and what it would accomplish. *Where are the Children?* was a very tentative attempt at initiating a conversation in museums on a subject that neither the museum community or the general public seemed ready to acknowledge. Over a decade

later, I am aware at the time of writing that this conversation has not become easier. However, the legacy of *Where are the Children?* remains, leading Canadian museums into the uncharted territory, in which the subject of residential schools is no longer avoidable. As my own knowledge of Aboriginal cultures and museology has increased, it has also been impossible to conduct any research in this area without first addressing this issue.

### *A Note on Terminology*

The words used to describe the world's peoples are subject to debate and often a product of reinvention as different groups determine how they would like to self-identify.

In Canada, the word *Aboriginal* is currently used to encompass three distinct groups of people: the Inuit, First Nations and Métis. In this text, I primarily adopt the term *Aboriginal*, which reflects recent changes in language that are taking place in British Columbia, in which First Nations individuals are increasingly identifying as Aboriginal in order to stress common political objectives, which are shared by all of Canada's original inhabitants. The Métis are now recognized as a specific cultural group within Canada, consisting of descendants of a particular community that originated in the Red River area of Manitoba. However, following the work of the political philosopher, John Ralston Saul, I use the term much more liberally, which I acknowledge may in itself be contentious to some Red River Métis. In this text, *Métis* is used to denote any individual of mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage, and even more generally, to denote a combination of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural influences in society. *Indian*, *mixed-blood* and *half-breed* are each historical terms that have been retained if part of a proper name or legal term. I have otherwise replaced both mixed-blood (a person of French and Aboriginal descent) and half-breed (a person of British and Aboriginal descent) with the more respectful term *Métis*. If possible, the specific names and spellings of different nations have been used, which are current to the author's knowledge. If differences exist between these and the names that have been historically used, I have identified these in a footnote. I use the word *indigenous* generally in reference to the original inhabitants of countries outside Canada.

Settlers to Canada are described as *Euro-Canadian* or *white* to denote Western European heritage, while those of African descent are identified as *Black Canadian*. Other

ethnic minorities are similarly referred to by their preferred combination terms, which reflect both their ethnic origins and Canadian identity, as in *Indo-Canadian*, *Chinese Canadian* and *Japanese Canadian*.

In this text, I maintain the name *Canada* instead of the title *Turtle Island*, which is increasingly being chosen by Aboriginal peoples to describe the nation-state. The term *Turtle Island* is derived from an Onondaga origin story that states that the people are descended from a woman who originally fell from the sky above boundless water. When the sea animals saw her falling, they brought up soil from the bottom of the ocean and built the land on the back of the Great Turtle in order to catch and save her (Miller 2000: 4). Turtle Island exists today, and is reflected in an extensive network of Aboriginal and Native American nations that encompasses the whole of North America (Kelly 2008: 19). I choose the term *Canada* primarily to indicate the colonial nature of the political state, and secondly, to differentiate the cultural and political changes currently taking place from those of the United States.

In this text, the term *Circle* is capitalized, indicating its centrality to Aboriginal philosophy as well as its potential as a formal structure within Canadian society.

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## **WARNING**

This thesis contains information about the Indian Residential School System and its after-effects. Gaining an understanding of what took place in residential schools necessitates an honest examination of the school system that balances the emotional protection of the reader with validation of the survivor experience.

Some readers may find this text emotionally difficult, particularly those with a personal connection to the issues discussed. Those who have experienced a traumatic incident may find the unexpected appearance of certain words to be emotionally distressing. I therefore provide a detailed description of potentially harmful language used throughout the text, as well as full disclosure of any sensitive subjects that are addressed:

- a) Chapter 5 contains detailed descriptions of what took place in the residential schools, which are primarily found in the second section of the chapter. The third section then discusses the after-effects within Canadian society. These may include problems that are occurring within Aboriginal families and communities, as well as the treatment of Aboriginal children by society at large and particularly in foster care. *This chapter should be read with extreme caution, particularly by Aboriginal readers.*
- b) One subject that reappears throughout this text is that of missing women in Canada, which is discussed briefly in the Introduction, in detail throughout Chapter 3, and also mentioned in Chapter 5.
- c) Chapter 4 is a historical chapter, in which the second section discusses the poor treatment of Aboriginal women during British Columbia's gold rush.

Throughout this text, efforts have been made to avoid unnecessary descriptions of sensitive content and to limit language that may be distressing to those concerned.

**However, given the nature of the subject matter, this has often proved challenging, and the following words are found throughout the text:**

**Physical assault and physical abuse,**

**Sexual assault and sexual abuse,**

**Emotional abuse,**

**Violence,**

**Prostitution,**

**Cultural genocide and genocide,**

**Holocaust,**

**Domination,**

**Authority,**

**Residential school**

**Being prepared to encounter this kind of language may minimize the impact of emotions that are brought to the surface during reading. However, reading this text merits a level of awareness and self-care on the part of the reader. Rothschild (2003) advises readers of sensitive content that paying attention to what their bodies are feeling, both physically and emotionally, is the clearest way of gauging whether the material is becoming overly distressing. If the reader finds the material upsetting, it is recommended to take short breaks from reading. It may also help to make a conscious effort to avoid visualizing the incidents, as this can make the situation seem more real, increasing the risk of emotional distress. A final consideration is for the reader to listen to their thoughts while processing the material and to avoid language that increases identification with those concerned (Rothschild 2003: xx-xxi).**

## INTRODUCTION

### *0.1 Museums and the Challenge of Memory*

One can learn a lot about the history of an area by visiting its museums. Museums present distinct versions of history that cannot be found elsewhere; not only have they evolved with the communities themselves, but they are primarily centered around narratives that can be demonstrated through objects from the past. Historical narratives often stem from the founding of the museum, beginning at the point at which a collection was formed. In Canada, and specifically in British Columbia where this study is based, museum histories often begin with the first pioneers. Every city in BC has a collection that began with its founding pioneers: household items, remnants of objects brought from far-off homelands, and new objects considered either useful or novel by the newcomers. Predominantly late 19<sup>th</sup> century settlers, they preserved a way of life based on local industries: logging, mining and fishing. Over time, these spaces of industry have also become heritage sites, with museums growing out of canneries, mines and mills. These are the places of BC history, where the first settlers toiled to clear the land and create their towns. Their tools and ways of life are proudly displayed before the narrative continues into the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the construction of highways, schools, and any other infrastructure needed to create the current way of life. The vast majority of BC museums are devoted to a similar narrative that begins by exploring pioneer industries and the cities that sprung up to support them.

The histories that are presented are subject to a carefully crafted nation-building mythology, which scholars argue, has been characteristic of the Euro-Canadian history taught in schools (Francis 1997; Carleton 2011; Osborne 2011; Reid 2012).<sup>1</sup> However, revisions by museum employees and local communities have ensured the narratives presented in museums are inclusive, and museums now feature the lives and perspectives of minorities who worked alongside Euro-Canadians. BC is portrayed as having been founded out of diversity, owing much of its success to Chinese, Japanese and Indo-Canadians, who made BC their home despite social inequity and racism. They have been absorbed into the Euro-Canadian mythology as unwanted neighbours, now accepted and

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to the Second World War, the focus of the education system was on promoting British imperialism. However, changes in attitude in post-war Canada resulted in new curricula in both English and French Canada in the 1960s, aimed at promoting Canadian or Quebec nationalism respectively (Carleton 2011: 110- 119).

esteemed.<sup>2</sup> In working with museums, they have recounted their experiences honestly, and museum narratives present their collections alongside a script of struggle for acceptance among whites, and in the case of Japanese Canadians, even having been labeled enemies and exiled during the Second World War.<sup>3</sup> These stories of disagreement have been integrated into the primary narrative in efforts to educate the public about the rights of minorities and about their contributions to the development of the province. The focus on tolerance is not politically neutral, but represents vigilance on the part of the communities involved to guard against the abuses suffered in the past. They promote active education about diversity and human rights, a prominent focus in the current BC school curriculum (Ministry of Education 1997, 2005a, 2006a, 2008) as well as in most museums.

More often than not, museum collections also include pieces from local Aboriginal peoples, displayed as an introduction to pioneer history itself. Permanent exhibitions undoubtedly begin with an Aboriginal gallery, dedicated to declaring the presence and rights of the local bands. The focus may be on the archaeology of the region, a past way of life, or the living culture of the present inhabitants. As a first introduction, the visitor comes face to face with those who have always been here and whose authority over the land remains.<sup>4</sup> Their material culture is presented, and then their communities promptly disappear as Canadian history begins. There is perhaps a brief time in the narrative in which settlers and Aboriginal peoples interact, but inevitably, as history moves forward, Aboriginal peoples are left in the timeless space at the entrance to the gallery, rarely making another appearance. In some museums, they disappear when diseases are introduced by Europeans, or at the beginning of the gold rush.<sup>5</sup> This stands in stark contrast to what is presented in the initial corridor: that the local Aboriginal community is here, vibrant, and working toward a variety of long-term goals to ensure its sustainability for future generations. Depending on the strength of the relationship with local communities, some museums do an excellent job of integrating Aboriginal perspectives into their displays. Yet, even in the best-curated exhibition spaces, there is still something

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<sup>2</sup> This theme was present in the galleries at the Surrey Museum, Museum of Vancouver and Royal BC Museum, visited in 2011.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, the narratives presented at the Museum of Vancouver, Royal BC Museum and Nikkei National Museum, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> See the North Vancouver Museum & Archives, Museum of Vancouver and Langley Centennial Museum, visited in 2011.

<sup>5</sup> See for example, the Langley Centennial Museum, 2011.

obviously disjunctive about the narrative that is presented. The tensions between competing memories of the land are at odds with each other; irreconcilable, they exist alongside each other, making little effort to address their contradictions or conflicts.

We need only look at the national museum, the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC), to see a model for such ideas. The First Peoples Hall displays a range of objects from Aboriginal peoples across Canada alongside a narrative that speaks of Aboriginal peoples discovering Europeans on their lands, the benefits of early alliances that were outweighed by the effects of European-introduced diseases and the forced attendance of Aboriginal children at Indian residential schools. The galleries are impeccably current, also making known that in 2008, Prime Minister Harper offered an official apology for the abusive and assimilationist school system (Harper and Government of Canada 2008). This apology paved the way for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), whose five-year mandate to collect testimonies from residential school survivors also began in 2008 (IRSSA 2006, Schedule ‘N’). This process of reconciliation is also acknowledged in the CMC’s galleries.

When visiting the museum in 2011, I was extremely impressed by the CMC’s construction of history. After viewing the fragmented histories presented in BC museums, entering the First Peoples Hall was the first time that, as a Canadian, I felt an intuitive connection to what was being presented. It was the first time that a museum had presented a complete version of Canadian history that seemed to make sense to me as a visitor. However, this excitement was soon overshadowed as I made my way through to the third floor to visit the Canada Hall. Introduced as the museum’s Canadian history gallery, the Canada Hall lies untouched by what is described in the First Peoples Hall. Here, the great Euro-Canadian mythology is presented, from the discovery of North America by Europeans, through the settlement of New France and the formation of the Dominion in 1867. While Aboriginal peoples are initially included and a substantial section is devoted to exploring early Métis communities, Aboriginal peoples disappear from the narrative immediately after. According to the CMC’s visitor guide, the Canada Hall remains the most popular part of the museum.

As a federally funded history museum, the CMC is caught in a delicate balance between displaying the authority of the state and the viewpoints of its citizens. This

difficulty is more apparent when considering the relationship between museums and state control. According to Bennett (1995), museums were initially envisioned as spaces of high culture with “the purpose of civilizing the population as a whole” (1995: 19). Nineteenth century thinkers positioned museums among a number of institutions, which would simultaneously aid with the governance of the citizenry and reinforce (through display) the economy of cultural power enacted by the state. In large state museums, history was (and is) often framed so as to create a social ideal, under the assumption that visitors will seek to emulate the utopian vision set out by those in control. In colonial societies, this ideal has often been the disappearance of the indigenous population and the advancement of the settler population (Bennett 1995: 47). However, in a 21<sup>st</sup> century democracy, even Canada’s state museums have had to bend to the pressures of the public, and particularly to Canada’s Aboriginal communities. For the national museum, it has been a question of being inclusive while also maintaining the settlement narrative that is needed to preserve the current colonial order.

On one hand condoned by government, the rhetoric of the First Peoples Hall is only permitted to exist in a space for Aboriginal voices. It cannot be included in the history of Canada, for it would overthrow the Canadian mythology upheld for so many years. Thus, the museum contains two distinct history floors: one narrated from the perspective of Aboriginal peoples and one that is supposed to speak for other Canadians. These histories are both permitted to exist. However, echoing the disjunction of smaller museums, they do not interact with each other. Which history is ours?

Perhaps I am the only one concerned with these discrepancies. What is presented is not unintentional; it is in fact, a very Canadian way to think about culture. Like Canadian society in general, there is a complexity that is presented, and this is not seen as a problem, but rather, as an appropriate way to discuss the territory. Canadians will present a plethora of views that often contradict each other, without viewing these discrepancies as a conflict. Canada is a diverse country where citizens do not attempt to simplify their identities when they cannot be. The fact that museums across the country choose to present such contradictions is partially explained by a national character that conceives of society as complex and non-uniform (Saul 2008: 54).

I argue that these contradictions also stem from the problem of coming to terms with the past. Perhaps it is in fact a disconnection between memory and history, in which the way that individuals remember their experiences is different from the way that understandings of the past have been generated within the larger society (Cubitt 2007: 13). Scholars working in other countries, such as Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, have demonstrated that this is not only a Canadian problem, but one affecting a number of post-colonial states, in which history has often been marred with inaccuracies or omissions in order to downplay any negative consequences of settlement (Coombes 2011; Curthoys 2003). These idealized versions of history are slowly being re-written in museums, usually by including the views of those peoples who were previously omitted from the historical narrative.

What is often displayed in Canadian museums is a metanarrative of Euro-Canadian domination over the land, supplemented and interrupted by others whose memories are not in accordance with this vision. These voices of interruption come from Aboriginal peoples, as well as other minority groups throughout the country. The Euro-Canadian narrative is usually presented as the authoritative, anonymous voice of the museum. If the memory of individual Euro-Canadians challenges this narrative, it is not shown, for any contesting memories of whites are silent within the museum space. In Canadian museums, the memories of minorities contradict the ‘official’ version of events at every turn, yet they are never able to override it. Conflicting views have merely been adapted to fit within the script that already existed. Perspectives that are irreconcilable with the dominant narrative are given a place before or alongside it, and a separate gallery space is useful for segregating these views under the appearance of inclusiveness on the part of the museum. Museum employees, of course, are attempting to act ethically by providing a space where other groups can interpret things differently. They have responded to requests from Aboriginal communities for separate spaces to interpret their own pasts (Duffek 1989; McMaster 1990). Those who work in museums do not conceive of this structural arrangement as segregation; if they did, this model would not have been adopted so widely.

Many readers will be familiar with changes in museum practice that have led to the inclusion of these seemingly contradictory statements. In the late 1980s, indigenous peoples worldwide as well as other minority groups challenged museums to surrender their

authority over collections and to be more inclusive of the peoples they represent (Cannizzo 1991; Ames 1992; Clifford 1997; Kreps 2003; Peers and Brown 2003). In Canada, museum employees now work with local communities in order to create narratives chosen by the communities themselves. Why is it that despite the best efforts of museum employees to engage with these communities, that they have such difficulty overcoming the Euro-Canadian narrative that still permeates museums, when it clearly does not seem to fit with either Aboriginal or minority views of the past, which are also accepted as valid? Even the best efforts to reconceive permanent history galleries still present a Euro-Canadian vision. There are now other voices present, given equal priority in the exhibition space and even permitted to challenge or protest this vision. Yet, no museum that I have visited has been able to innovate outside of Euro-Canadian mythology, creating a history of the country that truly reflects the complexity of how Canadians currently see themselves or the past. Museums have merely inserted new voices into the great myth, in which the first pioneers tamed the land and paved the way for progress.

Perhaps the concept of progress is in fact the problem. Using progress as a model for society has been characteristic of Western thinking for centuries, as 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophers commonly used the idea in both social and political theory. For many theorists, progress was seen as both positive and inevitable, as societies progressed through various stages, ultimately resulting in a state of perfection (Nisbet 1980: 171). When Darwin released *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, he was deeply influenced by the concept of progress, which he then applied to the biological evolution of species, and later in 1871, to the evolution of race and culture within society (Darwin 1871). Both Darwin and other social theorists considered indigenous peoples to be living in a state of barbarism, on a natural progression toward the civilized societies emblematic of Western Europe. Indigenous peoples were thought to exist at a lower state of evolution than Europeans, though capable of adopting similar behaviours and values if provided with the opportunity. When indigenous peoples rejected European social values, some theorists concluded that these peoples were intellectually inferior to Europeans in ways that could not be changed (Trigger 1998: 64). Today, these racial theories are considered inaccurate and obsolete. In BC's museums, the first pioneers are now accepted as having been multicultural, and this is seen as a strength. Unfortunately, the propensity of Canadians to think about society in a

linear, progressionist fashion has primarily gone unchallenged. Progress is often used to structure both time and history despite its racist implications.

In many museums, the structure of progress now exists alongside equally poignant Aboriginal concepts:

We declare and affirm our inalienable right of aboriginal title and aboriginal rights to the land, the mountains, the minerals, the trees, the lakes, the rivers, and the streams, the air and other resources of our land.

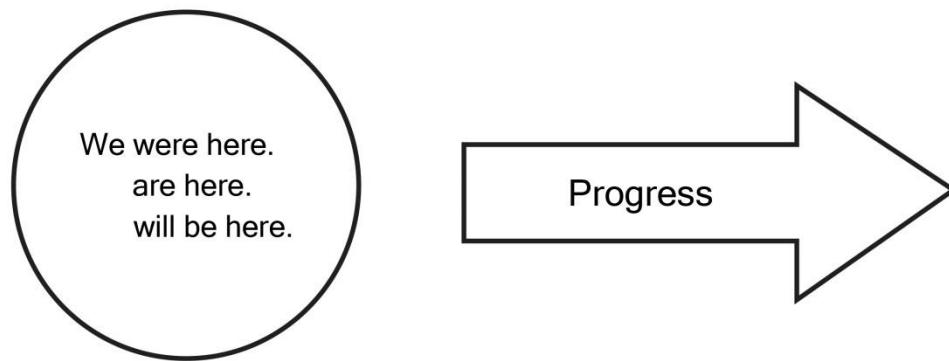
We declare that our aboriginal title and our rights have existed from time immemorial, exist at the present time and shall exist for all future time (XWE NAL MEWX (Coast Salish) Declaration, CMC Galleries 2011).

The problem is that the underlying philosophical tenets of these kinds of museum statements are rarely explained to the public or to museum staff. For many Aboriginal peoples, the Circle has a profound cultural significance and deeply affects the structure of thought (Pranis et al. 2003; Baskin 2005; Dickson-Gilmore and LaPrairie 2005; Julien et al. 2010). In Aboriginal philosophy, human beings have a sacred duty to protect the land from which they were created, and rather than progressing toward urbanism, societies are understood to recreate the same valued knowledge over time, often in cycles. “[I]t is not a linear progression of people and ideas in time, but rather a spiralling of events and themes that appear and reappear within circles of seasons and that are identified in oral traditions” (Marker 2011: 100). The past is always located in the local and traditional territory, and local events are often conceived as the most important stories to tell. As a sacred relationship is believed to exist between Aboriginal peoples and their lands, territory can be understood as the fixed point around which all other things revolve. The wisdom that existed at the time of Creation is passed onto subsequent generations, often through processes of experiential learning (Marker 2011: 102-105). Time and history both have the structure of a Circle.

Museums never present an integrated history capable of addressing the multiple perspectives and diversity of those who live on the land, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. This is partially explained by the fact that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples structure their views in different, incompatible frameworks. Moreover, this problem is compounded by the fact that these parties are not always consciously aware

of, or able to vocalize, the structural concepts that they are employing. For example, many non-Aboriginal Canadians take for granted the assumption that time is linear. Likewise, for Aboriginal peoples, the structure of the Circle permeates their worldview to such an extent that it is presumed to be understood, and therefore does not need to be explained.

Curators have primarily dealt with these cognitive incompatibilities by separating them: an introductory gallery narrated in the structure of a Circle is followed by other displays, which are narrated through the lens of progress.



**Figure 1 Primary Model for Museum History Galleries**

While current practice can be viewed as a way for museums to include the voices of all of their community groups, there are incentives for museum employees to develop a more integrated approach to exhibiting history. By separating and placing differing histories alongside each other, they have missed an opportunity to promote relationships. Integration is not about assimilation, but about acknowledging that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples all live in the same territory, and since the arrival of the first Europeans, they have always interacted. Museums are examples of institutions where employees have been building strong relationships with Aboriginal communities, and yet their galleries rarely reflect any kind of cultural mixing. The interaction is present in the way that communities now curate their own histories within these Western institutions, but rarely in

any direct examples of Canadians, including Aboriginal peoples, being part of the same place.

## ***0.2 Social Responsibility***

The integration of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal histories may also be a step along the path toward social responsibility, which is something that museum employees have been striving toward for some time (Ames 1992; Hill and Nicks 1992). While museum employees have typically contributed to social justice by promoting the arts and cultures of Aboriginal peoples (Ames 1988: 83), there is little evidence that the change in the art market that has raised Aboriginal art from tourist crafts to high art (Jonaitis 2004: 166) has had any impact on the social conditions of those involved. There may indeed be a greater understanding of Aboriginal cultures on the part of the public. Yet, rates of violence against Aboriginal peoples have not decreased (see Amnesty International 2004), and over twenty years since museums developed a social conscience, many Aboriginal reserves still suffer endemic problems of addiction, suicide and poverty (Fournier and Crey 1997; McKay 2008; Niezen 2009). Any contributions that those in museums have made have been minimal when it comes to the reality of these conditions. This is perhaps one reason that the definition of social responsibility in museums has been changing.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been a shift in the way that museum employees conceive of what they do. Many scholars refer to paradigm shifts that occurred in the late 1980s, in which museums were pushed by public protests to become co-managers of collections, working in partnership with the communities from which their collections originated (Ames 1992; Kreps 2003; Peers and Brown 2003). This time period is still remembered in the museum field as a revolution, which is often subject to critical review (Phillips 2011: 48). However, there has been little critical analysis of the more subtle trends in museology that have developed recently. Unlike the changes that were previously instigated, there has been no revolution of thought; it is this subtlety that has made the current tensions in museums much more difficult to examine, theorize, or conceptualize in daily practice. I am referring to a shift in the way that museum employees think about social responsibility, and increasingly, their desire for museums to actually *do* something to change the world, rather than merely representing it. A growing body of

work suggests a desire for museums to engage with issues outside of their usual mandates and to become actively involved (Sandell 2002; Gijssen 2008; Janes 2009; MuseumsEtc 2009, 2010). This represents an immense shift in the way that some individuals conceive of the purpose of museums.

Most museums are understood to collect, preserve and educate the public about some aspect of history. Yet, socially responsible museums are expected to be conscious of the struggles of their community members, of ongoing power structures and issues of oppression. Moreover, museums are posited as moral institutions, in which employees are not satisfied with simply being aware of these issues, but have a duty to assist in changing the systems of oppression. While discussions of social responsibility have been ongoing since the 1980s, definitions seem to have changed. Throughout the 1990s, being socially responsible was interpreted in museums as giving up the voice of authority and making way for the voices and overall inclusion of community perspectives at all levels (Hill and Nicks 1992). Social responsibility was thus inherently passive, taking the form of standing aside, or creating a neutral space for dialogue. This neutrality is also seen in the way that those in museums have given up space for Aboriginal peoples to interpret their cultures in their own terms. However, current definitions of social responsibility are much more active and focus on doing things that will create real change, rather than serving as spaces to discuss the issues. Museums are asked to do something well out of their mandates: to step outside of their roles of exhibiting social issues and to engage with the issues themselves (Sutter and Worts 2005: 131). Museums are, in effect, slowly leaning in the direction of activism.

### ***0.3 From Trauma to Resolution***

In this thesis, I argue that the structure of what is currently presented in Canadian museums is not only influenced by, but is a direct result of the denial of historical trauma. Furthermore, this ongoing denial is the primary force that prevents museums from moving forward and becoming relevant and socially responsible spaces for their publics. It is only by examining museums in light of trauma that the dysfunction of their operational structures, struggles for long-term funding, and inability to represent an integrated local history are given explanation. I argue that the key to operating successful institutions in the

future lies in the ability of both Aboriginal communities and non-Aboriginal museum employees to fully address and heal from this trauma. The goal of socially responsible museums is attainable, and furthermore, by building upon the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), those who work in museums are about to be given an opportunity like never before to prove their commitment to the wellbeing of the communities they represent.

The timing of this work is pertinent, for the full force of historical trauma is beginning to make its way into mainstream politics. While there remain many efforts to avoid the subject, the TRC has been conducting interviews at the national level, in an attempt to document the abuses that Aboriginal peoples suffered under the residential school system (see Grant 1996; Miller 1996; Fournier and Crey 1997; Chrisjohn et al. 2006). Following the coming out of thousands of survivors in the 1990s who were physically and sexually abused within the school system, the current commission seeks to understand the larger picture of the schools and recognizes that aside from the individual abuses suffered, the nature of the schools was intrinsically harmful, and the policies underlying the schools can be deemed genocidal (MacDonald and Hudson 2012: 445). In Aboriginal communities, among academics, and within government departments, individuals are beginning to discuss the concept of reconciliation and what it would mean for Canada and its many Aboriginal nations (Castellano et al. 2008; Rice and Snyder 2008; NWAC 2010a; Mathur et al. 2011). These are not museum debates. However, it is my view that museum employees need to seriously consider the questions being brought forth by the TRC if they are to continue to strengthen their relationships with Aboriginal communities. Moreover, without examining the larger picture presented by reconciliation, they are bound to make many mistakes when they are called upon to witness and to represent the more traumatic aspects of the past. This call to witness is emerging.

The stories being recorded will be alarming to many Canadians who have no knowledge of the residential school system and who do not have a clear understanding about Aboriginal relations in general. However, in order to effect change at the level of national consciousness, it will be imperative to educate all Canadians about the events in Canadian history that have been censored and concealed. It is only when Canadians understand the full legacy of the residential school system that they can begin to move

toward national reconciliation, and ultimately toward the healing of the country.<sup>6</sup> Some efforts at education are well underway. The current BC school curriculum includes educating high school students about the residential schools, and students now have the opportunity to study issues affecting Aboriginal peoples, including issues of colonialism and how the justice system affects Aboriginal communities in BC (Ministry of Education 2005b; 2006b; 2006c). This represents an immense change in what was taught at schools even a decade ago. Unfortunately, most Canadians are quite ignorant about Aboriginal issues. A recent survey of university students across the country showed that on basic issues to do with Aboriginal peoples, only 10% passed. 72% could not name a single First Nation in Canada (Bednasek et al. 2010: 429). This has been the legacy of an education system that has, for over a century, stereotyped Aboriginal peoples as either violent or lazy (when it discussed them at all), and has provided virtually no discussion of land claims, treaties, or the need for Europeans to acquire land through formal processes (Furniss 1999: 59; Carleton 2011: 102-104; Francis 2011: 176). The ignorance of most Canadians is overwhelming, despite five hundred years of contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

It is because of this lack of general knowledge that it is imperative to consider alternative modes of education, and one of the primary ways of doing this is through exhibiting. The first exhibit on residential schools, *Where are the Children? Healing the Legacy of the Residential Schools*, opened at the National Archives of Canada in 2002. Consisting of 118 framed archival photos, the exhibit also featured original classroom texts and historical government papers. The exhibit is still touring throughout the country ten years later. Since its creation, other Aboriginal communities have also curated on the subject.<sup>7</sup> Primarily photographic displays, each of these exhibits has been created to serve the needs of the community.<sup>8</sup> They are healing exhibits, providing a means for people to

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<sup>6</sup> The term *legacy* is commonly used to denote the ongoing effects of the residential school system.

<sup>7</sup> Of those I have found, *Residential Schools: The Red Lake Story* (Red Lake Regional Heritage Centre 2006), *We were taught differently: The Indian Residential School Experience* (NeChee Friendship Centre, Lake of the Woods Ojibway Cultural Centre & Lake of the Woods Museum 2008), *Ontario Residential Schools: Our Story* (Fort Frances Museum 2008), “*We were so far away...” The Inuit Experience of Residential Schools* (Legacy of Hope Foundation 2010), *100 Years of Loss* (Legacy of Hope Foundation 2010), *Honouring Memory – Canada’s Residential Schools* (McCord Museum 2013), *Speaking to Memory: Images and Voices from St. Michael’s Residential School* (UBC Museum of Anthropology 2013).

<sup>8</sup> A collection of art by children at Alberni School was also discovered and subsequently exhibited in 2012 at the TRC hearing in Victoria, BC, and since then, art galleries have also begun to display contemporary art on

talk about what happened, make a public stand that what happened to them was wrong, and to state their cases as survivors: those who refuse to be victims any longer. Although some of these exhibits are hosted by museums with a settler audience, these exhibits are not designed solely to educate the public. A much greater journey for survivors is taking place, in which exhibiting is actually not a public affair, despite the choice of public venues. These initial exhibits have been quite tentative, reflecting where each community is within a collective healing process. However, part of the TRC's primary mandate is public education, with a focus on exhibitions (IRSSA 2006: Schedule 'N'). Looking to the future, it is something in which museums across the nation are greatly implicated.

For the last twenty years, museums across Canada have been working to build relationships with Aboriginal communities. In many ways, these ongoing collaborations have been successful, as all parties focused on a shared interest in cultural heritage. While communities have not previously been ready to address the full impact of violence publicly, partnerships with museums have played a part in the reawakening of cultural pride, also a powerful tool for healing (Jonaitis 2004: 166). A strong focus on strengthening cultural practices has been a key strategy in the recovery of many communities, and museum employees have been keen to assist, whether in lending objects for ceremonial use, assisting with research or hosting exhibitions in which communities have had a role in curating (Phillips 2011: 137). As communities become stronger, the focus on culture may also shift in unexpected directions, as relationships with museums are a key outlet for Aboriginal communities to communicate with other Canadians. When the time is right to begin educational campaigns in earnest, museums may be approached by Aboriginal communities to host temporary exhibitions or to rework their permanent galleries. It is only a matter of time before museums are called upon to address the historical trauma that most Aboriginal-Museum partnerships have previously sought to avoid at any cost. Museum employees need only examine the disjuncture of their history galleries to see the effect that historical trauma has had on their ability to conceive of who they are and what has happened in the past. Understanding cultural trauma may depend on their ability to consider what is absent from their current displays (Brown, T. 2004: 258).

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the subject - see *Robert Houle: Enuhmo Anduhyaun (The Road Home)* (School of Art Gallery, University of Manitoba 2012), *Witnesses: Art and Canada's Indian Residential Schools* (Belkin Art Gallery 2013), *NET-ETH: Going Out of the Darkness* (Emily Carr University 2013).

Every time something traumatic has happened in the historical record, the effects have usually been minimized or omitted entirely from museum displays. The result is a plethora of exhibits in which Aboriginal peoples simply disappear at some point in time. At best, the events are acknowledged in the form of brief interruptions, in obvious silences, or in a lack of connection between what is displayed and what is narrated. They can be considered traumatic ruptures in the narrative. For example, the North Vancouver Museum & Archives displays a period schoolroom, along with a list of schools that children in North Vancouver attended, including residential schools. However, no reference is made to differences between the schools attended by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. The Surrey Museum (one of the few museums that attempts to organize information by theme rather than historical progression) shows a film featuring the Nisga'a land claims process, which also mentions residential schools. However, no connection is made to the Qw'o:ntl'an (Kwantlen) or Q'eyts'i (Katzie), who actually reside in Surrey. These nations are portrayed by the museum as hosts to regular powwows and festivals, who are actively engaged in passing on culture to younger generations. Their attendance at residential school is not addressed.

The evidence does not suggest that museums and communities are not trying. Rather, that those involved have not yet reached a point where they can successfully curate about the more sensitive aspects of history. These awkward silences or tangential interruptions may be all that remain when the collaborative process is through. Barriers to displaying trauma may equally include a lack of artifacts related to the trauma, or at times, lack of community consensus about sensitive parts of the past. Joan Seidl, Director of Collections and Exhibitions at the Museum of Vancouver, explains that one of the stories she felt most needed to be told in the galleries was of the forced removal of Aboriginal peoples from Kits Point, the land upon which the Museum of Vancouver, Vancouver Maritime Museum and HR MacMillan Space Centre now reside. However, Vancouver is the shared territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, all of whom have varying understandings of what took place. Until or unless the local bands can either agree to a common narrative or concede to post different versions of the events in question, the museum continues to display a blank wall awaiting interpretation: another silence in the

historical narrative.<sup>9</sup> The kinds of ruptures found in other museums are perhaps also the remnants of genuine intentions to represent trauma. Lisa McIntosh, the Director of Learning at the HR MacMillan Space Centre, points out that trauma is not simply a problem for curators. Museum educators are similarly uncomfortable discussing contentious topics, and interpreters often feel obliged to stick to an official museum script that has typically ignored any subject that could become controversial. There is always a fear of offending someone and a fear of being attacked, two common problems for overly polite Canadians attempting to interpret counter-narratives in museum galleries.<sup>10</sup> The ruptures present in museum displays are thus similarly occurring in what is orally stated or avoided by education staff.

The fact that so many of these ruptures exist in museum galleries suggests that museum employees and communities have entered into dialogue over these issues. Yet, rarely do these collaborations result in successful exhibitions. It is much more common that conflicts are separated, that events are omitted, and that most commonly, Aboriginal peoples are removed from history. They are found instead in the introductory gallery, where they proclaim a message of always having been in their traditional territory, practicing their culture, just as they are now.

#### ***0.4 Learning to See Ourselves***

The overarching theme of this work is that Canada is a Métis nation, born out of a combination of European and Aboriginal influences, and that this concept may serve as a starting point for re-examining history. It is a premise borrowed from John Ralston Saul, an award-winning Canadian novelist and essayist, who is considered one of Canada's leading public intellectuals. Saul's impact on political and economic thought has led to his inclusion in the Utne Reader's list of the world's top one hundred thinkers and visionaries, and his work has been translated into 22 languages in thirty countries (Saul 2013). The concept of the Métis nation, which Saul outlines in *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada* (2008), has greatly influenced how I consider reconciliation, as well as shaped my

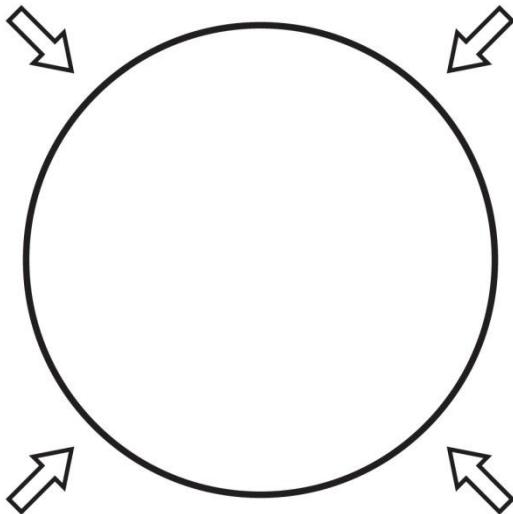
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<sup>9</sup> Joan Seidl, Personal communication, March 7, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Lisa McIntosh has also held the position of Education Coordinator at the Vancouver Maritime Museum and has been heavily involved in Interpretation Canada. These comments were provided in an interview by the author on April 11, 2012.

views of the museum field more generally. Saul argues that Canada has been profoundly influenced by its Aboriginal origins, and that many of the current stumbling blocks stem from the inability of Canadians to imagine themselves as part of this Aboriginal consciousness. He argues that Canadians are in denial of their own history and that their sense of identity is one of confusion. Believing that Canada has been modelled after French and British societies, they are incapable of seeing that the principles they live by are actually Aboriginal in origin.

Saul paints a picture of the country's foundation, in which early fur traders succeeded by marrying into Aboriginal society. From the inception of the fur trade, colonial officers had great difficulty holding onto their men, as more and more abandoned the colonial centres in favour of adopting an Aboriginal way of life. In time, early trading alliances turned into political alliances, with Aboriginal, French and British settlers finding agreements over land use and supporting each other in local warfare. New France, the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company were consciously built upon Aboriginal ideas of mutual dependence and partnership. In order to further political alliances, both French and British government policy favoured that men should marry Aboriginal women. Samuel de Champlain, the founder of New France, once said "Our young men will marry your daughters, and we shall be one people" (quoted in Saul 2008: 10). By marrying high ranking Aboriginal women, European men improved their social standing in the new world. Relying on these alliances initially for survival and later for success, the first 250 years of the country's history were thus typified by nation to nation interaction and political alliances based upon intermarriage. During this time, Europeans had at best achieved equal status with Aboriginal peoples, and in many areas, their foothold remained quite weak. The cultures that these early settlers were accepted into had a non-racial and non-linear idea of civilization. Society was based on the idea of an inclusive Circle that expands and gradually adapts to accept new people.



**Figure 2 Circular Model for Society**

Saul argues that those who thrived were often those who could navigate this complexity of identities; until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the greatest political leaders in Canada were Métis. Leaders such as Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont are those who fought to defend a particularly Canadian way of life, based on Aboriginal principles of diversity and balance. It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that European ideas about racial purity developed and were imported to the new world. However, the waves of new settlers overpowered much of what stood before, using arguments of racial superiority to justify their entitlement to land. They were determined to govern Canada in accordance with the monolithic model so dominant elsewhere in the Western world and many were determined to make Canada a white, Protestant country. Métis rebellions against these new settlers were unsuccessful, paving the way for Canada's assimilationist policies, the creation of Aboriginal reserves, residential schools, and the eventual forgetting of Canada's early history by most Canadians.

With the signing of the British North America Act in 1867, the founding pillar of Canadian society - the Aboriginal part - was written out of the country. Since then, Canadians have learned not to see this essential part of themselves. Their history has been one grounded in the European myth of settlement despite the fact that it is in complete

disjuncture with the reality of most Canadians. Yet, because their real history is not part of how they describe themselves, Canadians are living in denial of their identities. There has been virtually no intellectual engagement with what the place of Aboriginal culture at the core of civilization might be.

There remains at the core of Canadian civilization a subconscious mind that is Métis. It is the reason that Canada has adopted policies of multiculturalism or *interculturalisme* and that, while so many other countries struggle against immigration, Canada is approaching high levels of immigration the country has not seen since the beginning of the last century.<sup>11</sup> Canada's ease of acceptance and pride in cultural mixing are built on the idea of society as an inclusive Circle, enlarging to incorporate new, distinct peoples. This Métis mind is also the reason that Canada is slowly returning to principles that have their origins in Aboriginal thought: diversity, inclusion, continuing relationships, peacekeeping, and minority rights. According to Saul, an Aboriginal influence is also present in “[o]ur obsession with egalitarianism. Our desire to maintain a balance between individuals and groups. The delight we take in playing with our non-monolithic idea of society- a delight in complexity. Our tendency to try to run society as an ongoing negotiation... an expression of society as a balance of complexity, a sort of equilibrium” (Saul 2008: 54). These values do not stem from European thought. They have their origins in Canada, in the country that so many Canadians struggle to describe (Cohen 2007: 3). Furthermore, they are not new ideas, though they may appear to be.

In considering the suppression of Aboriginal culture, Saul argues that “[w]hat is not discussed is how, by destabilizing one of the three pillars upon which our society is built- the senior part of our foundation, the one that provides us with a real relationship to this, our place- we also destabilized the other two pillars and therefore the whole civilization” (Saul 2008: 24). This thesis also follows the premise that by continuing to deny Aboriginal peoples, the field of museums has been destabilized. It is therefore an attempt to help museum employees restabilize their work by learning to see themselves. Reconciliation is only possible by examining how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples have each been

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<sup>11</sup> *Interculturalisme* is a French Canadian concept that entails the intercultural relationship between the francophone majority, anglophone minority, the Aboriginal minority and the cultural communities (newer immigrants), with French as the central language for all four. Everyone can participate in the evolution of the social realm, which is always being remade to include new groups (see Meer and Modood 2012).

affected by this cultural denial and national myth-making. The way forward for museums may be through identifying and returning to a Canadian model of doing things - one based on principles that originated in Canada.

### **0.5 Thesis Aims and Structure**

This thesis was born primarily out of one museum's attempt to engage with social issues and the resulting conceptual problems that were raised for the author. In February 2011, Pamela Masik's *The Forgotten* was set to open at the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. Comprising portraits of 69 missing and murdered women from the Downtown Eastside (DTES) of Vancouver, the exhibit presented the museum with an opportunity to contribute toward preventing violence against women. The exhibition was accepted on its potential to engage the public in a moral debate, ultimately presenting them with the tools and resources to become involved, whether by lobbying government or volunteering with local organizations. However, *The Forgotten* was heavily criticized by those in the DTES and primarily by Aboriginal activists who did not think that the exhibition's position at MOA was appropriate. They felt that the non-Aboriginal artist's rendition had not been respectful toward the one third of the missing women who were Aboriginal and that MOA, as a place that was supposed to represent Aboriginal voices, should not have agreed to host the exhibition.<sup>12</sup> Many members of the DTES community found the idea of the exhibition difficult, as for them, it contributed to the ongoing trauma of having lost many friends and loved ones to extreme violence. Under pressure, the exhibition was eventually cancelled. MOA has extensive experience working with Aboriginal peoples, and the case illuminated the fact that even an experienced museum did not have an understanding of how severe trauma can be for the individual or have an appropriate methodology for working with communities of trauma.

While *The Forgotten* focused on the local issue of endemic violence facing sex workers, women, and particularly Aboriginal women, what the museum became caught in were the sensitivities that accompany historical trauma and that extend much further than the specific situation being represented. Thus, this thesis has taken many detours,

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<sup>12</sup> Corinthia Kelly and Gloria Larocque, Women's Memorial March Committee, Interview by the author, February 25, 2011.

beginning with the issue of violence against women and ending with a larger focus on the systemic abuses inherent in Canadian society that continue to put Aboriginal peoples at risk for violence (Jacobs and Williams 2008: 121). While the aim of this study was originally to establish a methodology for museums attempting to work with social issues, it has become clear throughout the research period that before museums can do this successfully, employees will need to take responsibility for the ways that they continue to contribute toward the marginalization of those they represent. Furthermore, unless museum employees can first learn to understand the ways that historical trauma affects them personally, they will not have the tools to curate exhibitions about the social issues most affecting Canada as a whole.

This text is divided into three sections. The first part, *Diagnosing the Problem*, attempts to illustrate that Canadian museums are symptomatic, exhibiting many problems associated with the denial of historical trauma. While those who have undergone traumatic events may attempt to suppress or avoid thoughts about these incidents, so do other members of society who may identify emotionally with the victims or survivors. This is especially pertinent in societies where extreme traumatization has taken place due to political suppression or genocide; bystanders may suffer from denial as a way to cope with their perceived involvement in the crimes committed. Canadian museums, predominantly made up of non-Aboriginal, Euro-Canadian employees, can be thought of as institutions of vicarious witnesses, in which personnel are heavily affected by the denial of history as they attempt to navigate relationships with Aboriginal communities. I examine museum theory and practice in light of this denial.

The second part, *Truth-Telling*, attempts to examine the basis for this denial by asking the questions that I argue museologists most fear:

- a) How severe was the violence committed against Aboriginal peoples during colonization?
- b) To what degree were settlers historically responsible for this violence?
- c) To what degree are settlers responsible *now*?

I examine the country's colonial past, which has had different impacts on non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal populations. I discuss the impact of colonization on settlers who were

witness to rapid changes in society from that of a Métis civilization to one of European domination. The nature of the residential school system is explored, including the lasting impacts that this system has had on today's Aboriginal peoples. I argue that for all parties to move forward together, non-Aboriginal Canadians must understand the fact that they are, in many ways, also victims of colonization who should similarly be seeking changes in government alongside Aboriginal peoples.

The third part, *Reconciling Canada*, discusses reconciliation in the Canadian context, building toward a solution for the problems and conflicts taking place in museums. I discuss the proliferation of truth and reconciliation commissions worldwide and attempt to situate Canada's TRC as an indigenous truth commission. I then examine Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal definitions of reconciliation and discuss some of the existing barriers to this process being successful. Museums are implicated in reconciliation as key educational sites with the potential to assist Aboriginal communities in recovery. By examining the practices of museums operating within other communities of trauma, I attempt to produce an initial methodology for curating about the legacy of residential schools.

In the thesis' conclusion, I lay a framework for new theory and methodology that would allow museum employees to become real allies to Aboriginal communities, while also exhibiting the parts of colonial history that their displays have thus far denied. I draw upon the Circle as an encompassing philosophy that should be used as a structure, theory, methodology and social practice within museums. By working in a Circle, museum employees and Aboriginal peoples can rebuild the Canadian museum field in accordance with a decolonized, Canadian value system. The change to Circular thought may be the first step toward reconciliation, not only in museums, but also at the national level.

## **0.6 Methodology**

My interest and approach to researching museums and trauma stems from a combination of training. I held positions at the Museum of Anthropology and Vancouver Maritime Museum before attending graduate school in the United Kingdom. Academically, my background has been in museum anthropology, and I therefore draw from theory and methodology that have evolved within the discipline, particularly in Canada. However, living in the United Kingdom and observing the workings of British museums has

contributed greatly to my ability to reflect on both Canadian museology and society with some distance, in effect, conducting anthropology in my own culture. In many ways, this text is an ethnography of Euro-Canadian museum culture, produced by a Canadian museologist with an insider and outsider's understanding.

I am also a certified practitioner in the field of Energy Psychology with experience treating trauma related to sexual assault and child sexual abuse.<sup>13</sup> My approach to studying museums is therefore quite different from that of a museologist. I have experience treating a variety of mental health issues, including symptoms associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, dissociation, addictions, phobias, self-harm, eating disorders, as well as many other effects of trauma. In considering this study, I have had to change my methodology considerably from that of a museum anthropologist. The anthropological and museum-based methodology of much of my training was insufficient to manage the issues at hand, and rather, I rely heavily on concepts of trauma and recovery as epistemology. It is my view that trauma can be recognized as a form of knowledge prior to discourse (Brown, T. 2004: 258), and this has contributed greatly to my overall approach to conducting anthropology.

As an anthropologist, I am well versed in the rhetoric of doing research with indigenous peoples and am conscious of the relationship between research and colonialism, in which research has great potential for exploitation (Bishop and Glynn 1999; Smith 1999; Baskin 2005; Kovach 2009). I have therefore been influenced by scholars who argue for more inclusive, community-based approaches to research. As David Butts (2003) has argued, it is important to locate the focus of the research with the participants themselves, and this means taking into account their cultural knowledge, values and needs (Butts 2003: 25). If this thinking is extended to account for trauma, community needs may include time to process and heal, respect for privacy, and avoidance of situations that may be deemed psychologically stressful and likely to be experienced as retraumatizing. Each of these considerations illuminates the risks inherent in doing sensitive research, as well as the potential inappropriateness of an external researcher becoming involved.

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<sup>13</sup> Energy psychology comprises a number of related energy therapies based on the Chinese Meridian system of medicine that work to quickly rebalance mental health problems. These therapies have proven highly effective in treating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Lee and Renzetti (1993) define a sensitive topic as one “that potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched the collection, holding, and/or dissemination of research data” (Lee and Renzetti 1993: 5). They identify four kinds of research that are likely to be threatening:

- a) where research intrudes into the private sphere or delves into some deeply personal experience
- b) where the study is concerned with deviance and social control
- c) where it impinges on the vested interests of powerful persons or the exercise of coercion or domination
- d) where it deals with things sacred to those being studied that they do not wish profaned (Lee and Renzetti 1993: 6).

They also identify threats that may result due to the high levels of emotional stress they produce, and this is my primary concern. For the purpose of this study, I consider sensitive research that which involves individuals or communities that have experienced trauma due to exposure to violence or other extreme stress. Doing sensitive research involves researching topics that involve vulnerable populations, and this poses ethical concerns as to how to conduct the research in an appropriate manner. When conducting sensitive research, the same concerns that apply to other topics also apply, however, those concerns become magnified (Dickson-Swift et al. 2008: 99).

Anthropological research methods are ideally chosen to align with the cultural understanding and worldview of the research participants and not necessarily the researcher. Western research agendas can be problematic as they impose a Western perspective that may not be deemed appropriate or useful for those involved in the study. Rather, research should follow collectively determined agendas based on consensus, and be conducted according to indigenous practices and preferences (Bishop and Glynn 1999: 168-69). The researcher is someone who should ideally develop a long-term relationship with a community, and the research goals should align with the sustainability and long-term wellbeing of the communities involved. In considering trauma, goals may therefore include recovery, empowerment, and self-determination (Baskin 2005: 174). The research at hand should serve these purposes before serving the interest of the academic community. It is

the role of the researcher to respect the overall goal of recovery and to align research with this aim.

An anthropological methodology gives primacy to community voices as experts and respects the rights of community groups to represent themselves. The role of the researcher is to listen to the participants' stories and to ensure proper voice and representation (Kovach 2009: 99). This is especially pertinent for indigenous peoples who may have been exploited by research in the past. External researchers may not always be wanted, and it may be more appropriate for community members to conduct their own research. There are many indigenous scholars working on behalf of their communities and if a non-indigenous scholar is to do research involving indigenous peoples, there should be justification for their involvement. This is even more important when it comes to sensitive research involving trauma. It takes a high level of trust for survivors to be able to speak about their experiences (Dickson-Swift et al. 2008: 44), and for some, it may take a lifetime to have healed enough to begin to speak about the trauma (Culbertson 1995: 169). It is imperative that survivors control how they disclose what has happened to them, and this must happen in a situation where the survivor feels safe. If research on the subject is conducted by someone of similar cultural background or from within the same survivor experience, there is increased trust and rapport between the researcher and the participants (Liamputpong 2007: 57; Smith and Pitts 2007: 10). For indigenous peoples whose trauma may be directly related to colonization with which research has historically been aligned (Smith 1999), the process of empowerment is better achieved from within. I therefore draw heavily on the work of Aboriginal scholars, who I consider more appropriate researchers than myself. These concerns have directly affected the way that I have pursued obtaining data and where I have drawn a line at being intrusive.

For the purpose of this study, museum research was conducted between October 2010 and August 2011 in the metro Vancouver area. I began by identifying museums that had approached traumatic subjects, either in permanent or temporary exhibitions, public programs or other museum events. In recognizing that most museums have yet to address the force of historical trauma in regards to Aboriginal peoples, I specifically aimed to also approach different community museums that were more experienced in exhibiting trauma with other populations. It was my aim to interview relevant museum staff about their

approach to such subjects and to interview community members who may have also worked on such projects. Depending on the response from museums, my data and involvement varied greatly. At the National Nikkei Museum & Community Centre and Chinese Canadian Military Museum, I was welcomed in to participate and observe meetings and school programs. At other times, staff resources were limited, and I gained information by reading program information and studying online exhibitions, which was my primary methodology at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. When looking at past exhibitions at the Museum of Vancouver and Museum of Anthropology, I had access to meeting minutes and exhibit files. I supplemented this knowledge with interviews with museum staff from museums throughout BC and through visits to local museums. As much of my information has been gleaned through entering museums as a visitor, this work is also heavily influenced not by what takes place behind the scenes, but by what is presented to visitors in the form of permanent exhibitions. In looking for representations of trauma, I became interested in the rhetorical devices employed by museums to narrate the past and so I retain a focus on text and interpretation, rather than on collections.

When there was opportunity to speak with community members, contacts were usually recommended by museum staff or were public figures that I had identified as community leaders. Recognizing that I could be placing people in a sensitive position, potential interviewees were always contacted in advance through email. This enabled interviewees sufficient time to consider their participation, rather than being put on the spot by an unexpected phone call. I introduced my research as a study that aimed to assist museums working with traumatic subjects and identified expertise that the individual might have to contribute. At all times, the focus remained on the individual's experience with the museum or on assisting me to understand the dynamics of the community itself. Participants were not asked to share personal stories of a traumatic experience and if such information did surface during an interview, it was volunteered by the participant. Interviewees were also sent a copy of a consent form in advance, which further explained the scope of the study and the responsibilities of the researcher. Interviews were semi-structured, taking place at a variety of locations chosen by the interviewees, whether at the participant's office, home, or a public place such as a coffee shop. I began each interview by explaining the research process again and by addressing any questions. In

understanding the aims of the study, interviewees were then free to contribute any information they thought would be relevant. Each participant was assured that their interview would not be used unless they had had the opportunity to see a draft of writing and to approve their final involvement. A verbal understanding came to underlie many of my research relationships, as information was also gleaned through impromptu introductions, meetings, and other situations in which consent forms were not used. In these scenarios, it was imperative that I explain the research process verbally and follow up with participants throughout the course of study.

In learning of the more traumatic aspects of a group's past or present, I have operated by a primary mandate of not causing harm (Liamputpong 2007: 24). I have been very aware of questions of intrusion which may be distressing and invasive for interviewees. Therefore, it has been a conscious decision to see if the more sensitive research could be carried out in other ways than by talking with people (Cowles 1988: 164; Dickson-Swift et al. 2008: 26). In each community, research has been produced internally and I have thus drawn my information from literature, film, and other media produced by members of these survivor communities. I believe that in the case of sensitive research, the most successful process is for the research to be conducted from within the survivor community. My literature review has drawn extensively from works produced from within survivor communities in order to give primacy to community knowledge. My research into the residential school experience has focused on a growing body of literature produced by Aboriginal scholars, information gained through news media, and through attendance by distance at the many TRC hearings held nationally and made available by webcast.

As I anticipated, the response to my research initiative was very limited. Many museum workers declined to be interviewed, citing either a lack of time, lack of expertise on the subject, or most commonly, they did not respond to my email. I did find that the majority of those who did not wish to participate were museum employees involved in collaboration with Aboriginal communities, who deemed the relationships sensitive and did not want to jeopardize them by exposing these relationships to an external researcher. I had anticipated this reaction, and the fact that museum employees themselves seemed uncomfortable talking about trauma was not surprising. This further reinforced my methodology of examining other kinds of community museums, rather than those who

work with Aboriginal communities. It should be noted that this study is limited primarily by its subject: trauma is generally not something that individuals want to discuss, and museum employees working with Aboriginal peoples have perhaps not been ready to participate in research on the subject.

Museum research was also supplemented by several interviews with clinical psychologists who specialize in working with trauma. Of these, some had extensive experience working with residential school survivors and were involved either in supporting survivors during their residential school court hearings or in conducting psychological assessments as evidence for trial.<sup>14</sup> Their clinical perspective has also been invaluable.

The main communities of trauma addressed by local museums were as follows:

- a) The Downtown Eastside community of Vancouver, with a specific focus on the friends and families of women who have been murdered or gone missing in the last thirty years.
- b) Survivors of the Jewish Holocaust and their descendants, now living in Vancouver.
- c) The Japanese Canadian community in metro Vancouver, including Second World War internment survivors and their descendants.

The communities of trauma avoided by local museums were:

- a) Survivors of the Indian Residential School system and their descendants.

Though many of these Aboriginal survivor communities currently have relationships with museums, exhibitions do not generally focus on the residential school experience, and trauma is either removed or minimized. I therefore posit the relationship to trauma as one of avoidance, though the relationship to the communities themselves may be strong in other respects.

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<sup>14</sup> In the 1990s, attention was drawn to the prevalence of sexual abuse in the residential schools as thousands of survivors began to challenge the churches and government of Canada in court.

An important consideration lies in the role of the anthropologist as activist. As Kenneth Roth (2002) has noted, “[a]nthropologists and human rights activists have not been natural partners. An anthropologist tends to accept a culture as it is. A human rights activist tends to identify injustices in a culture and work to change them” (Roth 2002: ix). He states that anthropology cannot seem to overcome its political cowardice or passivity. I would argue this reasoning also applies to museums. Trained to observe and represent, museum employees think in a way that is inherently passive. It has often only been when external voices have challenged museums that employees have been forced to change.<sup>15</sup> Yet even in aligning themselves with issues of social justice, a museologist’s natural practice is to represent what is occurring and not to take part in changing it.

In examining museum cases, I have also attended community events, such as festivals, marches, rallies and protests, in which I have had the opportunity to listen to survivors speak and observe the ongoing efforts at healing and activism inherent in each of these communities. As I have become more involved in following sensitive cases and in listening to activists, I have become increasingly aligned with modes of Action Anthropology. I have come to view political change as an inherent goal of anthropological research, where the researcher has the role of an outside helper in promoting the process of empowerment (Kiefer 2007: 200). This work thus promotes agendas of equality, justice, and restitution. It does so through the medium of museums, as this is the field of expertise of the researcher/activist, and is therefore an ideal avenue for her to contribute toward change. The thesis is unapologetically activist in nature; its critiques of the museum field are at times strongly worded and run the risk of being viewed as essentialist generalizations about those who work within the field. It must be considered in context as work that intentionally aims to deconstruct the foundation of the discipline in order to rebuild it. While potentially affronting to other scholars, I find this methodology surprisingly compatible with some anthropological ideals, such as giving back to research participants and conducting research that benefits the communities involved (Baskin 2005: 172). Aligning my overall aims with the goal of reconciliation is a key way to contribute toward

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<sup>15</sup> This is most evident in the way that critiques by indigenous peoples have resulted in changes in practice in museums worldwide. See Kreps (2003) for an overview of the indigenization of museum practices.

the long-term wellbeing of groups who still suffer from discrimination and violence in Canada, ultimately the positive intention behind raising criticisms.

A final methodological concern regards the role of the researcher as witness. At each of the TRC's hearings, those observing are welcomed primarily as witnesses. Witnessing is a concept that will be familiar for those museum employees who work with Aboriginal communities. Though this principle may vary between nations, witnesses are generally called to be the keepers of history when a significant event occurs. Witnessing is not a passive act, as it comes with the responsibility inherent in being the guardian of knowledge. A witness to survivors' accounts carries those stories with them and has the responsibility to educate others about what they have learned. The TRC has continually stressed the importance of bearing witness, also nominating Honourary Witnesses from four continents, whose roles are an official part of the hearings.

Honourary Witnesses are called upon to be the keepers of history when an event of historic significance occurs. The role of the Honourary Witness is to observe or account for the significance of the event. Bearing witness to the thought provoking stories of residential school survivors helps to validate the survivor experience. Honourary Witnesses are then asked to store and care for the history they have witnessed and most importantly, to share it with their own people when they return home (TRC 2011).

As a researcher, I have similarly witnessed many of these accounts and have a duty to guard and pass on this knowledge. It is my hope that the reader may also become the witness, not only through this work, but also through educating themselves on the subject if they intend to conduct museum work with Aboriginal communities. Those who work in the museum field carry a great responsibility. As will be demonstrated throughout this text, museums are inherently implicated in national reconciliation, both as educational institutions and potential sites of healing. If museums are to have a part in reconciliation, their roles should not be passive. Rather, museum employees should aim to transform their initial roles as witnesses into new positions as allies: those who are willing to act alongside Aboriginal peoples to challenge the larger oppressive power structures within Canadian society (Gehl 2013). Through reconciliation, it is possible to attain the goals of mutual understanding and respect, and to redefine the role that museums have in the processes of healing. All begins with the willingness to witness

**PART ONE**

**DIAGNOSING THE PROBLEM**

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA**

### ***1.1 The Nature of Traumatic Memory***

Of all human conditions, suffering through trauma can be one of the most difficult states to understand, simply because it defies what we may think of as normal life experience. It does not seem to follow the guidelines set out by previous experiences and there appear to be no rules to guide the person suffering from its effects. It is not surprising that there is little agreement among psychologists as to the nature of traumatic memories (see Geraerts 2010). However, there are common reactions to trauma, which are predictable in their effects (Herman 2001: 3). While historically, little understanding has been provided to war veterans, abuse survivors and others suffering from the after-effects of violence, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder is now a recognized psychological condition.

According to the American Psychological Association (1994), individuals who develop PTSD have been exposed to extreme stress, in which their lives or the lives of those around them have been seriously threatened. This may include a direct assault, witnessing the death or injury of another person, or learning about serious harm to a loved one. In each case, their reaction to the threat may have been intense fear, helplessness or horror. In the aftermath of such an event, individuals may be fraught with distressing memories, and nightmares are also common. Moreover, they may experience flashbacks that make them feel as if the trauma were occurring again. These may last from a few seconds to several days and can be extremely distressing for the individual. Survivors may also be hypervigilant about their surroundings, coming to live in a state of constant perceived threat. This anxiety causes problems sleeping and interferes with normal functioning during the day, as any number of things may be perceived as highly dangerous. The reaction of the trauma survivor is to avoid the traumatic thoughts at all cost, and this may involve numbing themselves with substances, avoiding places or other stimuli that remind them of the event, or an inability to recall aspects of the event at all. Individuals may respond with a kind of ‘psychic numbing’, with reduced ability to feel emotions. They may feel estranged from people and have little interest in things they used to enjoy. Individuals with PTSD may simultaneously develop other psychological disorders, such as

panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, social phobias, major depression and substance abuse problems (American Psychological Association 1994: 424-25).

While this definition is useful as a starting point for discussing trauma, there are complexities that require clarification. While the kinds of situations that cause traumatic reactions are subject to individual interpretation, all traumatic situations appear to contain two key elements: powerlessness and disruption. The victim was often completely helpless to influence the situation, resulting in feelings of powerlessness. Furthermore, the situation may have disrupted their daily existence to such an extent that the world did not seem to make sense anymore. When a traumatic event occurs, all of the individual's basic assumptions about their life are shattered, and the image they had of themselves and their environment no longer seem to fit (Figley and Kleber 1995: 78). Particularly when the trauma was caused by violence, disconnection from others is a primary effect of trauma.

Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis (Herman 2001: 51).

The survivor may feel utterly abandoned, and this sense of alienation affects every relationship they have, to family and community members, as well as to any perceived divine power. When a secure connection to those around them is lost, the survivor's own sense of identity or self is shattered.

In the aftermath of this seeming annihilation of self, it can be a lengthy process to readapt to the new circumstances. Experiences that are referred to as 'trauma' are those that call into question our basic assumptions about how the world works, notably our own personal safety, the expectation of our continual survival and the belief that the world is ultimately a just place (Wakefield and Horwitz 2010: 36). Though these may not be accurate assumptions, most people operate on the premise that people are basically good and decent and that the world is generally fair. Being able to deny our eventual deaths and ignore much of the terror that takes place in the world allows us to continue functioning; when something threatening or violent happens, we may be unable to maintain a sense of

safety and faith in those around us. Rather than living in a state of complete void, individuals often try to deny or forget what transpired (Waugh et al. 2008: 118).

Judith Herman's ground-breaking book, *Trauma and Recovery* (2001) is the most comprehensive written source on trauma. She explains that the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Unfortunately, there are certain things that are so terrible that they refuse to be buried. Those who are suffering from trauma are often caught in a conflict between the will to deny the traumatic events and the need to proclaim them out loud or order to gain some sense of justice or validation that what transpired was wrong. Survivors alternate between feeling numb and reliving the events, operating in an ongoing dialectic of intense emotion followed by depletion (Herman 2001: 1).

Some psychologists view trauma as an overwhelming input of information that bypasses the individual's regular ability to process what is happening to them. Traumatic events are often experienced as outside of normal life experience, not because they happen rarely, but because they overwhelm the individual's ordinary means of adapting to circumstances (Bisbey and Bisbey 1998: 23). Traumatic events may be unforeseen and happen without warning. They allow no time for mental preparation, and the brain may be overwhelmed with too much information to process in a short period of time. Traumatic reactions most often occur when taking action is either impossible or unsuccessful. When escape is not possible, the human system of self-defence becomes overwhelmed and disorganized.

Most daily events are processed by pre-existing schemata in the brain. We learn about our environments over a lifetime, developing mental pathways according to past experience. When something new occurs, we process the event according to this past experience and categorize the new information according to what we already know. This has been well demonstrated by Bartlett's (1932) experiments in remembering, which illustrated that the ways that people process new information is more often a process of reconstruction or inference based on past life experience. If a person has no pre-existing schemata - for example, they have never experienced severe violence before - an entirely new neural network has to be created if they are attacked. Especially if it contradicts old schemata, the individual may find the experience traumatic, or at best, confusing. If the person has no neural network capable of processing and assimilating the new event, all of

the unintegrated data may remain active until the brain is capable of integrating it. Common symptoms of PTSD, such as constant repetition and focus on the traumatic event, can be seen as the brain's attempts to find or create suitable pathways to process what has happened (Bisbey and Bisbey 1998: 23-25).

Traumatic memories are often fragmented constructions of information that do not seem integrated into a fixed event or experience. They are a combination of emotions, sights, sounds, physical sensations and gaps in memory that are shattered in terms of both narrative and time sequence (Geraerts 2010: 79). The individual often fixates on this information, and it replays and repeats as the brain struggles to integrate it into the categories it is familiar with. Until new pathways are developed and the individual is able to categorize each piece of information in the correct order and place, the person may become trapped in the brain's repetition of feelings and sensations that occurred during the original event. They are in effect, trapped in the past and unable to orient themselves toward the present or future. However, this is not always the case. When an unresolved trauma occurs, the individual's attention may not be consciously trapped in that situation, but rather, in trying to avoid it (Bisbey and Bisbey 1998: 34). If the stress of the event is perceived as severely threatening to one's survival, it can be removed from consciousness by a variety of means (Culbertson 1995: 174).

Two common means of dealing with trauma both during and after the events are repression and dissociation. Repression refers to the selective forgetting of things that cause the individual pain. This is not under a person's voluntary control, and elements are not necessarily forgotten permanently. The repressed material is not lost, but stored in the subconscious, where it may still affect the person's behaviour or surface into conscious awareness at a later date (Holmes 1990: 86). By contrast, when disassociation occurs, different, incompatible, elements are structured in the brain so as to exclude one another from consciousness. In this case, several cognitive systems may co-occur, seemingly independently (Spiegel 1990: 126-127). Individuals may feel disconnected from their thoughts and feelings, or as if the disturbing event is happening to someone else. A common example of disassociation is what occurs when a person is driving and becomes lost in thought; they reach their destination safely, but may realize they do not really recall the details of having driven there. When something traumatic takes place and escape from

the situation is not possible, the individual may go into a state of complete surrender. In these cases, the system of self-defence shuts down completely. Instead of escaping physically, the person alters their own mental state, replacing terror and rage with a sense of calm and detachment (Herman 2001: 42). The person may dissociate so that some aspects of the event are not really experienced. This coping technique may aid the individual to minimize the impact of intensely negative feelings and thus allow them to survive (Westphal et al. 2008: 243). In both scenarios, dissociation and repression, the trauma exists as a matter of what was *not* experienced or what is *not* remembered.

Even when memories are fully repressed, they are not gone. For many people, the symptoms of trauma persist long after the events have passed. In the aftermath of the events, the person's entire system may seem to go onto permanent alert, as if the danger may return at any moment. Any number of things is perceived as dangerous, and anxiety comes to dominate the way that the survivor perceives the world. The person's body is always in a state of arousal. Moreover, long after the event, survivors may relive the events as though they were reoccurring in the present (American Psychological Association 1994: 424; Herman 2001: 35-37). However, because the memory is often a disorganized compilation of thoughts and emotions, flashbacks more often comprise disconnected pieces of emotion or physical sensations, which seem to burst into the present (Culbertson 1995: 175-176). More severe flashbacks bring back the full force of the original events and may last for hours or weeks, in which the survivor cannot seem to regulate their body and emotions. Any reminder of the trauma is enough to bring these emotions from the past into being, and so survivors often go to great lengths to avoid anything they know may act as triggers: seeing a certain word in a newspaper headline or overhearing a conversation on the bus can trigger feelings of life or death, as the body re-enters survival mode unnecessarily. In time, being in a state of continual alert depletes the body's brain chemicals, and the survivor flatlines to a state of exhaustion, unable to react to very much at all. The survivor's existence may come to be dominated by the alternating presence and absence of trauma. This oscillation between hyperarousal and numbness is perhaps the central characteristic of those suffering from trauma (Herman 2001: 1).

When these effects are lasting, they can be very debilitating. The survivor often mistakes the level of threat they are experiencing, and rather than experiencing a normal

range of emotion, any form of upset brings back emotions from the trauma (Hembree and Foa 2010: 180). The trauma survivor may feel that they are on a roller-coaster of emotions that they are helpless to prevent; they are in effect, taken over by emotions from the past, constantly playing out in the present. Some of the most common emotions experienced are anger or rage, powerlessness, helplessness, depression, terror, grief, guilt and shame. Mostly, the survivor suffers from the beliefs that the world is an extremely dangerous place and that they are weak and unable to protect themselves. They operate under two prominent views: that the world is entirely dangerous and that they are completely incompetent (Hembree and Foa 2010: 181). Over time, these states of being can consume a person's daily existence, and all new information and life events will be processed also through these emotions and beliefs about the world. Danger is present in the most mundane of life events and the survivor may become hypervigilant about avoiding harm. In addition to these upsetting emotions, a person's body is similarly out of their control, as they seem to experience these emotions in an extremely visceral way. The body shakes in fear and sweats in panic. Uncontrollable rage causes a sense of heart attack. The emotions are not divorced from the body, and in fact, there is a sense that they are fully and irrevocably embodied. Fear responses include muscle tension, trembling or the urge to run (Hembree and Foa 2010: 180).

The survivor may have great difficulty discussing the trauma or even thinking about it in narrative form. “[A] patient’s recounting of a trauma is often far from perfect, with missing details, many repetitions, and a chaotic recollection of the exact temporal order of events” (Geraerts 2010: 79). They may be unable to attach language to the event at all. This is not merely because discussing the event may be painful, but it is rather an impossibility due to the way the event was originally processed by the brain. Until neural schemata are formed to process every aspect of the trauma, the individual cannot make the usual connections between language, time, events and emotions, which are so easily integrated in the recall of most life events. The survivor may have an awareness of what took place without the mental pathways necessary to think about the experience in words or images, or to attach specific emotions and thoughts to the events (Herman 2001: 38).

Memories that are comprised only of isolated fragments of emotion and physical sensations do not seem comprehensible (Culbertson 1995: 169). The shock of trauma is

not only in the disturbing events that took place, but also in its embodied aftereffects, which differ from previous life experience that has been processed on a more cognitive, semantic level (Van der Kolk 1996: 289). It may take a long time to begin to attach language to the experience. One of the aims of therapy is to assist the individual to narrate their experience, as many may feel an intense need to discuss things without the ability to do so: a paradox of silence and the need to tell (Culbertson 1995: 169).

The primary means of coping with trauma is through escape or avoidance (Creamer 1995: 60), with the trauma survivor attempting to avoid triggering stimuli at all costs. This may involve staying away from places or situations they know will likely bring up dangerous emotions, avoiding newspaper headlines and other media, and being cautious about scenarios they deem high risk for reminding them of the trauma. Many survivors attempt to numb the pervasive emotions with alcohol or other sedatives (Herman 2001: 44) or may slip into dissociative states, in which the world seems less real.

While the symptoms of trauma may seem extreme, they are also normal reactions to threat that may be present after a life-threatening or highly disturbing event. It is now understood that traumatic incidents are far from unusual, but occur frequently within all societies. For most people, traumatic symptoms diminish with time and individuals re-adapt, having learned to cope with what has taken place. However, for some people, these symptoms may last for months or years (Westphal et al. 2008: 220). Far too often, it is the secrecy, avoidance and denial that prevail, and rather than being discussed, the trauma surfaces only in the form of symptoms (Herman 2001: 1). Most people are in the company of individuals who are suffering from trauma. However, the majority of people are not necessarily able to recognize the symptoms either in themselves or in others. Recovery often begins when the person is able to come out of denial and consciously recognize the truth of what happened; particularly in cases where the memory is not intact, a survivor does not necessarily understand that they are in fact a survivor of anything at all. They may instead perceive themselves as incompetent and susceptible to a variety of mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression and addiction. Often persisting or emerging years after the events in question, the survivor and those in their company may view these symptoms as personal weaknesses instead of normal reactions to trauma. Despite its ubiquity in all societies, trauma is simply not self-evident, and while it may be present in

the form of severe symptoms, it is equally present in the form of an absence or a silence. Particularly in cases of childhood trauma due to abuse, memories may be embodied as the child is unable to process rationally what has happened.

Children who are abused by adults are given a clear message not to express their feelings about the abuse. It is common for the victim to learn to survive repeated trauma through non-expressive forms of coping, such as dissociation (Armsworth and Holaday 1993: 50; Shaw 2000: 229; Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005: 51). Studies show that when children are under great pressure of traumatization, there is a narrowing of awareness away from what is threatening and toward getting lost in a safer place (Kleinman and Kleinman 1994: 717). Abused children may describe being in a golden light, flying, or otherwise leaving their bodies. Particularly for young children, the imagination takes over, allowing the child to enter a realm of fantasy. The abuse experience is a mystical one that is a confusing mix of terror and transcendence (Culbertson 1995: 176-8). Once the child has learned to enter dissociative states, they may unwillingly employ this technique to cope with triggering reminders throughout their adulthood. While trauma may annihilate an adult's sense of self, in childhood, it deforms the personality as it is being formed. "It fosters the development of abnormal states of consciousness in which the ordinary relations of body and mind, reality and imagination, knowledge and memory, no longer hold" (Herman 2001: 96). When trauma is repeated in childhood, fragmentation becomes the central principle of personality organization. By the time the child reaches adulthood, their own concept of self is often marred by divisions that ensure that certain experiences remain hidden. It is estimated that up to 50% of sexual abuse survivors do not recall the abuse until years after it has occurred (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005: 40). For the survivor of childhood trauma, gaps in memory are not recognized, post-traumatic responses are often dissociated or immediately forgotten, and unhealthy behaviours or other symptoms of trauma are only partially recognized. As Culbertson (1995) recounts, the memories that do surface in adulthood are almost unrecognizable:

Such a memory is generally full of fleeting images, the percussion of blows, sounds, and movements of the body - disconnected, cacophonous, the cells suffused with the active power of adrenaline, or coated with the anesthetizing numbness of noradrenaline. The action of adrenaline and noradrenalin at the time of traumatic events functions to make the event a certain sort of experience (in which one fled or went numb or fought back) which

may later be recalled. It also makes the experience qualitatively different, limiting it sometimes merely to the reflexes, siphoning senses of fear and panic off into other parts of the brain so as not to destroy the potential for action as required. Thus events and feelings are simply not registered, but this does not mean they are forgotten; they are located in other parts of the mind and the parts of the body affected as well, though separated from the continuing integrated story of the self (Culbertson 1995: 174).

Children who were not able to dissociate or forget traumatic experiences must find ways to justify them. They often conclude that their innate badness was the reason for the abuse. Placing the blame on themselves allows the child to preserve an underlying belief that the abuser (often a parent or caretaker) is good, which is fundamental to the child's sense of security (Herman 2001: 102-103). Participation in abusive sexual activities may heighten this sense of self-loathing and shame. Regardless of whether these memories are intact in adulthood, low self-esteem is universal to survivors of child abuse, both in childhood and adulthood.

Aside from developing classic symptoms of PTSD, child survivors may have a lower tolerance to stress and feel easily overwhelmed by life in general. They may feel depressed and develop a pessimistic outlook on their lives, described as a sense of futurelessness. They are also more likely to develop behavioural problems, such as aggressive behaviour toward their peers, and they may be seen as disruptive or non-compliant. There is evidence that trauma severely impairs a child's language and communication skills, and some may even become mute following a traumatic incident of abuse (Armsworth and Holaday 1993: 50-52).

Due to fragmentation, children cannot often express what has happened to them, however, they may repeat the experience in their play (Shaw 2000: 231). Post-traumatic play is literal enough that the abuses suffered can often be easily inferred. Ordinary means of self-soothing are not enough to provide relief and children may engage in self-harming behaviour, compulsive sexual activity or other unhealthy risk taking in order to regulate their emotions. As adults, they may also repeat the experiences in a variety of hidden forms (Herman 2001: 39). For example, survivors may place themselves at risk for harm or attract relationships in which the abuse they suffered in childhood is repeated. The unconscious desire to either recreate the trauma or to treat and self-soothe any lingering symptoms is obsessive. An adult survivor may not recall memories of sexual abuse, but

may develop an obsessive need to wash their hands or otherwise clean themselves from the shame that subtly, but continually leaks into awareness. If, as a child, the individual was prevented from releasing feelings of overwhelming rage and grief, then these emotions remain unresolved. “The outcomes of unresolved psychological trauma are usually very severe. Some of the most common outcomes reported by ... frontline workers are: substance abuse and/or addictions; suicide or other self-harming behaviours, such as slashing, burning and cutting; dissociation, (inability to feel); and/or re-enactment through risk-taking or abusive behaviours.” (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005: 51). Self-harm, as well as alcohol or drug use, are common means of numbing unidentified and unacknowledged emotions from the past.

Adult survivors of child abuse may have great difficulty establishing or protecting themselves in intimate relationships. Major impairments in memory and identity interfere with their ability to form stable relationships. Survivors may feel desperate for the care, love and protection they did not receive as children and yet their fear of other people makes it difficult for them to accept the very things they crave. They are often terrified of abandonment, exploitation and violence. A basic inability to trust and feelings of shame and inferiority combine to make close relationships incredibly vulnerable for survivors. Yet, the experience of terror intensifies their need for secure attachments. They may alternate between isolation and desperate clinging to those around them. Their relationships are often emotionally intense and, like trauma itself, the relationships fluctuate between extremes (Herman 2001: 56).

In adulthood, survivors may need to avoid thoughts of childhood trauma, which are too painful to cope with. Remembering and forgetting often happen in tandem, and neither is permanently fixed. The trauma survivor may show symptoms of trauma and yet have no awareness of the cause. While avoidance can be viewed as a key survival strategy, it is also clear that it leaves the survivor with impaired functioning. Over time, behaviour like disassociation, which initially enabled the individual to survive, can become maladaptive. However, the impulse to deny the trauma may be very strong and beyond the survivor’s conscious control.

## ***1.2 Collective Trauma***

When focussing on entire communities or societies suffering from trauma, it becomes much more difficult to distinguish common reactions. How communities cope with disaster and violence is dependent on cultural beliefs and norms, as well as the specifics of the events experienced. When psychologists have been sent to sites of recent disaster, they have often been unsuccessful and found that people have not been interested in speaking to them. Clinicians find that individuals are more concerned with political stability and other material concerns than in talking about their mental health. This is partially due to avoidance behaviour, but also because differences in class, ethnicity and culture deeply affect the way that individuals view Western therapeutic methods.<sup>16</sup> Human rights organizations stress that one of the reasons community members are comfortable coming to them for help is specifically because they are human rights organizations and not mental health institutions, and they commonly find a lack of trust toward mental health professionals as opposed to aid workers (Becker 1995: 104). This issue may also be due to the fact that in areas of severe traumatization, where trauma is continuous and not based on a single event, individuals may not yet be free to assess their psychological needs and consider healing. Exposure to trauma is also not necessarily a private experience; it takes place in a social setting and may be directly or indirectly shared with others. In cases of political oppression or other mass atrocity, the experience may be one that affects everyone in the community. Layers of individual traumas are woven together, as communities attempt to cope with violence.

There is important evidence coming from those in human rights organizations and clinicians in non-Western countries who stress that the ways that communities respond to traumatic events does not necessarily fit into a Western ontology focussed on models of illness (Becker 1995; Stamm and Friedman 2000; Herbert and Forman 2010). While it may be true that people in Western societies react with post-traumatic symptoms, this is not necessarily the case for other cultures. At times, these symptoms are present and at times, survivors struggle with other concerns. Those writing on the subject point out that a population's mental health is not separate from the sociopolitical context of their lives.

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<sup>16</sup> Comments provided by Marilyn Bowman in an interview by the author on June 13, 2011. Bowman is a clinical psychologist and psychology professor whose research focuses on individual responses to trauma in a variety of cross-cultural situations.

Furthermore, by medicalizing trauma, the social context of illness is completely removed. There are few studies that adequately bridge the personal experience of trauma with sociopolitical dynamics or with the marginalization and persecution prevalent in many traumatized communities. Models like PTSD do little to capture the complexity of how communities actually register and overcome trauma (Summerfield 1995: 26-27).

A primary concern regarding the PTSD model is that it implies that traumatic events are bounded in time. The term *post* indicates that the traumatic event was limited to a point in time which has passed. However, many individuals experience continuous and cumulative trauma (Becker 1995: 101). Particularly if someone is victimized at a young age, they may be prone to revictimization throughout their lives. It is the nature of trauma that it repeats. Not only does this repetition take place in the mind of the survivor, but it may also be echoed in their behaviour and in how they are treated by others. There is very good clinical evidence to suggest that early childhood traumas predispose people to become victims later in life (Arata 2006; Widom et al. 2008). For many people abused as children, violence is also a condition of their later lives until or unless they are able to break free of the patterns instigated during their early development. In many areas, violence may also be a fact of life, unavoidable due to socioeconomic and political concerns. Exposure to traumatic events is often a continual process, which cannot be separated from political states of oppression.

In any society in which persecution and political repression occur, there will be evidence of a kind of chronic and cumulative trauma (Keilson 1992). In such societies, the term *extreme traumatization* (Becker 1995: 107) is applicable. Extreme traumatization occurs cumulatively. It is not limited in time, and can be thought of as a sociopolitical process rather than an illness. This kind of traumatization commonly occurs when groups are persecuted by other groups within the same society. In areas of extreme traumatization, it is rare to find communities suffering strictly from psychological difficulties. Many of the criticisms of PTSD come from those who argue that the primary component of distress found among non-Western cultures is somatization (Marsella et al. 1996; Robin et al. 1996; Stamm and Friedman 2000). Physical symptoms may appear within days of traumatic events, or years later. They may appear and disappear over the course of a person's lifetime (Becker 1995: 104). In cases of extreme traumatization, the effects may primarily

be somatic, as until the trauma has past, it is not safe for communities to begin to process its effects emotionally. As long as the threat is present, the body reacts to defend itself. Emotions are repressed or held in the body so that the individuals may survive under continual threat. If we consider the case of somatization, it becomes easy to see how whole societies can continue to function after atrocities have been committed; community members may carry the trauma in other ways.

A key study of extreme traumatization focussed on the continuing effects on those who lived through the Chinese Cultural Revolution. It sought to address how political processes of terror and resistance “cross over from public space to traumatize (or reanimate) inner space and then cross back as collective experience” (Kleinman and Kleinman 1994: 711). Results showed that the symptoms associated with trauma followed a Chinese belief system, including concepts of *qi* and *guanxi*.<sup>17</sup> In talking with survivors, the boundaries between physical symptoms and cultural critique were often blurred, with chronic pain, fatigue and dizziness standing in for overt challenges to authority. The bodily complaints evoked social complaints, and these were not so much represented or stated, but remembered in the body. Through the 1980s, the Chinese government moved from allowing some public expression of trauma through cracking down on any social criticism inherent in the victim narratives that were being created. Thus, in this case, there may have been a correlation between somatic complaints and the impossibility of dissent. State sanctioned versions of events ensured that individual memories and expressions of loss were suppressed; the memories were therefore carried within the body, where they could not be regulated or argued with. Experiencing dizziness may have been as close as individuals could come to expressing political opposition (Kleinman and Kleinman 1994: 715).

Another factor affecting communities is the concept of *vicarious traumatization*.<sup>18</sup> This term has primarily been applied to the effects suffered by psychologists and other aid workers who may be subjected to the recounting of traumatic narratives. However, I argue that vicarious traumatization probably accounts for the vast majority of trauma that occurs within oppressed nations. Where political repression occurs, it does not only affect those

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<sup>17</sup> *Qi* is a vital energy whose proper balance is necessary for maintaining health, while *guanxi* is a concept whereby everyday life is configured as a process of social connections.

<sup>18</sup> This concept is also known as secondary traumatic stress or compassion fatigue.

who experience violence first hand; it also has grave affects for the direct or indirect witnesses to these crimes. For all members of society, the burden of knowing about atrocity may be something too difficult to deal with. Instead, knowledge of the political reality is denied.

Vicarious traumatization occurs when individuals are exposed to the trauma of others. It is an act of imagination, in which an individual places themselves in the position of the traumatized person. “The *evidence* is witnessed firsthand, but the event itself is pieced together from images, stories, and physical artifacts and then represented through the imagination” (Keats 2005: 175). This kind of vicarious witnessing is what takes place when we watch the news or listen to the stories of others. Among clinicians, working with trauma patients may lead to signs of burnout, including experiencing milder symptoms of trauma. There is some evidence that merely being exposed to the trauma of others can cause significant effects, even for those with training. Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) describe the powerlessness that therapists experience in their attempts to heal the violation of their clients as *helpless witnessing*. It is this sense of helplessness that may contribute to developing symptoms of secondary traumatization. Marta Young (1997) describes the traumatization she felt upon working with a particular patient:

I remember walking home in an almost dazed fashion, barely greeting my partner and zeroing in on the futon couch in the living room of my apartment. I remember distinctly turning the lights off and lying in the dark for what seemed an indefinite period of time. My initial response was to burst into tears and feel very angry at the perpetrators. I also felt despair at the violence in the world and intense empathy for the pain Juana had had to endure. I was then flooded with many of the ... scenes Juana had described to me ... I continued to have intrusive recollections that gradually dissipated over the following months (Young 1997: 24).

Young’s ability to empathize and imagine what Juana had described contributed to a sense of powerlessness and despair at the violence taking place in the world. She recognized the need to limit the number of trauma patients in her caseload and to find adequate support for herself.

There has recently been a similar focus on protecting the health of journalists who may struggle when exposed to difficult news stories (Maxson 2000; Dworznik and Grubb 2007). Although most journalists react with resilience, there is a risk of possible PTSD,

depression and substance abuse. Events involving death, violence and human suffering can be troubling for journalists, especially when involving children. Some of the risk factors for journalists include lack of experience and preparation for covering difficult stories, exposure to war and exposure to a greater number of traumatic assignments. Those individuals at risk may also be those with negative beliefs about the self, difficulty with emotional expression and low social support. They may have been exposed to a traumatic event in their own lives that makes listening to the stories of others problematic (Smith and Newman 2009). Most journalists will react calmly in the face of the majority of stories. However, they may suffer from vicarious traumatization if a particular story touches upon a part of their own lives. For example, a reporter covering the story of a missing child may find himself reacting strongly if he also has a child of the same age. Another, arriving at an accident scene may find the victims look like her parents, making the entire assignment one of personal identification (Maxson 2000: 81). When a person is better able to imagine themselves in the position of suffering or becomes fearful about their safety or the safety of their loved ones, then vicarious traumatization may suddenly become a reality.

There is also evidence that members of the public react strongly to knowing about atrocities committed, even if they are not directly affected. Numerous recent studies support the fact that there are significant psychological repercussions for these vicarious witnesses. For example, a significant proportion of the US population developed PTSD symptoms following 9/11 after continual exposure to the attacks through the media (Schlenger et al. 2002; Galea and Resnick 2005). Many readers may have felt this kind of overexposure at some point in their lives. They may have inadvertently been exposed to information that they could not deal with and experienced as traumatic. This may have been in watching a film that was too violent, or in having difficulty processing a shocking societal event in which the individual was not personally affected but may have witnessed from afar. Sometimes, knowing about atrocity is enough to cause symptoms of trauma, as the individual struggles to process how dangerous and violent the world is. The concept of evil is one that humankind has always struggled with, finding it difficult to process existing in a world where bad things happen to good people. For some, processing this knowledge can also cause cognitive difficulty and the need to avoid the subject.

Just as witnessing may fall heavily upon the public, so too does knowing. Individuals and entire societies therefore develop coping mechanisms to deal with the profound weight of knowing about atrocity, which is primarily avoided even when acknowledged (Cohen 2001). Echoing individual means of coping with trauma, societies that are suffering from trauma will exhibit signs of avoidance in the form of denial. When denial happens, people, governments, and whole societies are presented with information that is too disturbing or threatening to be fully acknowledged. The information is somehow repressed, disavowed or reinterpreted. Sometimes, the situation is acknowledged, but the implications - the emotional or moral repercussions - are rationalized away. Denial can be thought of as an unconscious mechanism for coping with guilt, anxiety or other disturbing emotions. Mechanisms of denial often mirror the cultural norms and values that may be taken for granted within a particular society. They are found in the subconscious beliefs that people hold and within power structures that they may not have thought to challenge.

In *States of Denial* (2001), Cohen discusses some of the primary forms of collective denial as follows:

*a) Literal Denial*

With literal denial, the fact or knowledge of the fact is denied. Nothing happened, there was no massacre, and those who say there was are lying. Individuals refuse to acknowledge the facts whether they are deliberate lies or unconscious defense mechanisms.

*b) Interpretive Denial*

In these cases, the facts are not denied, but are given a different interpretation. Officials may not deny what happened, but state that it is not what it looks like. By using euphemisms or technical jargon, meanings behind the events are washed over or changed.

*c) Implicatory denial*

Facts and their conventional interpretation are both acknowledged, however psychological or moral implications are denied. The fact that mass atrocities occur every day is acknowledged but not seen as disturbing enough for individuals to act out against them.

In societies suffering from extreme traumatization, the oppression of one group by another may be normalized so that it is not registered as disturbing to most citizens. A multitude of justifications are created to maintain the political structure, and these may be held as subconscious beliefs as well as direct assertions. “Besides collective denials of the past... people may be encouraged to act as if they don’t know about the present. Whole societies are based on forms of cruelty, discrimination, repression or exclusion which are ‘known’ about but never openly acknowledged” (Cohen 2001: 11). These unpleasant truths are either ignored or made to seem normal.

### ***1.3 Canada and Collective Denial***

I have stated above that societies at risk for extreme traumatization are often those in which one segment of society has tried to destroy another. “Extreme traumatization is characterized by a structure of power within the society that is based on the elimination of some members of this society by others of the same society. The process of extreme traumatization is not limited in time and develops sequentially” (Becker 1995:107). There is thus a clear link between extreme traumatization and colonization, where one group of people has attempted to settle in land that was already occupied by another group. For many indigenous peoples worldwide, colonization has been a slow process of attempted destruction over generations, at times characterized by violence and at times enacted through discriminatory policy initiatives (see Adams 1995; Belich 1996; Broome 2010).

In Canada, processes of systemic oppression, assimilation and violence against Aboriginal peoples continue into the present (Amnesty International 2004; Jacobs and Williams 2008; Human Rights Watch 2013). As there has never been a formal restructuring or change in government, it cannot be argued that there has been a gap between the colonial government of the past and the present leadership. Aboriginal nations are often subject to 19<sup>th</sup> century policies and caught in bureaucratic red tape that keeps cycles of poverty and dependence in place (RCAP 1996a: 101). The result of approximately 150 years of government assimilation has resulted in a host of mental health problems and social dysfunctions among Canada’s Aboriginal population that Aboriginal

leaders are now identifying as extreme trauma caused by colonialism (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005: 40).

The fact that so many Canadians are able to ignore or justify this openly known secret is the result of processes of denial that have evolved over generations. Most Canadians are not aware that they are in denial; they have been socialized to function in such a way that the dispossession and poor living conditions of many Aboriginal communities are not registered. Yet, for many, it is also a matter of removing the existence of the peoples themselves from awareness. Thus non-Aboriginal people do not often see the Aboriginal. They do not see the potential for incorporating Aboriginal philosophy into the mainstream. Most have never considered integrating an Aboriginal Parliament into the political system. When they do encounter the Aboriginal in everyday life, many are made profoundly uncomfortable. While it is sometimes identified as colonial guilt, the majority of Canadians are not aware that the discomfort they feel around Aboriginal peoples actually parallels the reaction of a trauma survivor who is living in a deep state of repression. Those who suffer from the most severe dissociative disorders and are unaware that they have been traumatized often carry with them an uneasy awareness that *something is profoundly wrong* ... that there lurks within them a hidden truth that is both terrifying and demoralizing (Spiegel 1990: 136). Canadians are familiar with this feeling – it is most often explained as a lack of Canadian identity (Cohen 2007: 3), an inability to self-define, a feeling that something is missing, and yet, an intense reticence to examine the problem further. It arises most when in the company of Aboriginal peoples, who, particularly for Euro-Canadians, serve as the ultimate trigger to repressed trauma. Canadian society has been founded upon and still depends upon set forms of denial to keep these emotions and questions at bay.

John Ralston Saul identifies three forms of denial present in Canadian society, the first of which is the fundamental denial of any racial mixing in the country's past (Saul 2008: 9). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, ideas of racial purity took hold, leading many Canadians to couch their Métis ancestry in a façade of whiteness. The racist views of many of the new immigrants were not simply directed at Aboriginal peoples, but served as a direct attack on those of established settlers of mixed descent: the very basis of Canadian civilization (Van Kirk 1997). These views affected everyone. Furthermore, with the introduction of the Indian Act in 1876, the government began defining who was and who was not an Indian. It

became possible to lose one's Aboriginal status by marriage or enfranchisement, and in fact, from a governmental standpoint, losing status was equated with becoming a citizen of Canada (RCAP 1996a: 101). This need to distinguish between racial categories still affects Aboriginal status and band membership, as well as the belief among the non-Aboriginal population that these categories are fixed. Despite this impossibility, in the mindset of many Canadians, Aboriginal peoples are distinct from settlers and have always been so.

The implications of this denial are profound. To admit that they are related to today's Aboriginal population is to admit that they have committed the most heinous crimes against their own and to admit that the force of political repression has also been turned against themselves. It is to admit that possibly, the feared and hated 'other' is actually a part of them or that they are an integrated part of that other (Saul 2008: 6). Canadians have not been ready to admit this. In order to minimize the implications, they have delineated between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations and omitted from their identities the part that was once, and perhaps still is, Aboriginal.

A second common form of denial is the denial that Aboriginal peoples still exist (Saul 2008: 21). Settlers are still influenced by views that took hold in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that Aboriginal peoples were dying races (Dickens 2000: 21). The spread of diseases combined with the moral backing of Christianity often provided justification for the removal of land, and it was seen by some as the natural order that European settlers were the successors to land when it was so clear that Aboriginal peoples would not survive. Lurking under the surface of the Canadian psyche is all of the guilt, anxiety, and quiet discomfort raised by the sheer fact that Aboriginal peoples *have* survived (Saul 2008: 32). Their survival provides a constant reminder that the succession to land did not go as planned. By continuing to exist, Aboriginal peoples bring any guilt over land theft into awareness. The non-Aboriginal reaction has been to erase any reminders of these rightful landowners. In telling history solely from a Euro-Canadian perspective, they have ensured that if Aboriginal peoples exist, it is not in a way that has any effect on society as a whole (Saul 2008: 21). Aboriginal contributions are omitted (see Newhouse et al. 2005), and non-Aboriginal Canadians live their lives in the separate realm where they do not need to think about the ongoing presence of those living in neighbouring Aboriginal communities.

The third form of denial stems from the colonial mindset, which most Canadians are not aware that they possess. According to Saul, the colonial mind is obsessed with its relationship to the colonial powers. In regards to Canadian leaders, he states, “At some profound and unconscious level they think and act as if they find themselves accidentally in the colony. Accidentally or temporarily. Their citizenship is an inexplicable emotional accident. Their real culture is that of the empire” (Saul 2008: 230). They do all they can to train their children in the ways of the empire, refusing to consume or produce the local culture. He argues that, in the case of Canadians, an even more perplexing aspect of empire worship has been the switch to worshipping American powers, which now stand in for former French and British idols. A key part of the colonial mind is an intense personal insecurity that cannot be intellectually explained or dealt with. It is coupled with self-loathing, as it is difficult for individuals to believe that they deserve as much as others who belong to a ‘real’ place. Emotional security is therefore established by accepting one’s inferiority before another civilization. Individuals find security by following, imitating and becoming dependent on other nation states, but cannot envision or create anything for themselves.

By my own observations, non-Aboriginal Canadians have great difficulty accepting that they are from Canada. One of the most common questions heard upon introduction in Canada is ‘Where are you from?’<sup>19</sup> It is futile to state that you are Canadian, as this response will immediately be rebuffed with the prompt, ‘No, but where are you *really* from?’ Even if settled for generations, many Canadians have never accepted that they belong to the territory. They may state with pride how long their family has been in the country, keeping track of whether they are 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> generation Canadians. However, the focus of identity still remains on the fact that they are really from somewhere else. Surprisingly, those most likely to ask the question are often Euro-Canadians who have lost track of their cultural heritage, and they direct this question at ethnic minorities, as they envy those who can still claim to have a ‘real’ culture (one from somewhere else). They are at a loss of words to define Canadian culture (Cohen 2007; Studin 2007). It does not

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<sup>19</sup> This is likely also a borrowed phrase from Aboriginal culture. However, while Aboriginal peoples use this phrase as an introduction in order to place others in a network of existing relationships, non-Aboriginal peoples seem to use the phrase only in identifying their lack of relationships and ties to Canada.

matter how long they have lived in Canada; they will never feel that they are in their rightful place.

This geographic dislocation has important implications, as it prevents Canadians from seeing that their culture is actually part of a diverse network of Aboriginal nations, that do not conceive of them as inferior dependents, but would accept them respectfully as equal partners and Canada as an empowered nation in its own right (RCAP 1996a). Unfortunately, because they are not from the territory, most Canadians have no definable relationship to Aboriginal peoples. They deny themselves the opportunity to be considered kin, or neighbours, or friends. By denying their Canadian identity, they deny that the history of the territory - the Aboriginal history - is part of their own origins.

#### ***1.4 Museums and Denial***

The three forms of denial I have discussed above are also operating within museums. History galleries are excellent examples of these, as in Canadian museums, local history is often marred by divisions that reflect the denial of an Aboriginal foundation:

##### *a) We are not Aboriginal.*

Museum galleries are almost always arranged chronologically. While this may seem logical to non-Aboriginal peoples, there are several problems with this layout, including the fact that a chronological version of events is directly tied to European ideas of progress (Nisbet 1980), in which the continuation and success of Aboriginal communities cannot easily be integrated. There can also be no indication of a truly Canadian history as long as settlers are trapped by progress as a means of structuring time. In museums, this display tactic falsely defines Canada as a European society while barring any possibility that it may be something more or different than this. Removing Aboriginal peoples from history communicates that they are distinctly Aboriginal, while others are distinctly Canadian. If cultural mixing is discussed (and it sometimes is), it is done so at specific historical points that are bounded within a linear timeframe.<sup>20</sup> The result is that these interactions are never

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<sup>20</sup> This is especially evident at Fort Langley and the Langley Centennial Museum. Fort Langley is a historic site that offers a non-linear, oral, and integrated approach to history. It focuses exclusively on European/Aboriginal intermarriage, yet does not discuss the implications of these relationships past the year 1858, a political turning point that served as the end to this Métis era. The nearby Langley Centennial

portrayed as having any lasting impact on the nature of Canadian society or the present. Aboriginal peoples may have brief interactions with settlers, but they do not affect settlers, who remain distinctly Western.

*b) Aboriginal peoples do not exist.*

This statement may frustrate those in the museum community who have worked to build relationships Aboriginal peoples and to include their views in exhibitions. Most BC museums now introduce visitors to an Aboriginal presence as soon as they enter the galleries. The original intention of this positioning has been to proclaim the centrality of Aboriginal peoples, and it also follows the Aboriginal protocol of acknowledging traditional territory before any other discussions take place. However, placing these views at the beginning of the history galleries implies again that these peoples used to exist before settlers took their rightful place as landowners. In some galleries, text panels state the continuing presence of Aboriginal peoples very strongly. However, this is not always the case, and even when this does happen, the structure of the galleries still implies on a subconscious level that they are in the past. They are placed in the pre-history of the progress model, reinforced by the fact that Aboriginal voices almost never reappear in the middle or at the end of the history galleries.<sup>21</sup> Labels may state ‘We are here’, but within the galleries, they have disappeared.

*c) We are subjects of the empire.*

Most Canadian history galleries still communicate the proud story of settlement told through the narrative lens of empire. The stories communicated are those of settlers creating communities that emulated those of Europe. In BC, they may focus on local industry, yet from the fur trade to the logging and fishing industries, Canada’s economic merit has been to send goods abroad. Museums rarely narrate the complexity of the early settler experience. If this were the case, more museums would describe settlers trying to learn the local ways. They would focus on learning to hunt and trap, to survive the winter

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Museum subscribes to chronological display and also makes no mention of European and Aboriginal interactions past this point in time; Aboriginal peoples disappear from display around 1858, although the Qw’o:ntl’an (Kwantlen) Nation still reside adjacent to the museum and fort. Both sites were visited in 2011.

<sup>21</sup> The North Vancouver Museum & Archives (2011) serves as an exception, having incorporated Aboriginal individuals also near the end of the galleries (in the present).

climate, and on how settlers adopted Canadian ways as immigrants. They would discuss the sheer complexity and difficulty of all of Canada's early ethnic communities attempting to work alongside each other, as they shared space and built economies in conjunction with the Aboriginal population. As it stands, museums usually describe the founding of industry to serve those back 'home' in Europe. The Canadian pride in logging, mining and fishing have nothing to do with the place they live in. Their value as Canadians has always been as trade partners, who once served the needs of Europe and now, America and Asia.<sup>22</sup>

Museum employees should be asking if there is a more Canadian way of describing history. This kind of account would be inclusive of Aboriginal and settler viewpoints, and it would also be able to combine worldviews in such a way as to restructure the narratives onto a distinctly Canadian model. I do not believe that European views of progress actually define the way that Canadian settlers think. They simply have not been presented with another way to view themselves. They need help breaking through the denial of who they are in order to see things clearly. The problem is that in order to break through this denial, they will first need to recognize that it exists. Museum employees, and in particular anthropologists, may have more difficulty with this than most Canadians simply because they have built stronger relationships with Aboriginal peoples - if not literally, then in terms of a personal identification. It is possible that the closer they have become to communities, the more they have become entangled in denial. They are too close to the issues. In short, they represent exactly the kind of vicarious witnesses who are potential candidates for secondary trauma. Not only are they more knowledgeable about the country's colonial history, but through a shared focus on cultural heritage, they have become close enough to the issues to be able to imagine Aboriginal community members as friends and family.

As a scholar, it is difficult to advance this kind of argument, and it may put those in the museum field on the defensive. Many consider themselves to have very positive relationships with collaborative partners. However, my observation, having worked in the museum field since 2002, is that the evidence is there inside each employee; if employees are truly honest with themselves, they may find that despite their years working with

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<sup>22</sup> A prime example of this is in the CMC's construction of BC. Though substantial discussion is given to interactions between Aboriginal peoples and minorities in the fishing industry, BC is primarily of value to Canada because its port allows the export of goods and resources to Asia (CMC Canada Hall, 2011).

communities, they are still plagued by an indescribable unease that does not diminish as the relationships grow. It is the feeling that after twenty-five years of collaboration in museums, *something is still profoundly wrong*. Museum employees are paralyzed in their minds and practice by the implications of knowing what they cannot know, seeing what they cannot see, and potentially discovering what they most fear: that perhaps they are to blame for the marginalization of the very communities they aim to support. For museums to move forward, museum employees will need to face all of these things; it is the only way to overcome the wall of denial and truly address the situation proactively.

## CHAPTER 2

### MUSEUMS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

#### ***2.1 From Protest to Collaboration, 1988 - 1992***

From 1988 to 1992, a new museology was developed in Canada to account for the differences between Aboriginal views of cultural heritage and the ways that museums had previously managed Aboriginal material culture (Ames 1992; Halpin 1997). Museums are deeply influenced by the discussions that took place twenty-five years ago, which ushered in a new era of socially responsible museums (Hills and Nicks 1992). However, I argue that the ways that museum employees have attempted social responsibility are also heavily influenced by a psychological need to repress their knowledge of and feared participation in colonial violence against Aboriginal peoples. While those in the museum field have actively sought to free themselves from colonial practices, ongoing denial has limited their success. As museum employees have yet to acknowledge the degree that they are also affected by colonization, current efforts to discuss sensitive or traumatic topics are premature in the healing process for everyone involved.

Social responsibility sparked increasing interest in museums in the late 1980s as a global shift occurred, pushing museums in the direction of collaborating with the communities from which their collections originated. These changes came as indigenous scholars and communities began to question museum practices that had previously interpreted their cultures for them, taking on the role of experts on cultural knowledge. They challenged the wrongful removal of their material culture as well as the collection of human remains, bringing into question the entire history of the museum field, which they aligned with colonial practices (Cranmer Webster 1988; Doxtator 1988; Tapsell 1998; Simpson 2001). For some communities, the removal of objects was associated with the forced removal and attempted eradication of the cultures themselves, as the practice of collecting often coincided with the work of missionaries and the curtailing of cultural practices (U'mista Cultural Society 1975). In addition to conflicts over the origins of collections, communities also questioned other aspects of museum practice, including the sole right of the institutions' employees to interpret and care for material culture. They challenged those in museums to surrender their assumed authority and to let indigenous

peoples speak for themselves (Duffek 1989; McMaster 1990). They called for increased representation within museums and a re-working of Western museum practice to include indigenous perspectives on the care of artifacts, which may include a spiritual or ritual component to care (Clavir 2002; Sully 2007). Throughout the 1980s, curators at the Museum of Anthropology and Glenbow Museum had begun to experiment with increased community consultation and were on the verge of including Aboriginal co-curators for exhibitions. For the museum staff and communities involved, learning to work together was a new process and one that required each side to come up with new roles and understandings of the exhibition process. Aboriginal community members were not naturally comfortable in museums and found it difficult to adjust to museum work (Mayer et al. 1991: 20). This discomfort was equally tied to the anxiety that often accompanies trauma.

In Canada, these challenges to museums were not separate from the political and psychological struggles taking place in Aboriginal communities. They coincided with an increased push toward political activism, demands for the settlement of land claims and resource rights, and with many residential school survivors and their descendants attempting to cope with their childhood experiences (Ennamorato 1998: 9; Corrado et al. 2003: 15). The reality of these experiences was not made public until the early 1990s, when thousands of survivors found the courage to challenge the Canadian government and churches in court over cases of sexual abuse committed in the schools (Stanton 2011). Yet, throughout the 1980s, these things were not usually spoken of (Castellano et al. 2008: 9): they were emoted. The mistrust and growing anger that came to be directed against museums was not only about museums - it was equally tied to the colonial violence committed by educational institutions, which commonly involved sexual and physical abuse, as well as complete psychological domination by authority figures. These educational institutions had strong relationships with police forces and government given authority over all aspects of the students' lives (see Grant 1996; Miller 1996). In the mindset of many Aboriginal elders, the relationship to museums-as-educational-institutions was thus one that was embodied through relationships of violence and domination. Community stands on cultural patrimony can be seen as tentative stands against the larger mechanisms of violence, which may have been fully voiced and integrated in the minds of

those making the challenges, and yet, equally silent to those being challenged. The removal of objects into institutions could not be separated from a greater loss: the removal of the children into institutions. Thus, when Aboriginal individuals spoke to museum employees about culture loss, it was with the same grief that as children, many had felt about being removed from their parents and way of life. It was the same grief that many as adults had felt over losing their own children to residential schools.

At the time, the museum community understood these issues in part, but was not ready to acknowledge the extent that they were implicated. Sometimes, all that employees understood was the anger being voiced against them, which came as a shock when they had always viewed their roles positively. The first book offering Aboriginal accounts of the residential school experience, *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School*, was published in 1988, the same year that major challenges began to be voiced against museums. Those interviewed spoke honestly about their experiences, and yet many more were reticent to document the more abusive aspects of the schools. These discussions were not commonplace. Most museum employees did not know what had happened in the schools and so took any arguments over artifacts at face value. By the late 1980s, museums in Canada were showing their commitment toward inclusion, and there were collaborative projects originating in major museums across the country. At this time, however, such practice was not the norm. It took protests over several key exhibitions to change museum practice at a national level and to push museum employees to really consider social responsibility within their institutions.

In Canada, the two exhibitions most responsible for ushering in a new era of Canadian museology were *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* and *Into the Heart of Africa*, which opened in 1988 and 1989 respectively. *The Spirit Sings* was produced by the Glenbow Museum to coincide with the 1988 Calgary Olympics. The exhibition's curator stated that it was "designed as an important vehicle to educate the Canadian people about the native heritage of their country and to bring the wealth of Canadian native materials held in foreign museums to light" (Harrison 1988: 6). Bringing together a large number of artifacts from across Canada and abroad, it focused on the resilience of the cultures involved in the face of colonization. Alongside the exhibition, the museum also hosted a Celebration of Native Cultures, which allowed Aboriginal

individuals to present contemporary dances, traditional crafts, storytelling, foods, fashion shows and literature readings to the public. In many ways, the exhibition was highly successful, outselling any previous exhibitions at the Glenbow Museum, and in particular, gaining a larger Aboriginal audience than any other exhibition the museum had mounted in the past (Harrison 1988: 8). These details were often overlooked in the wake of the exhibition's larger controversy, yet at the time, the Glenbow Museum was being progressive in working with contemporary Aboriginal groups and attempting to celebrate the wealth of the living cultures at hand.

The exhibition's budget was provided by a grant from Shell Oil, as well as sponsorship by the federal and provincial governments. Plans for *The Spirit Sings* became caught in a larger conflict, when in 1986, the Lubicon Lake Cree announced a boycott of the upcoming 1988 Olympics in order to draw attention to their outstanding land claim. The dispossessed band members were considered squatters on their traditional lands, which had been dominated by oil companies since the Second World War. In the 1980s, the Lubicon reached a crisis point, as the combination of oil exploration and a series of forest fires severely decimated their usual income from hunting and trapping. They went from a combined income of \$255,000 in 1983 to a mere \$20,000 in 1988. Many of the Lubicon contracted tuberculosis. At the same time, suicide became endemic, as did death from drinking or from freezing (Shore 1994). The Lubicon battle against Shell Oil was a fight for their very survival. The Lubicon claimed the oil company and government's sponsorship of the exhibition was an attempt to make them appear supportive of Aboriginal peoples, when they were actually annihilating them (Harrison 1988: 6). The Lubicon did not object to the content of *The Spirit Sings*, but to its sponsorship and association with the Calgary Olympics. Addressing the museum primarily through the media, they called for others to boycott the exhibition. Many of the Lubicon's supporters indeed found it hypocritical for the exhibition to celebrate the continuity of the cultures involved, whose current survival was threatened by the exhibit's own corporate sponsor (Clifford 1997: 205).

From within the museum community, the exhibition was justified by a need to refrain from partisan politics. Some personnel reacted strongly, defending their obligation to operate independently of the personal causes of politicians and other interest groups.

They believed that universal access to collections should not be determined by political beliefs and that the legitimacy of the institutions would be called into question if they were forced to promote the political causes of pressure groups. In a 1988 article, MOA director Michael Ames called support for the exhibition a political stance for the *objects* and against the “politics of suppression” (Ames 1988: 83) advocated by some members of the academic community. Of the 110 institutions approached by the Glenbow Museum, only 12 supported the boycott by refusing to lend objects, indicating an overall support for the exhibition by other museums (Harrison 1988: 6).

*The Spirit Sings* called into question many of the fundamental tenets of museum practice. Some criticized the gap between the historical presentation of artifacts and the current state of Aboriginal peoples (Phillips 2011: 49). The Celebration of Native Cultures was often overlooked as the focus remained on the exhibition itself and the presentation of historical materials. While the Glenbow Museum was consulting Aboriginal communities, the Lubicon protest created a microcosm of criticism, in which people examined the museum’s activities with a magnifying glass that had not previously been turned on a Canadian museum exhibition. Though the museum’s level of consultation was already above that of most institutions, there were for the first time arguments being raised for full collaboration with Aboriginal nations.

Members of the public also agreed that museums were implicated in the social context of the peoples they were representing. What they were asking those in museums to do was to consider the place of these institutions in the wider context of Aboriginal social conditions. Many Aboriginal peoples were struggling in poverty and fighting for the return of their traditional lands, and those involved did not view institutions as neutral, but implicated them in the larger processes of oppression, whether by virtue of their funding sources or representational practices. They were asking museum employees to make a moral choice, something which was perceived as grossly inappropriate by a museum community that understood its duty as a public trust to remain politically uninvolved in debates happening outside the museum walls.

From *The Spirit Sings* controversy emerged a defined view of social responsibility within the museum community, based on advancing the causes of Aboriginal communities through promoting understanding of the richness of their cultures. They would promote a

message that “contemporary native groups share a sophisticated, complex and diverse heritage that continues to be relevant to them” (Ames 1988: 83) and that wider understanding on the part of the public would contribute to their overall wellbeing and political legitimacy. When faced with very real examples of political oppression, museums would become venues that celebrated the cultures of the oppressed. By focusing on community strength in the form of the arts, Aboriginal causes would be indirectly promoted, and museum employees could also become political while claiming neutrality. I would summarize the first definition of social responsibility as one that emerged directly from *The Spirit Sings* controversy.

*Social responsibility is defined by the promotion of the ongoing artistic and cultural production of Aboriginal peoples in order to facilitate greater understanding of Aboriginal cultures and indirectly foster social change.*

According to this definition, it is not the place of museum employees to become politically involved in the struggles of Aboriginal peoples for justice or restitution, yet they may assist a general understanding of these peoples in order to change negative stereotypes into positive associations. The socially responsible museum forgoes complete neutrality toward Aboriginal peoples by becoming their cultural *promoter*. However, museum employees may still claim that these public institutions are politically *uninvolved*, and therefore, *neutral*.

The struggle to remain neutral parties during *The Spirit Sings* can be seen as a struggle to remain in the role in which museologists had generally seen themselves: that of sympathetic, but innocent bystander. They adopted policies of cultural promotion, and so aligned themselves with Aboriginal peoples. Yet, they did this in a very safe way, where cultural production was separated from the psychological and material wellbeing of those involved. As Gloria Cranmer Webster (1990) stated, “It is as if Indian and Inuit art is acceptable as long as it is removed from its context. That context is the reality of most native communities in Canada, which have the highest rates of suicide, alcoholism and drug abuse especially among young people, high unemployment, low educational achievement and other symptoms of unhealthy communities” (Cranmer Webster 1990: 132). When

pressed to acknowledge its connection to the oppressed, the museum community fought to maintain a sense of denial. In this case, they acknowledged the political context of Aboriginal communities, but justified their disengagement, citing the apolitical nature of institutions. When their practices were challenged, they subverted the meanings of these messages, placing themselves again in the role of supportive promoter, rather than oppressor.

With these discussions fully underway, another exhibition, *Into the Heart of Africa*, opened at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in 1989. With *The Spirit Sings* still freshly in the mind of the public, the ROM exhibit proved to be equally controversial, though this time, for issues directly related to representation. The ROM's guest curator wanted to focus on the collections' origins, primarily acquired during the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial era by missionaries and Canadian soldiers, who collected trophies to demonstrate their religious or political conquests on behalf of the British Empire. Heavily influenced by postmodernist thought, the exhibit was highly reflexive, attempting to look closely at colonial history and in fact, analyze the museum itself as existing in a particular social milieu and historical period (Cannizzo 1991: 150-151). The collections were displayed alongside labels that used the colonial language of the time, its irony demonstrated through the use of quotation marks. However, some of the exhibition's subtlety was lost on the public, who took the curator's use of words like "savage" and "Dark Continent" literally. Others may have missed the exhibit's irony completely if they did not read the labels. While the curator's intentions had been to examine 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial attitudes, some members of the Black Canadian community claimed the exhibit celebrated colonialism and demanded that the exhibition be closed. An ad hoc group of Black Canadians operating under the name *Coalition for the Truth about Africa* renamed the museum the 'Racist Ontario Museum', and began weekly appearances to picket the site. Eventually, clashes at the museum resulted in confrontations with the police, when several members of the group were charged on various counts, including obstructing and assaulting the police, escaping lawful custody, and assault with the intent to resist arrest (Butler 2008: 81). The curator was later harassed at her home and work. The heightened emotion of this time was due in part to the larger context of policing issues in Toronto, with one member of the Black Canadian community shot by police and another dying in custody. Though unrelated to the exhibition, both

occurred during the timeframe of the exhibit, heightening the atmosphere of unrest. During the controversy, the weekly protests were heavily covered by the media, spurring public debate as to the nature of representation in Canada's museums.

It should be noted that despite the long history of Black Canadians in Canada, the ROM had never targeted the population for an exhibition. *Into the Heart of Africa* focused on the culture of imperialism, using the museum's collections to direct the focus back onto the colonizers. Like *The Spirit Sings*, a contemporary component would be added to the exhibition through a lecture series with African scholars, and through cultural dances, musical performances and films by African directors, which focused on contemporary life (Cannizzo 1991: 155). However, questions were raised about the exclusion of the Black Canadian community in Toronto, reinforcing stereotypes of the ROM as an elitist institution whose policies were divorced from the realities of the surrounding communities. Many community members objected to the fact that they had never had the opportunity to tell their stories in a major institution. They questioned why members of the community were only minimally consulted during the exhibit's development and why the exhibit featured the voices of the Canadian soldiers and missionaries, rather than those of Africans (Butler 2008: 12). The ROM never asked the question of how members of the Black Canadian community related to their collections.

A second 1989 exhibition, *Africville: A Spirit That Lives On*, proved to be the example that the museum community needed in order to create a new model for consultation, as well as salvage its sense of being in the right. Opening at the Art Gallery at Mount Saint Vincent University, the exhibit focused on the Black Canadian community in Halifax that had been evicted from their neighbourhood in efforts at slum clearance in the 1960s. The demolition of Africville remains a contentious topic in Canada, and the resistance of the Africville community is seen as a symbol for the fight against racism (Africville Genealogy Society 1989: 24). Because the museum had no collections, employees were dependent on the community itself for the exhibition. They hired someone from within the former Africville community to work with them (Mayer et al. 1991: 18). The exhibition relied heavily on personal testimony, using the narratives of community members to revise the vision of *Africville* commonly portrayed by the media. While usually discussed in terms of city revitalization, the *Africville* exhibit changed this

discourse by recreating a sense of community life, including photographs, household items and church pews (Baele 1992). The exhibit was a clear public success, touring through other parts of Canada. When it appeared in Toronto in 1990, comments in the York Quay Gallery's guest book were extremely positive, showing empathy for the former *Africville* residents (McLennan 1990). Just one year after the *Into the Heart of Africa* debacle, the exhibit appeared to accomplish its aims effortlessly. The museum community saw the benefits of working in collaboration with community groups, and it was through debate and comparison between these two exhibits that they refined a second definition of social responsibility.

*Social responsibility is defined by the full inclusion of source communities from the early stages of exhibition development.*

According to this definition, museum employees could avoid potential public backlash by approaching community groups in the early stages of exhibit design. They saw that when communities were fully included, the resulting exhibits could serve as tools of empowerment. By sharing authority with communities, curators would take on the role of *cultural facilitators*, providing a space in which community voices could interpret their history.

Just like after *The Spirit Sings*, what the museum community did with *Into the Heart of Africa* was turn a demand for activism into something much more passive. Those protesting *Into the Heart of Africa* were demanding the right to represent themselves, to have a voice in major institutions, and for those in positions of authority to stop oppressing their communities, whether by acts of police racism or through acts of disrespect and exclusion by public institutions. For the community involved, these actions were not separate, and museums were directly implicated in current political struggles for equality. The museum community responded by re-examining their practices and sought to build new relationships that would work towards mutual respect and *inclusion*. Again, they would not take a stand against anything happening outside of their doors, but would move to act appropriately in their own institutions. Socially responsible museums would include

communities in exhibitions, rather than focus outwardly on the social issues facing those groups.

I argue that the success of *Africville* had the unintentional consequence of allowing the museum community to forget *Into the Heart of Africa*, despite its key place in museum scholarship. While *Into the Heart of Africa* has been commonly cited and discussed, the shift to collaborative thinking allowed museums to quickly gloss over some of the issues raised. The black community in Toronto had been implicating the ROM in the political context of racism and oppression felt by many members of the community. Museums did not need to react by separating curatorial issues from social ones; yet *Africville* provided those in the field with an excellent example of a successful exhibit, which allowed them to deny the extent of the problem. They esteemed the *Africville* exhibit and applauded themselves for coming up with the solution to their curatorial woes. Seen as an isolated incident, *Into the Heart of Africa* has been remembered as a faux-pas created by one curator, and one who is always posited as well-intentioned (Butler 2008). In the museum community, she has become a kind of martyr, who was persecuted for her postmodernist, reflexive and critical thinking - all values that are still respected within the discipline. The very real threats made against the curator when combined with the example of a more successful exhibition provided members of the museum community with the opportunity to ignore the parts of *Into the Heart of Africa* they did not wish to see: in this case, the call for social responsibility in a larger context than that involving exhibitions.

1989 was also a pivotal year in British Columbia, with the successful repatriation of the potlatch collection to the newly created U'mista Cultural Centre and Kwagiulth Museum (now Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre). The collection was originally confiscated by authorities on Village Island at Dan Cranmer's potlatch in 1921.<sup>23</sup> While the law against potlatching had only been enforced sporadically, Indian agent and former residential school administrator, William Halliday, had seen the event as an opportunity to eliminate potlatching in the region for good (Clifford 1997: 123). Cranmer's potlatch resulted in the incarceration of approximately twenty community members, as well as the confiscation of potlatch regalia, which some were persuaded to surrender to spare themselves from time in

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<sup>23</sup> The potlatch remains the most important ceremonial occasion on the Northwest Coast of BC; used to celebrate major life events and to pass on names and rights, potlatches were illegal in Canada from 1884-1951.

prison. The surrendered objects were originally displayed at St Michael's residential school at Alert Bay, becoming part of an assimilationist system also in the process of removing Kwakwaka'wakw children from their families and schooling them in English and Christianity. Just as the children were removed each year, the potlatch regalia was similarly taken into the imposing educational institution. From there, the items were traded to collectors, eventually dispersed into museums, held primarily at the Royal Ontario Museum and National Museum of Man, which is now the Canadian Museum of Civilization (U'mista Cultural Society 1975). Kwakwaka'wakw demands for repatriation came into full force in the 1980s after many years of lobbying museums for the objects' return. The collection returned to Kwakwaka'wakw lands in 1989, housed partially at Alert Bay and partially at Cape Mudge on Quadra Island. However, they were not permitted to return to individual chiefs and families, as per local tradition. Though the request for the objects' return was finally accepted by museums, it was only with imposed standards of care, as communities were forced to construct their own museums to preserve the objects at museological standards.

The resulting two communities grappled with the imposition of museums onto their lands in different ways. Gloria Cranmer Webster (1990) stated that “[i]t was clear from the beginning that our people did not want a museum, because ‘Indians don’t go to museums’” (Cranmer Webster 1990: 135). The term *cultural centre* was an important distinction in the way the community would conceive of U’mista. However, in practice, the centre appropriated a very museological outlook, with a mandate to collect, preserve and exhibit Kwakwaka'wakw artifacts, while also preserving the language and other cultural traditions of the nation (Cranmer Webster 1990: 135). From the outset, the story told in the galleries was one of political strength, targeted toward a non-Aboriginal public. The Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre, on the other hand, would not let its agendas be determined entirely on white terms (Saunders 1997: 149). The community perceived that

[T]he existence at Cape Mudge of a public museum that labels and interprets objects according to standard ethnographic practices has destroyed traditional Kwakwaka'wakw structures of authority and systems of knowledge management. It has intervened... in a traditional system according to which authority over the display and interpretation of important cultural artifacts is assigned to individuals who have inherited rights to the knowledge and who have been selected by elders to receive traditional knowledge (Phillips 2005: 102-103).

The Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre continues to be recognized for its refusal to engage with external audiences in the way that most museums would. For both cultural centres, there is a need to accomplish community goals within and despite an imposed museum structure.

Due in part to this case, it became an accepted practice for museums in Canada to acknowledge repatriation requests from communities. However, both in Canada and internationally, museums imposed standards of care onto communities, which would often need to build facilities to house the returned objects or find other acceptable buildings where temperature, humidity and security could be controlled. The result of these policies is that in 1997, a Nuxalk Echo mask was repatriated to the lobby of the bank in Bella Coola (Kramer 2004: 168), and in 2006, a Haisla totem pole was similarly repatriated to a local shopping mall until a cultural centre could be constructed.<sup>24</sup>

Along with human remains and sacred materials, repatriation demands have often surrounded objects that were unjustly and suddenly removed from communities. In these cases, the objects stand in for the children who were taken away. In the case of the Cranmer potlatch regalia, objects were caught in a system involving the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, government agents, church-run residential schools, and museums. These four forces worked together to curtail cultural practices, erasing culture, often through the removal of young children and cultural artifacts. However, when museum employees repatriated objects, they positioned themselves as benefactors for having been so forward thinking as to change policies and allow the objects to return. Their imposition of museums back into communities demonstrates that employees were not able to repatriate the material psychologically, holding onto beliefs about proper care that were at odds with the idea of relinquishing full control to Aboriginal peoples. Just as government, school administrators and police forces had done, museum employees now took on the role of deciding what was best for these nations. Was the repatriation successful? The objects may have moved. Yet, the employees responsible also imposed a colonial ideology onto communities, leaving little room for real repatriation to take place.

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<sup>24</sup> Taking proper care of the pole was also important to the community and some wanted the pole to remain at MOA until a suitable facility was built in Kitimat. The mall represented an uneasy compromise in bringing the pole home (Robinson 2007).

It was in light of many of these debates that a conference entitled *Preserving Our Heritage: A Working Conference Between Museums and First Peoples* arose. The conference was a joint initiative of the CMC and Assembly of First Nations, and developed within months of the *Spirit Sings* controversy. The conference attracted two hundred Aboriginal representatives and non-Aboriginal delegates from across Canada to discuss the long-term concerns of Aboriginal peoples in regards to heritage. They expressed dissatisfaction with the ways that museums often portrayed their cultures as existing in the past and outside of mainstream Canadian history. They challenged museums on many fronts, as *The Spirit Sings* had been a key opportunity to raise questions about the care of Aboriginal materials and involvement of the communities themselves.

The emotion of this era should not be downplayed. “[T]he conference sessions were suffused with the raw emotions and residual tensions that had been generated by the boycott. Friends and colleagues who had found themselves on different sides of the issues were still barely on speaking terms” (Phillips 2011: 13). After years of silence between museum employees and communities, the trauma of the residential school experience and of colonialism itself had suddenly burst into awareness, unregulated, and with unexpected force. Aboriginal peoples were making very direct stands against museums, which they did not separate from Canada’s colonial legacy. They were demanding that museum employees come out of denial and see the truth of what had taken place:

First Nations people have been stereotyped into depressive, dehumanizing roles which are taught in learning institutions. To save ourselves, we have had to change this historical identity, to challenge the way that we were made to understand ourselves and those roles that we have been forced to play out - that of drug addicts, drunks and losers. Who caused all this? Our ancestors were sent to residential schools to break our family ties, so we did not have the support of our loved ones, or protection from sodomy and child abuse by the priests, ministers and other government agents. The real cause of suicides must be addressed and analyzed and presented to the public. This is part of the truth that must be shown (Horn-Miller 1993: 44).

Though many in the museum community were initially defensive, the force of these kinds of statements also shook curators and other employees into action.

The result was the formation of a Task Force on Museums and First Peoples to conduct nationwide research over the next two years. The resulting policy document, *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museums and First Peoples* (1992),

would initiate nationwide policy on new collaborative relationships. The final report presented seven principles and 34 recommendations, which covered issues of repatriation, training, interpretation and access. The seven principles provided an ethical framework that served as a radical departure from how museums had previously managed Aboriginal material heritage. They are presented in full below:

1. museums and First Peoples will work together to correct inequities that have characterized their relationships in the past; in particular, the desire and authority of First Peoples to speak for themselves should be recognized and affirmed by museums;
2. an equal partnership involves mutual appreciation of the conceptual knowledge and approaches characteristic of First Peoples, and the empirical knowledge and approaches of academically trained workers;
3. First Peoples and museums recognize mutual interests in the cultural materials and knowledge of the past, along with the contemporary existence of First Peoples;
4. First Peoples and museums must accept the philosophy of co-management and co-responsibility as the ethical basis for principles and procedures pertaining to collections related to aboriginal cultures contained in museums;
5. appropriate representatives of First Peoples will be involved as equal partners in any museum exhibition, program or project dealing with aboriginal heritage, history or culture;
6. First Peoples and museums must recognize a commonality of interest in the research, documentation, presentation, promotion and education of various publics, including museums professionals and academics, in the richness, variety and validity of aboriginal heritage, history and culture; and
7. First Peoples must be fully involved in the development of policies and funding programs related to aboriginal heritage, history and culture (Hill and Nicks 1992: 82).

The report was readily adopted despite tensions and anxiety from within the museum community. In the late 1980s, employees had faced many upheavals, and the public seemed to be turning its gaze onto museum practice like never before. By 1992, many museum employees were convinced of the need to change practice in order to meet public and community concerns. The Task Force report gave museum personnel direction, and while the process was uncertain, the principles outlined served as basic guidelines for their goals. While the United States had adopted a legislative framework for redirecting museums with the passing of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (Fine-Dare 2002), employees of Canadian museums adopted the Task Force report primarily as a moral document. Principles would not be enforced, but rather, museum employees were asked to act in ethically responsible ways toward Aboriginal peoples and to uphold the principles of the report out of the goodness of their hearts. A third definition of social responsibility emerged.

*Social responsibility is defined by a moral obligation to enter into partnership and co-management with Aboriginal peoples in regards to any and all Aboriginal cultural heritage held within museums.*

Socially responsible employees thus focus on sharing authority, listening to diverse perspectives, and respecting the knowledge and knowledge systems of Aboriginal peoples alongside those of academics. Social responsibility is primarily established by entering into collaborative partnerships with communities and opening museums up to processes of change. The Task Force report ushered in a new era of Canadian museology, in which the pressure by Aboriginal peoples and other community groups resulted in changes toward power-sharing structures.

## ***2.2 Collaboration in Principle and Practice, 1993 - 2004***

The 1990s were characterized by establishing socially responsible museums through building relationships with Aboriginal peoples and other minorities. For the next decade, museum employees would turn inward, as they focused on overcoming the tensions inherent in building mutually beneficial partnerships. Their thoughts were on how to best manage collaboration and not on supporting any changes in the world outside their institutional walls (Harper 1996; Notzke 1996).

The Task Force report is an interesting document in that it had solidified partnerships between museums and Aboriginal communities at a very early stage. Within four years of the major upheaval, museum employees had adopted the principles of collaboration. This is still seen as a time of revolution for museums, in which museum employees were forced out of their comfort zones in order to reconceive everything that museums had previously stood for. Unfortunately, events that took place throughout the 1990s indicate that the Task Force agreement may also have been an effort at premature reconciliation between museums and communities. By moving straight to collaboration, museum employees and Aboriginal peoples assumed that they were ready to work together and that their conflicts could be resolved through the process of partnership. What those involved did was effectively skip over major stages in the healing process. They did not

really face the truth of their relationship as one of colonial violence and imposition. They did not undergo a process of healing before reconciling their relationships and moving forward together. Rather, they attempted to move ahead, putting the past aside and starting from a new place of partnership. Initial relationships were inevitably tense.

In the years following the release of the Task Force report, discussions among museum employees invariably focused on how collaboration should take place, sharing examples of successful, if tentative, efforts to fulfill the report's mandates. Articles in *Muse* focused on the need for Aboriginal peoples to come into museums and represent themselves (Horn-Miller 1993), on museum training programs that were being set up for Aboriginal peoples (Andrews and Hayward 1995; Tanner-Kaplash 1995), and obstacles to co-management (Notzke 1996). Those in museums were experimenting with including Aboriginal peoples and sharing the challenges they encountered with the larger museum community (Harper 1996).

Many of the new collaborative projects focussed on contemporary art. This was especially true in BC, where Northwest Coast artists were benefitting from an art renaissance instigated in the 1960s. There was a proliferation of young artists taking up traditional Northwest Coast styles of art, which were also highly sought after on the commercial art market. While previously, these works may have been dismissed as tourist arts, the newfound respect offered to Aboriginal artists was also exemplified in their relationships with museums and galleries, which showcased their works as contemporary fine art (Jonaitis 2004: 166). Aboriginal individuals who chose to visit museums throughout the 1990s were often young carvers, looking for examples of older works from which to learn. While some were working in traditional apprenticeships, others began by studying the formal elements of design and copying museum pieces. Museums came to have a role in cultural revival by standing in where there may have been interruptions in traditional learning systems. Museum employees saw that providing opportunities for young artists was mutually beneficial. Visual art became the focus of cultural pride and often the common point around which employees and Aboriginal communities came together.

The art revival was equally tied to BC politics, and those working in museums understood the unequivocal links between assertions over material culture and assertions to

land and self-government. Material culture came to be aligned with identity politics, in which Aboriginal art styles exemplified cultural uniqueness and therefore justified Aboriginal demands for political autonomy (Townsend-Gault 1997: 132). Curators negotiated this realm of art/politics quite easily as long as the focus remained on art. They posited themselves as key partners in an artistic revival that provided ongoing potential for exhibitions and new relationships.

Although Aboriginal peoples were working with museums, their position as partners or insiders did not always curb their position in opposition to museums. They made efforts to collaborate with the institutions. Yet, when communities and museum personnel did not fully agree, the emotions that erupted were sometimes disproportionate to what was taking place. The same artists who were eager to work with the institutions often took on the roles of those who tried to subvert museums from within (Houle 1991; Townsend-Gault 2004). Employees did not identify this artistic dissent as traumatic intrusions, which had perhaps been triggered by museums. Rather, those in museums were touting their many collaborative successes, as Aboriginal artists were engaged in protesting both inside and outside the institutions.

The museum community responded primarily by denying these interruptions, imagining themselves as partners in these protests. They offered up their museums as neutral spaces where political protests could be mounted. Protests against museums were viewed as reflexive commentaries from their partners, and not validated as real criticism. This is perhaps more obvious for acts of protest that occurred from within the museum space. In her 2004 article, Jennifer Kramer aptly discussed the inherent difficulties in repatriating Aboriginal material when the Canadian legal system and Aboriginal law are not in agreement over what constitutes ownership. She argued that contemporary Aboriginal artists had therefore been engaged in a kind of figurative repatriation within museums, in which art was being used to make claims of self-determination (Kramer 2004: 164). Repatriation had become an act of reclaiming metaphorical territory via control of an object, which could be accomplished when Aboriginal peoples subverted control within the museum space. Robert Houle coined the term “artist-warriors” (Houle 1991: 32) to describe those who challenged dominant practice from within these power structures. Artist-warriors often unsettled visitors by disorienting their expectations. Aboriginal artists

were thus engaged in putting up “no-go signs” (Townsend-Gault 2004: 243) by refusing translation and interpretation in museums, often deliberately blocking off access to certain materials or creating works that would only be understood with insider knowledge made unavailable to the visitor. For the most part, these demonstrations were accepted by museums, whose employees reformulated their institutions in the new theoretical paradigm of contact zones.

James Clifford’s (1997) work on museums as contact zones was a pivotal influence for museums in the late 1990s, who were struggling through the tensions of having their institutions subverted by artists and their practices questioned by other community collaborators. A concept devised by Mary Louise Pratt (1992), the contact zone was defined as “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (Pratt 1992: 6-7). Clifford stressed that the interactions taking place within museums were subject to asymmetrical power relations that fit within this description. He argued that museums had become more like border zones, typified by power-charged exchanges, as different groups were vying for control (Clifford 1997: 192-194). In viewing museums as zones of conflict, the museum community took an academic interest in the power struggles that had been taking place. However, curators often positioned themselves outside of the debate. They recognized that museum culture was often conceptually at odds with Aboriginal cultures, and yet, they were able to place these conflicts in the safe zone of academic theory. Aboriginal artists were continually pressing curators to come out of denial; in order to reduce this threat, their challenges were sometimes reconceived as interesting social phenomena, in which conflicts were identified, theorized, and normalized (Pinto 2013: 13).

Theory was further used to minimize the challenges made by Aboriginal peoples by labeling their protests as performances or rehearsals. In these cases, the museum’s role in the contact zone was neutralized completely, as it became a mere venue where conflicts were taking place. The political challenges which were acted out in museums were interpreted as “the acting out of ‘real’ political dynamics in a museum-as-theatre” (Phillips 2005: 104). By distinguishing between ‘real’ political challenges and mere rehearsals,

museum employees assumed the political acts so frequently taking place within their walls were not actually directed at them. Ruth Phillips (2005), former MOA director, discussed one such performance, in which a member of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation, using a copper from the museum's collections, announced that the chief was about to break the copper/artifact upon the government of Canada, the province of BC and museums in order to challenge them to deal with outstanding issues of repatriation. In Kwakwaka'wakw culture, coppers have traditionally been used as identifiers of a chief's wealth and status, and breaking a copper is considered the highest indignity, akin to wishing your opponent dead (Jonaitis 1991: 41). In this case, the copper specified was not actually broken, the threat remaining as the only public demonstration that took place that day. Phillips categorized the act as a rehearsal, implying that participants were enacting a 'pretend' challenge at the museum before mounting 'real' protests against governments. Again, the work of museums was separated from that of governments, despite these institutional bodies having been mentioned in the same sentence and seen as recipients of the same challenge by the individual making the speech. This person had threatened to break a copper upon governments *and museums*. Yet, the reaction of the museum's director was to minimize the challenge and to place the museum in context as host venue or theatre.

As museum employees were struggling to adjust to their institutions being taken over by Aboriginal communities, a separate and equally poignant dialogue on funding took simultaneous precedence in the field. As much as museum personnel were focused on collaboration with communities, they were also hindered by years of funding cuts, leaving the futures of these partnerships uncertain. The relationship between financial challenges, collaboration, and the development of the museum is rarely discussed. However, it is also imperative to consider the continual loss of funding as a major event in Canadian museology, also affecting views of social responsibility.

In the 1990s, many museum employees still remembered the glory days of the 1970s, in which museums proliferated and excelled. Many museums were founded from government funds that were invested in cultural heritage to coincide with the 1967 Centennial. Centennial projects accounted for 40-50% of the museum development at the time (Teather 1992: 28). A wealth of exhibitions ensued, and it seemed that museums set the standards, while the government supplied around 80% of the funding. As governments

began to cut funding to museums in the 1980s, museums turned to the private sector. However, private sector giving in Canada was not well established and museum employees were facing challenges of financial security (Tyler and Trudel 1992: 2). Finding money to build was easier than finding money to operate (Chandler 2003: 24). Blockbuster shows became too expensive to mount and many museums stopped producing touring exhibitions (Swann 1986: 10). Some people initially considered their funding constraints to be temporary. However, moving into the 1990s, it was becoming clear that the problematic funding situation could possibly be permanent.

By this time, museum employees were getting used to accounting for every dollar spent, and they responded to financial challenges in a variety of ways. Entering the age of marketing had been a necessity, with museums turning to corporate sponsors and attempting to raise funds through shop sales and facility rentals. The biggest toll of the funding crisis was on museum staff, as many museums were forced to lay off personnel and restructure to make up for gaps in their original organizational structures (Hood 1998). Initially, middle level positions were the first to be eliminated, which resulted in a lack of senior management, as museum directors retired without suitable replacements. While previously, those in middle level positions were promoted to fill directors' positions, many institutions were now lacking suitable successors (Deachman 2001: 25). Employees often found themselves enduring a series of temporary acting-directors, until positions were finally filled by directors from abroad or by individuals with little to no museum experience (Marshall 2002: 28). A desperate need to generate funds meant that museum boards began seeking directors who had public relations expertise. They were expected to be the public face of the museum, liaising with potential donors, attending high profile events, and ideally bringing in revenue. Having never been curators, they did not always understand basic museological values, such as public education and cultural preservation. The result is that there became a widening gap between those in management, often hired on account of their business or marketing backgrounds, and those working in other museum roles, who may have benefitted from the increase in museological training available and whose goals of preservation, education and collaboration were at odds with management's focus on the bottom line.

The new infrastructures made it difficult to support active research or other activities that had traditionally occurred in museums. Staff responded to financial challenges primarily by working harder, putting in longer hours, and often taking on the burden of the extra workload left by co-workers who had been laid off. The effects of burnout resulted in the loss of many museum personnel who chose to leave the field, finding it untenable. “[B]etween 1995 and late 1996, the curatorial staff [at the ROM] decreased by one third, from 45 to 30. The support staff declined as well, leaving curators to handle much of the work formerly done by departmental assistants and technicians. As a ROM curator, I was too busy administering the collection to think about how to interpret it - this was one of my reasons for leaving” (Hood 1998: 38). Small to medium sized institutions felt the constraints of cut-backs even more, with each staff member expected to juggle a variety of roles, while often working part-time hours.

By the year 2000, there was hope in museums that those in the baby-boomer generation would soon retire, leaving positions open for new graduates. A proliferation of training programs produced a pool of potential employees with degrees in tourism, museum and curatorial studies, marketing and fundraising, in addition to the more traditional avenues of history, archaeology and anthropology. For a brief time, it was believed that new students would have their pick of positions. However, most graduates found the opportunities offered to them were for minimum wage or contract positions. When curators did retire, their jobs were often eliminated to save money, rather than filled by successors. Younger museum employees were also commonly caught in restructuring, as many senior positions were changed into junior positions. The workload and responsibility remained the same, but often, the pay was low and the positions intentionally given to employees in their early twenties who were eager for work experience and who would put up with the maltreatment under the title of ‘assistant’. Younger employees also had difficulty finding full-time museum work, and when they did, they did not always share the attitudes of their predecessors toward working conditions.

These problems are further explained by Robin Inglis, director of the North Vancouver Museum & Archives:

Many in the pioneering group that built Canada’s museums in the ‘60s and ‘70s are close to retirement. Many others are giving up and leaving the sector for better paying jobs and

more realistic workloads. It isn't entirely clear there will be enough people to take over for them, under these conditions... Long glossed-over endemic problems of overwork, poor pay and a lack of succession planning, training and development could result in serious human resources challenges in the not too distant future. The willingness of museum staff to carry a tremendous workload may be admirable, but it no longer makes sense to use that willingness as the foundation for human resources planning (quoted in Brown, D. 2004: 16-17).

These endemic funding problems often left museum employees struggling to meet operational costs and pressed to meet staff shortages at the same time that they were putting effort into collaborating with local communities. While employees were making tremendous gains in changing their practices to be more inclusive, they were simultaneously faced with undue personal strain. Those who acknowledged the extent of the problem often left the field, while those who remained are those who denied how dysfunctional and stressful their work environments had become. They were left asking how they could create sustainable partnerships with communities that would outlast the staff turnover and financial cuts that had been normalized within their institutions.

During this time period, museum employees were not engaging with the history of residential schools directly. While they were increasingly working with survivors, the only exhibition on the subject was curated by the Legacy of Hope Foundation, a charitable organization that forms part of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.<sup>25</sup> It was thus not the result of any museum initiative. Yet, in 2001, *Where are the Children? Healing the Legacy of the Residential Schools* began a tour of approximately twenty museums that continues to this day. Displayed not in Aboriginal community centres but within public museums, this early exhibition formed the blueprint for later exhibitions on residential schools, which have each emulated its format.

The goals of the exhibition were

to acknowledge the experiences of, and the impacts and consequences of Canada's Residential School System on Aboriginal peoples; to create a public and historical record of this period in Canadian history that could be easily accessed by Canadians; and to promote public awareness, understanding and education of the history and legacy of residential schools (Legacy of Hope Foundation 2013).

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<sup>25</sup> The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was established by the government in 1998 to help communities in need of healing from residential school abuse.

Designed as an educational exhibition for non-Aboriginal Canadians, the exhibition features archival photographs of Aboriginal children attending residential schools, which are supplemented by historical government papers that explain the rationale of the school system. Text panels explain the nature and impact of the school system on Aboriginal peoples and lead visitors to ask questions, such as ‘Is assimilation a good thing?’ (Legacy of Hope Foundation 2013).

While ground-breaking at the time of opening, reactions to the exhibition by both visitors and museum staff were mixed. As a student employee at MOA, I witnessed firsthand the fact that, when mounted there in 2002, visitors were not interested in engaging with the exhibit. The majority of those who entered the exhibition space did not read the panels, quickly viewed the photos of school children, and then left. While it may be harsh criticism for such an important exhibit, the reality is that there were no artifacts on view, and visitors did not seem to think the black and white images of children at school were as interesting as other pieces of art featured in MOA’s collection. Visitors glanced at them and then passed them by. Even for museum staff, there was a reticence to discuss the exhibit or to really do anything with it other than putting it on display. Despite the exhibition contributing to our own knowledge on the subject, there was a greater need to push it away in favour of discussing safer topics.

### ***2.3 Questioning the Sustainability of Museums, 2005 - Present***

It is questions of sustainability that have come to mark recent discussions in museums. Originally sparked by concerns over global climate change, the language of ecological sustainability has been imported into the museum field in order to address haphazard management and funding schemes that would not allow for successful long-term planning for many institutions (Sutter and Worts 2005; Gijssen 2008; Janes 2008). Museum employees began considering the sustainability of museums as they looked for stable funds, ecologically viable practices, and an integrated presence at the heart of communities that would see museums become essential services in the face of global change. Stemming in part from increased social consciousness produced by social media, museum workers have sought to make their institutions relevant to the changing expectations of their publics. Often this has meant a greater focus on global issues and a strong focus on the present.

Some museums have replaced traditional curatorial roles with other positions that are seen to be more relevant to today's audiences. For example, the Museum of Vancouver currently employs a Curator of Engagement and Dialogue and a Curator of Contemporary Issues. Discussions of reform have again entered the discipline, as museum employees contemplate their place in the world and the feasibility of their current structures.

Faced with environmental threats of unprecedented urgency, those in museums have been questioning larger issues of environmental, geological, political and social survival in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The place of museums before such impending struggles is unclear, and indeed, some worry that museums may become irrelevant in light of these larger concerns. "There is a real threat that unless museums - individually and collectively - make themselves part of the greater enabling social structure and help to moderate and lead through change, the pressures on society will be too great to tolerate any divergence of energy and resources away from larger social-environmental issues" (Gijssen 2008: 44). These museo-environmentalists argue that in order to ensure the survival of museums, employees must transform their institutions into part of a larger ecosystem, embedded in their local environments. Museum collaboration cannot continue to focus solely on internal projects, but must also respond to greater objectives that will benefit society at large. In this current model, the museum becomes critical to the health of a place and central to its long-term planning; it plays a role outside its own purpose. It is not an isolated institution, but part of the whole of society, and its aims reflect this integration (Gijssen 2008: 46).

Robert Janes (2008) identifies the need for museums to awaken to their "perceived irrelevance" (Janes 2008: 20) as un-embedded institutions. He states that museums are inwardly focused and self-congratulatory, possessing only a focus on how to get better at doing the same outdated things. He challenges this kind of thinking in light of global threats, such as climate change, and other local concerns pertaining to the health and wellbeing of communities. He also criticizes the "persistence of the fallacy of authoritative neutrality" (Janes 2008: 22), as most museum employees still maintain they are obligated to assume a neutral stance and refrain from holding an opinion. However, remaining neutral may be akin to maintaining the status quo and in effect, operating despite the clear intrusions of global concerns. For those in the museum community, "sustainability involves revisiting the first principles of museum work, assessing the cultural needs and

opportunities of our communities, and evaluating how our institutions are engaging and addressing those cultural situations” (Sutter and Worts 2005: 131). Museums can become active facilitators of social change. Janes argues that as part of the solution, museums should make their commitment to social responsibility clear, as part of an explicit mission. This is echoed by others in the field, who have provided support for the idea that museums should be addressing social issues as part of their mandates (Frederick 2011: 26).

The kind of social responsibility museum scholars are espousing is very far from the definitions I have presented above. What we have witnessed in recent years is a shift from responsibility through local relationship-building to engagement with the social issues faced by communities, often in light of macro-level, global concerns.

*Social responsibility is defined by becoming an integrated part of the community, identifying community needs and assisting communities to sustain themselves in face of either localized or global threats.*

According to this definition, museum employees become actively engaged in work that is bigger than their own operations, and instead, work as integrated parts of the community in order to fulfill community agendas. As their institutions are socially embedded in local contexts, neither museums or their employees are neutral; rather, they each serve as political entities that work for the sustainability and health of the communities involved. Museums are thus currently pursuing an agenda of addressing social issues, demonstrated through a wealth of exhibitions that focus on contemporary concerns.

My concern with the changing definition of social responsibility lies not in any criticism of sustainability models, but with the overlap between social issues and traumatic subjects. The social issues chosen by museums are also those that touch upon parts of history that museums and communities have previously been reluctant to address. Their sheer sensitivity presents a host of problems that the museum community has proved through twenty-five years of avoidance that it may not have the skills to address.

In 1992, the spirit of partnership between museum employees and Aboriginal communities was formalized in the Task Force report. At the time, the parties involved were not nearly ready to address the full force of colonial trauma. There were a few years

fraught with protest, but when things threatened to become too traumatic, individuals retreated, deciding to gloss over the psychological concerns they were experiencing and to move instantly into reconciliatory relationships. This can be seen as healthy coping and self-protection on the part of both Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal museum personnel. Yet, twenty-five years later, the political climate has changed and conversations about Canada's legacy of trauma are making their way into the mainstream.

A number of exhibitions about residential schools have begun to be developed, beginning with *Residential Schools: The Red Lake Story* in 2006, and reaching a peak in 2013 to coincide with the TRC hearings taking place across the country. The aforementioned exhibit was created to compliment *Where are the Children?* when it was hosted by the Red Lake Regional Heritage Centre (Ontario) and focused on the experiences of survivors at two local residential schools, McIntosh and Pelican Lake. Like *Where are the Children?*, the exhibit featured historic photographs and documents. However, these were supplemented by stories that were submitted by survivors and well as government employees and others who had worked in the North. The history of each school was described, as well as who attended the schools and what their daily experiences had been like. Survivors and their families were also asked to identify and locate as many of the former students in the photographs as could be reached (Canadian Heritage Information Network 2014). While *Where are the Children?* told the national experience of residential schools, the Red Lake exhibit went further, seeking to put a face to those who had been affected by the school system, and this was echoed in other exhibitions.

In 2007, eight Inuit survivors shared their memories in *We Were So Far Away: The Inuit Experience of Residential Schools*, also a development of the Legacy of Hope Foundation. Stories were told in their own words and with their own personal photographs and objects, which were contextualized by more general historic photographs. Survivors noted the importance of the exhibit in light of the fact that their communities were only beginning to discuss residential schools. The exhibit was not only curated for the non-Aboriginal public, but was also directed to Inuit families and was presented in English, French and Inuktitut (Legacy of Hope Foundation 2014). Not long after, a unique partnership between the NeChee Friendship Centre, Lake of the Woods Ojibway Cultural Centre and Lake of the Woods Museum in Ontario resulted in the exhibition *We Were*

*Taught Differently* (2008). Exploring the experiences of local survivors, residential school survivors and their families were included in the curation of the exhibit, associated talks and films, and a community powwow (Aiken 2008). Virtually all other museum exhibitions on the subject have followed a similar format. The blueprint developed in 2001 for *Where are the Children?* – archival photographs and documents with text explaining the origins of the school system and the different aspects of life at the schools – is now also supplemented by quotes and stories told by local survivors.

These exhibitions are important first steps in addressing the legacy of residential schools in Canada and should be commended by those in the field. They also serve as examples of how far collaboration has come in the past two decades. However, despite the example of some Aboriginal communities being willing to display historical injustices within museums, there are questions that remain as to the present status of Aboriginal peoples within Canada, and their relationship to museums as a whole.

Some of the concerns raised during the unrest (1988-1992) have yet to be addressed. In 1993, Kahente Horn-Miller put the question to the museum community, “How about setting up the first North American Indian Holocaust museum in the Western hemisphere?” (Horn-Miller 1993: 46). No such museum exists in Canada. Moreover, twenty-five years later, Aboriginal peoples remain reticent to work in museums. There has been increasing interest on the part of communities to open their own community centres and to develop Aboriginal tourism opportunities.<sup>26</sup> Yet, there remains a severe lack of skilled Aboriginal staff within Canadian museums. There has been virtually no change in the governance structures of museums that would make these work environments comfortable for Aboriginal employees. While in some institutions, meetings and joint projects may operate according to Aboriginal protocols, this practice has yet to be formalized in Canadian museums in the way that some other countries have done.

One need only look at the case of Aotearoa New Zealand to see that Canadian museums have made little advancement in including Aboriginal peoples within mainstream institutions. When the Labour party came into power in Aotearoa in 1984, it formalized a policy of biculturalism, which led to the reorganization of state institutions (including

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<sup>26</sup> Some examples include the recent openings of the Nisga'a Museum, Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre, Haida Heritage Centre and Musqueam Cultural Centre and Gallery.

museums) to reflect Maori practices and cultural symbolism. The national museum, *Te Papa Tongarewa*, responded by constructing a *marae* where cultural exchanges could take place, and many museums now follow a *mana whenua* model for managing collections. In accordance with Maori traditions, the local tribe members become the custodians of any *taonga* held within their lands. Translated into museological terms, this gives the local tribe responsibility over collections from other communities.<sup>27</sup>

To meet the country's bicultural vision, Maori also stressed the need for 50% Maori representation in museums at all levels, from visitor services to the boards of directors, as well as the indigenization of the institutional protocols themselves. While the changes have been challenging for those involved and the process of change is open to criticism, museums have actively sought to meet these demographic goals (see Tramposch 1998; Butts 2003). In Canada, Aboriginal peoples remain eager to collaborate with, but reticent to join the museum sector. This can partially be explained by the fact that Aboriginal peoples choose alliance-building as a preferred way of working with Canadian institutions. Yet, it also reflects a failure of the museum sector to make their institutions comfortable indigenous spaces, which are organized according to Aboriginal principles.

Relationships with communities are not as healthy as museum employees would like to believe. Often their joint projects are very successful, as evidenced by the exhibits described above. Behind the scenes of the collaborative process, things are not as straightforward. In museums, institutional architecture or interactions with authority figures such as curators and directors, may act as triggers for residential school survivors who are coping with trauma (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005: 59-61). Aboriginal individuals of all generations are triggered by seeing artifacts in museums (that are *felt* to be stolen), behind glass (*felt* to be held captive), or not in use (*felt* to be culturally dead). Museum employees may have experience with individuals who are not able to enter the gallery space without being overcome by a sense of grief, anger, or other intense emotions. Despite successful collaborative relationships, museums still stand in for residential schools at a very deep level, making them inherently unsafe places for Aboriginal peoples.

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<sup>27</sup> The *marae* is a traditional Maori meeting place where formal greetings and discussions take place. *Mana whenua* indicates a tribe's power stemming from their traditional territory or authority over the land. *Taonga* (treasure) is a term applied to Maori cultural heritage. Material *taonga* housed in museums may be considered members of the tribe and are sometimes treated as kin.

Museum employees are similarly struggling. Years of funding constraints have resulted in what the individuals I interviewed have described as a ‘culture of bullying’, in which managers attempt to get increasingly more from employees who are already pushed to the limit in terms of workload. The situations that museum employees describe are classic symptoms of toxic work environments, which are often created when organizations enter into financial crisis; in these situations, the financial survival of the institutions takes precedence over employee morale, and toxic managers come to thrive (Kimura 2003: 29). Toxic managers are characterized by an inability to plan strategically and delegate effectively. Their behaviour is “unpredictable, explosive, and disrespectful to their staff. They demonstrate little appreciation for ideas other than their own, and may bully, threaten, and shout to persuade others. Frequently, they take credit for their department’s successes, but blame others for any shortcomings” (Kimura 2003: 28). These managers often place their own needs before those of their employees or institutions, displaying only a concern with securing their own personal advancement. They set only immediate goals and show a lack of long-term planning for their organizations.

Toxic work environments often lead to a breakdown in planning, organizing, and problem-solving, all of which are difficulties with which those in museums are struggling. One individual, who has been an employee of numerous museums in BC, stated,

The hostile management techniques have now become commonplace as I seem to be managing the fallout from these situations daily for friends and colleagues. The most interesting thing of note is the accepted culture of bullying is present in *all* not for profit environments but no so in the profit world... Leads me to think that it's a management style that is being taught and endorsed within our field.<sup>28</sup>

The idea that this management style is being taught is also evident in the confusion that some employees have expressed about the propensity of co-workers to change upon promotion. Numerous individuals that I spoke with have indicated a sense of betrayal and sadness at friends and colleagues who seemed to become bullies, either to protect themselves from other toxic colleagues, or upon becoming managers themselves. There are examples of individuals who worked successfully with colleagues for twenty years, and yet,

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<sup>28</sup> These comments were provided in an email to the author by an individual who wishes to remain anonymous.

upon becoming directors, are perceived by other staff to have adopted the same inappropriate behaviour that they had spent their earlier careers resisting and protesting. The implication is that problems with management can no longer solely be blamed on the importation of directors from other fields; rather, bullying has become a larger problem within BC institutions, in which museum employees are not learning effective management styles, and when they are promoted to management positions, they are often resorting to intimidation for lack of other skills.

Museum employees also do not feel right about their community partnerships. Those who work with Aboriginal peoples are often more aware of Canada's colonial history than other Canadians. Though they may deny the extent of the damage caused, they also understand the implications of conducting research with indigenous peoples, as many have been exposed to essentializing critiques that posited all researchers as exploitative, colonial and malevolent (Smith 1999). As such, some have internalized the belief that as non-Aboriginal peoples, they are personally responsible for the theft of land and ongoing oppression of Aboriginal communities. Though they may have positive relationships with Aboriginal individuals, they are constantly afraid that all Aboriginal peoples hate them, silently accusing them of having colonized the country. The result is that they are never fully able to trust their relationships with collaborative partners – they yearn to be accepted but fear an impending rejection. They are constantly seeking atonement, which only their Aboriginal partners can provide.

Ultimately, this endemic guilt is unproductive and hinders relationships. For example, the director of a BC museum recently reached out to the local Aboriginal community. The director had recently been appointed, and as he had experience working with Aboriginal peoples, he recognized immediately the need to establish an ongoing relationship, which those at the museum had not previously done. The chief that he contacted reacted positively and came to the museum to conduct a ceremonial cleansing of the galleries and museum staff. He was described by the museum's employees as young, charismatic and enthusiastic. However, employees recall that the cleansing ceremony was

interrupted when the director started crying, and the chief had to stop in order to explain to him that “this is not about you against us”.<sup>29</sup>

The paralysing effect of guilt is also evident in the fact that many museum employees have successful working relationships with Aboriginal contacts, while few of these relationships have crossed the border into friendship outside of the museum. Ironically, many museum employees long to be closer to, or accepted into, the Aboriginal communities they work with. However, the gut reaction of these employees is that something has gone terribly, terribly wrong, and that moreover, they are the ones responsible. They cannot seem to overcome this psychological conflict, and thus, they always feel separate, inadequate, and rejected. It does not matter how many times Aboriginal peoples state their desire to work with non-Aboriginal institutions: to employees, it is always a question of negative interpretation, in which the underlying assumption is that these genuine acts of openness and acceptance are a lie.

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<sup>29</sup> The names of the institution and employees have been removed in order to protect the privacy of those involved.

## CHAPTER 3

### MUSEUMS AND TRAUMA

#### ***3.1 Exhibiting Trauma***

Museums in BC have dealt with the traumatic nature of colonization primarily through avoidance, and this can be seen in the narratives present in BC history galleries. There is therefore no current model for curating about traumatic subjects within Canadian museums. There are some international models for exhibiting trauma, which are found in museums dedicated to displaying genocide and human rights issues. Unfortunately, when these museums attempt to display human rights, they sometimes do so in ways that are inappropriate for handling the subject sensitively (Lisus and Erikson 1995). Museums usually assume a healthy visitor population (Silverman 2002: 69), when in reality, there are very real emotional effects for visitors who may find sensitive content overwhelming and traumatic (Keats 2005: 175).

Lennon and Foley (2000) have drawn attention to the public's inquisitiveness about sites of recent death and disaster. They use the term *dark tourism* to denote recent visitation trends that include the former sites of atrocity, such as former concentration camps, prisons and other sites of genocide. There has been similar interest in atrocity museums, with the establishment of museums dedicated to genocide and human rights issues. Examples include the World Centre for Peace, Freedom and Human Rights in France, Liberty Osaka and the Kochi Liberty and Peoples' Rights Museum in Japan, the International Red Cross Museum in Switzerland and the Museum of Compassion in the United States.<sup>30</sup> Visitors to these kinds of museums may come for different reasons, yet it seems clear that there is a correlation between those who seek to visit genocide museums and physical death sites. The reasons for visitation are complex, and many have aligned these practices with modern concepts of pilgrimage, in which people travel to the sites of atrocity to pay their respects to those who have been lost (Blair 2002; Bowman 2009; Sather-Wagstaff 2011). Despite the potential consumer or tourist qualities of these visits, many individuals consider death sites as sacred sites and are not visiting out of an interest in the macabre.

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<sup>30</sup> For further discussion on genocide and human rights museums, see Duffy 2000.

Those who visit atrocity sites and museums are equally those who are looking for healing and closure. They may do so out of a need to settle something within themselves or out of a social responsibility to carry the information with them. Patrice Keats (2005) points out that the many people who make pilgrimages to former concentration camps each year do so respectfully, out of a need to witness to what happened. The witness carries the memory of the trauma into the future when survivors no longer remain, and for many visitors, bearing witness is a social responsibility. They are those who stand in for the survivor who can no longer tell the story. Witnessing is not without risk, and she notes that there are emotional, physical, cognitive, social and spiritual risks inherent in observing representations of atrocity. Visitors to the sites report strong emotional reactions, along with digestive problems, sleep disturbances, headaches and emotional exhaustion. Some cannot stop thinking about the images they have seen, and in many ways, the reactions that concentration camp visitors experience parallel many of the symptoms associated with the firsthand experience of trauma (Keats 2005: 175-181). Visiting museums that focus on atrocity can at times have the same overwhelming effect as visiting atrocity sites. Depending on how museum exhibits are curated, they may be psychologically damaging for visitors. This is especially true if the museum employs the use of graphic, violent images or results to sensationalism in attempts to shock visitors into action.

The Beit Hashoah Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles serves as a primary example of how museologists with little knowledge of trauma may attempt to curate these subjects. The museum has been criticized for its ‘Disneyfication’ of the Holocaust, using a variety of multimedia and interactive tools to create a theme park experience (Luke 2002: 54). As the visitor enters one gallery, an amplified voice accosts them with insults, such as “faggot!” and “nigger!” The visitor is instantly unsettled and made the subject of hatred in order to understand the ‘real’ experience of discrimination. In a small theatre, the film *It Is Called Genocide* is displayed, in which images of genocide appear on three different screens. The images move quickly, with flashes of heads on spear points, a child lying dead in the water, and other representations of death and slaughter (Lisus and Ericson 1995: 4). The museum’s multimedia approach to curating relies heavily on disturbing visual imagery, delivered by film or through photographs in order to convince visitors that when compared to such atrocity, tolerance is the only solution.

It seems unlikely that such shock tactics are those that will drive people to action, let alone assist with closure and healing. Moreover, for visitors who are ‘sensitive’: children, survivors of violence of any kind, or those with a personal connection to the Holocaust, viewing such material may come at the expense of their own health and wellbeing. For those already suffering from trauma, the consequences of witnessing such displays may be enough to cause relapses into substance abuse, trigger suicidal thoughts, or at best, create a situation in which the museum visit is so re-traumatizing that decades later, the individual may still be plagued with terrifying and intrusive thoughts or flashbacks of the visit. The psychological risks for visitors are of a serious kind.

Though Canada does not have a strong history of discussing traumatic subjects, the federal government is following in the footsteps of other atrocity museums, with the development of a new national museum, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR). The CMHR is the first national museum outside of the capital region and the first to focus specifically on the human rights abuses most affecting Canadians. The museum uses a human rights framework for discussing history, with its Content Advisory Committee made up of 17 human rights scholars from across Canada. The group networks extensively with other human rights organizations and views the museum primarily through a scholarly lens of human rights theory (Canadian Museum for Human Rights 2010: 65). The committee has sought to achieve a balance between museology and human rights in their approach to the issues. However, the museum has been marred with controversy since its inception, which brings into question whether the CMHR, or museums in general, have the expertise to collaborate with communities on such sensitive subjects.

The national museum was initiated primarily by the large Jewish population in Winnipeg, who had long been calling for a national Holocaust memorial. The concept of the museum would serve this memorial purpose, as well as provide a venue for the public, especially school groups, to learn about human rights issues more generally. However, during planning for the museum, staff quickly became caught in longstanding confrontations between different community groups over human rights abuses committed during the Second World War. In the 1980s, the Jewish community had lobbied the government to form a commission of inquiry into possible Ukrainian war criminals living in Canada. While no evidence to support their suspicions was found, it outraged many

Ukrainian Canadians, who were also coping with war crimes that had been perpetrated against their families. These conflicts re-emerged during planning for the museum. In 2011, arguments over the centrality of the Holocaust story led to demands by groups of Ukrainian, German and Polish Canadians for the federal government to intervene in the affairs of the museum's board and for the suspension of funding until issues of content could be resolved (Basen 2011). The museum is thus entwined in the layered traumas of many different community groups, which represent conflicts that, in their sheer sensitivity, may be irresolvable.

In the early stages of planning, the advisory committee met with Canadians across the country in order to ask the public what human rights issues were important to them. The results included the rights of Aboriginal peoples, of women and children, those with disabilities, as well as those in the LGBT community. One of the key issues that kept re-emerging in the cities they visited was the number of women who are going missing or who are murdered across the country. This was seen as a serious Canadian problem particularly affecting Aboriginal communities and an issue that needed to be addressed by the museum (Canadian Museum for Human Rights 2010: 41).

The museum thus has a very difficult task in being able to work with communities and organizations representing a diverse set of human rights issues, which are inherently sensitive. When working with Aboriginal communities, there are further considerations around developing a shared understanding about practice and exactly what the museum aims to do. In an early meeting between the advisory committee and the Saskatchewan First Nations Women's Commission, museum staff were reminded that "there is no trust between museums and First Peoples; their trust must be earned for this project to be successful" (Canadian Museum for Human Rights 2010: 31). The CMHR's eagerness to collect stories evoked the impression that the museum's process was a colonial one that failed to take into account the different implications and contexts of telling in Aboriginal traditions. For museums and communities to get to a point where they have a shared understanding and are ready to discuss such personal narratives is a long process, often marred by misunderstandings and differences in pedagogy; these issues were evident from the outset.

Even if collaboration on sensitive topics is achieved, the question is whether an institution can serve as a place where the general public can learn about human rights abuses and also serve as a place of healing for the communities involved. To begin this process, a high level of trust must be present (Booth and Booth 1994), which as those meeting with the CMHR pointed out, is a weak point for museums and Aboriginal peoples, even after twenty-five years of collaboration across Canada. Despite these trials, the commitment to discussing human rights abuses in the context of colonialism is something that many Aboriginal leaders and activists feel strongly about pursuing, and museum employees have demonstrated an equal interest in displaying contemporary social issues. Unfortunately, as the following case study illustrates, addressing local trauma primarily as a social issue may in itself be problematic.

### ***3.2 Missing and Murdered Women in British Columbia***

Although the current figures are difficult to ascertain, it is estimated that close to six hundred Aboriginal women have disappeared or been murdered in Canada in the last thirty years.<sup>31</sup> Across the country, over four thousand women are missing or murdered, with Aboriginal women being far more likely to go missing, and five times as likely to die at the hands of violence (Amnesty International 2004: 23).<sup>32</sup> In BC, incidences have become well known in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) of Vancouver and off of Highway 16, between the cities of Prince George and Prince Rupert. Yet, this is also a nation-wide problem, with other high risk areas in Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon and Winnipeg (Jacobs and Williams 2008: 134).

The DTES has long been posited as a place of degradation and social ills.<sup>33</sup> However, the stereotypes assigned to the DTES have been changing in recent years, as residents push for a different view of their community. Those who live in the area stress the neighbourhood's focus on acceptance (Zuluaga and Walia 2011). For many people with mental health issues or addictions, this is the one place where they have found acceptance without judgment. This is a neighbourhood where people still know each other and are actively involved in community life. It has been called the most vibrant

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<sup>31</sup> As of March 2010, the Native Women's Association of Canada had 582 cases recorded (NWAC 2010b: i).

<sup>32</sup> As of September 2011, the Walk4Justice had compiled a list of close to 4200 women.

<sup>33</sup> For a history of the Downtown Eastside, see Sommers 2001.

neighbourhood in Vancouver on many occasions, with a character of its own that residents would rather retain than have blighted by city planners with an eye on redevelopment. While revitalization may seem like the answer to many of the neighbourhood's social problems, it also poses a grave risk to many residents who survive mainly because of the strong community connections they have. The idea of dispersing those who live there weighs heavily on the wellbeing of these residents, whose position remains that they have a right to exist and to have a say in strengthening their own community (Pedersen and Swanson 2010: 5). Resistance to neighbourhood gentrification is often deeply entwined with artistic production and enacted through activities that lay claim to DTES spaces. Community art projects stake a claim to property that stands in contrast to both housing developments and higher profile galleries, which are perceived to be encroaching on community space (Blomley 2004; Enright 2010).

However we construe the DTES, we also cannot gloss over the real problems faced by residents living in this area. When compared with other places in Vancouver, the neighbourhood does have a higher proportion of people living in poverty, a high prevalence of HIV and Hepatitis C infection, as well as high rates of addiction and mental illness (Planning Department 2009: 7; Zuluaga and Walia 2011). Young people often come to the neighbourhood escaping abusive upbringings, initially finding the DTES a much safer and welcoming environment than home. Many women are engaged in survival sex work, and the lack of affordable and safe housing contributes to a risk of assault. Local battles over safe shelters for women, access to medical care and improved social services are ongoing.

Unfortunately, the area is also now known for the number of women who have gone missing from the neighbourhood since the 1980s. Because the women involved were mainly sex workers, many of them suffering addictions and seen to be leading a high-risk lifestyle, little if any attention was initially given to investigating their disappearances. Though friends and family members lobbied police forces, they were consistently met with barriers and were told repeatedly that their family members were probably not missing and had chosen to move elsewhere or to disappear (Cameron 2010: 92). Police portrayed the missing women as transient individuals, despite the fact that families insisted they had always kept regular contact. The images of women who were loved and connected to their families despite addiction problems and involvement in the sex trade did not fit with police

stereotypes concerning the missing. Despite the ongoing endeavours of advocates for the area, women continued to go missing throughout the 1980s and 1990s with little done to solve the cases. When those in the neighbourhood became concerned that at least one serial killer was frequenting the area, they were repeatedly told by police that there was no evidence the disappearances were related to each other (Cameron 2010: 253).

The arrest of Robert Pickton in February 2002 launched the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) into a murder investigation that would prove to be the largest in Canadian history. After years of insisting the disappearances were not connected and few police resources dedicated to the cases, the RCMP found themselves involved in something far beyond what they could have imagined. The details have been covered extensively by the media, with the DNA and remains of over thirty women now recovered from the farm.<sup>34</sup> The high-profile case struck a chord with the public, as the details of the trial were slowly unveiled and sensationalized by the press. Again, families of the victims were subjected to extreme insensitivity as they navigated the court process. A lack of support services for families and limited involvement and communication with authorities occurred at all levels (Cameron 2010: 598-602). When Pickton was convicted on six counts, justice was served for some families. However, most women would never have their murders go to trial, and for other families, there were still no clues as to what had happened to their missing loved ones. Furthermore, levels of violence faced by DTES residents have not changed since the Pickton trial. This grave problem is not characterized by the vagrancy of one individual, but is rather characteristic of larger socioeconomic problems that place some women at greater risk.

Although this is also an issue of poverty that affects women of other ethnicities, a greater number of Aboriginal women have gone missing from the DTES and across the country. Aboriginal peoples view the situation as part of a legacy that has devalued Aboriginal women and placed them at greater risk for violence. On Highway 16, known as the *Highway of Tears*, 32 women have gone missing between Prince George and Prince Rupert. This is unfortunately another area where it appears that a serial killer is at work, targeting Aboriginal women living in communities along the length of the highway. Sadly, there was little media attention given to the disappearances until one white woman went

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<sup>34</sup> See also Cameron 2010 for a detailed examination of the Pickton investigation.

missing; the largest search and rescue mission in BC history was then launched, indicating that when it comes to the value of a life, it really does depend who you are. For communities that have had to deal with the ongoing presence of violence, coupled with the repeated disappearances of friends and family members, the loss is unimaginable.<sup>35</sup>

As discussions about the missing women continue in the media, those in the DTES continue to commemorate those who have been lost. Most of this commemoration takes place privately. However, with so much denial on the part of public officials, remembering the missing women has increasingly become a public affair, as the spaces of violence are reclaimed by the community (see Culhane 2003; Cultural Memory Group 2006; Welsh 2006; Burk 2010). Vancouver's largest memorial event takes place on Valentine's Day, when a group of family members, friends and activists has been walking every year since 1991. When crowds gather at the Carnegie Community Centre, they are led by family members who carry banners and a memorial quilt in honour of those who have disappeared. The group blocks off the intersection of Main and Hastings for around half an hour, as the public gathers to the sound of drumming and the names of the disappeared are read aloud. The march then proceeds through the DTES, stopping at sites where women were murdered or were last seen. At each spot, the area is smudged with sage and a rose is laid down in remembrance: red for the murdered and yellow for the missing. The group stops outside the police station and forms a rally demanding justice for those subjected to violence, and finishes the march in Oppenheimer Park. The community then gathers for a feast at the Japanese Language School. In 2011, the twentieth anniversary of the march was marked with two weeks of memorial events. In a downpour of rain, over four hundred people joined the final march. During the 2010 Olympics and in better weather, the march drew estimates of over five thousand people, proving that awareness and concern is also growing among members of the general public. Marches now also take place on this date in ten other cities across Canada.

It is unsurprising that a number of artists have also chosen to portray the issue at hand (see Townsend-Gault and Luna 2003; Kovacic 2007). Pamela Masik's project was set to open at the Museum of Anthropology in February 2011. *The Forgotten* comprises 69

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<sup>35</sup> For more information on violence against Aboriginal women in Canada, see Anderson et al. 2010; Amnesty International 2004; Welsh 2006; Zuluaga & Walia 2011.

portraits of missing and murdered women from the DTES, made larger than life on 8x10 foot canvases. Masik's intention was to make each portrait so large that it could not be ignored and to take this message to those sections of the public who may not be aware of or who choose not to see the treatment of women living in the DTES. She does not envision herself as a spokesperson for the DTES and has always maintained that she speaks only for herself as an artist. Being moved by what was happening, she saw her art as the one way that she could create social change (Masik 2010a).

The paintings were based on photographs of the disappeared, some provided by family members and others taken from mug shots, often the only available photos released to the public. As part of the process of dealing with the subject, Masik included references to the violent fates to which the women were subject, at times slashing and further abusing the portraits, and including pieces of plastic packaging and other references to remains found at the Pickton farm. Though aware of concerns that people may have about the way they are portrayed, she wanted to represent the truth of what happened to many of the women in a way that would force people to stop and really think about the issue. "I believe this controversy I face will someday subside and I will be led to do the right thing so the intention of this work- to create awareness and dialogue, will be embraced in a positive way by those who I truly want to help. My hopes are that this project becomes a platform for discussion, confronting issues much of society hasn't wanted to face" (Masik 2010b). The mantra she developed for the collection is: *everyone has the right to a dignified life.*

Like many artists, Masik also uses her art as a means of working through her own past issues, and it is apparent from her blog entries that the resulting portraits are as much about her as they are about the missing women. As if to further prove this point, Masik also painted her own portrait as part of the series, though without intention to display it. Masik has lived on the DTES and volunteers teaching art classes for local women. Many of the women she works with are friends of those who have disappeared and consider themselves survivors. Noting that artwork has helped her work through her own abusive past, she feels strongly about teaching art to others as a mode of healing as well as giving back to the community. When she began work on *The Forgotten*, Masik started to attend meetings of the Women's Memorial March Committee. However, she quickly fell out of favour with the group when they suspected her motivations were less to do with assisting

the march and more to do with promoting her art. Representatives from the Women's Memorial March Committee have been the most vocal in questioning her intentions, artwork, and its proposed location at the Museum of Anthropology.

### **3.3 The Forgotten and the Museum of Anthropology**

When director, Anthony Shelton, first saw works from *The Forgotten*, he was immediately struck by the paintings and thought that it raised an important issue that needed to be discussed.<sup>36</sup> He and Masik shared the same vision of using the paintings as an initial platform for bringing attention to the larger issues concerned. With the museum's recent renewal completed, one of its aims is to have a role in discussing contemporary social issues. The museum has often posited itself as a place of confrontation and debate- a venue that does not shy away from controversy, but rather, values the institution as a space of dialogue. However, museum personnel have not yet worked out a suitable methodology for creating exhibits based on controversial local issues.<sup>37</sup>

When the concept was pitched to the museum's exhibitions committee, a large number of the staff began their own lengthy discussions on whether there was justification for accepting the exhibit and what potential problems could arise. The exhibit was not accepted lightly, and for around three weeks, employees debated some of the major questions involved. Many people had gut reactions against taking the exhibit and saw the way the women had been portrayed as degrading. Questions were raised as to whether MOA, as a place for Aboriginal art, would be seen as exploiting the Aboriginal women who had gone missing. The staff also wanted to know how family members of the missing women viewed the art and to what extent they had been involved in Masik's process. Despite these reservations, Shelton also had a vision for the exhibit and firmly believed that the issues needed to be discussed. As one member of staff recalled, he felt strongly about discussing the larger issue of violence against women worldwide, and there really was no argument against that.<sup>38</sup>

Those at the museum contacted a group of faculty from around the university who they thought would have expertise to contribute. These included representatives from the

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<sup>36</sup> Anthony Shelton, Personal communication, November 30, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Anthony Shelton, Email to the author, June 15, 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Jennifer Webb, MOA Communications Manager. Interview by the author, February 9, 2011.

department of Women's and Gender Studies, First Nations Studies, the First Nations House of Learning, and Humanities 101 (a university program for DTES residents). By extending the conversation outward, the museum hoped to be able to curate an exhibit that gave suitable interpretation alongside Masik's artwork and discussed the global implications of violence. From the outset of the exhibition process, MOA employees did not believe that Masik's work should stand alone at the museum. While the museum does not always do collaborative exhibits, they recognized problems of representation, and they questioned the fact that one woman's voice could speak for this issue. Using their UBC contacts, they began to discuss possibilities for lecture series, film screenings and other events that could accompany the exhibit in order to make up for its lack of interpretation. Several professors at UBC thought *The Forgotten* would fit well with their course curriculums and planned to teach sections of their classes around the exhibit.

Meanwhile, those at the museum also began to arrange for the DTES community to be included. Given the sensitivity of the subject at hand, they would need to provide special services to family members and close friends of the victims, and they discussed having a separate opening or a cleansing/closing ceremony for those close to the women. Yet, the problem of how to reach the family members was an issue. Museum employees would have ordinarily made contact with all involved parties before an exhibit was accepted. Contrarily, they found themselves in the position of having the artist as the mediator between the museum and the community involved. When beginning her paintings, Masik had initially contacted a victim services representative at the RCMP in order to send out a letter to their family contacts on her behalf. As one would expect, some families came forward and others did not respond. Masik explained to the museum staff that she had researched all of the women's stories and that she wanted to respect the families. She said that families had been generally supportive, but for example, one woman did not like the way the portrait of her sister was painted and found it emotionally difficult.<sup>39</sup> Those at MOA decided to use Masik's contact at the RCMP to get in touch with the families again. They decided their best strategy was to contact those that they could and wait for other family members to approach them. In the meantime, they also discussed how they could aid DTES residents to get to the events by providing bus tickets, and

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<sup>39</sup> Museum of Anthropology, Unpublished Meeting Minutes from April 21, 2010.

whether they should contact DTES organizations for assistance, particularly in reaching friends of the missing women and others who should be afforded family status. In looking for speakers for the public opening, they considered asking members of the Women's Memorial March Committee.<sup>40</sup>

By August 2010, much had been done by way of discussion, but there had been little in the way of action when it came to making real contact with the DTES community. Furthermore, the community had begun to speculate as to what the museum was doing, as the place of *The Forgotten* at MOA had been made public by the artist. Everything came to a head very abruptly when members of the Women's Memorial March Committee sent an email to the museum, voicing their concerns about *The Forgotten*, as well as a roundtable discussion taking place the following day at Harbour Centre through Simon Fraser University (SFU).<sup>41</sup> The email to the director stated:

As an artist, Ms. Masik has the right to freely express herself... We are dismayed though, that your University would choose to endorse her project and lend her your credibility and support as a representative for women in the Downtown Eastside or as an artist whose work fits in at the Museum of Anthropology. First Nations women, the life givers, are best empowered by inviting them to be heard in a respectful and honourable way. We have, in our midst, many powerful and articulate First Nations women... [who] would have been more appropriate choices since they have demonstrated their awareness and commitment to accurately and respectfully honour women living on the margins.<sup>42</sup>

Sections of the letter were strongly worded, calling for the museum to cancel the exhibit immediately. Members of the committee were advocates for DTES residents and were aware of responses from within the community. As one committee member, Corinthia Kelly, explained, "Women that I know, street sisters to the women who were killed, were devastated - just enraged. And so I felt really certain about what their position was".<sup>43</sup> Shelton and his assistant curator, Sarah Carr-Locke, attended the SFU symposium in order to gain a better understanding of the issues before responding to the women's letter. The symposium was hosted by a group of scholars, primarily working in feminist frameworks.

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<sup>40</sup> Museum of Anthropology, Unpublished Meeting Minutes from August 2, 2010.

<sup>41</sup> The Symposium, entitled *Absence, Silences, Action & Voice in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside*, featured a roundtable discussion on Masik's work, yet was not affiliated with MOA or UBC.

<sup>42</sup> Women's Memorial March Committee, Email to Anthony Shelton, August 12, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Corinthia Kelly, Women's Memorial March Committee. Interview by the author, February 25, 2011.

The scholars were quite shocked when a group of women from the DTES community stood up and refused to let Masik speak.

The artist responded defensively, stating that she had been receiving threatening phone calls because of *The Forgotten*. She demanded the group stop threatening her and stated her rights to freedom of expression. She later recounted the event in a blog post.

I could have stood before the microphone and said anything because it was not acknowledged anyway. These women are so blind and deaf to any greater perspective on the issues, that illustrate they are not theirs to own. Many women over the years have experienced very similar stories despite the differences in class, race, ethnicity and sexuality. I have been discriminated [against], among the many things named, a 'white privileged' woman. Despite sharing some things about my story, my past experiences, my wounds weren't as big as theirs. How could I understand their plight? I sat there taking bullets (Masik 2010a).

Carr-Locke recalls what happened, as the floor was taken over by speakers, and the audience listened to six or seven survivor stories of those who had been sexually assaulted in the DTES or attended residential schools. Masik, who had been receiving threats over her work and who had now been attacked at a public event, reacted emotionally and did not seem to understand the viewpoint being presented to her: that for the individuals involved, colonization had been a traumatic experience, and they experienced Masik's artwork as a continuation of this trauma.<sup>44</sup> Museum employees later found out that several panellists had pulled out of the event early, refusing to participate in a dialogue with the artist. This would only echo things to come.

The following day, Shelton responded to the Women's Memorial March Committee. He invited them to come down to the museum to discuss things and offered the alternative of meeting somewhere more convenient to them. Two representatives met with museum staff in October, by which time the exhibit opening was only four months away.

The following comments were provided by committee members Corinthia Kelly and Gloria Larocque in an interview that I conducted in February 2011, one month after the exhibition's cancellation. By this time, they had had time to collect their thoughts on the

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<sup>44</sup> Sarah Carr-Locke, Assistant Curator of *The Forgotten*. Interview by the author, January 17, 2011.

subject and they explained their concerns in an articulate, and in many ways, academic fashion. It should be noted that Larocque was a UBC student at the time; she explained that her initial decision to approach the museum was with a spirit of academic inquiry and not with any intention of starting a protest at the museum. Larocque understood the ethical standards that MOA usually employs when working with communities and she became both concerned and inquisitive that MOA did not appear to be following a collaborative methodology.<sup>45</sup>

When these DTES advocates approached the museum, it was not necessarily their position that the art should not be shown, but rather, that there were problems with the process behind the art, which involved questions of ethnicity and representation. A primary concern was to what extent the families of the missing women had been consulted before such paintings were displayed in a public institution. Secondly, they believed that MOA's interpretation that focused generally on violence against women glossed over the specific situations of the women involved, which due to factors of ethnicity, were experientially different. Thirdly, in order for the work to be shown, they felt that concerns over representation needed to be adequately addressed.

As the advocates explained, for many family members and friends of the missing women, *The Forgotten* represented an indignity and further exploitation of the women's lives. While Masik may not have had better photos to work from, mug shots are an embarrassment, often taken at a person's worst moment. This is not the way that anyone would want to be remembered and certainly not the way that anyone would want to be permanently memorialized. Considerable discussion goes into what forms a public memorial should take in order to communicate the right message. They provided the example of the Women's Memorial March as an event that honours the women and respects the different wishes of family members. For example, in some Aboriginal traditions, it is considered disrespectful to speak a person's name after death. These names are not read aloud during the march. By contrast, the advocates felt that instead of remembering the lives that these women had, the exhibit's title implied the women were of little importance – a view that friends and family had been fighting very hard to combat. The term *forgotten* was seen as an indignity within the community.

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<sup>45</sup> Gloria Larocque, Women's Memorial March Committee, Interview by the author, February 25, 2011.

That's like saying that all of our hard work... twenty years in the making of trying to remember and trying to get society to remember. She comes in and promotes something like 'we forgot these women'... but her saying we forgot these women is silencing the families that have been demanding justice. That have been demanding and seeking some kind of reprisal, away from what they see as lack of action. There are many women that will *never* been found. Whose killers will *never* be admonished. They [the families] will *never* get the satisfaction of closure. But [the families] never forgot.<sup>46</sup>

Other concerns surrounded the sensationalism to which the DTES is often subject. This is an area that has been overly researched, whose residents feel overly used, where journalists and photographers traverse hoping to catch images of people living in the margins. It is the neighbourhood made famous by the largest case of serial killings in Canadian history. Yet, for those involved, this sensationalism only provides more trauma and exploitation to what is a very profound pain. For friends and family, their trauma has been sensationalized for the last twenty years, often without consideration for the further harm this causes. Advocates wondered if this should be made into an afternoon outing, where wealthy citizens could go to the museum, talk about how terrible the situation was over dinner, and in effect, use the tragedy for entertainment value. They felt that an institution endorsing this kind of behaviour was disrespectful toward the families involved. A particularly pressing concern to the advocates was whether suitable permission had been obtained from *all* of the families for the work to be shown. They became concerned when it became clear that this kind of contact between the museum and the victims' families may not be happening.

There was also concern about the theoretical frameworks chosen by the museum and their associates at UBC. By positing the issue of violence as one affecting all women worldwide, the museum had too quickly adopted a feminist framework. Gender was used as the basis of who was being targeted for violence and why. While no one would argue that this is an endemic problem facing women, the advocates argued that the use of feminist frameworks also had the unintentional effect of making invisible any discussion of race. The museum would be using portraits of a decidedly local phenomenon involving both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women. The problem is that experientially, the issues that led women to the DTES, perhaps to drugs and perhaps into sex work, were different. The

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<sup>46</sup> Gloria Larocque, Women's Memorial March Committee. Interview by the author, February 25, 2011.

reasons they were marginalized were different, and the reasons they were victimized were different. The artist's perspective that this kind of violence is everyone's issue showed that "[s]he had no awareness of how different the world is for Aboriginal women. She didn't know".<sup>47</sup> In the course of my research, I have returned to the following perceptual problem many times. When a white woman is assaulted, it is because she is a woman. When an Aboriginal woman is assaulted, it is because she is Aboriginal. The occurrence cannot easily be separated from the legacy of colonialism and is inherently embodied, experienced and interpreted differently by the survivor, who cannot easily separate the experience from the legacy of colonialism and may, in fact, view the act decidedly through this lens. Moreover, this difference is important enough to make any gender-based interpretation of violence in the DTES insufficient. Using portraits of the missing women to illustrate a women's issue would in fact silence the individual experiences of those involved, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

The inclusion of portraits of Aboriginal women also raises questions about representation. While Western attitudes usually favour freedom of information and expression, the issue of representation is quite different within some Aboriginal traditions, particularly in BC. In Northwest Coast cultures, imagery and the rights to create and display it are often subject to hereditary title, in which art is directly linked to inherited privileges that are ceremonially transferred from one generation to the next (Ostrowitz 1999: 22). Artists accept a responsibility to transmit the history of their people in accordance with the spiritual values of the group, and works of art are thought to embody the cultural philosophy and worldview of the community (Miller and Pavel 2008: 40). Museum employees in BC are well aware that, in Aboriginal communities, ownership of intangible culture, such as songs, stories, and the rights to represent something artistically, is of primary importance. I do not intend to imply that anyone has strict ownership rights over who can and cannot discuss the subject of missing women, but I do wish to stress that in Aboriginal communities, a different level of consideration exists regarding the presentation of imagery and the responsibility that comes with knowledge. When I broached this subject with the advocates, they agreed that there were cultural differences

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<sup>47</sup> Corinthia Kelly, Interview by the author, February 25, 2011.

involved and that representing these women in the particular manner that Pamela Masik had done felt intuitively wrong to them as Aboriginal women.

The advocates stated that they had difficulty imagining that any Aboriginal artist would choose such a graphic means of portraying the subject, and they expressed concern that such a sensitive issue was not being portrayed “in a good way”, an Aboriginal expression that indicates something should be done in a spiritual way.<sup>48</sup> They viewed Masik’s graphic portrayal as problematic when roughly one third of the missing women were Aboriginal and when the exhibit was set to open at MOA, a space that is supposed to represent Aboriginal voices. The women’s intuition that the graphic nature of the content felt wrong was likely not only due to a difference in worldview, but also due to an understanding of the way that trauma was operating in the DTES community.

When the Women’s Memorial March Committee presented their concerns to the MOA representatives, they were told that the exhibit would not be cancelled and that those at the museum were under contract and had a professional obligation to Pamela Masik. However, employees were sympathetic to the women’s concerns and wished to involve them in the exhibition. Those at MOA began to hold a series of separate meetings with Kelly and Larocque, as they attempted to redesign the exhibit in a way that would work for everyone. The main concept came under the heading of *Recall, Remember, Respond, React*, which would comprise Masik’s *The Forgotten* project as one section of the exhibit, a further exhibit by the Women’s Memorial March Committee that would voice DTES perspectives, and a detox area where visitors could reflect, recover and find information about what they could do to help the cause. The museum would provide pamphlets from DTES organizations and lists of contact details for local Members of Parliament. The hope was that along with being confronted by Masik’s artwork, visitors would also gain an understanding of the issues at play and be challenged to act.

With only three months before opening, advocates who had come forward to challenge the exhibit were suddenly placed in the position of curating it, something quite outside their expertise. This collaborative project may have worked given a longer time frame, however, there simply was not time for those at the museum to guide them in this

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<sup>48</sup> Corinthia Kelly, interview by the author, February 25, 2011.

process properly. Furthermore, it was becoming clear that opposition to the exhibit threatened to overrun the employee's goals of dialogue. Following the symposium at SFU, Masik was hesitant to do any public appearances in association with the exhibit. Organizations from the DTES refused to be associated with Masik in any way, even in providing promotional materials about their services. Some UBC professors decided they would not be comfortable taking their classes inside the museum as long as the exhibit was featured. Filmmakers who had originally agreed to show their films recanted their participation. Moreover, the Women's Memorial March Committee made it clear that just because they were working with the museum inside did not mean that they would not be protesting outside for the duration of the Masik exhibit. Eventually, the committee decided that they did not want to be associated with the Masik content at all and pulled out completely.<sup>49</sup>

During this time, something strange had begun to happen behind the scenes of the museum's exhibit meetings, as staff began to realize that the protest might actually serve everyone's needs. The main goal of those at MOA was to facilitate discussion and debate, and garner attention to this controversial issue. However, they were quickly losing any programming they had, with an artist who would not be a public spokesperson, and with all other parties refusing to be associated with her content in any way. While employees hoped to bring the DTES community in to debate Masik's work, it was a debate in which the community refused to engage. Those at MOA were essentially stonewalled on all sides, and their only real option was to hang *The Forgotten* paintings without interpreting them, the very concept they had been trying to avoid from the exhibit's inception. Yet, the staff wondered if the protest could be of benefit. There would be ample discussion and attention to the exhibit, and the Women's Memorial March Committee would also succeed in getting their views heard on an even grander scale than planned. After twenty years of taking a public stand against violence, a highly publicized protest at a world class museum could serve their needs well. As the collaborative process was failing and tensions rising, perhaps the best thing to do would be to mount a controversial exhibit and let it all fall apart.<sup>50</sup> It was, however, at this point in mid-January, that Shelton decided to cancel *The Forgotten*

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<sup>49</sup> It should be noted that this was a committee decision, while Kelly and Larocque still wished to work with the museum.

<sup>50</sup> Jennifer Webb, Interview by the author, February 9, 2011.

exhibit entirely, concerned that *productive* dialogue would not ensue and that they may only be causing further distress to those most affected by the issues (Museum of Anthropology 2011, emphasis mine).

### **3.4 Engaging with Trauma**

From a museological perspective, everything that MOA employees attempted to do made sense. They engaged in discussion about the pros and cons of accepting the exhibit, in which they demonstrated knowledge and sensitivity about the subject; they were aware of representation issues and of gaining suitable permission. They sought the advice of partners, who included Aboriginal advisors and scholars who work with those on the DTES. Their intention was always to include the DTES community and to try to provide some kind of meaningful experience for friends and family of the women who had disappeared. When questions or problems were presented to museum personnel, they accepted suggestions and tried to rework what they were doing. Those involved had extensive experience with collaboration, some having been with the museum over twenty years. However, MOA staff were also influenced by the same denial that I have discussed in previous chapters, which may have limited them from being able to understand several key aspects of the situation. The result was that tensions erupted, and the DTES community had little interest in working with them.

The first real problem was perhaps the desire to turn local trauma into a broader, global issue. Pamela Masik did not intend to discuss the global implications of violence against women. She had painted a series of portraits about a very personal and local issue. She may not have been fully aware of or understood Aboriginal perspectives of the situation. Yet, it was certainly not a global issue that she was painting; she was painting what is perhaps considered the most sensitive topic in Canada at the moment, particularly in Vancouver. Ongoing developments in the situation are featured in the news approximately every two to three days and have always been discussed by the media and the public as a local concern. Why would the director's first thought upon seeing the portraits be about global issues of violence?

I suspect that Shelton may have been trying to distance himself from the intimacy of the situation. One of the reasons that non-Aboriginal employees were willing to curate an

exhibit about violence against women may have been that it allowed them to ignore the issue of violence against Aboriginal peoples, which for museum employees, is much more personal and problematic. They fear they may be implicated in violence against Aboriginal peoples. However, museums have no relationship to violence against women, making it a safe subject for exhibition. In this case, the idea that this sort of thing ‘happens everywhere’ was used to justify exactly how grave the local situation had become. That situation was removed from the social context of Aboriginal communities in BC, of which some have members who have moved to the DTES, who suffer from addictions, who are engaged in prostitution, and who are at risk of extreme violence. Rather, museum employees turned the issue into something that affects all women, and from the outset, based the exhibition on what some DTES community members felt was the wrong premise.

A secondary concern is the apparent normalization of conflict that has taken place within the institution, which may be another sign of denial on the part of museum employees. Following Clifford’s (1997) work on museums as contact zones, the concept of conflict has been deeply internalized by museum employees, who, since its publication, have become extremely adept at navigating emotionally tense political encounters with Aboriginal peoples. I have argued elsewhere (Pinto 2013, included as Appendix 1) that at this particular institution, museum employees have become so accustomed to working in a zone of conflict that the discomfort it raises has become second nature. The ongoing tension that arises in the institution has been normalized so that it is no longer experienced as either unexpected or alarming. Both MOA employees and representatives from the Women’s Memorial March Committee agree that their meetings were quite intense and emotional. For museum staff, it has become part of their job descriptions to navigate such encounters rather than avoid them. Meeting with a group of protesters would simply be seen as another example of the kinds of interactions that employees face when they come to work. To illustrate this point, those involved in the meetings made it clear that they were quite comfortable should the women mount a protest against them.<sup>51</sup> They are used to relationships being tense, and they often cope with this tension by denying the severity of the challenges that are frequently made against the institution. In this case, denial was so

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<sup>51</sup> Jennifer Webb, MOA Communications Manager, Interview by the author, February 9, 2011.

pervasive that those at the museum were able to conclude that the protest would be positive or beneficial.

The problem is that when tension is normalized, it becomes very difficult to gauge when it is part of a normal working relationship with a community and when that community is actually trying to tell museum personnel that their actions are unacceptable. Though the worst of the potential controversy over *The Forgotten* was avoided, it took ongoing meetings in which advocates for the DTES community repeatedly stated that the exhibit would be devastating for those concerned, the refusal of third parties to become involved, and the threat of a major protest before a decision was made to cancel the exhibition. This thinking is not limited to those at MOA. The case actually reflects an attitude that has become commonplace within museums (Cameron 2005). In 2011, Ruth Phillips argued for the “positive social value” (Phillips 2011: 298) of controversies, encouraging museum employees to embrace the controversial subjects which have so often led to new theory and practice in the museum field. However, when Canadian exhibits have resulted in controversy, it has almost always been because these exhibitions touched upon something that had been experienced as traumatic by the communities involved. Phillips’ own examples primarily related to cases of colonial trauma. Contrary to what Phillips suggests, I argue that in these cases, museum employees are right to act cautiously. While I agree that controversial exhibitions have “revelatory potential” (Phillips 2011: 298) for museums, the ends do not necessarily justify the means in cases where trauma is concerned.

Both Phillips’ arguments and the behaviour of those at MOA indicate a museological pattern that consists of making mistakes and then correcting them. This is something that has been unintentionally accepted as a permanent methodology in museums. It stems from the challenges that were brought forth in the late 1980s, in which employees were held accountable for the practices of those who came before them and asked to change the nature of the discipline. When the process of collaboration began in earnest, it was often with a strong learning curve, in which museum personnel learned to work with Aboriginal communities through experimentation. In practice, what this meant was making many small mistakes and then waiting for Aboriginal partners to comment and correct them. The process of collaboration can be likened to one of constant readjustment. It has

thus been accepted by museum employees that they should jump into situations and experiment first, and then adjust their behaviour as mistakes are made and pointed out by others. The problem here is not necessarily denial, but the assumption that any mistake can be corrected and that mistakes in general do not seem to have consequences: because Aboriginal communities are patient when it comes to negotiation and discussion, there is little risk of the relationships fully breaking down. In this case, when community members indicated that real harm was being done, it was still the natural response of employees to readjust, correct mistakes in representation and move forward. Museum personnel have been conditioned to work in this way, and for the most part, it has worked well. However, I cannot overemphasize the fact that when applied to sensitive or traumatic topics, the potential psychological damage caused by mistakes is very serious for participants or other witnesses to what is being displayed.

The new Canadian Museum for Human Rights may be Canada's first large-scale attempt to curate about the legacy of residential schools and other human rights abuses in Canada. However, when I examine the CMHR, it is evident that, like *The Forgotten*, the museum itself may be centred on the wrong premise. The developers' use of a human rights lens is highly academic and proposes human rights theory as the most appropriate way to examine the issues affecting Canadians. It is one that is grounded in human rights abuses as universal experience. It is completely depersonalized, non-complex, removed from the Canadian experience of intercultural identity, and really, has very little to do with Canada. If we consider something as personal as the case of missing and murdered women to Aboriginal peoples, it seems unlikely that a human rights lens can capture what the communities affected are trying to convey. Furthermore, any time that museum employees identify human rights education as the primary aim, they are overlooking the enormous potential that the site could have had to actually help those affected by the issues. I believe that this desire is also present, but that the methodology has yet to evolve. Perhaps, those in the museum field are simply looking through a lens that is too narrow.

If museum employees can learn to see themselves in another way - a Canadian way - then they have the potential to become leaders when it comes to national reconciliation. This potential extends beyond any one exhibition or museum and is inherently tied to

improving the real social conditions of Aboriginal communities. Museum employees have proven through years of collaboration with communities that they are more knowledgeable and more willing to work toward reconciliation than perhaps any other institutional body in Canada. However, there is still much to be done in terms of decolonization. In these initial stages of reconciliation, museum employees should be asking themselves two fundamental questions about their institutions: How does staff denial currently prevent reconciliation from taking place? and How can this museum become a site of healing for both museum employees and their Aboriginal partners? To answer either of these questions, there is much more to consider. Museum employees must be willing to take a step backward to examine how these problems originated.

## **SUMMARY OF PART ONE**

- a) Trauma deeply pervades any society recovering from extreme violence. Where extreme traumatization has taken place, circumstances are often denied by the majority of citizens.
- b) Canadian museums are heavily affected by historical denial, which places limitations on museum operations and relationships with Aboriginal communities and partners.
- c) Denial has resulted in dysfunctional institutions in which many employees are unhappy with overwork for little recognition. Many museums in BC are considered toxic work environments.
- d) While partnerships with Aboriginal communities have been successful in some regards, museum employees also minimize the effects of colonialism on Aboriginal peoples, choosing instead to avoid the issue of violence.
- e) When museum employees do attempt to curate about violence against Aboriginal peoples, they do not often employ the level of sensitivity that is required to carry the projects to completion in a good way.
- f) The residential school system is a topic that will increasingly be making its way into museums. Museum employees do not currently have the skills to manage the subject well.

**PART TWO**  
**TRUTH-TELLING**

## CHAPTER 4

### A MÉTIS NATION

#### **4.1 The Establishment of a Métis Nation**

Canada's early history was heavily influenced by trade relationships between Europeans and Aboriginal peoples, and yet there has been little discussion as to the lasting psychological effects that this prolonged contact has had on settlers. As museum employees consist predominantly of Euro-Canadian settlers, it is worth examining the country's history. Unfortunately, the history that has been taught in schools (and that is frequently reflected in museums) has often omitted Aboriginal peoples, while at the same time, espoused inaccurate myths of the country's formation (Carleton 2011; Osborne 2011). Integration with Aboriginal peoples is almost never discussed, and this oversight persists despite the fact that the fur trade played a major role in contact in almost all areas of the country (see Fisher 1977; Van Kirk 1980; Sleeper-Smith 2009). Canada still retains a strong trade culture, and it is not surprising that negotiation and mediation are considered Canadian traits (Saul 2008: 54)

Early exchanges between Europeans and Aboriginal peoples quickly developed into a new economy, with fur pelts, in particular beaver, initially exported to dress the Parisian aristocracy. By 1575, demand for furs led French merchants up the St. Lawrence River, and a fort was established at Quebec in 1608. By the 1630s, beaver hats had reached all classes of male society, with pelts supplied by Aboriginal hunters and trappers (Dickinson and Young 2008: 17-18). The fur trade was responsible for all of the first settlements in New France in the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century and would continue to dominate the economy for the next two and a half centuries.<sup>52</sup> The French initially controlled inland trade, while fishing off the east coast led the British into coastal trade; however, eventually both French and British colonies would expand their reaches over land. The Canadian landscape was mapped and explored primarily by early *courreurs de bois*, and later, by traders working for the Northwest and Hudson's Bay Companies, all of whom forged alliances with the local

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<sup>52</sup> Dickinson and Young (2008) point out that we should not overlook the fishing industry in Canada's early history, which also served as a primary economy on Canada's east coast and along the St. Lawrence river (Dickinson and Young 2008: 16).

populations before most real settlements were established.<sup>53</sup> For the first 250 years or so of contact, European settlements remained fairly minor and existed alongside a stronger trade economy, built upon Aboriginal ideas of mutual dependence and partnership (Saul 2008: 7).

Europeans initially relied on the Aboriginal population for survival and later for success in the new environment. The French approach to trade was through immersion in Aboriginal society, and the *coureurs de bois* often lived in Aboriginal communities for extended periods of time. Some were fully assimilated into Aboriginal cultures, and all learned new skills and ways of thinking from the local inhabitants. These included means of dress, what foods to eat, and how to paddle a canoe for long distances (Bumstead 1992: 44). In most areas, settlement was not pursued, as the success of the fur trade was conditional on Aboriginal peoples continuing to occupy their lands and practicing their traditional hunting, fishing and trapping (Furniss 1995: 18). Europeans never had the physical might to impose their own cultural standards onto the peoples they encountered, who adamantly refused to be assimilated (Belmessous 2004: 524; Dickinson and Young 2008: 18). When Europeans did gain the advantage, it was often because epidemics reduced the Aboriginal population and not due to cultural or military superiority (Dickinson and Young 2008: 20).

Early Canadian society functioned predominantly according to Aboriginal protocols. Integration was facilitated through intermarriage, and the early traders forged political and cultural alliances by marrying into high ranking Aboriginal families. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, French policy favoured sending out a small corps of people to various colonies who would intermarry with indigenous populations. Intended as an assimilationist policy, *Françisation* was not unique to Canada, and was seen by France as a means of gaining foreign nationals by teaching indigenous populations to speak French and converting them to Catholicism (Belmessous 2004: 510). However, in practice, many of the fur traders were being integrated into Aboriginal kinship networks. In 1637, the Ouendat declared that they were pleased with intermarriage because “the French traders

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<sup>53</sup> Translated as ‘runners of the woods’, the *coureurs de bois* were independent entrepreneurs who traded furs and often lived and worked alongside Aboriginal peoples.

were proving to be quite good Hurons” (Van Kirk 2002: 3).<sup>54</sup> The Ouendat refused to lower themselves to learn the French language and often stated that if the French wanted to trade, they could learn to speak the local language (Miller 2000: 45). In fact, the French adapted quite easily to Aboriginal ways of life.

The importance of Aboriginal women in Canada’s early history cannot be overstated. Recent scholarship has focussed on the prominence of intermarriage and its importance to the development of fur trade culture (Van Kirk 1980, 2002, 2009; Dickason 1985; Lawrence 2004). Many of these marriages went unrecorded in church records, as they were primarily conducted *à la façon du pays*, according to local Aboriginal protocols.<sup>55</sup> In time, marriage customs evolved to incorporate European elements and these Métis ceremonies became a commonly understood custom in fur trade society. Traders exerted considerable peer pressure on newcomers to take Aboriginal wives, whose traditional skills, like producing moccasins and snowshoes and preparing hides, were highly valued within the forts. Women also served as much-needed guides and interpreters when company men made contact with new Aboriginal communities (Van Kirk 1980: 63). Van Kirk (1980) points out that compared to European women, Aboriginal women exerted a great deal of sexual freedom, and it is significant that casual sex did not become the usual pattern of interaction between traders and Aboriginal women; marriage and not prostitution was the norm (Van Kirk 1980: 27).

As a population of Métis children grew into the fur trade, the boundaries between who was considered either Aboriginal or European became significantly blurred (Lawrence 2004: 48). Fur trade families began to marry extensively, and Métis daughters were seen as ideal marriage partners. During all of these interactions, colonial authorities remained at a distance, physically and psychologically removed from the realities of living in the new colony. These conditions favoured the development of a new culture that would become increasingly distinct from that of France (Belmessous 2004: 509; Dickinson and Young 2008: 35).

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<sup>54</sup> The Ouendat First Nation have historically been known as Huron.

<sup>55</sup> Marriages conducted “after the fashion of the country”, also known as country marriages, were usually conducted at fur trading posts in the absence of clergy and if possible, were re-validated by clergy at a later date (Van Kirk 1980: 52).

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, colonial authorities in New France gradually made attempts to set up an agricultural system along the St. Lawrence River that would emulate the French seigneurial system. However, there were many barriers to success; those who adopted farming were far from producing large agricultural surpluses and were generally operating at a base level for meeting subsistence needs. Most seigneurs were as poor as their tenants. Carving out farmland from first growth forest could not be accomplished at a rate of more than a few acres per year, and would have been challenging work when other opportunities could be found in the fur trade (Bumstead 1992: 224). Early settlers often found a tension between their European backgrounds and the North American environment. Their French origins provided the institutions, language, and set of assumptions about how society ought to function. However, the daily realities of working in the New World worked against these European assumptions at every turn, often modifying and replacing them with concepts better suited to thriving in the new environment (Bumstead 1992: 81).

Colonial policies remained at odds with the reality of daily living, which centred on an integrated and semi-nomadic way of life. Assimilating the indigenous population proved futile and French authorities became increasingly concerned at the authority shown by the local peoples and the propensity of the fur traders to take on the cultural norms of the Aboriginal population (Belmessous 2004: 521). A series of policies were introduced to control the high number of men who were entering the trade unlicensed and in effect, prevent the Frenchmen from ‘going Native’. These attempts at colonial control were often unsuccessful, as the traders had little respect for regulations. By 1680, there were over 600 fur traders operating in the interior in defiance of repeated ordinances. Colonial authorities increasingly disparaged the mixed marriages they had initially supported, yet to a certain extent, they could only compromise and acknowledge that it was necessary to maintain trade relations if they wished to hold onto the country at all (Conrad et al. 1998: 107-122).

Though integration was pursued more fervently by the French, the practice of intermarriage was also adopted by the British later in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when they established themselves around Hudson Bay (Dickason 2008: 28). Political alliances between the British and the local peoples were sometimes tenuous; Aboriginal peoples viewed the French as traders who asked only for furs and hospitality, whereas the British were

sometimes seen as agriculturalists who aimed to drive the local nations into the hinterland (Miller 2000: 83). Further south in New York, a precarious alliance was formed between the British and the Iroquois. While some officials saw the Iroquois as dependant wards, this view did not reflect the reality of the alliance, in which the Iroquois insisted on an equal partnership. They expected the British colonists to respect Aboriginal ceremonial protocols, which mandated frequent councils between the two parties to ensure ongoing relations. The Iroquois also had the physical might to ensure that this took place. The Iroquois were as essential to the British as the Ouendat, Algonquin and Montagnais were to the French (Miller 2000: 51; Taylor 2006: 22-23).

For both European nations, maintaining alliances was a political necessity. The British and French colonies were involved in every major conflict that took place between England and France prior to 1763, often vying for control of the new territory.<sup>56</sup> These were incredibly complex relationships, in which allegiances changed and positive relationships needed to be continually reaffirmed. Havard (2001) illustrates this complexity in his account of events leading up to the Great Peace of Montreal in 1701, in which over forty separate nations, including the French and British, met at a series of conferences in order to arrive at a peace agreement. These month-long ceremonial occasions put an end to the Iroquois Wars and involved an extensive network that stretched from Acadia to the eastern edge of the Great Plains. European representatives followed Aboriginal ceremonial protocols and exercised little authority compared to the chiefs who facilitated the events.

Though relations with Europeans were not always positive, the new arrivals did manage to arrive at a general sense of balance within the pre-existing social order. The territory that would later become Canada was characterized by political instability and continuous warfare between different nations, of which the British and French represented only two. The distinct peoples of the colonies lived and fought alongside each other for over two centuries (Havard 2001; Dale 2004; Taylor 2006). Throughout this time, Aboriginal women remained key players in society and were readily adopted as wives by European traders. In the absence of white women outside of most settlements, the descendants of many of the first Canadians were decidedly Métis.

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<sup>56</sup> The conquest of New France during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) ended colonial warfare throughout the region.

When New England conquered Acadia in 1710, the British assumed the Aboriginal nations were allied to the French and therefore shared their defeat. However, the Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik had never sworn allegiance to France and had no intention of succumbing to the British.<sup>57</sup> They also proved a significant military threat, fighting alongside the French Acadians and other members of the Wabanaki Confederacy for a further fifty years (Reid et al. 2004).<sup>58</sup> During this time period, the British provided almost no defense for the new colony and though they retained possession of the fort at Annapolis Royal (Louisbourg), they presented an image of great weakness in the face of French-Aboriginal partnerships. In general, the British never pursued integration in Acadia and either failed or refused to adopt any of the strategies that had worked in the region for the French (Plank 2001: 66).

The last major war fought between the French and British in North America occurred from 1756- 1763. The Seven Years' War had a profound effect on the region when the British had the Acadians deported, and later, also gained control over New France. Both French territories, Acadia and New France, came permanently under British rule, from which the country as a whole has never fully recovered. In the aftermath of the war, attempts to impose British political and legal institutions initially failed and were abandoned. The change in government had consequences for the remaining French settlers and Aboriginal peoples, and all parties felt the economic impact of the war. The price of furs immediately dropped, the quality and quantity of goods diminished and the British abandoned the custom of giving gifts in recognition of alliances (Dickinson and Young 2008: 99). Some Aboriginal communities were facing starvation, and a series of rebellions, known as Pontiac's Conspiracy, were instigated among a number of nations in an effort to defeat the British (Dale 2004: 82-84). Aware of the potential for devastation, and partially in response to the uprisings, the British developed a new approach to Aboriginal relations in the French territories, concentrating on alliances and emulating the French way of doing things (Milloy 1999: 14).

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Quebec Act of 1774 set out the clear intentions of the British government to protect the diversity and rights of those in the

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<sup>57</sup> The Wolastoqiyik have historically been known as Maliseet.

<sup>58</sup> The Wabanaki Confederacy is a coalition of five Algonquian-speaking nations, inhabiting present-day Maine, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and parts of Quebec.

colonies. Through the Royal Proclamation, the land rights of Aboriginal peoples were established, with any territories west of the Atlantic rivers reserved for the Aboriginal population. Any colonists within this territory were mandated to leave, and the authority to purchase lands was then limited to the Crown in order to prevent abuses (British Parliament and King George III 1763). Similarly, the Quebec Act created a new province that guaranteed religious freedom and the use of French civil law for its citizens (British Parliament and King George III 1774).

Despite aims to protect the balance of minority cultures, this time period marks the instigation of a major rupture in settler identity, as an integrated French-Aboriginal society came under permanent British rule. The permanent transfer of Acadia and New France to the British inevitably had many negative effects for both Aboriginal peoples and their Métis allies, who were increasingly facing conflict with Anglo-American speculators and settlers: those moving north from the Thirteen Colonies (Dale 2004: 78). Though the policies of the time reflect a comprehensive understanding of how this diverse trade society functioned, from 1763 onward, these territories were characterized by an increase in settlers, who were primarily interested in land rather than commerce (MacLeitch 2009: 190).

#### ***4.2 Challenges to Métis Culture***

Following the British takeover, French immigration to North America effectively ceased. The industrial revolution was transforming Europe, and Britain attempted to maintain its home population to serve the growth of new industries. Yet, the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a substantial amount of movement back and forth from the southern colonies (now United States), and in time, greater influxes of settlers from Europe. With an increased population and the advent of new industrial technology, the newcomers were better able to recreate European institutions; they were therefore less dependent on Aboriginal peoples (Conrad et al. 1998: 442). Many were not interested in adopting an integrated way of life. To some extent, this conflict between integration and domination had been present since the inception of the colonies. However, previously, settlers had never had the force of numbers to override the local cultures. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed, settlers focused primarily on establishing a concrete governmental structure for the new territories. However, the question of how society ought to function and be

governed was highly contested, and political debates often turned to brawls and riots, in which politicians and laypeople were equal instigators (Radforth 2011).

The fur trade continued to thrive well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Rupert's Land, the Hudson's Bay Company acted as a de facto government, controlling an equal amount of territory as the British Colonial Office.<sup>59</sup> Employees of both the British HBC and French Northwest Company continued to build new alliances through intermarriage. By this time, company posts were supporting the wives and children of the traders, many of whom lived within the forts (Van Kirk 1980: 39). However, in the political centres, more recent settlers were finding a political voice, which worked against the vision of the country purported by Aboriginal peoples and more established Métis settlers. In Britain, the idea of progress was deeply entrenched. The assumption that the Western nations of Europe were at the summit of civilization (Strawbridge 1988:107-108) contributed to racism against Aboriginal peoples and affected the way that they were treated as new British immigrants continued to arrive in the territory .

This racism affected all levels of society, including the fur trade. An influx of female settlers transformed the trade, as for the first time, traders had the option to marry white women. These women often adopted a racist air of superiority over the local women, who were hardworking and practical, rather than ladylike (Conrad et al. 1998: 441). The newcomers had difficulty adjusting to the arduous life of the fur trade and they viewed Aboriginal and Métis women as competitors for husbands. Missionaries exerted pressure on company employees to have church marriages at the same time that racism was growing. The result is that traders increasingly succumbed to the pressures of the Protestant clergy who considered taking Aboriginal wives to be unsuitable. In some areas, fur traders came to view Aboriginal women as objects of sexual gratification instead of marriage partners (Van Kirk 1980: 146-217).

Those who still identified with Aboriginal peoples as allies and neighbours fought to defend an integrated vision of society. The political debates of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century reflect this conflict in worldview. Political leaders asserted the need for a hierarchical social structure to emulate that of Britain, but their vision of Canada failed to

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<sup>59</sup> Rupert's Land was a territory claimed by the HBC from 1670-1869 until it was purchased by the Canadian government. Mostly comprising the Hudson's Bay drainage basin, it also encompassed large sections of the prairies.

materialize. Recreating a European system of land tenure had been sheer fantasy in the new environment. The reality of farming in both Upper and Lower Canada was that of threadbare survival (Bumstead 1992: 224), and the idea of treating land in a monolithic way did not seem to make sense to the more established settlers. From the turn of the century, governments faced growing opposition, and political reformers gained support in both provinces in the 1830s (Conrad et al. 1998: 365-374). The reform movements consisted primarily of United Empire Loyalists, who had moved north following the American War of Independence. Often portrayed as key political figures in the formation of the country, there has been considerable mythologizing of the Loyalist movement in Canada, with the Loyalists construed as upper class Englishmen. As Knowles (1997) explains,

The Loyalist tradition is usually identified with a cluster of related ideas: unfailing devotion to the British Crown and Empire, a strong and pervasive anti-Americanism, suffering and sacrifice endured for the sake of principle, elite social origins, and a conservative social vision... Several generations of scholars have identified the Loyalist tradition as one of the defining elements of the English-Canadian identity (Knowles 1997: 3).

More recent scholars argue that the Loyalist ideal bears little relationship to the historical record. In reality, most Loyalists were ordinary farmers of the lower and middle classes. Far from showing such devotion to Britain, many moved north out of a desire for good, cheap land (Romney 1999: 32-34). The Loyalists also consisted almost entirely of minorities, including substantial German, Swiss, Acadian, Jewish, Black and Native American populations (Magee 1984: 26; Dickinson and Young 2008: 69). Having fought alongside each other during the War of Independence, they understood how to live and work in an integrated way. Upon moving north, many Loyalists ignored government initiatives to separate communities by race. Members of some regiments were determined to form integrated communities, even giving up their land grants in order to settle in close proximity with one another (Paxton 2010: 223).

Fighting for political representation, thousands of ordinary residents lobbied the British government for political changes in numerous petitioning movements. Initiated by the Loyalists, this form of popular politics was much more heavily engaged in than the high politics limited to political parties and interest groups. It is significant that through petitions, thousands of women and other minorities could make their political views heard

(Wilton 2000). Meanwhile, reformers led by William Lyon Mackenzie and Louis-Joseph Papineau challenged The Family Compact in Upper Canada and Château Clique in Lower Canada, calling for responsible government and an elected legislative council (Dickinson and Young 2008: 160).<sup>60</sup> Rebellions in 1837 and 1838 were easily quelled by those in power. However, tensions remained between Europe and the colonies, between recent and more established settlers, and between the British and the population of minorities.

Concern over the rebellions in combination with petitioning movements eventually resulted in the democratization of Upper Canadian politics, yet with the caveat of unification with Lower Canada. The union of Upper and Lower Canada in 1840 proved very unpopular in the colonies. Canada did not come into being because of a desire to unite, but because of an agreement between local politicians and the British Colonial Office (Reid 2012: 175). With unification, the government reverted to the European concept of a monolithic state, which the majority of people sensed could not work. This led to a general sense of disillusionment within the new United Canada (Saul 2008: 130). When a parliamentary democracy was finally established, it failed to live up to the expectations of many reformers, and the legislation of the 1850s was often penned by wealthy capitalists and lawyers, who were not representative of the population (Conrad et al. 1998: 294). Outside of the political centres, most of the territory still operated according to Aboriginal norms.

In the North, the HBC had sent supply ships to Hudson Strait every year since 1670. Regular contact with the Inuit had resulted in the trade in seal and whale blubber, sealskins, caribou hides, spears and lances (Barr 1994). The northern fur trade was beginning in earnest in the 1840s; ships were often frozen in for the duration of the winter, leaving the traders isolated with the Inuit (Miller 2000: 296). HBC employees at trading posts on Baffin Island were recruited in Britain under the understanding they would not marry, but those manning the posts often did marry Inuit women (Sager 2009). In contrast, the search for the Northwest Passage had also resulted in two centuries of exploration by the Royal Navy, whose men were determined to abide by European norms rather than adopt the ways

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<sup>60</sup> The Family Compact and Château Clique were political oligarchies made up of a small number of conservative families who controlled Upper Canada (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec) in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. They believed that the French and other minorities should be assimilated and supported the continuation of appointed legislative and executive councils.

of the Inuit. The result had been two centuries of malnutrition and tragedy, with the loss of ships like the HMS Erebus and HMS Terror. While often construed as heroic tragedies, HBC employees in the area saw the failure of the Royal Navy as a problem of wanting to bring their home environment to the Arctic rather than choosing to adapt to new conditions. It is not a coincidence that those in the Franklin Expedition were exploring without Inuit assistance when they were lost (Miller 2000: 287). The Inuit who discovered the dead crew reported the last survivors of the expedition had resorted to cannibalism, however British authorities refused to consider the possibility that these reports were true (Pigott 2011: 24-46). When the new Dominion was formed in 1867, the furthest reaches of the North were also claimed, uniting geographic areas that shared very little cultural ground with the country's political centres.

The colonial period began in earnest with Confederation. The Conservative government under John A. Macdonald focused on agricultural settlement as a means of encouraging the development of a truly transcontinental nation. The newly formed Dominion was envisioned as a partnership between Anglo and French Canadians at a time when the formation of nation-states was becoming a global ideal, and the greatness of a nation was often equated with size (Varouxakis 2007: 138). Underlying everything was the desire to expand an empire, conquering the continent from east to west (Francis 1997: 17).

From the imperial government, the new Canadian government inherited the right to legislate for Aboriginal peoples, and within two years, had discarded the Royal Proclamation as a model for Aboriginal relations, replacing it instead with the Indian Act in 1869 (Furniss 1995: 22). MacDonald and his government viewed Aboriginal peoples as childlike and incapable of managing their own affairs; not only were Aboriginal nations given no place in Confederation (Milloy 2008: 8), but through the Indian Act, virtually every aspect of Aboriginal life came under government control (Grant 1996: 92). The Indian Act defined who would be considered an Indian, restricted the movement of Aboriginal peoples, and through numerous amendments, successfully curtailed Aboriginal resistance to Western expansion (Milloy 2008). The Indian Act will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Along with a deeply entrenched racism toward non-European peoples, many of the settlers who arrived during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were also religious purists. The Orange

Order, a Protestant fraternal organization originating in Northern Ireland, became popular in Canada during this time period, and Orange lodges spread quickly throughout the country. Determined to make Canada Protestant and British, the Orangemen's hatred of the Catholics in Ireland was re-directed at the French Canadian Catholics in the colonies and at any other minority without a white, Protestant identity (Saul 2008: 18). The Orangemen also came to dominate Canadian politics, with an informal entente between the Orange Order and the Conservative Party (Houston and Smyth 1978: 261). Political historians often associate the Orangemen with incidents of violence, as political demonstrations frequently turned into brawls and riots for which the Orangemen are seen as responsible (Romney 1999: 26; Radforth 2011: 25). Though rarely expressed in Canadian history texts, some of Canada's founders would, by contemporary standards, be understood as religious extremists. Yet, the primary motivation at this time was an intense desire for land, which had become increasingly difficult to obtain in Britain.

In the rush to establish the newly formed confederacy, Aboriginal peoples in the west were pushed aside as quickly as possible. Treaties were established to extinguish Aboriginal title in exchange for reserve lands (Conrad et al. 1998: 391). Aboriginal peoples had used treaties long before European arrival to the continent (Morin 2005: 19); however, they believed that the signed documents also encompassed the essence of their discussions. French and British colonial governments had previously renewed such contracts at annual conferences where the spirit of the agreements was ceremonially re-validated. However, the new Canadian government saw the treaties as a quick formality necessary to extinguish Aboriginal rights and permanently acquire their lands (RCAP 1996a: 8-9).

Westward expansion was successful primarily due to the aid of the North-West Mounted Police, created in 1873 to ensure a peaceful western settlement.<sup>61</sup> In contrast to the HBC that preceded colonial expansion by forming alliances with Aboriginal peoples, the NWMP moved in to police new areas and ensure that there were no Aboriginal rebellions. Consisting of elites from Eastern Canada, the NWMP was a legal institution organized on a quasi-military model. Entrusted with magisterial powers, they could function in the absence of regular courts as a self-contained instrument of the law. It has been suggested that the investment of such powers in the context of isolation effectively

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<sup>61</sup> The North-West Mounted Police are currently known as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

rendered the police force a separate government (Harring 2005: 94; Nettelbeck and Smandych 2010: 359). The colonization of the west occurred much more rapidly than in the east, aided by this state intervention and control. Despite this rapid settlement, both attitudes toward society – that of integration and that of dominance – had time to take root. One was imported by Métis peoples moving west and by the HBC, which still favoured intermarriage with Aboriginal communities well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The other arrived with the new immigrants, intent on gaining land.

In examining the political debates of the Confederation period, political leaders throughout the provinces appear to have been living in different cultural worlds. While the majority of politicians were debating the merits of nation-building, a minority were attempting to lay out a framework for Aboriginal rights and Métis self-government (Ajzenstat et al. 2003). These arguments were most eloquently put forward by representatives of the Red River settlement, where the right conditions had at last resulted in the creation of a truly hybrid culture (Sprague 1988; Ens 1996; Reid 2012). The term Métis is most often applied to the descendants of those from this area, who are now recognized as a distinct people within Canada.

Following the merger of the Hudson Bay and Northwest Companies in 1821, the new amalgamated HBC had begun a task of complete reorganization in efforts to limit company expenses. As a result, many trading posts were closed, leaving fur traders without work. Large Métis families were seen as a financial burden by the HBC, which began to encourage the hundreds who had been discharged to settle in the Red River Valley in Manitoba (Innis and Ray 1999: 286). Though their ethnic origins were diverse, the Scottish, French and Cree who migrated to Red River built a new economy that combined the buffalo hunt, seasonal labour for the HBC, as well as small-scale farming. Over the next forty years, Métis families would become successful subsistence agriculturalists, while also trading in highly sought-after buffalo robes.<sup>62</sup> Though some families received land grants from the HBC, there also emerged a tradition of land tenure based upon occupation. Those who squatted on unclaimed land were initially left undisturbed, forming the basis of some Métis settlements (Ens 1996: 32). As the fur trade declined throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many former traders would migrate to Red River, where the diverse group came to

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<sup>62</sup> A buffalo robe is the skin of a buffalo with the fur still attached and the hide tanned.

possess a distinct language and unique modes of dress, cuisine and arts. By 1870, the Métis population in Manitoba had grown to close to ten thousand (Ens 1996: 140).

Government policies were consistently challenged by the Métis, who set out a different vision of governance on the prairies. From the 1850s to the 1880s, Métis leaders were setting out clear arguments as to how to govern land, pointing out the impossibility of anyone owning land in the way that Ottawa asserted. When Canada purchased Rupert's Land from the HBC in 1869, Louis Riel set up a provisional Métis government, resisting efforts to survey and partition land in the British fashion. The Métis were concerned that annexation without their involvement in the negotiations would result in the loss of their religious, language and land rights. As a result of the Red River Resistance, the Canadian government responded to demands to protect the rights of the Métis with the creation of Manitoba in 1870. However, Macdonald viewed the allocation as a temporary compromise until their population would be swamped by the influx of new settlers (Sprague 1988: 30; Reid 2012: 10-13). Ongoing delays over land grants confirmed the government's lack of sincerity and an influx of Ontarians led to violent clashes between the Métis and mobs of Orangemen (Ens 1996: 145). The Cree were similarly suffering on the prairies, as the Indian Department determined that its policies were too costly and made cutbacks. At a time when buffalo were being hunted to extinction, they cut rations to starvation levels to force the Cree to work as farmers. The policy was seen as cruel and unworkable (Harring 2005: 96).

Clashes continued during the 1870s, forcing many Métis to move west to the Saskatchewan Valley. Riel fled to the United States following the resistance. Though officially exiled by the Canadian government, the public elected him to the Canadian House of Commons three times during his absence (Reid 2012: 2). In 1884, the Métis community implored him to return to Canada to negotiate for a sovereign Métis nation in the North-West. When the government failed to respond to Métis petitions, the decision was made to threaten rebellion. The North-West Resistance led by Gabriel Dumont and Louis Riel marked a turning point in relations with the government, as Métis leaders took up arms against the NWMP. Though distinct from the Métis uprising, the Cree also took up arms to resist the removal of their lands, their impoverishment and starvation (Harring 2005: 98). However, the newly constructed Canadian Pacific Railway allowed for the quick

importation of troops and the rapid defeat of the rebels. In the immediate wake of the 1885 resistance, 28 Aboriginal communities were designated disloyal. While Dumont escaped to the United States, the highly respected Cree leaders, Poundmaker and Big Bear, were sentenced to prison. Louis Riel, along with eight other Aboriginal leaders, was hanged (Reid 2012: 25-29).

The North-West Resistance instigated a great division between British and French settlers, and between those who believed in an integrated way of life and those who fought for British expansion. Riel's execution was perceived as an attempt to execute all of French Canada and considered an act of war (Bumstead 1992: 401; Reid 2012: 131). The Canadian government had made its views of minorities clear, and those in the young Dominion understood the message. When the Métis rebellion failed, an integrated Canada was defeated in many ways (Peterson and Brown 1985: 4). Many Métis fled from the Saskatchewan Valley and were dispersed throughout Canada and the United States. The role that the transcontinental railroad played in defeating the Métis was not overlooked. Completed at the same time Riel was tried for treason, the Canadian Pacific Railway launched an aggressive advertising campaign to draw in business and repay its debts. It would become the dominant symbol for national progress, uniting the provinces from east to west (Francis 1997: 17).

After the Métis dispersal, these families were left with the choice to either assimilate into the mainstream or accept a position on the margins of society. An overview of Métis communities throughout the prairies suggests that most communities continued to engage in hunting and trapping, fishing, agriculture, as well as a variety of seasonal wage labour (Barkwell et al. 2012). However, these semi-autonomous communities also had difficulty sustaining themselves, often trying to compete with members of the dominant society for employment in face of the same kinds of racial discrimination experienced by other Aboriginal groups. Métis families built shanty-like homes on the edges of settlements or on road allowances, and unlike Aboriginal peoples, their ambiguous status provided them with no title to land or special resource rights. In most cases, the Métis have been legally considered squatters, living in poor conditions as they have fought for government recognition and a Métis land base to compensate for what was taken from them at Red River (Friesen and Friesen 2004: 98-106).

### ***4.3 The Origins of Denial: The Case of Victoria, British Columbia***

As discussed above, virtually all areas of Canada were settled through the same primary pattern. Initial alliances built through intermarriage resulted in cultural exchanges between Europeans and Aboriginal peoples. While these complex identities persisted for some, others found their cultures challenged in the face of rapid settlement. It is only through examining specific cases that it becomes possible to see that this re-making of identity in the British fashion was actually experienced as traumatic by established Canadians. When racist settlers tried to dehumanize Aboriginal peoples, this degradation was also witnessed by their Métis and non-Aboriginal allies. This vicarious witnessing may have resulted in the settler denial that museums are dealing with today. In this section, I focus on the settlement of Victoria, British Columbia, as Victoria as an excellent example of the patterns discussed above.

Aboriginal peoples on the coast of BC had contact with Europeans from as early as 1774, when the first Spanish ship made contact with the Haida. Four years later, James Cook arrived on the coast, as well as a number of American vessels, each interested in acquiring sea otter pelts to trade to the Chinese. By 1792, there were 21 ships trading along the coast of BC, and by 1800, the coastal nations had established trade relationships with the Americans, the British and the Russians (Fisher 1977: 2). Operations eventually moved inland, and the HBC established trading posts at key locations like Fort Simpson and Fort Langley. The presence of the forts was advantageous to groups who could monopolize trade with the HBC employees, and as per company policy and local tradition, these relationships were cemented through marriage (Fisher 1977: 42).<sup>63</sup>

When Victoria was established by HBC officer, James Douglas, it was envisioned as a new HBC headquarters and a site where fur traders could retire with their Métis families. In 1843, the Lekwungen volunteered to build the fort, considering it as much their property as anyone else's and a good defense against attacks by the northern nations (Lutz 2008: 74).<sup>64</sup> Douglas had climbed up the ranks of the HBC and was in many ways representative of the company culture. Born in British Guiana to a Scotsman and a black woman, Douglas was known in his time as a “Scotch West Indian” (Canadian Encyclopedia

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<sup>63</sup> Fort Langley is currently a successful heritage site devoted to educating Canadians about the nature of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal alliances and the fur trade marriages that took place at the site.

<sup>64</sup> The Lekwungen comprise the current Songhees and Esquimalt Nations.

2012). Like many of the company men, he had met his wife through the fur trade. Amelia Connolly was the daughter of his HBC superior and was of Irish, French Canadian and Cree descent (Tennant 1990: 18).

By 1850, settlers were beginning to arrive in the area, and the Colonial Office made Vancouver Island an official colony in order to protect the area from potential American takeover. Douglas was appointed governor and was soon faced with the challenge of maintaining order in the face of settlement. To these ends, he sought to protect the interests of settlers and Aboriginal peoples alike. Douglas showed an understanding of Western and Aboriginal cultures and was not against settling disputes according to Aboriginal protocols (Fisher 1977: 57). His policies would change over the course of his career, however, there are numerous examples of his attempts to protect the interests of Aboriginal peoples and to prevent violence between the new settlers and the local nations (see Fisher 1977; Tennant 1990). As settlers arrived in the area, they were confronted with a political leader who had spent thirty years working in the fur trade and who understood the delicate balance of good relationships built on mutual dependence. In many ways, he represented the Métis nature of the newly established colony. This Métis order was greatly at odds with the Victorian identity held by the new arrivals, many of whom expected to recreate Britain on Vancouver Island and who, despite its majority Aboriginal population, considered Victoria to be a British village (Edmonds 2010: 36). The affinity that Douglas showed with local ways of behaviour did not always meet with the approval of the newest settlers.

If there was some conflict between a Métis and Victorian consciousness before 1858, this discrepancy reached a crisis point when that year, gold was discovered along the Fraser River (Fisher 1977: 95). Tens of thousands of American, Chinese and European gold miners would stop in Victoria to obtain their licenses, placing a great strain on society and transforming Victoria overnight into a booming frontier town. Thousands of Aboriginal people throughout the territory began to travel to Victoria to conduct business with the newcomers. They took advantage of the boomtown conditions, supplying building materials, ferrying passengers and freight, and working as semi-skilled labourers, domestics, seamstresses and laundresses. At times, Victoria's Aboriginal population swelled to between ten and fifteen thousand people (Lutz 2008: 84).

These interactions came with a high price. Aboriginal people who came to Victoria for work also brought infection back to their home communities. The smallpox epidemic of 1862 is the most devastating epidemic on record, having reduced BC's Aboriginal population by a massive 62% (Furniss 1999: 33). Understandably, the epidemic brought a certain amount of hysteria to BC, and for some settlers, confirmed the expectation that Aboriginal peoples were soon to die out, completing their rightful succession to land. The gold rush also introduced alcohol into these weakened communities, resulting in increased violence and a high number of deaths due to alcohol poisoning (Lutz 2008: 88). Missionaries worked to save Aboriginal lives, which they believed could only be achieved through the abandonment of their cultural beliefs and acceptance of European ways. While prior to 1850, missionization had largely been unsuccessful, these efforts began to take root as settlement increased and Aboriginal medicine proved futile against smallpox. The missionaries demanded total cultural change, and at a time of rapid infiltration by settlers and repeated epidemics, Aboriginal cultural and spiritual values were also greatly undermined (Fisher 1977: 116-142).

The gold-seeking miners showed little respect for Aboriginal peoples. Consisting primarily of foreigners, the miners had no understanding of an integrated, Métis society. For the first time, abuses against the local peoples became the norm and there were often reports of Aboriginal men and women being physically assaulted (Fisher 1977: 98). Some of the miners expected Aboriginal women to fulfill their sexual needs and were not above sexual assault if these demands were refused (Perry 1997: 514). Police charge books from the time show that "violence by European men against Aboriginal women was frequent and stunningly brutal" (Edmonds 2010: 215). These crimes largely went unpunished. Epidemics resulted in some widows and orphans entering the sex trade in order to provide for themselves (Daisy Sewid-Smith in Lutz 2008: 179), and many Aboriginal women were reduced to prostitution in Victoria's brothels and dance houses, as were Chinese women (Barman 2013: 42).

The rapid influx of miners also affected how Aboriginal women were seen by settlers. Barman (1997) emphasizes that during the Victorian period, all female sexual autonomy was seen as illicit. Though sexuality could not be discussed openly, "Victorian sexual morality was focused on, and expressed through, the 'social evil' of prostitution"

(Barman 1997: 242). With the arrival of the mining population, Aboriginal women were no longer valued as wives and were dehumanized in many regards. While unheard of before this period, the pejorative term ‘squaw’ became common in BC after the gold rush (Fisher 1977: 113). The illicitness associated with female, indigenous bodies also resulted in an atmosphere where any Aboriginal woman could be sexualized as a prostitute. By the end of the gold rush, Aboriginal women had been almost completely sexualized, which would continue to justify a sense of entitlement by white men. By construing all Aboriginal women as sexually transgressive, men were able to seduce or abuse them with relative impunity (Barman 2005: 206). The change from wife to prostitute represents a drastic change in the role of Aboriginal women, which took place in Victoria *within ten years*. Mixed marriages were highly disparaged, and even Métis men from prestigious families could not find successful employment or marriage partners within settled society (Van Kirk 1997: 151).

At a time of rapid change, Douglas attempted to appease all sides. His attempts at fair treatment were criticized by both politicians and settlers. As one woman stated, Douglas “has spent all his life among the North American Indians and has got one of them for a wife so can it be expected that he can know anything at all about Governing one of England’s last Colonies in North America” (Fisher 1977: 59). The settlers in BC were not confused about integration: they arrived in BC to recreate a version of Victorian England on the frontier and there was no place for Aboriginal culture within that vision. The newcomers imported racial stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples, and once settled in BC, most of them did not build relationships with local groups enough to have these views challenged. Rather, they arrived with certain expectations about obtaining land in the colony and were influential in ensuring that government policy would be developed to protect their own interests (Fisher 1977: 60).

With limited engagement with the local population, many felt insecure and fearful. Douglas often received complaints from settlers about imaginary attacks, and the large number of Aboriginal people who came to trade and work in Victoria made the settlers

uneasy.<sup>65</sup> Pressure began to increase for their removal and separation from settlement (Fisher 1977: 63).

Although more sympathetic to Aboriginal interests than most, Douglas also believed that acculturation and assimilation was to a certain extent, inevitable (Tennant 1990: 29). In his initial attempts to negotiate treaties and create reserves, he stipulated that the different nations should be given as much land as they wished. However, the minimum amount of ten acres designated by Douglas was later used as a maximum, and through numerous changes in authority, the province never completely developed a clear Aboriginal land policy (Tennant 1990: 33-52). When BC joined Confederation in 1871, Aboriginal peoples in the province became subject to federal policies that had been developing in the rest of the country, including the Indian Act. The province's entry into the Dominion coincided with the Métis resistance on the prairies and shortly after, with the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The railroad would only bring more settlers to the province, and in many ways, would also symbolize the inevitability of progress and expansion.

What I wish to bring into question is the effect that these events would have also had on BC's non-Aboriginal population. Regardless of racist stereotypes, what fur trade families would have witnessed in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century was a very rapid change in social order, in which individuals who had previously been known as allies, neighbours, friends and family members were dispossessed and segregated from the rest of society. Contrary to what is typically written, this dispossession was *violent*. It entailed the dehumanization of Aboriginal peoples, and racist attitudes were reinforced not only through policies that limited freedom of movement, but with personal threats and abuses. Particularly for Aboriginal women, there was a risk of sexual assault, which during this time period, was difficult to report and often went unpunished (Edmonds 2010: 216). The traders would have witnessed Aboriginal women being referred to as squaws and traded into prostitution. They would have witnessed the social confusion and loss of faith experienced by many individuals in the face of aggressive missionization. They would have also witnessed ongoing epidemics, with the fear and hysteria that often accompanied

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<sup>65</sup> Northern nations also travelled to Victoria for potlatches, which typically hosted hundreds or thousands of guests (Lutz 2008: 81). These large gatherings were little understood by settlers and therefore would have been perceived as threatening.

them. We can only imagine what it would have been like to know that those around them were dying of disease while the settler population remained relatively untouched.

There are only a handful of ways that such communities of witness could have reacted to the situation at hand. One involved blaming the victim, justifying the mistreatment along the lines of racial inferiority and the epidemics as divine punishment (Fisher 1977: 124). Denying the suffering and rights of those being dispossessed would have been a key survival strategy that many adopted. Dissent was another option, and though there were always a minority of voices who protested, they were largely without political power (Harris 2002: 58). The third option is perhaps the most confusing, as it entails a combination of identity loss and silence, the legacy of which remains with many Canadians. There are many who through fear of speaking out, perceived lack of power or sense of hopelessness, would have simply done nothing. If they did empathize with Aboriginal peoples, these feelings created quite a conflict of identity. To empathize with the local population was considered akin to being a ‘savage’ or ‘squaw’ oneself. The self-loathing that accompanies such denigration would have not only affected Métis families, but other whites who were sympathetic to their communities.

Scholars have sought to establish what motivated James Douglas’ approaches to land settlement, which changed over the course of his career and were not always self-explanatory (Tennant 1990; Harris 2002). The challenge is also to imagine what it would have been like for a man with a Métis wife to find himself responsible for restricting Aboriginal communities onto reserves. After founding Victoria for Métis families in 1843, he would leave his position twenty years later to successors who represented the most racist attitudes of the time.<sup>66</sup>

During all of these changes and despite the concerns of some settlers, biological and cultural Métissage remained a consistent aspect of BC culture throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Perry 1997: 515). At least a thousand of those who arrived with the gold rush fathered children with Aboriginal women. In the 1901 census, 2000 people who reported themselves as half-breeds are identified by their last names as the descendants of miners.

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<sup>66</sup> Joseph Trutch was the primary policy-maker after Douglas’ retirement in 1864. He personified settler attitudes and considered Aboriginal peoples to be bestial, lazy and violent. During his time as Chief Commissioner of Land and Works, he tried to overturn elements of Douglas’ land policy and was the first to assert explicitly that Aboriginal peoples had never owned the land (Tennant 1990: 39).

BC was also home to a considerable Métis population whose origins were Cree or Dene. Faced with growing racism, Métis populations formed into clusters and tried to live in isolation where they would not attract attention. This social clustering bound some Métis families into self-sufficient communities (Barman and Evans 2009: 75-81).

The gold rush had also brought an influx of Chinese miners, many of whom settled in BC permanently, and some of whom married Aboriginal women (Pleshakov 2010: 27; Barman 2013: 47). Chinese settlers were also joined by immigrants from Japan beginning in the 1870s. These Asian settlers were poorly received by the white population, and numerous attempts were made by the government to tax their immigration and ban them from certain professions (Li 1998: 34; Adachi 1991: 41; Barman 2013: 44). However, many East Asians worked closely with Aboriginal communities in the fishing and lumber industries. They developed a close allyship based on mutual respect, which was strengthened by a shared understanding of discrimination. In the case of Japanese Canadians, a strong sense of mutual protection still exists between the community and BC's Aboriginal population.<sup>67</sup> In many ways, it can be argued that it is BC's ethnic minorities who continued to build the Métis nation. It has been my observation that these communities are primarily free of the guilt that has plagued relationships between Aboriginal peoples and Euro-Canadians. Rather, many of these immigrants have built bridges to Aboriginal communities and are much more comfortable interacting with the Aboriginal part of the country as well as with each other. Métissage between Aboriginal peoples and whites – perhaps because it is more visible – has been considered a much greater source of shame within Canadian society.

It did not take long for Victoria's founding Métis families to lose their standing. Van Kirk (1997) explains that most of the city's prominent families had Aboriginal origins, stemming from the fur trade. However, Aboriginal ancestry quickly became a source of shame as racism continued to intensify in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Incoming settlers resented that Aboriginal families could rank so high in the social hierarchy and were not above making these feelings known. Virtually all of the Métis sons failed to marry and had difficulty finding successful employment; the majority turned to crime and were punished

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<sup>67</sup> These sentiments were expressed to me by members of the Japanese Canadian Human Rights Committee when I met with them in 2011, as well as by representatives of the Squamish Nation at a Talking Circle that I attended at the 2011 Powell Street Festival.

harshly. By contrast, the status of their fathers still made Métis daughters desirable mates and all found successful, white husbands. Yet, family estates were passed to white son-in-laws, and in subsequent generations, the families' Aboriginal origins were intentionally downplayed, denied, ignored and forgotten (Van Kirk 1997).

#### ***4.4 Settlers and the Question of Identity***

John Ralston Saul argues that Canadians are suffering from a problem of false identity, in which they believe their culture is derived from British or French cultures. He makes the point that Europeans have only dominated the area for just over a century and that this has not been enough to override the local cultures, which still permeate the country. While the institutions and myths of national grandeur are European, the way that Canadians think is still heavily influenced by the 250 years of integration that preceded British domination (Saul 2008). If there is a Métis consciousness in Canada, it operates primarily at the subconscious level; most Canadians do not know enough about Aboriginal cultures to recognize they have been influenced by them. Canadians take great pride in the history of the fur trade and the seemingly positive relationships between locals and newcomers. However, there is no consideration as to its lingering effects; much of this early history is overlooked in favour of other national myths.

Daniel Francis (1997) details the complexity of the nation's symbols that have often been formed through the propaganda of elites, whether governments or corporate entities. Myths about the country's development, such as the success of the Canadian Pacific Railway or the altruism of the Mounties, have often been carefully created stories aimed at reinforcing the success of particular institutions as well as developing a sense of national pride. He argues that these myths "are not lies.... Rather, they express important truths. They usually do not provide a precise record of events, but that is because they serve other purposes. Myths idealize. They select particular events and institutions which seem to embody important cultural values and elevate them to the status of legend" (Francis 1997: 11). He argues that despite their lack of historical truth, Canadians remain attached to these legends as part of their national identity.

Jennifer Reid (2012) makes a compelling case for the opposite. She argues that these symbols have in fact *not* been internalized by Canadians. She clearly illustrates that

while Francis' key symbols continue to be promoted by elites, they have had little effect on the Canadian psyche. For example, in mythic narratives, the Mounties were able to pacify and settle the West without resorting to the violence that occurred south of the border. The Mountie represents a society in which law and communal order are valued above individual autonomy. However, while the quintessential image of the Mountie continues to be celebrated in tourist paraphernalia, it does not resonate with Canadians, who primarily associate the current RCMP with high levels of racism, violence and corruption. This open secret is prevalently known among Canadians, particularly since corruption following the October Crisis resulted in their loss of jurisdiction over internal national security (Reid 2012: 61-63).<sup>68</sup> In BC, the RCMP are primarily associated with providing an inadequate investigation into missing and murdered women throughout the province (Jacobs and Williams 2008; Cameron 2010), and more recently, for physical and sexual assault against Aboriginal women and girls (Human Rights Watch 2013). Similarly, the promotional campaigns of the Canadian Pacific Railway have not produced a national affiliation with the railway, in part because it was built through the exploitation and death of many Chinese workers. As knowledge about Chinese Canadian settlers in Canada has increased, the CPR has come to represent a black mark against the country and an episode in history of which the country is ashamed (Reid 2012: 60).

Interestingly, what *has* resonated with both French and English Canadians more than any other story is that of the Métis leader, Louis Riel. The most famous, written about and documented political figure in Canadian history, Riel is no longer seen by Canadians as a traitor, but as a national hero in a country that does not produce heroes.<sup>69</sup> There have even been calls to have Riel recognized as the father of Confederation (Reid 2012: 4). It is interesting that the Métis hero has not been appropriated by Aboriginal or Métis writers, but has become the mythic hero of Euro-Canadians. They have shown a remarkable desire to engage with this historical figure who fought so hard against the current political organization of the country. The country's esteem for Riel is especially surprising coming from Anglo-Canadians, who saw Riel almost universally as a homicidal traitor in 1885

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<sup>68</sup> In the 1970 October Crisis, the kidnappings of several government officials by the paramilitary group, Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ) resulted in the only peacetime use of the War Measures Act in Canada.

<sup>69</sup> Saul explains Canada's lack of national heroes partially by the fact that Canada has been a nation of impoverished minorities who survived due to cooperation, not individualism. Hero-worship is not a part of Canadian culture (Saul 1997: 140).

(Reid 2012: 49). Yet, through lack of affinity with government-propagated myths and symbols, what has become a source of identity for Canadians is one of the historic voices attempting to put a halt to a British-dominated Canada. Riel has come to be seen in many ways as prototypically Canadian.

National symbols are only one source for consideration. However, the evidence for this identity conflict is omnipresent. Canada is often discussed as a country that has failed to achieve any kind of national identity, and the problem of identity is in fact posited as *the* Canadian problem (see Studin 2007). Canadians have little ability to define themselves, and when they do achieve some form of definition, it is largely a negation, put forth in the form of what they are *not*. “The Canadian Identity, as it has come to be known, is as elusive as the sasquatch... It has animated and frustrated generations of statesmen, historians, writers, artists, philosophers and the national film board” (Cohen 2007: 3). Thomas Homer-Dixon (2007) writes, “A Canadian is... almost always unsure of what it means to be Canadian. Maybe this is a strength. Maybe it is evidence of our tolerance and pluralism and of our enlightened postmodernity. Let a thousand identities bloom! Or maybe it just reveals our hollow core - a vacuity at the centre of our soul” (Homer-Dixon in Studin 2007: 8). For the Canadian, there is an indescribable emptiness or discomfort with the self that has thus far gone unexplained despite all of the effort that has been devoted to the subject. Whether or not it has been born of past trauma, what does seem certain is that at some point in time, Canadians forgot who they were. Furthermore, who they were was overwhelmingly influenced by living in Aboriginal territory. While denying the Aboriginal allows non-Aboriginal Canadians to justify the current colonial order, there is also a price that they are paying, which is their own loss of identity.

How many problems could be resolved were all non-Aboriginal peoples to start envisioning themselves as Métis? Perhaps accepting that they are under the influence of their Aboriginal neighbours is in fact the first step to self-definition and self-acceptance: the long-awaited release of colonial guilt. It may serve as a starting point for rebuilding Canadian society in a way that fosters secure identities for all of its peoples and in effect, grounds them at last in Canada. Perhaps, the only way that non-Aboriginal Canadians can truly come to support the empowerment, success, and self-determination of Canada’s Aboriginal peoples is if they come to understand what they are rarely able to admit to

themselves ... *that Canada is an Aboriginal territory. It has always been an Aboriginal territory.*

## CHAPTER 5

### COLONIAL HISTORY

#### ***5.1 The History of Residential Schools in Canada***

In the previous chapter, I discussed a pervasive change in attitude that occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in which acceptance of cultural diversity was replaced by racism. Both attitudes toward society – integration and domination – still affect the way that non-Aboriginal Canadians view Aboriginal peoples. What affects all Canadians much more profoundly is the history that has been the most silenced, and this is the history and legacy of residential schools.

In various colonial states, different systems of indigenous education have been developed, some of which have been more successful than others. In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were historically considered uneducatable (Price 2012: 2). Some minimal efforts were made at providing education. Yet, because indigenous groups were legally excluded from society, they were primarily exempt from public schooling (Coopes 2009: 138). By contrast, in Aotearoa New Zealand, a national system of village primary schools developed at the request of Maori communities. An English education was seen as necessary if Maori were to vote and hold seats in Parliament, these rights both granted in 1867 (Barrington 2008: 19). Though student experiences differed, the teachers who went to work in the village schools often became integrated parts of the Maori communities in which they taught (Simon and Smith 2001). A system of grants also provided for the brightest students to continue their education at boarding schools, of which many respected Maori leaders were graduates (Barrington 2008).

Boarding schools were also a fixture in the United States and Canada. However, unlike the case of Aotearoa, these were specifically aimed at removing children from the influence of their parents, communities and cultures (Churchill 2004; Fear-Segal 2007; Milloy 1999; Trafzer et al. 2006). Particularly in Canada, this isolation left the children susceptible to abuse by school authorities.

Over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British imperial government and later, the Canadian government, were increasingly making attempts to assimilate Aboriginal peoples into Western society. The imperial government began its first ‘civilization program’ in the

1830s. The concept of civilization was closely linked to that of progress, in which Aboriginal societies were seen as savage, whereas European societies were perceived to have progressed to a higher state of civilization (TRC 2012a: 3). However, in Canada, initial attempts to civilize Aboriginal peoples were not based on racist attitudes, but on the perceived need to protect Aboriginal land from unscrupulous settlers, a mandate established in the Royal Proclamation of 1763. The policy was implemented through a new system of land treaties and reserves (Leslie 2002: 24).

Aboriginal peoples were eager for their children to receive a Western education in order to thrive in a territory increasingly shared with settlers. When the first treaties were devised, many included clauses for the provision of schools on the reserves at the request of Aboriginal communities (Sinclair 2009; TRC 2012a: 2). ‘Civilization’ did not reflect a government desire for either complete assimilation or political control. The new policies were implemented within the framework of the Royal Proclamation, in which different Aboriginal nations were recognized as self-governing entities. The imperial government thus required the chiefs’ consent on matters of schools, as well as any other aspects of reserve development. The aim was to ensure the continuation of self-sufficient communities that were guaranteed possession of their lands by treaties. To these ends, Aboriginal governments were more than equal partners in decision-making (Milloy 1999: 12).

Though the imperial government may have respected self-government as a matter of policy, the civilization program did, to a certain extent, aim to coerce Aboriginal peoples to abandon their own traditions in favour of European ways of behaviour. In 1857, the Gradual Civilization Act was established, which conferred certain privileges on individuals who were seen to be successfully assimilating. Aboriginal men who were well educated, free of debt and of good moral character would be eligible for land grants and all of the rights accompanying them (Jacobs and Williams 2008: 122). The Act represented a larger strategy to have Aboriginal peoples exchange their Indian status for enfranchisement. The government envisioned that upon obtaining some degree of civilization, most Aboriginal

people would volunteer to become enfranchised and leave their bands (TRC 2012a: 11).<sup>70</sup> In practice, Aboriginal peoples resisted doing so.

Between the 1840s and 1870s, some government officials were greatly concerned at the limited progress being made by communities and began to focus more narrowly on the education, or assimilation, of Aboriginal children (Milloy 1999: 17). Initially, a system of day schools was established by the Crown to fulfill the treaty clauses; however, Aboriginal leaders made it clear that they were seeking an education for their children and not a fundamental change in lifestyle. When the assimilative nature of the schools became apparent, many parents withdrew their children from the day schools (Ennamorato 1998: 41-42). This resistance provided the government with impetus to develop new models for Aboriginal education that would remove children from the influence of their parents and place them instead in church-run residential schools. Government officials believed that in order to educate Aboriginal children effectively, they would need to remove them from the influences of Aboriginal culture while they were young. By removing the children from their families, they would complete their education ready to take up places in the civilized world (Milloy 1999: 23; Stout et al. 2003: 28). Implicit in this goal was the annihilation of Aboriginal languages, history, knowledge and traditions (TRC 2012a: 1). The concept of the residential school was not a new one, and there had been previous experiments with residential schooling in New France as early as the 1620s (Miller 1996: 39). However, in a country where Aboriginal culture and politics still dominated, these efforts were largely unsuccessful and the schools were poorly attended. A handful of schools opened between the 1830s and 1860s. However, it was not until 1879 that the Canadian government decided to adopt residential schooling as a national policy (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005: 33). By this time, the nation-building ideology that precluded any Aboriginal component to society was well underway.

The schools that developed were primarily modeled after the large industrial schools that were evolving in the United States to assimilate Native American children. Schools like the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania served as early experiments in Native American education, aiming both to break down tribal cultures and to educate

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<sup>70</sup> Although referred to as enfranchisement, it did not actually provide Aboriginal peoples with the right to vote.

Native Americans in white ways of behaviour (Fear-Segal 2007: 159). Combining school lessons with industrial training, authorities envisioned that Native Americans would take up places as assimilated citizens, prepared to work in the bottom tiers of society as labourers or domestic servants to the white population. The schools were run in military fashion, where the students wore uniforms and performed extensive drills. Along with contributing to the schools' operations, the students' vocational training took them into nearby communities through an 'outing' program that allowed them to gain practical work experience (Adams 1995; Lomawaima and McCarty 2006; Fear-Seal 2007).<sup>71</sup>

In Canada, residential schools were much more focused on religious training, as the schools were not merely government initiatives, but joint operations of the federal government and the Catholic, United, Methodist, Anglican and Presbyterian churches (Nagy and Sehdev 2012: 67). Principals were clergymen who were seen to have good standing in the church; it was not required that they had any experience in teaching or with children. Other school staff were sometimes drawn from the RCMP or the army (Grant 1996: 141). In the residential schools, learning and practical training were balanced by a half-day system. Schools only provided lessons for two to three hours per day and the rest of the students' time was devoted to religious instruction and other training. Boys were taught farming, blacksmithing and carpentry, while girls focused on cooking, sewing and other domestic duties, (Haig-Brown 1988: 72; MacDonald and Hudson 2012: 431). It was thought that intensive chores would not only teach children the skills they would need in the civilized world, but also had economic value, both in the running of the schools as well as assisting local industries (Milloy 1999: 35). Children often did all of the cooking for the schools, as well as laundry and any other duties that went into school operations. Due to the intensive labour needs of the schools, some students were so occupied working that they never attended classes (Deiter 1999: 63).

From the inception of the school system, schools were consistently underfunded and there were known cases of the students being subject to harsh punishments. However, when Aboriginal peoples across the country protested the school conditions, government

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<sup>71</sup> While a detailed description of Native American boarding schools is outside the scope of this study, the American system bore strong resemblance to the Canadian residential school system, particularly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. More information can be found in Adams 1995, Szasz 1999, Child 2000, Churchill 2004, Lomawaima and McCarty 2006, Trafzer et al. 2006, Fear-Segal 2007.

officials countered their efforts primarily through legislation (Sinclair 2009). With the establishment of the Indian Act, the government established an aggressive assimilationist operation for Aboriginal communities under its jurisdiction (Milloy 1999: 21). Aboriginal peoples would no longer enter into negotiations with the new government as distinct and autonomous nations. John A. MacDonald viewed all indigenous peoples as incapable of managing their own affairs. Under his direction, the government became a guardian to Aboriginal peoples, who were legally rendered dependent wards of the state (Furniss 1995: 22). Aboriginal self-government was quickly abolished in favour of new municipal governments that were implemented on behalf of Aboriginal communities (Milloy 2008: 6). Furthermore, through the Indian Act, the federal government became the primarily authority in determining a person's cultural identity and way of life. As Agnes Grant (1996) points out, "It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this legislation because nowhere in the world is there another piece of legislation that deals with the whole life of a people in the way the Indian Act does" (Grant 1996: 92). Through numerous amendments to the act, virtually every aspect of Aboriginal life came under government control (Furniss 1999: 41).

The 1876 Indian Act defined Indian status primarily according to male lines of descent. An Aboriginal woman married to a non-Aboriginal man was struck from the registry and no longer allowed to be an Indian. If she married a man from another Aboriginal community, she was registered under his band and lost all rights to her own nation. The consequences were especially evident in bands that followed matrilineal descent patterns. The Indian Act introduced a European patrilineage system, which disrupted traditional kinship and residency patterns (Jacobs and Williams 2008: 122-123). Women were doubly disadvantaged under the Indian Act, as they were not allowed to vote in band elections, could not own or inherit property, and their identity became dependent on the status of their fathers or husbands. Even if a woman was wholly integrated into Aboriginal society, she ceased to be an Indian, by definition, the moment she married a non-Indian (RCAP 1996a: 101). The Native Women's Association of Canada argues that the Indian Act was intentionally designed to destroy women's traditional roles within their clan and governance systems, preparing them instead to become the 'property' of individual men (NWAC 2010a: 11).

The Indian Act also had consequences for intermarriage, as the government had the authority to determine who was a status Indian belonging to a reserve and who would be labelled as trespassers and removed (Milloy 2008: 10). With the ultimate goal of enfranchising all Aboriginal peoples upon their assimilation, the act left little room for those with mixed or hybrid identities. The 1876 Act excluded anyone who was not considered ‘pure Indian’, and in 1880, it was modified to specifically exclude half-breeds from any of the treaties and from coming under the provisions of the act (Lawrence 2004: 88-89).

The Indian Act ensured that Aboriginal parents would be powerless to retain their children in their home communities. Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of Canada’s TRC, describes the fact that the Indian Act was continually amended to counter Aboriginal resistance to the residential school system:

Even though they [Aboriginal parents] willingly sent their children to these schools because they wanted their children to be educated, the complaints that came back were numerous, very early on. And so we know of instances in which parents heard about what was being done to their children and what was happening, and they went to gather them back and bring them back home. So the Indian Act was amended to provide that no parent could interfere with a child who was in a residential school designated by the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs ... We have heard stories from survivors in the brief time that we've been acting as commissioners of the fact that their parents would come and take them out of a school if something happened to them - if they were abused or punished or something occurred to them in the schools. Their parents would come and take them out and they would talk about the Indian agent coming with a police officer to their house and telling their mom or their dad, “if you ever do that again, we're gonna lock *you* up”, because you can't take your kids out of these schools now that we've designated them. So the parents were interfered with. Their ability to interfere with the abuse their children were receiving was taken away from them by an act of Parliament (Sinclair 2009).

Some parents attempted to visit the schools in order to see how their children were being treated; however, the 1876 Indian Act had introduced a pass system, precluding Aboriginal people from leaving their reserves without the written permission of their Indian agents (LeBeuf 2011: 34). Some parents attempted to protest the school system. In 1885, the Indian Act was amended so that it was illegal for Aboriginal people to gather in groups of

three or more to protest any government action.<sup>72</sup> In the 1880s, Indian agents also acquired additional powers as justices of the peace; they could therefore prosecute Aboriginal people under their jurisdiction. 1884 amendments to the Indian Act banned cultural practices like the potlatch and sundance (Fournier and Crey 1997: 25), and made residential school attendance mandatory for children under sixteen. Parents who refused to cooperate faced fines and imprisonment (Stout et al. 2003: 29). Some Aboriginal leaders attempted to seek justice through the courts. Yet, despite their efforts, residential school attendance only increased in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1927, the act was amended so that any Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal person wishing to challenge the Indian Act in court could not do so without the written permission of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (RCAP 1996b: 272). Pursuing land claims was made illegal, and any lawyers who accepted a retainer to dispute Indian legal claims were also subject to disbarment (Sinclair 2009). At their peak in the 1930s, there were a total of eighty residential schools in Canada. At this time, the role of the RCMP in enforcing school attendance was made official, as in 1933, police officers were made truant officers under the Indian Act (LeBeuf 2011: 34).

An estimated 150,000 children attended the schools between 1870 and 1996, of which there are approximately 80,000 survivors alive today (Nagy and Sehdev 2012: 67; MacDonald and Hudson 2012). Though official policy changed in 1951 to close the schools and integrate Aboriginal children into day schools with other Canadian children, it took another four decades for the system to be completely phased out. The last residential school in Canada closed in 1996. This is a recent history, and the effects of the school system are felt deeply within all Aboriginal communities. Though most residential school students were First Nations, many Métis and Inuit also attended, where they faced the same conditions as other Aboriginal students (Chartrand 2006; King and Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2006). Particularly for Inuit children who attended schools hundreds of kilometers from home, it was impossible for family to visit them and some did not return home for years at a time (TRC 2012b: 5).

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<sup>72</sup> This legislation followed the Métis and Cree rebellions on the prairies, as the government attempted to prevent any other organized resistance.

## ***5.2 Residential Schools as Total Institutions***

In Canada, the means of assimilation largely took place out of view of the settler population. Aboriginal children, some as young as four years old, were forced to take on new identities partially through education and training, but primarily through institutionalized acts of terror and violence, which took place behind closed doors (Haig-Brown 1988; Furniss 1995; Grant 1996; Miller 1996).<sup>73</sup> Survivors' accounts vary and some survivors do recall positive associations with the schools, such as caring teachers and lasting friendships (TRC 2012b: 6). However, the reader should be aware that the process of speaking about these experiences is also subject to psychological barriers. While some survivors are ready to embrace this process, others are reticent and may still deny that they were abused. As is common with cases of child abuse, other survivors may not fully recall what transpired, or may recall aspects of loneliness and separation while blocking more severe abuses from consciousness (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005: 40). Even when the memory is intact, the process of telling is not one that is necessarily compatible with speaking at a single TRC event. Residential school survivors often disclose the abuse in stages, as they become more comfortable and determine that the listener can be trusted.<sup>74</sup> The full story of what occurred in the schools may always be incomplete. However, from the fragments of narrative revealed at TRC hearings and from previously published accounts, a general account of the school system has been emerging. The ambiguities that remain are often to do with the intent of the school system, while the experiences of abuse and neglect are at this point well-established facts (TRC 2012a; 2012b).

Students were initially brought to school by their parents or were apprehended by Indian agents and RCMP officers who arranged transportation. From the time that students arrived at school, their lives became highly regimented. Children were immediately stripped and roughly bathed, hair was cut short, all were given uniforms, and at times, new names or merely numbers in place of a name (TRC 2012a: 22).<sup>75</sup> Pupils were segregated

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<sup>73</sup> Students usually began school at six or seven years old, but it was not uncommon for children to have been removed from communities as young as four years old. A survivor at the TRC hearing in Dryden, Ontario on Nov 22, 2012 reported having been brought to residential school as a baby.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Ley, Interview by the author, June 23, 2011. Ley is an associate professor at Simon Fraser University and a clinical psychologist who has been responsible for the psychological assessments of over 130 residential school survivors.

<sup>75</sup> This kind of induction was also described by a survivor at the TRC hearing in Eskasoni, Nova Scotia on October 14, 2011.

by sex, which meant that for years, siblings had little or no contact with each other; survivors have recounted being punished even for smiling or waving at a sibling (TRC 2012b: 5). Being so close and yet isolated from family members instilled a sense of powerlessness in the children and reinforced the sense that everything familiar to them was being removed (Haig-Brown 1988: 53). At school, they were also forbidden to speak their languages or engage in their cultural or spiritual practices as a matter of policy. New students who had yet to learn English or French were effectively left without a voice, with no way to express themselves or to ask questions about their surroundings (TRC 2012b: 5).

Due to the half-day system, many students did not receive an adequate education. It was not uncommon for students who had spent a decade in the schools to emerge with only rudimentary reading skills. The schools eroded the children's proficiency in their native languages, yet often failed to provide adequate instruction of English or French. Despite extended stays in the schools, some children left without proficiency in any language (Barnes et al. 2006: 24).

While the government invested in a national system of residential schools, it was not actually willing to devote sufficient funds for the care of the students (TRC 2012a: 16). When schools were established, they were consistently underfunded despite complaints by school staff. The schools were poorly constructed and maintained, which staff blamed for an appalling number of deaths among the children. Until the 1940s, the schools were suffering from a crisis in sanitation and health conditions, and poor heating and clothing combined with overcrowding contributed to the spread of disease (Milloy 1999: 77; Walker 2009: 7). Tuberculosis was especially prevalent, and the high level of death and disease was well-known to Indian agents, church representatives and government officials. The *Bryce Report*, released in 1907, concluded in its investigation into school conditions that "even war seldom shows as large a percentage of fatalities as does the education system imposed on our Indian wards" (Quoted in Churchill 2004: 39). A year later, leaders in the Anglican church argued that health conditions were so dire that the government was leaving itself open to charges of manslaughter (Milloy 1999: 77). Approximately 50% of the children died from disease and in some schools, estimates were higher; within the first 16 years of operation at File Hills school, 75% of all pupils had died (Deiter 1999: 21). Due to underfunding, food at the schools was often insufficient and survivors also recall

hunger as a key aspect of the school experience (Grant 1996: 127; Schmeling 2004: 46). Churchill (2004) points out that students were not always receiving the meagre rations that were allocated to them, as staff were often spending the monies budgeted on luxury items for themselves (Churchill 2004: 31). The food that was provided was of poor quality, and children were sometimes forced to eat food that was rotten or full of maggots. Complaints about the food were not tolerated, and those who did complain went hungry or were forced to eat off the floor (TRC 2012a: 38). Students who became sick from rotten food were at times forced to eat their own vomit. This is a practice that has been recounted by survivors from different schools (Grant 1996: 130; Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005: A22).

Complete obedience was expected from students and even minor infractions could be met with sudden outbursts of violence on the part of teachers and supervisors. Students were frequently subjected to physical punishments, and even by the standards of the day, their severity crossed the line into abuse (TRC 2012a: 38). Punishments included being strapped, whipped, beaten to the point of drawing blood or breaking bones, or having sewing needles pushed through their tongues, which was a routine punishment for language offenses at Alberni School (Haig-Brown 1988: 16; Chrisjohn et al. 2006: 49). Other students may have had their tongues burnt or cut for language offenses (Schmeling 2004: 75). Children were also routinely forced to beat other students, including their own siblings (TRC 2012b: 5). It is unknown how many children died as a result of physical abuse, but survivor accounts also document witnessing students being beaten to death or simply disappearing (Grant 1996: 135). Aside from physical beatings, some survivors have reported the use of electrical shock devices, including electric chairs (Ennamorato 1998: 13; Chrisjohn et al. 2006: 50). Exposing children to the elements was also a common form of punishment, sometimes resulting in life-threatening conditions such as frostbite or pneumonia (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005: A22).

For many students, attending residential school was also a humiliating experience. Religious instruction often focused on the evil of Aboriginal culture and spirituality. As well as learning the basic tenets of Christianity, the students were called ‘savages’, ‘heathens’, and learned from a young age that as Indians, they were worthless (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005: 47; Kelly 2008: 24). Staff and clergy instilled a deep sense of shame in students over anything to do with sexuality or bodily functions. Public

humiliation as a form of punishment was common. For example, students who wet the bed were made to wear their wet sheets over their heads while being spanked or paraded throughout the school. Some students were beaten while naked in front of other students or school officials (Haig-Brown 1988: 83; Fournier and Crey 1997: 121). At Schubenacadie, the nuns decided not to provide sanitary napkins for the girls; some were beaten if they soiled their sheets with menstrual blood (Grant 1996: 231). There are other stories of students having their faces rubbed in human excrement, and a common punishment for bedwetters was to have their faces rubbed in their own urine (Milloy 1999: 284).

Priests and nuns also overemphasized a focus on sin and on the evil of sexuality. Particularly for girls, the focus on maintaining modesty seemed to border on obsession for some clergy members, and dire consequences over modesty pervaded every aspect of life. For example, some clergy consistently interrogated the students to determine whether they were sexually active (Haig-Brown 1988: 64). In some schools, students were told to wear their undergarments in the shower, and girls had their breasts bound so that they would not develop. Nuns kept strict records of the girls' periods, and the segregation of the sexes was maintained under the belief that contact with the opposite sex could only lead to sinful thoughts or deeds (Miller 1996: 235). Catholic schools often stressed the importance of becoming a nun, and one student recalled that from a class of fifteen students, fourteen went on to become nuns, while one became a prostitute (Ennamorato 1998: 79). Thus, as well as denigrating students' cultural identity, the school system also instilled in them a negative body image and often, extreme confusion over adult sexual relationships, which were highly equated with sin.

Sexual abuse was incredibly widespread, which when combined with the church's focus on sexuality as sin, was a deeply shaming experience for students. In some schools, the rate of sexual abuse was 100%, with devastating effects for students. Many students were routinely sexually abused by multiple perpetrators for the entire duration of their education (Miller 1996; Ennamorato 1998; Fournier and Crey 1997; Schmeling 2004; Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005). Not only were students abused by priests and nuns, but there was also a high level of student on student abuse as older students learned from

the ways they were being treated and then abused the younger students.<sup>76</sup> There have been reports of prostitution rings that were run out of some schools, of frequent pregnancies and of the spread of sexually transmitted diseases among the students (King and Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2006: 15). Getting students pregnant posed a problem for abusive staff members, and in one school, nuns were seen by students to have become experts on inducing abortions (Schmeling 2004: 39). Another account states that a pregnant student was beaten nightly in attempts to have her confess the father of her child; the beatings continued until the student died (Grant 1996: 135).

There were limited options for students, but children resisted by stealing food and disobeying regulations (Miller 1996: 361). Students were also responsible for attempting to burn down at least seven residential schools (TRC 2012a: 53). More commonly, children simply ran away. Some students died as a result as run-aways were left to withstand the Canadian climate without suitable clothing and sometimes froze to death (TRC 2012a: 40). Some schools were very isolated and there was literally nowhere else for the children to go. Even if children did arrive safely back to their reserves, they could be apprehended by truant officers in the form of Indian agents or RCMP officers. A recent report issued by the RCMP accedes that some children who ran away from school were tried in court or sent to prison upon their capture (LeBeuf 2011: 49). Once returned to school, other punishments may have included being physically bound by chains, locked in closets or placed in solitary confinement, going without food for days or having their diets reduced to bread and water for up to two weeks (Kelly 2008: 24; TRC 2012b: 5). Running away was punished harshly and the run-aways were often made examples to other children. However, even minor infractions within the schools were sometimes met with violence. Many survivors have compared the schools either to prisons or concentration camps (Fournier and Crey 1997: 61).

Current discussions about the residential school system focus on how and why the schools ultimately became such sites of abuse. Some scholars point out that the residential school system attracted certain kinds of employees - school staff were often outsiders from Canadian society who may have been motivated by religious ideology (Chambers 2003:

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<sup>76</sup> Introduction to school was especially rough on boys, who were sometimes beaten or sexually abused by groups of older boys. Violent initiations were frequently used to screen newcomers to determine their toughness (Haig-Brown 1988: 55; Chambers 2003: 67).

65). Grant (1996) argues that some of the teachers may have similarly been victimized in their youth; many priests and nuns left home during their formative years and through the church, they learned a kind of discipline that was punitive and shaming (Grant 1996: 150). Moreover, those who wanted to work in isolated areas in poor conditions for little pay were often those seeking out vulnerable populations to abuse. Some school supervisors have been described as sadists, consisting primarily of men who had been dismissed from the RCMP or armed forces (Haig-Brown 1988: 21). The outsider status of some perpetrators has led to differences of opinion on the intention of the school system. Though abuses were widespread, there are differences between the crimes committed by individuals and the overall desire to assimilate, enacted through government policy. One of the questions being raised by communities is whether the residential school system can be considered an act of genocide (Grant 1996; Ennamorato 1998; Churchill 2004; Chrisjohn et al. 2006; MacDonald and Hudson 2012).

Government representatives as well as non-Aboriginal Canadians have been much more willing to attribute abuses within the school system to sexual sadists than to describe the abuses suffered by students as part of predetermined and established methods of social engineering or extermination.<sup>77</sup> However, scholars recognize that residential schools were ‘total institutions’, a concept first introduced by Erving Goffman in *Asylums* (1961). Goffman focused on the effects of institutionalization in hospitals, prisons and boarding schools, which he argued were totally encompassing environments that disempowered their inhabitants. In such institutions, staff had complete power to erase the inmates’ previous social identities and replace them with new ones (Scott 2011: 2). In residential schools, the staff had total authority over every aspect of the students’ lives and such power was consistently abused for over a century of Aboriginal education. When new children entered the residential school, staff often established authority through the use of unexpected violence. Survivors have spoken of being beaten within minutes of entering school, which usually occurred the first time they attempted to speak, undoubtedly in their own languages. This immediate, brutal reaction is a device used to establish total control instantaneously and is a tactic frequently employed in terrorist regimes (Grant 1996: 189). The sexual

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<sup>77</sup> During the early residential school trials, cases were treated as individual acts of abuse, while defense attorneys denied that any systemic conditions were to blame.

abuse also often began within days of entering school, and in some cases, while traveling to the school (Fournier and Crey 1997: 47). Researchers at the Aboriginal Healing Foundation argue that residential schools fit the definition of ritual abuse, in that the abuse that children faced was often repeated and systematic (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005: 35). The systematic nature of abuse occurring in schools across the country indicates that this was not simply the work of a few disturbed individuals.

Herman (2001) points out that in situations of captivity, such as prisons, concentration camps, brothels and cults, the methods that enable one person to enslave another are remarkably consistent. Across the globe, these techniques are not random, and it is often possible to trace how certain groups train and groom others in the use of terror as a method of control. She states that “the methods of establishing control over another person are based upon the systematic, repetitive infliction of psychological trauma. They are the organized techniques of disempowerment and disconnection. Methods of psychological control are designed to instill terror and helplessness and to destroy the victim’s sense of self in relation to others” (Herman 2001: 77). The things that survivors describe as core aspects of the residential school experience: inconsistent and unpredictable outbursts of violence, scrutiny and control of the children’s bodily functions, and the destruction of attachments to siblings and home communities, are all time-tested mechanisms of terror and control more frequently described by prisoners of war (Herman 2001: 77-80).

Herman states that the final stage of ‘breaking’ a person and making them a compliant prisoner occurs when the victim is forced to violate their own moral principles and to betray their basic human attachments, either by witnessing atrocities committed against other people or being sexually humiliated by the perpetrators. This is the most destructive of all coercive techniques because the victim who has been forced to abandon a sense of morality comes to loathe themselves and often loses the will to live or to resist (Herman 2001: 83). Within the schools, Aboriginal children were intentionally broken by having their morality overridden; this occurred through sexual abuse, through witnessing violence against other children, and through being forced to harm others. There was a particular focus on harming the weak, for example in beating younger students or in some

cases, being made to kill puppies and kittens.<sup>78</sup> Though violence may have been intermittent in some schools, the threat of violence acted as a mechanism of constant terror.

To a certain extent, these practices seem to have been endorsed. When harsh punishment and sexual abuse were reported, perpetrators were often transferred to other schools or in some cases, promoted (Churchill 2004: 63). In contrast, teachers who challenged the system and complained that students were being mistreated were often dismissed, as were those that tried to show healthy affection towards the children or improve the children's activities (Szasz 1999: 21; Chambers 2003: 64). Government reports that criticized school conditions were either suppressed or discredited. After the *Bryce Report* (1907) was released, not only was Bryce dismissed, but conditions in the schools he had examined became much worse. By 1920, at Sarcee school, all but four students had contracted tuberculosis and were being made to attend classes despite bandages and open sores. Only those who could no longer stand were permitted to rest (Churchill 2004: 39-41).

Scholars agree that in discussing the residential school experience, it is often the narrow definition of genocide that is problematic (Churchill 2004; MacDonald and Hudson 2012; Mako 2012). At the Genocide Convention of 1948, Raphael Lemkin originally proposed a definition of genocide that included provisions for three separate mechanisms of destroying a particular culture - physical, biological and cultural genocide:

- a) *Physical Genocide* includes both direct/immediate extermination and “slow death measures”, in which subjection to inadequate housing, clothing, food and medical care or excessive physical exertion is likely to result in death.
- b) *Biological Genocide* includes involuntary sterilization, compulsory abortion and any other policies intended to prevent births within the target group.

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<sup>78</sup> Being forced to drown animals was reported by a survivor at the TRC hearing held in Victoria, British Columbia on April 13, 2012.

c) *Cultural Genocide* includes all policies aimed at destroying specific characteristics by which the target group is defined, thereby forcing the group to become something else (Churchill 2004: 5-6).

Cultural genocide was later abrogated from the Genocide Convention upon protest from states that were engaging in this practice, namely the United States, Australia , Sweden and Canada (Mako 2012: 175). Thus, the definition of genocide has been set by colonizers to allow them to persecute minority groups without facing prosecution under international law. This is something which is currently being revised by the countries mentioned above. At this point, scholars working in Australia have been the most forthcoming in adopting a stance that the treatment of its indigenous population by both settlers and government was in fact genocidal (Manne 2004; 218). The Australian link to genocide is perhaps more evident than in Canada, where settlers did not engage in the widespread murder and massacre of its indigenous population in the way that early Australians did (see Palmer 2000).

MacDonald and Hudson (2012) recommend we adopt the term *cultural genocide* to describe the residential school experience, which is often applied when mass death did not occur and where the intent to destroy a group's physical existence was absent. In colonial contexts, it is defined by active attempts to destroy culture, language and religion while appropriating land and outlawing social customs (MacDonald and Hudson 2012: 442). However, because *cultural genocide* remains outside the definition of genocide in international law, using this term often results in the minimization of harm caused to Aboriginal peoples and serves as another argument that what transpired in residential schools cannot have been that severe – it was merely cultural assimilation. Most Aboriginal communities intuitively feel that what they have endured is tantamount to genocide, and this is the reason that despite a lack of legal standing in Canada, the term *genocide* is increasingly being used to describe Canadian colonialism. The problem is that legally, in order to discuss residential schools in this manner, one would need to confirm that the death of Aboriginal children was a specific intention of the churches and federal government which ran them (MacDonald and Hudson 2012: 445).

Though not always recognized, it is also possible to deduce that death may have been an obvious intention of the system itself. This is evident in the fact that from the inception of the school system, children were not provided with enough food, clothing, safe housing and medical care to thrive (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005: A22). Churchill's assessment of the schools is that officials were attempting to induce the slow death of the students by starvation (Churchill 2004: 31). Prior to the First World War, staff consistently complained about the conditions of the schools, but despite knowledge of the high number of deaths, there was no significant reformulation in policy (Furniss 1999: 44; Milloy 1999: 102). Official investigations into the schools revealed that the level of disease was a direct result of the school's conditions. To put this in perspective, in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the percentage of students who died in residential schools was higher than in some Nazi concentration camps (Churchill 2004: 34).<sup>79</sup> Through numerous reports and investigations, the government was well aware of this fact; however government response was not to increase funding, but to *increase enrolment in the schools* (Ennamorato 1998: 60; Churchill 2004: 39). The number of schools increased, reaching their peak in the 1930s at the same time that RCMP officers were legally made truant officers to ensure school attendance (LeBeuf 2011: 34).

It should be noted that it was not mandatory to inform parents when a child died; for many parents, the first indication they had of a child's death was when the child failed to return home at the end of the school year (Grant 1996: 129-133). Many questions remain about those who are now known as the Missing Children.<sup>80</sup> While more investigation is needed into deaths at the schools before genocidal intent can be conclusively proven, we must also be weary of arguments that the residential school system merely produced "genocidal outcomes" (MacDonald and Hudson 2012: 428), which posit the high number of deaths, psychological trauma and eventual community breakdown as accidental by-products of a system that was "the best Canada could do" (Churchill 2004: 29) at the time. The idea that the Canadian government had a specific intent to destroy the physical

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<sup>79</sup> It should be noted that these were not death camps, but work camps. The death rates at Buchenwald, Dachau and Mauthausen were 19%, 36% and 58% respectively, and occurred primarily due to disease (Churchill 2004: 34).

<sup>80</sup> The TRC's Missing Children Research Project aims to compile a list of children who died in the schools as well as their cause of death. Further information will be available at the end of the initial investigation in 2014 (TRC 2012b: 17).

existence of its Aboriginal population is not an absurd hypothesis and must be given further consideration and investigation by Canadians.

The fact that there were other possibilities available is made strikingly clear when one considers similar issues faced by American authorities when dealing with Native American boarding schools. The American schools faced similar problems in underfunding and poor sanitation, and the school system was similarly criticised by an external review. The *Meriam Report* was released in 1928 and found that Native American boarding schools were inadequate facilities, offering poor food and a high infection rate. What was passing for vocational training was often nothing more than drudge work aimed at keeping the schools running. In addition to improving these conditions, the report recommended that the students be shown more freedom, and that their instruction should no longer be based upon assimilation (Reyhner 2004: 207; Lomawaima and McCarty 2006: 67-75). While the *Bryce Report* was buried, many changes and improvements were made in response to the *Meriam Report*. Although problems still remained with the system, a plan was initiated following its release to gradually phase out the existence of boarding schools, and 12 boarding schools were closed between 1928 and 1933 (Reyhner 2004: 209). From the 1930s onward, military drills were removed and rather, efforts were made to include some aspects of Native American culture in the curriculum.

Many of the boarding schools did remain open, yet over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, school reformers and Native American activists joined forces to increasingly indigenize the curriculum, including its teaching staff. There is a consensus that at some point, the boarding schools that were once aimed to assimilate were transformed by students and staff into Native American institutions, many of which students are proud to attend today (Reyhner 2004; Lomawaima and McCarty 2006; Hoerig 2002). By contrast, Canadian authorities did not seriously consider making any changes to the school system until after the Second World War. Even then, progress in either closing or improving the schools would take another forty years in some areas (Stout et al. 2003: 30).

### **5.3 The Legacy of Residential Schools**

Sending the children away to school impacted communities heavily from the outset. While some children were able to return to normal activities during the summers, cultural

transmission was severely disrupted for most. Many children returned as lost souls who could trust no one. Children blamed their parents for sending them away and now saw their cultures as evil or as something of which they should be ashamed (Grant 1996: 258-269). Many survivors have stated that they no longer felt connected to their families at all; even upon their return home, they could not turn to anyone for help (TRC 2012b: 6). The assault on Aboriginal languages was effective. Many of the children had been terrorized out of speaking their native tongues. In some cases, family relationships were disrupted as adults knew little English or French and children were not fluent enough to speak their traditional languages (Haig-Brown 1988: 16). Upon completing school (if not within the schools themselves), the most common reaction was to turn to alcohol as a means of coping (Grant 1996: 250; Ennamorato 1998: 9). Long after leaving school, survivors found themselves fluctuating between high levels of anxiety and an inability to feel anything. Students had learned to survive the residential school experience primarily by detaching themselves from their experiences and shutting down their emotions (Stout et al. 2003: 42). When intrusive thoughts or memories of abuse would emerge, they used alcohol to stop overwhelming feelings, much like entering a dissociative state (Chansonneuve 2007: 20).

Survivors had difficulty taking on the responsibilities of adulthood when they had previously never been permitted to make even the smallest decisions for themselves (McKay 2008: 111). Emotionally shutting down resulted in apathy and an unwillingness to work among some survivors (Grant 1996: 254). Likewise, because they lacked traditional skills such as hunting and trapping, many became dependent on the welfare system (Furniss 1999: 50). Without having had role models for parenting or family living, survivors were also confused when it came to parenting their own children and many experienced coping problems (Mussell 2005: 61). Parents had difficulty expressing love for their children particularly in healthy, physical ways, such as giving hugs. In some communities, there are families where virtually no nurturing or affection was present for generations. Parents often followed the model they had been shown – a model of authoritarianism, harsh punishment, violence and neglect (Grant 1996: 76-79; Stout et al. 2003: 33; TRC 2012b: 6). Survivors had learned as children that relationships were built on values like fear, anger and power. When they had children of their own, they continued to base family relationships on these values, only they were now the ones in power (Corrado et al. 2003: 13; Ross 2008:

151). Most survivors did not discuss their school experiences with their children, and many either became disconnected from their traditional culture, or attempted to deny their ethnicity (Fournier and Crey 1997: 12; Furniss 1999: 9).

Residential school survivors are now recognized as exhibiting symptoms of PTSD, as well as high levels of generalized anxiety and depression (Corrado et al. 2003: 15). The prevalence of such symptoms combined with the specificity of the residential school experience has led some clinicians to adopt a new diagnosis, known as Residential School Syndrome. Residential School Syndrome is characterized by

recurrent intrusive memories, nightmares, occasional flashbacks, and quite striking avoidance of anything that might be reminiscent of the Indian residential school experience. At the same time, there is often a significant detachment from others, and relationship difficulties are common. There is often diminished interest and participation in [A]boriginal cultural activities and markedly deficient knowledge of traditional culture and skills. Often there is markedly increased arousal including sleep difficulties, anger management difficulties, and impaired concentration. As might be the case for anyone attending a boarding school with inadequate parenting, parenting skills are often deficient. Strikingly, there is a persistent tendency to abuse alcohol or sedative medication drugs, often starting at a very young age (Brasfield 2001: 79).

Residential School Syndrome is unique in that it contains a cultural component, in which the lack of traditional skills is understood as a key part of the illness. Deficient parenting skills combined with alcohol abuse have also had severe impacts on further generations of Aboriginal youth.

If only one generation of Aboriginal children had been placed in residential schools, communities may have been able to recover. However, a total of seven generations attended the schools.<sup>81</sup> Even in areas where the schools closed down relatively early, the children and grandchildren of survivors were deeply affected by family violence, which was transferred from the residential schools back into Aboriginal communities. Lateral violence is one of the biggest problems communities are facing, as generations of residential school survivors turned against their own families, abusing their spouses and

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<sup>81</sup> Justice Murray Sinclair, Opening remarks at the TRC hearing in Thunder Bay, Ontario on December 4, 2012.

children emotionally, physically and sexually (Rice and Snyder 2008: 49).<sup>82</sup> Continuing cycles of abuse can partially be understood as matters of re-enactment, in which survivors attempt to regain feelings of power and control that were removed from them as children (Chansonneuve 2007: 21). Among Aboriginal peoples and other indigenous peoples worldwide, this kind of violence is also beginning to be understood as a kind of internalized colonization (Priday et al. 2011: 52). The theft of identity resulting from the residential school system has resulted in self-hatred that is often enacted through unhealthy and self-destructive behaviour. This behaviour is aimed either at oneself or members of one's nation (Rice and Snyder 2008: 53). Many survivors recall the pain they experienced as children and so they are aware of the harm they are causing their own loved ones; this has only increased feelings of shame, yet has not changed the unhealthy behaviour (Ross 2008: 152).

By the end of the Second World War, it was obvious to officials that community and individual breakdown was occurring instead of assimilation. At every level, the school system had failed to produce the re-socialized individuals that had always been its aim (Milloy 1999: 186). The 1951 Indian Act largely reiterated previous regulations, yet for the first time, it included provisions for closing residential schools and integrating Aboriginal children into day schools with other Canadian children. After 1951, Aboriginal children living in close proximity of a provincial school were thrust into the new system and left to compete with non-Aboriginal children (Ennamorato 1998: 62-63). Racism that most encountered in the provincial schools continued to fuel an inferiority complex among Aboriginal students. The school curriculum was written from a colonial viewpoint, and their white, middle-class teachers had little to no understanding or experience with cross-cultural difference or with Aboriginal issues. By the 1970s, the provincial school drop-out rate for Aboriginal youth was 94% (Haig-Brown 1988: 131-132).

In more isolated areas, progress in closing the schools was painfully slow. The residential schools persisted in some remote places for another four decades because no alternative was available (Stout et al. 2003: 30). Even as the system was declining, it also seemed to take on a new rationale, becoming part of the wider approach to the question of

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<sup>82</sup> Lateral violence (victimizing one's own group) is most common in oppressed communities, where powerlessness prevents people from directing their aggression at the oppressors (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005: 41).

child welfare services. Many residential schools became homes for neglected children at a time when the government instigated a second form of child removal. Known as the ‘Sixties Scoop’, thousands of Aboriginal children were removed from communities and placed into care by child welfare agencies. By the late 1970s, one third of all Aboriginal children and in some provinces, one half, had become wards of the state (Milner 2001: 154). Primarily placed with white families, these children moved between various foster homes where they were subjected to emotional, physical and sexual abuse. While many were treated well by foster families, far more report that they were treated as domestic and sexual servants within their foster homes (Milner 2001: 154; Fournier and Crey 2007: 121). Other children were adopted out, losing contact with their birth families and nations (Jacobs and Williams 2008: 127). Through to the 1980s, many Aboriginal children were sold to families throughout the United States, where a lack of recordkeeping ensured there would be no way for them to trace their origins. Even when placed within caring families, these intercultural adoptions had a low success rate, as adoptees came to face a crisis of identity in their teenage years (Fournier and Crey 1997: 88-90). For those abused in the foster care system, the theft of Aboriginal identity was compounded by low self-esteem. Youth who are raised in care show high levels of alcohol and drug dependency, anger, violent behaviour and incarceration.<sup>83</sup>

Rates of sexual abuse are notoriously hard to estimate in any population. Yet, it has been estimated that “more forcible assault has been perpetrated on Aboriginal children than on the young people of almost any other nation, except during times of war” (Fournier and Crey 1997: 116). Instigated in the residential schools and then perpetuated by the foster care system and within Aboriginal homes, the prevalence and acceptance of sexual abuse against Aboriginal children is considered by some to be the darkest secret needing to be reconciled (Ross 2008: 153). Research by the Hollow Water First Nation in Manitoba indicates that in many communities, 60-80% of community members have been victims of sexual abuse at the hands of family members, while 50% have also been perpetrators of

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<sup>83</sup> At the TRC hearing in Thunder Bay, Ontario on December 12, 2012, a social worker who works with young offenders explained that many Aboriginal youth in foster care do not understand where their anger comes from and find themselves in and out of prison due to their violent behaviour. Prison is seen by some social workers as the next generation of residential schools.

sexual abuse (Ross 2008: 152). Other research has estimated that 75-94% of community members in some areas are sexual abuse survivors (Ennamorato 1998: 161). Like other statistics on sexual abuse, these estimates may be conservative. Aboriginal children and women are often doubly at risk for sexual assault, as they are victimized within their own homes and communities, and also considered targets by non-Aboriginal men. Youth who leave home due to abuse sometimes move to Canada's cities, where they are forced into the sex trade for survival. Aboriginal scholars and activists argue that the result of this legacy for Aboriginal women is that they continue to face fundamental issues of safety and survival (Jacobs and Williams 2008: 121; NWAC 2010b: 3). In considering missing women in Canada, many of the women's parents or grandparents were residential school survivors; others had been raised in the child welfare system. Still others had been displaced from their communities due to technicalities of the Indian Act and were forced to live in unsafe areas with inadequate housing. Most had been victims of sexual abuse in childhood (Jacobs and Williams 2008: 133).

Whether raised on or off reserve, at home or in foster care, in remote areas or in cities, the intergenerational impact of residential schools, known as a legacy, has affected all Aboriginal people in Canada. Far too often, the primary consequences for individuals have been the theft of languages and culture, low self-esteem, the breakdown of families and loss of parenting skills, dependency on others, alcohol and drug abuse, compulsive sexual behaviour, high rates of poverty, incarceration, suicide, and physical and sexual violence (Furniss 1995: 31, Fournier and Crey 1997: 121; McKay 2008: 112).<sup>84</sup> Over a century of denial and silence surrounding the residential school experience has resulted in younger generations being raised in environments of alcoholism and violence without knowledge of why these conditions exist in their communities (Ing 2000: 117). Many in the second and third generations blame themselves for being abused or may believe settler stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples to be true. Like their survivor parents or grandparents, they also report communication difficulties, the denial of Aboriginal identity, physical and sexual abuse, substance abuse and emotional distance (Ing 2000: 119-120). For many youth, a sense of hopelessness about the future puts them at risk for suicide, and

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<sup>84</sup> Aboriginal peoples make a distinction between the terms *loss* and *theft*. Referring to culture loss or language loss indicates that Aboriginal peoples somehow misplaced their cultures and languages through their own carelessness. Rather, these elements are considered stolen through residential school attendance.

youth suicide has reached epic proportions in some communities (Kirmayer et al. 2007: xv; Niezen 2009: 179). It is for this reason that community leaders consider it imperative to address healing holistically and for all generations. Chief Wilton Littlechild, chair of the TRC, stated at one hearing “Who will speak for our children, for what we have done to them?”<sup>85</sup> Healing residential school survivors is only one part of a much larger project of community healing. While clinicians may make diagnoses of depression, PTSD or Residential School Syndrome, Aboriginal peoples are now adopting a vision of their communities, in which the illness from which they collectively suffer is being identified as colonialism.<sup>86</sup> Recovering from this illness is heavily dependent upon instilling self-esteem in today’s Aboriginal youth and ending cycles of family violence.

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<sup>85</sup> Quoted from an opening address at the TRC hearing in Eskasoni, Nova Scotia on Oct 14, 2011.

<sup>86</sup> A common theme in many survivor’s testimonies before the TRC is that they are only recently coming to understand the historical circumstances that have shaped their communities. Now that the colonial legacy is being acknowledged, they can begin their healing journeys.

## **SUMMARY OF PART TWO**

- a) The Canadian history that has been taught in schools has been subject to government myth-making that has simultaneously glorified the formation of the country while ignoring or denigrating any Aboriginal influence on society.
- b) Closer examination of historical sources reveals that Canada was indeed founded upon Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal integration, in which new immigrants were adopted into Aboriginal society. For five hundred years, Canada has been a Métis nation.
- c) The formation of the Confederation was deeply influenced by racism and religious extremism that by today's standards would be considered morally offensive in Canada.
- d) When extremists came to power in 1867, they immediately developed legislation to dispossess and, in many ways, eradicate Aboriginal peoples.
- e) The residential school system has been the primary means of enacting what is considered by Aboriginal peoples to be genocide. This continuous onslaught has been directed at seven generations of Aboriginal children.
- f) The legacy of colonialism is that many Aboriginal communities suffer endemic social problems due to trauma, while non-Aboriginal Canadians suffer from a complete loss of identity and inability to accept their own country.
- g) Despite the fact that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples have always interacted and intermarried, the majority of Canadians know virtually nothing about their Aboriginal neighbours.

**PART THREE**  
**RECONCILING CANADA**

## CHAPTER 6

## RECONCILIATION

### ***6.1 Truth and Reconciliation in Context***

When presented with challenges as large as those facing Canadian society, it is difficult to find a starting point for change or to envision an endpoint when this process will be complete. The course of healing from any trauma entails three main components: establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and the community (Herman 2001: 3). When an entire society is suffering from trauma, this process is referred to as reconciliation.

Scholars discuss the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) as part of a larger trend in truth commissions that has been increasing since the 1980s (Walker 2009; James 2010; Stanton 2011; Nagy 2012). With over forty to date worldwide, truth commissions are being established in virtually every state that has recently emerged from either authoritarian rule or civil war (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2010: 129).<sup>87</sup> Some of these commissions are fact-finding organizations, which seek to establish what took place during certain periods of time so that the actions of the previous regimes can be better understood. For example, Uganda's Commission of Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights (1986) and Haiti's National Commission for Truth and Justice (1995) sought little more than to document what had happened to civilians under previous governments (Quinn 2004; McCalpin 2012). However, the majority of commissions are not limited to establishing what took place and also expand their truth-finding task to offer suggestions for the future; they focus on reducing conflict between the parties involved so that the past abuses are not repeated. For these commissions, the purpose of establishing records of the past is to promote reconciliation between parties whose relationship may have formerly been characterized by violence (Kemp 2004: 72). Commissions aiming to promote national reconciliation include Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2000), East Timor's Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (2002), Ghana's National

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<sup>87</sup> The International Centre for Transitional Justice had forty commissions recorded as of early 2011 (ICTJ 2013).

Reconciliation Commission (2002) and Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2005 (see Attafuah 2004; Cueva 2004; Silove et al. 2006; Long 2008).

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission remains the most well-documented of truth commissions, primarily because it was the first commission to ever make its hearings available for public broadcast and has therefore garnered unrivaled media attention (Chapman and Van der Merwe 2008b: 9). It has often been used as a blueprint for other commissions that have adjusted their frameworks according to the South African TRC's perceived successes and failures (Van Zyl 1999; Wilson 2001; Chapman and Van der Merwe 2008a, 2008b; Nagy 2012). In particular, while South Africa has been praised for including the public in its hearings, its commission has been widely criticized for failing to examine the human rights violations that took place as part of a systemic problem. The commission may have documented the abuses that took place, but it provided little meaningful context for why the abuses occurred and did not link the abuses to the larger ideology of Apartheid (Nagy 2012: 350). This is an oversight that other commissions, including Canada's TRC, have been apt to learn from in the way that they conduct their hearings and interpret survivors' testimonies.

Virtually all of the truth commissions that have taken place rely on the testimonies of those who have suffered from ethnic or political violence, who are invited to share their experiences before the commission. It is hoped that through statement gathering, the patterns of violence may become clear, allowing policy-makers to identify points of contention and make recommendations for political reform. Though established in a variety of settings and for differing reasons, these commissions are applied most predominantly to countries whose political structures are in transition and they are therefore closely aligned with the field of transitional justice (Schabas 2004: 1). "Transitional justice is ... focussed on the future while it reviews the past. It is an attempt to help a society change from a state where wrongs have gone unaddressed to a state where injustices of the past have been confronted and acknowledged. Most often, this occurs when a state moves from a period of violence and human rights abuses, to a period of social stability and democratic government" (Walker 2009: 3). In transitional societies, truth commissions are state-sanctioned organizations, established by governments aiming to make either a metaphorical or literal break from the past while moving into a new democratic political

era. In cases where there has been no change in regime, they are sometimes perceived as a means for governments to re-legitimate themselves when they may have faced public and international scrutiny for past human rights violations (Quinn 2004: 411).

Truth commissions sometimes work in tandem with criminal courts (Kemp 2004: 74), but most are established in cases where prosecution in the courts has not been possible (Llewellyn 2007: 353; Chapman and Van der Merwe 2008b: 2). When mass violence has occurred, courts are often unable to process the large number of claims. They are also not designed to deal with the aftermath of such extensive violence or to heal broken relationships within society (Rice and Snyder 2008: 45). When it comes to repairing the dignity of those who have been victimized and re-building trust on a national scale, litigation is seen as insufficient at best if not directly damaging to survivors of trauma. Survivors find that testifying before a court and being subject to intense cross-examination is often retraumatizing and a cause of undue stress (Fournier and Crey 1997: 75; Minow 2000: 238). Yet, truth commissions can serve as an alternative mode of justice, which is theoretically more sympathetic to the needs of survivors as well as better able to address violence at a national level. Commissions focus not on punishing offenders, but on reconstructing broken societies, where mass violence has affected entire nations. Ideally, truth commissions bring victims and offenders into contact with each other and investigate the perspectives of all sides. However, in practice, this is rarely accomplished. Perpetrators are reluctant to come forward unless mandated by the courts or provided with specific benefits, such as a provision of amnesty (Chapman and Van der Merwe 2008a: 266). Truth commissions are therefore often the sole domain of survivors, understood as starting points for longer processes of reconciliation that extend far beyond specific victims and offenders.

Though each commission is unique, truth commissions share several commonalities, which are relevant to Canada's TRC:

*a) Survivor-centred processes.* Truth commissions are victim-centred (or survivor-centred) organizations (Brahm 2007: 19). Compared to criminal trials, which frequently place excessive emotional strain on survivors during cross-examination, truth commissions have often been envisioned as part of a therapeutic process, in which survivors regain control

through recounting their experiences (Quinn 2004; Doak 2011). Learning to attach words to what happened and expressing feelings about the traumatic experience are necessary for recovery. Giving survivors a safe place to tell their stories can therefore assist by beginning to satisfy survivors' needs to be listened to (Hayner 2002: 134-135). Taking part in a truth commission may also allow the survivor to release any blame they have placed upon themselves, as they are able to present their experiences as part of larger cultural or political situations which were not their fault. Their situation is thus normalized and made easier to eventually accept (Doak 2011: 286).

*b) Acknowledgement.* Truth commissions validate the survivors' experiences by making a moral judgement that what transpired was wrong. In order for survivors to recover, it is not enough to speak; it is also of utmost importance that the listener is perceived as sympathetic to the survivors' stories (Minow 2000: 245). Truth commissions are rarely seen as neutral bodies, but rather, as moral organizations that are allied to those who have been victimized. Their power is primarily symbolic, as they do not have the authority to prosecute offenders (Wilson 2001: 16). Rather, they possess the power to witness, acknowledge and validate survivors' feelings. This moral acknowledgement is not only important to survivors, but also assists in re-establishing the public's faith in the state. By rendering a judgement that what occurred was wrong and through acknowledging the many injustices that took place, truth commissions seek to reaffirm positive social values, bringing the state back to a place of accountability (Wilson 2001: 19; Kemp 2004: 70).

*c) Macro-level truth finding.* Truth commissions generally investigate patterns of abuse over time, rather than specific events (Hayner 2002: 14). They are far better suited to establishing macro-truths – contexts, causes and patterns of violence, than to discovering micro-truths – the specifics of particular cases and people. This is significant, as the macro-truth is often the perspective that is most missing from the history of post-conflict societies. People know quite a bit about persecution that they and their communities have endured, but may know very little about the larger processes underlying these events. Many survivors also want to understand the context and causes of the crimes committed, which may assist with acceptance and closure (Chapman and Ball 2008: 144). By allowing

survivors to come forward without fear of retribution by authorities, the patterns of abuse from community to community become apparent and the larger truth may be revealed (Quinn 2004: 405).

*d) Historical reconstruction.* Truth commissions aim to establish a historical narrative of the past, which may serve as a beginning for a shared vision or understanding of the country by all citizens. Commissions create an official version of events, determine the causes of violence and make recommendations to new governments in order to ensure that past wrongs are not repeated (Chapman and Van der Merwe 2008b: 3). In doing so, they act as nation-building processes that construct a revised national history and establish a new collective memory for the nation. Unlike nationalist views of the past, which focus on the strengths of the nation, truth commissions construct their narratives around “discontinuous historicity, where the past is not a past of pride, but of abuse” (Wilson 2001: 16). Discussing atrocities as firmly set in the past can provide a needed release of ethnic or political tension as well as provide for a cleansing of the nation. Through their participation in truth commissions, perpetrators and survivors are metaphorically wiped clean and able to move forward together in a new rebuilt, reconciled nation (Wilson 2001: 13-15).

The language of reconciliation is rarely used among democratic nations or in reference to indigenous peoples. However, Australia broke new ground in adopting the term *reconciliation* in the early 1990s. Though no truth commission was established, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was formed in 1991 in order to promote the process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the larger Australian settler population. This marked an acknowledgement that something had gone wrong in the relationships, which would need to be rebuilt over time. In Australia, early efforts at reconciliation came to focus on the nation’s child removal practices, which had never been formally examined or even acknowledged (Price 2012: 2012: 26). From 1910 to 1970, between 1 in 3 and 1 in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were removed from their families and made legal wards of the state (Price 2012: 27). The legislation primarily targeted half caste children for resocialization, and constituted an intentional

policy of breeding out the colour in mixed-race children (Manne 2004: 223-229; Coopes 2009: 72). The children who were removed are now collectively known as the Stolen Generations.

In 1995, the federal Labor government established a national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and communities. The resulting report, titled *Bringing Them Home* (1997), affirmed that from 1900 onward, the state had enacted legislation enabling processes of child removal, which had had lasting repercussions for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders affected (Price 2012: 27). For many children, this not only resulted in identity loss and loss of land rights, but they were also subject to abuse and neglect by those charged with their care. The report not only condemned policies of child removal, but went further to state that the Australian government was guilty of genocide (Manne 2004: 217).

Since the release of *Bringing Them Home*, there is increased awareness of reconciliation in Australia, with ongoing events, such as National Reconciliation Week, which is held each year in late May. However, the report has also been met with substantial backlash and denial on the part of some Australians (Curthoys 2003: 186). When *Bringing Them Home* suggested that monetary compensation should be provided for the Stolen Generations, government response was to deny the number of children that had been removed and to state that reparations were not needed (Price 2012: 28).

It may be the case that the rhetoric of calling something either a national inquiry or a truth and reconciliation commission is important. While national inquiries are often overlooked by the public, a truth commission automatically suggests a certain gravity to the situation being examined, which is being placed on par with human rights abuses that occur internationally. In a democratic nation, where the underlying assumption among citizens may be that their country is less subject to corruption than transitional states and therefore faces only minor problems, the truth commission has the potential to awaken citizens to the severity of social problems that may need attention in their own territories.

Canada's TRC differs from other international commissions in several key regards, notably in the fact that its foundation was not a government initiative. The groundwork for the TRC was set as part of a comprehensive legal settlement between residential school survivors, the churches involved in the running of the schools, and the government of

Canada. Unlike other commissions, which were initiated by heads of state, Canada's TRC was court-mandated and resulted from overwhelming legal pressure placed upon the government through class action lawsuits filed by residential school survivors (Flisfeder 2010: 7).

Until the 1980s, a veil of silence concealed thousands of stories related to the residential school experience, as survivors were reluctant to discuss the abuse they suffered with even their closest loved ones (Castellano et al. 2008: 9). However, during that decade, some communities began to discuss the effects of the schools on their lives. This time of high emotion coincided with increased political activism, including well-known challenges to museums. Residential school trauma and protests over museological displays were not separate issues. In 1990, the first stories of abuse were made public, when Grand Chief Phil Fontaine disclosed in a CBC interview that he, as well as all of his schoolmates, had been victims of sexual abuse while attending Fort Alexander Indian Residential School. "In my grade three class ... if there were twenty boys, every single one of them ... would have experienced what I experienced. They would have experienced some aspect of sexual abuse" (Fontaine, quoted in Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 1990). This statement had a very profound effect on Aboriginal communities. As the Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Fontaine stood as a representative for First Nations communities at a time when many individuals felt the need to remain silent about the things they had endured in childhood. Having a strong leader come forward about the abuse served as a turning point for other Aboriginal people to speak out about their experiences (Stanton 2011: 2).

Some residential school survivors began to prosecute the former school staff who had abused them. Initially, these court cases were targeted at individual priests and other perpetrators. However, this did little to address the systemic issues underlying the residential school abuse (Stanton 2011: 3). Survivors consequently sought litigation against the churches and government of Canada directly. In court, government defense lawyers did not deny that the claimants had suffered abuse, but rather, challenged the litigants to prove that it had damaged them. When survivors presented their life histories of repeated victimization, sexual exploitation, alcoholism and drug addiction, defense attorneys used these circumstances as evidence that the survivors' testimonies could not be trusted, and survivors were often blamed for their circumstances. The process took a toll

on survivors, many of whom experienced the trials as highly traumatic. Depending on how well survivors held up to cross-examination, compensation varied immensely for the same kinds of experiences. Most survivors did not feel the trials were validating or healing on any level.<sup>88</sup> Yet, the cases mounted by residential school survivors eventually increased to include thirteen thousand individuals submitting claims of emotional, physical and sexual abuse (Flisfeder 2010: 7; Stanton 2011: 3).

The trials coincided with a larger investigation into Canada's Aboriginal/ non-Aboriginal relationship, which had been instigated by the government following a crisis in Oka, QU, in which a land dispute between the Mohawk Nation and the government of Canada had erupted into a violent confrontation (Swain 2010). The breakdown to violence led to the formation of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), which in 1991, began collecting testimonies from 96 Aboriginal communities across Canada. RCAP issued its final report in 1996, a 4000 page document that lent support to the concept of Canada as a Métis nation. The report illustrated how a mutually beneficial relationship was overridden in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as Canada's colonial policies were put in place. It also explained the nature of residential schools and the legacy faced by the descendants of survivors. Yet, RCAP went well beyond creating a historical account, also providing 440 recommendations on how to restructure Canada's relationship with Aboriginal peoples. Though preceding Canada's TRC by over a decade, the report is the clearest vision of reconciliation put forth in Canada, setting out the means to bring all aspects of Aboriginal and Canadian life into balance, including the achievement of economic self-sufficiency for Aboriginal communities. The report argued that if its plan were adopted, many of Canada's governance problems could be resolved within a twenty-year period of renewal (RCAP 1996a).

The report was released at the same time that lawsuits by residential school survivors were proving both emotionally difficult for survivors as well as financially unviable for the government to defend. In 1997, Phil Fontaine, then appointed as National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, commenced larger negotiations with the churches and government for a comprehensive settlement agreement (Stanton 2011: 3). The Liberal

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<sup>88</sup> These comments were provided by Robert Ley in an interview with the author on June 23, 2011 and by Eroca Shaler in an interview by the author on July 20, 2011. Ley and Shaler are both clinical psychologists with extensive experience working with residential school survivors at the time of the court proceedings.

government under Jean Chrétien was initially supportive of RCAP's findings, and it committed to establishing a different kind of relationship with Aboriginal peoples that would focus on partnership, mutual respect, and negotiation instead of litigation. This commitment was articulated in a *Statement of Reconciliation* (1998) and through the unveiling of a new Aboriginal Action Plan. The government also created the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, providing a grant of \$350 million for community-based and Aboriginal-directed healing initiatives for residential school survivors (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development 1998).

The late 1990s marked a time of hope with several key successes on the path towards Canada becoming a Métis country not only in principle, but in practice. In addition to establishing that Aboriginal title to land exists in BC, the case of *Delgamuukw vs. British Columbia* (1997) solidified the use of oral history in court proceedings (Lippert 2000). The Nisga'a Agreement was signed in 1998, marking the successful negotiation of the first modern land claim (Quesnel and Winn 2011). Moreover, the government's pledge to support Aboriginal self-government was further affirmed in 1999 when the Northwest Territories were split in half and the Inuit gained their own self-governing territory, Nunavut.<sup>89</sup> However, despite these gains, the RCAP report was perhaps over-idealistic in its aims. Perhaps it was simply too innovative. The government's engagement with the document quickly stalled. On this lost opportunity for change, Saul writes,

How often do countries offer to themselves the privilege of a great intellectual and human re-examination of themselves? How much more irresponsible of those with power not to find the courage to pick it up openly and engage? What frightened the authorities? I think it was the reappearance of the concept of Canada as an ethical pact built over centuries rather than an administrative power arrangement in which whoever has the power today gets to believe that they can run it as they wish (Saul 2008: 25).

RCAP's plan was ambitious and required a fundamental rethinking of Canada's political structure, of the way that resources are divided among Canadians, and of the very foundation of the country itself. Decisions of this magnitude had not been made since the Confederation period. It is likely that even politicians who were sympathetic to its overall aims had difficulty imagining its implementation.

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<sup>89</sup> For more information on Inuit attitudes toward governance and political culture in the North, see Henderson 2007.

If RCAP was easily pushed to the side, it was not the case for the lawsuits instigated over the residential school system. The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) was reached in 2006. It is currently the largest class action settlement in Canadian history, setting aside \$1.9 billion for residential school survivors. Included in the settlement is a common experience payment of \$10,000 for every survivor, plus an additional \$3,000 for each subsequent year that the student was in attendance. An independent assessment process provides further compensation for the resolution of specific claims of abuse. The settlement also includes a commitment to establish a truth and reconciliation commission (IRSSA 2006).

The IRSSA had been negotiated with a Liberal government, and when the Conservatives came to power in 2006, there were consequences for how the TRC proceedings would unfold as well as Canada's progress toward partnership in a Métis nation. In 2008, Prime Minister Harper, on behalf of the government of Canada, at last issued an official apology to residential school survivors and their descendants (Harper and Government of Canada 2008).<sup>90</sup> It was disappointing to Aboriginal peoples when just one year after making his apology, during a press conference at the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh, Harper stated that Canada had "no history of colonialism" (quoted in Henderson and Wakeham 2009: 1). It would take the government until 2010 to sign the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, a mainly symbolic document committing to respect the human rights of indigenous peoples.<sup>91</sup> In fact, rights organizations and opposing government accused the Conservatives of mounting a financial campaign to derail the document's creation (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 2007).

The relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Conservative government deteriorated further when, in 2012, longstanding opposition to the proposed creation of an oil pipeline from Alberta's tar sands through to Kitimat, BC resulted in the government

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<sup>90</sup> The apology was considered overdue when compared to apologies made by the churches involved in the early 1990s. The United Church issued an apology in 1986, to be followed by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1991, the Anglican Church in 1993, and the Presbyterian Church in 1994. The Catholic Church has yet to release an official apology, but in 2009, Pope Benedict XVI expressed his sorrow over abuse that took place in Catholic residential schools to a delegation of representatives from the Assembly of First Nations. This statement has been generally accepted as an apology by the Catholic Church.

<sup>91</sup> The document was endorsed by the international community in 2007.

passing legislation to override the input of Aboriginal peoples on environmental issues.<sup>92</sup> Bill C-45 removes the extensive consultation process formerly required for development to occur in proximity to Canada's waterways. Aboriginal peoples and environmental activists argue that it is tantamount to removing environmental protection for 99% of Canada's three million lakes and rivers (Harding 2013). It also makes it easier for Aboriginal reserve lands to be leased to the government without the knowledge or support of a majority of community members. The combination of these provisions makes it possible for the government to acquire reserve lands for pipelines and other forms of industry which threaten the environment, while bypassing full consultation with Aboriginal nations whose lands are directly affected (Gordon 2013). Bill C-45 has been highly protested by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples on the grounds that it threatens the environment and stands in direct violation of Aboriginal treaty rights.

Interestingly, the 'Idle No More' movement, whose main platform is resistance to the Conservatives' environmental policies, has seen a high level of cooperation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, the latter of whom have been called to action as allies (Idle No More 2013). While it has yet to be phrased in this way, the movement is about much more than potential environmental damage; it is the beginning of reconciliation at the grassroots level. The instigation of a national protest movement has provided Aboriginal peoples and settlers with the opportunity to join together in new efforts to secure government accountability toward Aboriginal peoples. The shared goal of environmental protection has been a major focus at hundreds of events across Canada and internationally, which has allowed all parties to remain relatively silent about what has also been taking place: Canada's TRC.

In 2008, the TRC began its five year mandate to review the history of residential schools. The primary responsibilities of the commission include the following:

- a) to acknowledge residential school experiences, including their impacts and consequences
- b) to provide a holistic, culturally appropriate and safe setting for the people who come forward

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<sup>92</sup> Public opposition to the Northern Gateway project has been covered extensively by the media. See Mickleburgh 2012 for a general overview.

- c) to promote and facilitate a number of public truth and reconciliation events
- d) to promote awareness and public education concerning the residential schools
- e) to create a historical record about the schools
- f) to produce a report with recommendations
- g) to support the commemoration of former students and families (IRSSA, Schedule ‘N’ 2006).

The TRC was not established to convince commissioners that the abuses took place, but rather to dispel ignorance amongst non-Aboriginal peoples about the residential school system and its continuing legacy (Stanton 2011: 6). The TRC’s final report will include a comprehensive historical account that will become part of Canada’s national consciousness. The report will also provide recommendations to promote reconciliation within Aboriginal communities and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians (Walker 2009: 2). In many ways the TRC’s aims are similar to those of RCAP, and its recommendations may echo those found in the RCAP report, Canada’s preliminary treatise on reconciliation.

The TRC is unique in that it is the only commission in the world that has been established as part of a judicially supervised negotiated agreement. It is only recently that the Canadian government has acknowledged its assimilationist policy was harmful, and it has done so under overwhelming legal pressure. If not for the large financial costs of defending numerous class actions, the TRC would not have been established (Stanton 2011: 1-4). However, because Aboriginal peoples involved the government in such large-scale litigation, it is now the first truth commission in the world to focus on indigenous peoples and the first commission to focus exclusively on the experiences of children (Regan 2010: 8). The TRC will surely set precedence for other indigenous peoples wishing to force political changes within their own colonial contexts. Though many truth commissions have taken place, this commission must be understood as an indigenous truth commission. As the following section will illustrate, this necessitates an understanding of indigenous views of justice.

## ***6.2 Peacemaking Circles, Restorative Justice and Reconciliation***

Some critics of truth commissions cite their inability to prosecute perpetrators as a failure of justice. They are confounded by truth commissions because they seem to represent a step backwards from the longstanding goal of prosecution upon which legal systems are based. Truth commissions are seen as weak substitutes that allow abusive governments to avoid justice, in contrast to criminal courts, which actually have the power to sentence offenders (Brahm 2007: 22; Llewellyn 2008: 188). However, I argue that these criticisms have largely arisen due to unfamiliarity with indigenous thought, in which justice is not at all associated with punishment. Scholars have raised concerns about Canada's TRC, citing the lack of precedence for holding a truth commission in an established democracy (James 2010: 24). Yet, they are perhaps unaware that the principles of restorative justice often enacted through truth commissions have been heavily influenced by indigenous judicial practices (Consedine 2003; Hand et al. 2012) and owe much to centuries-old Aboriginal philosophy (Llewellyn 2008: 188). Restorative justice is often understood as “a process that brings victims and offenders together to face each other, to inform each other about their crimes and victimization, to learn about each other’s backgrounds, and to collectively reach [an] agreement” (Immarigeon 1999: 306). By enabling victims and offenders to develop solutions to the crimes that have been committed, their active participation in the judicial process can be a transformative experience for everyone involved. Canada is in many ways already familiar with restorative justice, which is increasingly being chosen by the courts when working in partnership with Aboriginal communities. Just as museums have been adapting their practices to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives for best practice, so has the Canadian judicial system (see Law Commission of Canada 2003). It therefore must be stated that while in other contexts, some may find truth commissions puzzling, the framework of restorative justice is already well-established in Canada.

Justice officials increasingly agree with what Aboriginal communities have known for some time: that the harsher that youths are treated by police, the worse their behaviour becomes, and that those who have spent time in jail return to their communities feeling even greater dislocation. Incarcerating individuals does little to reduce recidivism and actually places communities at greater risk (Ross 2003: 137). The failure of the justice system to work for Aboriginal peoples is not unique to Canada, but is a common problem

in every Commonwealth country that has attempted to impose a British-derived legal system upon its indigenous peoples (Green and Healy 2005: 61). In Western societies, injustice is dealt with primarily through punishment. When the courts impose a punishment on the offender that is in proportion to the wrongdoing, then justice is considered to be complete (Wenzel 2008: 375). The Western justice system is therefore premised upon different variations of ‘getting even’. Yet, Aboriginal peoples are concerned at what they perceive as a Western penchant for “labeling people as criminals and then making them suffer” (Youngblood Henderson et al. 2005: 3). They view the Western justice system as intolerant to human frailties, serving instead as a mechanism of social control by violence. In contrast to this ‘top-down’ model, Aboriginal communities have primarily dealt with offenders by attempting to counsel them. Zion (2005) explains that Western law does not attempt to deal with psychological injuries, but traditional Aboriginal laws do. Most disputes are seen to occur because of “bad attitudes, feelings, or thinking” (Zion 2005: 69). Many Aboriginal people therefore wonder why the Western justice system seeks to punish offenders rather than attempting to heal them (Ross 2003: 125). This difference between ‘justice as punishment’ and ‘justice as healing’ is a fundamental and incompatible difference between European and Aboriginal philosophies.

Restorative justice assumes, like all Aboriginal philosophy, that humans are “profoundly relational” (Pranis 2007: 65). While different nations have different belief systems, there exists a central Aboriginal worldview, in which everything in the universe is related (Baskin 2005: 172; Castellano 2008: 386; Hodge et al. 2009: 214; Julien et al. 2010: 115). In an interdependent universe, every part of existence is connected to every other part and impacts every other part. Individuals are sometimes understood to be located at the centre of a set of concentric Circles that ripple outward to include and also affect the family, community, nation, and the natural world (Flisfeder 2010: 2). This system of relationships also extends into the past and future, as exemplified by the ‘Seven Generations’ principle. When making important decisions, Aboriginal elders stress the need to look back seven generations to see if wisdom can be found from those who have gone before. Individuals are then encouraged to look ahead seven generations to think about the consequences their actions will have on those who are to come (Borrows 2008: 3-4). A respondent in one research study explained, “You have a very specific responsibility

(to past and future generations). It's a circle that keeps going around and there's an imaginary fire in the middle of the circle and across from you sits those different generations and you have responsibilities, some very specific responsibilities to them as an Aboriginal person" (quoted in Julien et al. 2010: 120). When connectivity is emphasized, it is also possible to see that no hierarchy exists between women and men, or between humans, animals and the natural world (NWAC 2010a: 8). Everyone and everything is connected and therefore equal as well as interdependent.

It is this concept of interdependence that secures a sense of mutual responsibility between individuals and communities. It is not just a passive responsibility to do no harm, but an active responsibility to support and nurture the wellbeing of the other (Pranis 2007: 65). If one part of the community becomes unbalanced, then the whole community is unbalanced. It follows that if a crime is committed, the harm done does not simply affect the victim and perpetrator, but causes ripples that also affect their families, communities and society as a whole. Justice can therefore be understood as an attempt to repair the harm caused to all of the relationships affected by the hurtful action. This does not only speak to the relationship between the victim and offender, but between the victim, offender and their communities (Llewellyn 2007: 355). Within this holistic framework, crimes are interpreted less individualistically than they are in the Western legal tradition. Seen as imbalances within the larger community, Aboriginal traditions acknowledge that everyone in the community has played a role in the patterns that eventually led to wrongdoing; the responsibility for correcting the behaviour is, at least in part, a shared responsibility (Pranis et al. 2003: 12; McCaslin 2005: 89).

Increasingly, the Canadian judicial system is choosing to work within Aboriginal models as, in contrast to time in prison, it has been repeatedly demonstrated that the most successful legal programs have encouraged personal accountability while empowering Aboriginal languages, ceremonies, and traditions (Youngblood Henderson et al. 2005: 4). Some of the models being adopted include correctional healing lodges for prison inmates, Holistic Circle Healing, Elders' or community sentencing panels and community mediation committees (Green 1997; Barlow 2009). Though different models may be adopted, they each share a focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment and on consensus decision-making that involves the community in the sentencing.

Ross (2003) demonstrates the difference between Western and Aboriginal approaches in his account of a case that took place in the Oji-Cree community of Sandy Lake, ON. The case involved a man who was charged with assaulting his wife while under the influence of alcohol. Ross explains that Western sentencing would probably have included a short lecture on using violence, a sentence imposing either a fine or community service work and a six-month Probation Order to abstain from alcohol. Yet, in this case, the community used a Police Committee composed of Cree women in order to advise the judge and counsel. The committee found that the defendant's alcohol use was a symptom of things that had occurred to him as a child and that the breakdown between husband and wife had to do with the fact that they were each carrying their burdens alone rather than communicating with each other. The sentence the women suggested included attendance at an alcohol treatment program as well as attendance for both husband and wife at a series of workshops on family violence and family communication. The women were also concerned about the children who had witnessed violence in the home and who were at risk of growing up to repeat the behaviour themselves. The whole family was sentenced to attend a month-long family healing program (Ross 2003: 127-128). As this case demonstrates, Aboriginal justice is primarily aimed at addressing the root of criminal behaviour rather than focussing on the immediate criminal charge. Greater thought is put into developing context-specific solutions, and sentences are devised to fit the offender instead of the crime. Moreover, the offender is not seen in isolation but as part of a network of relationships affected by his or her behaviour.

One of the primary models being encouraged by the courts is that of Sentencing Circles, which are also known in Canada and the US as Peacemaking Circles (Green 1997; Pranis et al. 2003; Pranis 2007). Peacemaking Circles were introduced in Canada as an alternative way of sentencing that involved all stakeholders in the decision. However, as more Circles were used, it became clear that sentencing was actually a small part of what was taking place – often a larger process of addressing conflict while creating support networks for victims and offenders in order to assist them with reintegration into the community (Pranis et al. 2003: 21; Van Ness 2007: 511). Circles vary in their composition, but usually involve the offender, judge, crown representatives, the victim, defense counsel, respected community members, as well as family members of both the victim and offender

(Green 1997: 84). Most Aboriginal traditions do not make sharp distinctions between victims and offenders. Rather, they begin by involving the relatives of both parties in order to arrive at a proper resolution that addresses the interests of everyone involved (Zion 2005: 70). “When a Circle explores everyone’s genuine interests, punishment is rarely relevant to what offenders need to rehabilitate and become accountable, what victims need to heal, or what communities need to grow stronger” (Pranis et al. 2003: 12). However, through talking in a Circle and sharing different life stories and experiences, those involved are better able to arrive at the root of the problem and propose solutions for change.

Peacemaking Circles have been used for a wide range of offenses, including robbery, impaired driving causing death, sexual assault and sexual abuse. In cases of sexual abuse, victims and offenders are assigned separate support teams and often not brought together unless the victim is in agreement (Green 1997: 92-95). In addition to sentencing offenders, Circles are used to help both victims and offenders. Those involved stress that if punishment occurs as part of the sentence, it cannot be of a kind that would isolate the offender from the relationships that would make their reintegration possible (Llewellyn 2007: 58; Van Ness 2007: 511). Unlike sentencing in court, Circle sentences are decided by consensus with the input of the offender. The best solutions often come from offenders and communities because offenders are more likely to commit to making those solutions work (McCaslin 2005: 88). Those who have undergone Circle sentencing do not view it as a weaker option than sentencing in court. In Circles, offenders are expected to explain their behaviour to their parents, grandparents and other community members and to listen in return to their honest opinions about the harm that has been done. Having community members present is strenuous enough to serve as a deterrent to crime in and of itself. Furthermore, compared to time in prison, Circles are more demanding and often much longer processes where offenders must demonstrate accountability and reform (Green 1997: 97).

While Circles are primarily used when working with Aboriginal communities, the judicial system has increasingly been applying the principles of restorative justice, including consensus-based decision making, in cases involving non-Aboriginal offenders. Justice officials report that, like Aboriginal peoples, non-Aboriginal Canadians are also dissatisfied with the adversarial nature of the Western justice system. “The Law

Commission of Canada has consulted with Canadians about meaningful methods of resolving conflicts. The commission's consultations revealed that Canadians want choices for resolving their conflicts, and that many want to actively participate in the conflict resolution process" (Law Commission of Canada 2003: xiii). Some of the restorative justice models being used for non-Aboriginal offenders include victim-offender mediation, community and family group conferencing, and other participatory initiatives, such as anger management, to assist prisoners with their future reintegration (Law Commission of Canada 2003: xv). The Law Commission of Canada views restorative justice as the preferred method of resolving conflict in a range of criminal and non-criminal activities involving both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. It is therefore likely that when it comes to the larger picture of national reconciliation, settlers as well as Aboriginal peoples may prefer to adopt an Aboriginal approach to justice. This approach has been best articulated by RCAP.

Of all of the countries currently initiating processes of reconciliation, Canada is perhaps different in that a clear path forward has been established before the proceedings of its truth commission. The RCAP report offers an extremely detailed analysis of the country's potential for positive change. It is a ground-breaking initiative that will have an impact for years to come – yet, it is awaiting the political will to oversee its implementation.

When RCAP began its investigation, it focused on one primary question: What are the foundations of a fair and honourable relationship between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people of Canada? After examining over five hundred years of Canadian history and speaking to members of 96 Aboriginal communities, the commission reached a striking conclusion – that the single most important policy direction pursued in Canada for the last 150 years ... has been wrong. RCAP argues that the policy of assimilation has been a denial of the principles of peace, harmony and justice for which Canada stands, and that moreover, that policy has failed. From coast to coast to coast, Aboriginal peoples remain distinct, and proudly distinct, peoples. Acknowledging that assimilation has failed is the first step to rebuilding the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples based on honesty, mutual respect and fair sharing.

The commission identifies four principles that should form the basis of a renewed relationship:

*1. Recognition*

The principle of mutual recognition calls on non-Aboriginal Canadians to recognize that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants and caretakers of this land and have distinctive rights and responsibilities flowing from that status. It calls on Aboriginal people to accept that non-Aboriginal people are also of this land now, by birth and by adoption, with strong ties of love and loyalty. It requires both sides to acknowledge and relate to one another as partners, respecting each other's laws and institutions and co-operating for mutual benefit.

*2. Respect*

The principle of respect calls on all Canadians to create a climate of positive mutual regard between and among peoples. Respect provides a bulwark against attempts by one partner to dominate or rule over another. Respect for the unique rights and status of First Peoples, and for each Aboriginal person as an individual with a valuable culture and heritage, needs to become part of Canada's national character.

*3. Sharing*

The principle of sharing calls for the giving and receiving of benefits in fair measure. It is the basis on which Canada was founded, for if Aboriginal peoples had been unwilling to share what they had and what they knew about the land, many of the newcomers would not have lived to prosper. The principle of sharing is central to the treaties and central to the possibility of real equality among the peoples of Canada in the future.

*4. Responsibility*

Responsibility is the hallmark of a mature relationship. Partners in such a relationship must be accountable for the promises they have made, accountable for behaving honourably, and accountable for the impact of their actions on the well-being of the other. Because we do and always will share the land, the best interests of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people will be served if we act with the highest standards of responsibility, honesty and good faith toward one another (RCAP 1996a: 20-22).

Aboriginal peoples are seeking a rightful place as partners in the Canadian federation. This aim is dependent upon political restructuring that would enable Aboriginal communities to flourish within their communities and within the larger nation-state. Interestingly, the report makes the point that membership in Aboriginal nations is not defined by race (RCAP 1996a: 26). Rather, Aboriginal nations are political communities comprising people of mixed backgrounds and heritage. This concept also defines Canada as a Métis nation.

RCAP proposes three autonomous orders of Canadian government – federal, provincial/territorial and Aboriginal. The commission advocates for the dissolution of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and its replacement by a

Department of Aboriginal Relations, which will negotiate and manage new treaties and agreements with the Canadian government. A new Aboriginal body will represent Aboriginal peoples within federal governing institutions and advise Parliament on Aboriginal issues. Eventually, this should result in the establishment of a House of First Peoples, to govern Canada alongside the House of Commons and the Senate. A variety of institutions will similarly need to be created as Aboriginal societies rebuild, including an Aboriginal University (or universities). These will provide skills for Aboriginal peoples to make use of the employment opportunities, which will come available as communities become self-governing and economically self-sufficient. RCAP argues that in every sector of public life, there is a need to develop Aboriginal institutions that reflect the values of Aboriginal peoples. Many of these should proceed before self-governing nations emerge, but they should also be designed to complement future self-government.

The redistribution of lands and resources is crucial for the political, economic and social revitalization of Aboriginal nations. Communities require enough land and resources to be able to attain a sense of ‘home’, rather than the meagre partitions of land that constitute many reserves. They require enough land and resources to pursue traditional hunting and trapping, to become economically self-sufficient, and to finance their own self-government.

Transforming Aboriginal economies from dependence to self-reliance will not be easy. The greatest boost for most nations will come from access to a fair share of lands and resources. The results of recent land claims settlements suggest that nations will use their timber, minerals, fish, wildlife and other resources to create jobs, bring in revenue, and lay the foundation of a diversified economy” (RCAP 1996a: 41).

If the principle of fair sharing is adopted, then Aboriginal peoples, through the development of their own resources, will be able to achieve economic self-sufficiency and end their relationship of dependence on the Canadian government. Business development, education and employment training is also of utmost importance.

During this process of rebuilding, Aboriginal communities also require time and respect as they continue to heal from the legacy of residential schools. Rebuilding cannot be achieved without also addressing the harm that has been perpetuated in many

communities. Restoring communities to harmony is an extension of healing at the individual level, both of which need to be addressed alongside self-government.

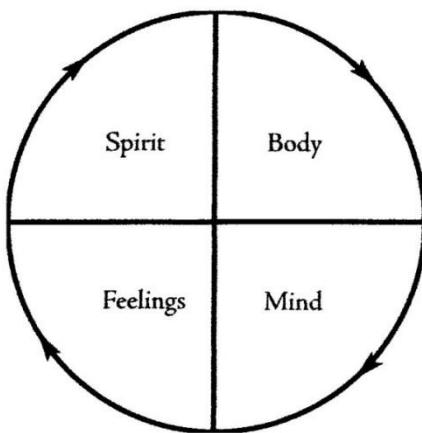
Though a complex process, RCAP stresses that these goals can be achieved, and that the central mechanism of change is the treaty. Aboriginal peoples have historically been, and should still be seen as, ‘treaty nations’. Those interviewed by RCAP stressed that treaties existed between Aboriginal nations prior to contact with Europeans and that treaties are still identified by many Aboriginal peoples as sacred and enduring trusts. “The fact that they have been violated time and again by the Canadian government does not change their underlying legitimacy” (RCAP 1996a: 47). The commission suggests that, as Canada renews its relationship with Aboriginal peoples, Parliament should issue its support in the form of a new Royal Proclamation, which affirms the rights of Aboriginal peoples to oversee the governance of their nations and lands. This Royal Proclamation should also be backed up by companion legislation, providing a legislative framework for the creation of new institutions under the renewed relationship. The restoration of the treaty relationship is seen as the way forward for the Canadian government and Aboriginal peoples. This encompasses both the renewal of old treaties as well as the creation of new ones to reflect the distribution of lands and resources according to principles of fair sharing among all nations. A new, independent treaty-making process is required to accomplish this task.

What is the incentive for non-Aboriginal peoples to adopt RCAP’s vision? If nothing else, it is the financial burden of maintaining the status quo. By marginalizing Aboriginal peoples, Canada has been creating a spiral of economic loss due to high rates of poverty, unemployment, social assistance and other government funded programs that promote the dependence of Aboriginal peoples rather than their self-sufficiency. RCAP estimated in 1996 that the status quo was costing Canadians an additional \$11.6 billion per year that could be eliminated were Aboriginal peoples empowered with the means to rebuild their societies and contribute to the Canadian economy as working professionals. Investing in Aboriginal economies and decreasing the income gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples does not pose a threat to Canadians, but actually saves Canada money and can only contribute toward the country’s future success.

### ***6.3 Challenges to Reconciliation***

Outside of the RCAP report, the preliminary discussions of reconciliation in Canada appear to embody two distinct conversations. Aboriginal peoples define reconciliation as the healing of Aboriginal individuals and communities (Castellano et al. 2006; Kelly 2008; T'lakwadzi et al. 2009; Flamand 2011; Galley 2011; Green 2012), while non-Aboriginal peoples view reconciliation as the healing of the nation-state (Ross 2008; Walker 2009; James 2010; Nagy 2012). In these discussions, restoring communities is sometimes seen by Aboriginal peoples to take precedence over any kind of nation-building and justice does not necessarily depend upon or include settlers. Likewise, nation-building is seen by settlers as the overall purpose of the TRC – this implies that the wellbeing of the nation-state takes precedence over the immediate crises faced by Aboriginal individuals and communities. Both lines of thinking are divisive. Moreover, each fails to address a third level of reconciliation, which involves the healing of the settler population. Yet, three aspects of reconciliation need to be addressed for Canada to achieve a state of balance, and each cannot occur without the others; they are interdependent processes.

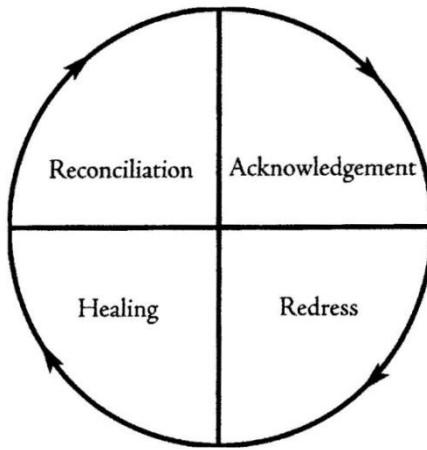
By Aboriginal definitions, reconciliation is a matter of restoring healthy relationships through healing communities. Individual healing is sometimes portrayed by use of the medicine wheel, which has long been used to structure thought among Aboriginal peoples and Native Americans. The medicine wheel symbolizes many things, from the cycles of nature, the interconnections present in life and the idea that life's journeys are often Circular (University of Ottawa 2009). When illustrated in four balanced quadrants, the medicine wheel can assist our understanding of a particular problem by illustrating an ideal state of balance. The medicine wheel below, provided by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, reflects the fact that for life to be lived in a holistic and complete way, individuals need to bring the body, mind, emotions and the spirit into balance (Castellano 2008: 387). Each of these components of the self are interdependent and healing must take into account the whole system.



**Figure 3 Holistic Balance (Castellano 2008: 387).**

Unlike Western traditions, Aboriginal understandings of healing rarely focus solely on biomedical or psychological paradigms (Waldrum 2008: 6). Healing is described as “allowing ourselves to live in a world as Aboriginal people who feel connected with our unique, shared culture” (Youngblood Henderson et al. 2005: 5). This view is affirmed by Aboriginal scholars who discuss reconciliation as a matter of restoring Aboriginal families and cultures so that individuals are fulfilling their proper roles within their relationships with others (NWAC 2010a: 7). Healing is not limited to mental and physical wellbeing, but is also deeply tied to acquiring self-determination (Kelly 2008: 22; Green 2012: 138) and adequate land and resource bases for communities to thrive (Rice and Snyder 2008: 53). In this context, ‘reconciliation as healing’ is similarly defined as language revitalization (Flamand 2011: 73; Galley 2011: 224), restoring the wisdom of traditional teachings (Chansonneuve 2007: 35), and restoring the dignity of women (NWAC 2010a: 3). Reconciliation is a matter of providing justice by enabling Aboriginal individuals to fulfill their unique potential as Aboriginal people.

When the reconciliation process is illustrated through the medicine wheel, it is evident that public acknowledgment and redress for the wrongs that were done are essential components of community healing. When individuals and governments take action to compensate for the harms inflicted, then the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual balance of Aboriginal individuals, families and communities can take place. Only then can all parties accept one another following the period of conflict (Castellano 2008: 385).



**Figure 4 Components of Residential School Resolution (Castellano 2008: 385).**

Aside from a need to acknowledge what took place, non-Aboriginal peoples are sometimes portrayed as passive witnesses in the reconciliation process. The TRC hearings are often framed as important events for educating Canadians about the country's history of colonial violence, and little consideration is given to reconciliation past the commission's five year mandate. Education is an important first step, but also communicates to settlers that their only role is to witness, to know, or to understand and then their task will be done. While governments are encouraged to make reparations, non-Aboriginal individuals are often relegated to the margins when it comes to reconciliation. Yet, there is a real danger of re-enforcing the status quo if settlers are encouraged to remain passive rather than given an active role in creating a just society. There is also a danger in portraying Aboriginal peoples as the only ones in need of healing as it may inadvertently promote the myth of cultural superiority: if Aboriginal peoples are ill, then it follows that settlers must be well. This is simply not the case. The reality is that the illness suffered by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is different by a matter of degree and not kind. In examining the patterns of avoidance behaviour often surrounding Aboriginal issues in Canada (Cohen 2001: 11), it is my opinion that the country as a whole is suffering from a profound trauma caused by colonization. There is no doubt that Aboriginal peoples have suffered more from this history. However, they are not the only peoples to be dislocated from their identities and disconnected from those around them (Cohen 2007; Studin 2007). Just as Aboriginal peoples may define healing as a restoration of cultural identity, so too are settlers in need of

rediscovering who they are as Canadians. It is not a matter of appropriating Aboriginal cultures for themselves. However, rather than focusing on their immigrant origins or simply espousing that they are at a loss to define their culture, it may be time for settlers to ask themselves what it means to them to have immigrated to an Aboriginal territory. ‘Reconciliation as healing’ for non-Aboriginal peoples can be defined as a needed awakening, in which settlers are able to reconcile themselves with where they are living. They must overcome their denial and accept that culturally if not also biologically, they too are part Aboriginal. Accepting this part of themselves is perhaps the only way that they will be able to create a just society that does not marginalize and ignore the fundamental pillar of its identity.

Settlers are unable to reach this kind of personal acceptance without Aboriginal peoples. They cannot recover without learning Aboriginal history, understanding Aboriginal philosophies and talking to Aboriginal people in a daily, habitual and normative way. Similarly, Aboriginal peoples are unable to restore their cultures to positions of strength without massive reparations, institutional reforms, resource redistribution and an end to racism on the part of the settler population. There is another way to phrase this ... we are all in the Circle together. We exist in networks of relationships that bind us together, and neither side - Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal - has any intention of going anywhere (Kelly 2008: 28). Many settlers are terrified of interacting with Aboriginal peoples because they subscribe to the cultural model of ‘justice as punishment’ and subconsciously fear that Aboriginal peoples wish to see them punished. Yet, Aboriginal peoples are not interested in punishing or getting even with settlers. This concept simply does not fit within an Aboriginal worldview emphasizing the connectivity of all people and things. If settlers were more aware of this, they would perhaps be more willing to engage with what is actually taking place: one society based upon the idea of a Circle, gradually expanding to *include* and *accept* new and diverse peoples. Aboriginal leaders continually state that their communities are not interested in being independent from Canada, but wish to work in partnership with other Canadians in a mutually respectful and interdependent way (RCAP 1996a: xi). Their message to Canadians is remarkably consistent: “[A]s the years go by, the circle of the Ojibway gets bigger and bigger. Canadians of all colours and religion [sic] are entering that circle. You might feel that you have roots somewhere else,

but in reality, you are right here with us" (Grand Chief John Kelly, quoted in Saul 2008: 29). Recognizing that this Circle exists is perhaps the first step toward reconciliation at a national level.

T'lakwadzi et al. (2009) suggest that in Canada, the Nuu-chah-nulth term, *Hishimyoothoothl*, may be a more appropriate term than reconciliation, as reconciliation is not an indigenous concept. *Hishimyoothoothl* translates as 'to gather our family', meaning that the family will meet to discuss the problem and together they will strategize how best to deal with the situation (T'lakwadzi et al. 2009: 146). Based on this definition, I suggest that the kind of restorative justice needed to address Canadian society as a whole may be akin to a Peacemaking Circle. If Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples can come together to discuss their life histories and specific challenges in an honest and good way, they will be able to come up with innovative solutions to solve their problems. Both victims and offenders must be fully involved in the process or it is unlikely that offenders will commit to making the proposed solutions work. Thus far, the most comprehensive attempt at political reconciliation has been articulated by RCAP. However, one of the reasons that such a ground-breaking policy initiative has not yet been adopted is perhaps the fact that it did not include the non-Aboriginal population in its creation. I stress that RCAP's goals will not be met unless the non-Aboriginal community is also involved in the Circle to such an extent that they too are empowered to carry out the necessary changes, having also been a part of their development.

Those familiar with truth commissions understand that there are many barriers to reconciliation. The single largest criticism of these initiatives is that they simply do not work. It is not clear that truth commissions actually result in political change, that participants experience the hearings as therapeutic rather than traumatic, or that governments show any desire to adopt the commissions' recommendations when hearings are complete (Quinn 2004; Silove et al 2006; Brahm 2007; Llewellyn 2007; Chapman and Van der Merwe 2008a; Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2010; Doak 2011). Truth commissions are most often organized rhetorical devices that allow governments to affirm a need for change while continuing to maintain the status quo. As an established democracy, one would think that Canada should be more willing to effect change than some authoritarian regimes. However, the evidence suggests that the opposite may be true.

Matt James (2010) argues that the Canadian obstacles are precisely those that have been associated with the failures of other truth commissions to achieve justice for their participants. In his analysis, he examines the key questions that appear to determine whether the truth commissions of the past have been effective:

- a) Is the system of government in place during the commission's tenure the same as that associated with the relevant injustices?
- b) Does the prevailing balance of social or political power tend to favour the victims or the perpetrators of the injustices?
- c) Is societal complicity in the injustices fairly minimal or widespread?
- d) Did the injustices occur over a short or a long period of time?
- e) Were the victims targeted primarily because of ideology or group membership?
- f) Does the commission have a strong focus on finding fault and naming names, or is it constrained in these respects?
- g) It is empowered to address a wide range of injustices?
- h) Does it have access to ample or meagre resources?

Given these criteria, it is unlikely that the Canadian TRC will result in real change. It is not difficult to see that Aboriginal peoples have been targeted on the basis of identity for a prolonged period of time, in a situation where the majority of citizens continue to be complicit in their marginalization. Perhaps more importantly, the regime in question is still in power and without a change in government, it is very unlikely that changes on the scale required will be instigated by those with the authority to do so. The work of the TRC threatens the legitimacy of virtually every key Canadian institution, notwithstanding the Christian churches, the RCMP and the Canadian government itself. James concludes that “[t]he commission takes place in a political context involving the basic, long-term continuity of the perpetrator regime. The victims are politically marginalized. The injustices involve deep societal complicity and a remarkably long time frame of occurrence. They invoke the most difficult political fault lines of ethnocultural difference, colonialism, and racism” (James 2010: 32). Given this context, the Canadian majority has strong incentives to ignore the workings of the commission.

It is clear that belonging to a democratic nation has both benefits and pitfalls. Half way through its mandate, the TRC accused the Canadian government of non-compliance for its refusal to hand over documents related to the residential school system (TRC 2012b: 16). The TRC later took the government to court, where the judge mandated the release of the files. In many ways, this case is exemplary of how progress is achieved in Canada when it comes to Aboriginal rights and other related issues. In a democratic nation, the TRC is not limited in its mandate and can examine the full scope of the residential school legacy with relative impunity. Likewise, the courts have been supportive of seeing justice done for survivors, and in cases where Aboriginal peoples and government cannot come to an agreement, the court system often rules in favour of the former. However, litigation is a costly and time-consuming initiative that cannot continue to be Canada's primary means of achieving justice. A full change in regime may actually benefit the country. Yet, in a nation that values non-violent negotiation above almost anything else, this is very unlikely to occur.

The conclusions that can be drawn are that if reconciliation is to occur in Canada, it must be considered a long-term process, it must involve Aboriginal peoples and settlers in equal measure, and it must not depend upon government initiative. Using the 'Seven Generations' principle, Canadians should be encouraged to look into the country's past to see what can be learned from Aboriginal-settler relations before the colonial period. They should also think about what they would like their country to look like seven generations from now and then work toward making those aims a reality. Political changes of this scale take time and do not occur within one generation, except in cases of violent revolution. However, they can be created by other means. Aboriginal peoples have been resisting colonial policies since the relationship between Aboriginal nations and government changed to one of dominance. What has changed is the fact that settlers who once stood as allies have fallen silent. Yet, if government reform is to occur, it will require the initiative of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to become a majority voice for political change. Furthermore, the force that may be needed is the equivalent of the biggest protest movement the country has ever seen.

## CHAPTER 7

### SURVIVOR METHODOLOGY

#### **7.1 Adopting a Safe Approach to Trauma**

Reconciliation is a long-term process that involves repairing damaged relationships within society. Yet, in the initial phases of reconciliation, museums may primarily be implicated in this process as sites that provide educational exhibitions about Canada's colonial history. At this point in time, there is little precedence for displaying violence committed against Aboriginal peoples or the resulting trauma that has ensued. It may therefore be useful to examine what other communities have been doing to manage similar issues.

It may seem like the obvious choice to examine the way that other colonial states have curated about the indigenous schooling experience. However, there are few documented case studies, and these often illuminate the fact that, due to historical differences, the resulting exhibitions are not extremely helpful for Canadian display. For example, a successful exhibition on Native American boarding schools, titled *Remembering Our Indian School Days: The Boarding School Experience*, opened at the Heard Museum in Phoenix in 2000 (see Hoerig 2002). The exhibition gave a balanced account of the complexities of boarding school life. It aimed in part to recreate the boarding school experience, as visitors encountered the disorientation of entering a new environment and were able to explore recreated dormitories. However, the Native American experience of boarding schools was much more ambiguous than that of Aboriginal Canadians, and most scholars agree that while the schools were meant to assimilate the children, at some point in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "the students changed the schools into 'Indian' schools" (Hoerig 2002: 643). The exhibition was also able to celebrate the friendships made at school, the art created by the students, and the sense of pan-Indian identity that emerged as a result of boarding schools. Though many similarities do exist between the relative school systems, the curatorial approach that proved successful in the US would not work in Canada, where a recreated environment may prove traumatic to abuse survivors, or where positive aspects of the schools are not currently being emphasized. If curators are going to have success

portraying residential schools, an understanding of other indigenous school experiences may not be as important as an understanding of trauma.

Much of the research dedicated to portraying trauma in museums has been derived from Holocaust museums and their role in commemorating human rights abuses that were committed against Jews and other minority groups during the Second World War (Handler 1994; Bartov 1997; Duffy 1997; Young 2004; Wollaston 2005). While European educational facilities equally encompass the physical sites where these atrocities took place (Young 2004; Keats 2005), American museums have sometimes gravitated toward the use of graphic imagery and multimedia in order to facilitate the visitor experience (Norden 1993; Lisus and Ericson 1995). I have demonstrated in previous chapters that this kind of curatorial approach is both insensitive to the needs of survivors as well as unlikely to result in effective public education, as visitors are also at risk of vicarious traumatization from such practice. Despite these examples, there are other, more positive guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust that may be useful in considering how trauma should be approached by museums. The most detailed resource has been developed by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (2013), whose principles have been adopted as a model by both museums and school teachers with a focus on Holocaust education.

The museum's guidelines suggest that educators first ask themselves *why* they are teaching the Holocaust, and subsequently, that they consider whether each document, image or film they choose to employ is an appropriate medium for conveying what they wish to teach. These two concepts – rationale and medium – form the basis of action-centred Holocaust education. Many of the reasons the museum identifies for teaching the Holocaust reflect a desire to teach responsible citizenship. Learning about the Holocaust can teach teenagers and young adults that

Democratic institutions and values are not automatically sustained, but need to be appreciated, nurtured, and protected;

Silence and indifference to the suffering of others, or to the infringement of civil rights in any society can – however unintentionally – perpetuate the problems; and

The Holocaust was not an accident in history – it occurred because individuals, organizations, and governments made choices that not only legalized discrimination but also allowed prejudice, hatred, and ultimately mass murder to occur ...

Thinking about these events can help students to develop an awareness of the value of pluralism and encourages acceptance of diversity in a pluralistic society (US Holocaust Memorial Museum 2013: np).

The purpose of Holocaust education is inherently active, aimed at teaching citizens to identify early warning signs and to know when to react before discriminatory state policies and racism push societies to the point of genocide. It follows that if the primary purpose of genocide education is preventative, then students and other visitors should be presented with information in ways that will encourage personal responsibility without over-stimulating these visitors so that they become emotionally overwhelmed. If this occurs, then visitors may be unable to process the content of the exhibition or they may perceive the information as traumatic and therefore wish to avoid the subject entirely. In this case, museums run the risk of nurturing passive citizens, who through exposure to graphic media, are more likely to deny state-sponsored discrimination instead of intervening to change such policies. However, if museums present the subject in an appropriate manner, without exploiting the emotions of their visitors or communities, then museums can become sites that foster social engagement.

In considering appropriate contextualization, the museum advises educators to make responsible methodological choices. “Graphic material should be used judiciously and only to the extent necessary to achieve the objective of the lesson. Try to select images and texts that do not exploit the students’ emotional vulnerability or that might be construed as disrespectful of the victims themselves” (US Holocaust Memorial Museum 2013: np). The museum is especially concerned about ‘simulation exercises’, which some museums and teachers have used to help students understand the Holocaust. For example, a common methodological choice in Holocaust museums has been to provide the visitor with the identity card of an individual who was impacted by the genocide. The visitor traces the victim’s history throughout the exhibition and, while taking on the victim’s identity, has the opportunity to find out what happened to them and whether or not they survived (Handler 1994: 675). However, when this strategy is employed, students often forget the purpose of the lesson, and worse, they are left with the impression that they now know what it was like to participate in the Holocaust. There is a risk of trivializing the subject matter and replacing a focus on critical thinking with an entertainment experience that easily distracts

the students. Rather, the museum advocates the use of primary materials and survivor testimony to convey the subject. When a methodology combining action-centred education with a sensitive learning environment is employed, there is vast potential within museums for exhibitions which are both socially responsible and emotionally safe for visitors and survivor communities. The result can be a change from educational exhibits to healing exhibits, which are those able to accomplish more than the institutions originally intended, surpassing museological aims to assist communities in recovery.

The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre (VHEC) is an example of a museum that places primacy on the needs of Vancouver's Jewish survivor community. Founded by a group of Holocaust survivors, the museum is a teaching museum that reaches over 25,000 students annually with exhibits, schools programs and teaching materials. The VHEC also maintains a collection of over 1200 items, archives, a library and resource centre, and over two hundred recorded testimonies from Holocaust survivors, rescuers and witnesses from the local community. The VHEC offers support services for survivors, including counselling services and drop-in meetings for Holocaust survivors, child survivors and those in the second generation (VHEC 2013). Located in the larger Jewish Community Centre, it is also sited in a community space where a diverse array of programs and activities take place.

The museum's oral testimony collection predates the founding of the institution itself and stems from the initiatives of some Vancouver survivors to document the community's experiences. When these individuals gave testimony to their experiences, trained psychologists were involved from the outset and an initial meeting with a psychologist took place before survivors were invited to speak. Those involved understood the need to have someone who could follow up with survivors not only after their interview, but a week later, a month later, six months later, and so on. They were especially concerned for silent survivors, who may not have spoken of their experiences before. For those coming forward to tell their stories for the first time, there is a high risk of suicide, and it was imperative that those providing testimony were provided with ongoing support. Those conducting the interviews understood that no group or organization should ask individuals to open such deep wounds unless they were going to be

very responsible about mitigating any harm to those concerned.<sup>93</sup> Testimonies from local survivors are still maintained by the museum as a key resource, which are frequently featured in exhibitions.

Along with these oral accounts, the majority of the museum's collection reflects the experiences of local survivors, and several survivors sit on the museum's board of directors. The museum's director explains that, as insiders, members of the board understand which aspects of the Holocaust experience are likely to provoke strong responses from within the community. One primary methodological consideration is that the museum rarely displays graphic images, which are experienced as traumatic by survivors. The VHEC is also cautious and judicious about the use of triggering symbolic images, such as images of Hitler, as these are understood to provoke an equal level of distress for some community members.<sup>94</sup> If graphic images have been employed in exhibitions, it has been solely in the context of artwork created by survivors as part of therapeutic initiatives. Those at the museum note that for some survivors of trauma, portraying the terror they witnessed or endured can help individuals process and recover from the events. However, if such images are displayed for the public, the museum staff provide guidelines and assistance to school groups in order to help mitigate potential traumatic reactions. The VHEC advocates the need to explain to students why the art is being created and shown, for example, that although the experiences were harmful, the process of relating what happened assists the survivor and should be seen as evidence of strength. Likewise, exercises that allow the students to debrief and work through any overwhelming emotions directly after visiting can be helpful. These may include group discussions, journal writing or drawing to help counteract the effects of any disturbing material (Miller 1997: 1-4).

The desire to create a safe learning environment has greatly influenced the way that the VHEC approaches Holocaust material. While the more horrific (and graphic) elements of the Holocaust are well-known within Canada, the museum has developed a breadth of Holocaust-related topics, which are directly tied to current social issues. By focusing on

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<sup>93</sup> These comments were provided by Roberta Kremer, the former curator at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, in an interview by the author on June 10, 2011.

<sup>94</sup> Frieda Miller, Director of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. Personal communication, March 22, 2011.

themes within the Holocaust experience as well as connections to other communities and world events, the museum promotes responsible citizenship, anti-racism education, and critical thinking concerning the protection of human rights. The museum veers away from discussing atrocity in an outright manner, and instead, uses aspects of Nazi German society to discuss the problems that preceded genocide by the state. By examining themes like nationalism and intimidation, students are encouraged make connections to current struggles in Canadian society and abroad, which may require action. The teaching materials that accompany each exhibit aim to provide students with the tools to protest and resist racism in areas of their own lives. The VHEC's exhibitions are much more likely to focus on the nature of propaganda and the use of government policy to suspend civil rights than on any portrayal of death camps. In the past, the museum has featured portraits of Albanian Muslim rescuers and their descendants (2011), exhibits on Canada and the 1936 Olympics and sports in Nazi Germany (2010), and on the Jewish fashion industry (1994). Through in-depth teaching materials, these tangential subjects are used to promote critical thinking on other subjects: school bullying, conflicts in Rwanda and Darfur, Canada's immigration policies, the refugee experience, and the way that the government ban on cultural practices has affected Aboriginal peoples (Miller 1999, 2002a, 2004; Krieger 2006). Exercises often include discussions on the reasons for speaking out against injustice and the risks associated with doing so. Students learn about the tools of resistance they have at their disposal and are encouraged to write letters of protest or design poster campaigns within their schools (Miller 2002b; Krieger 2006). The overarching approach of each of the VHEC's exhibitions is to allow a safe pathway into larger discussions of vigilance and human rights protection, which are Holocaust-centred without being trauma-centred.

On the subject of genocide museums, the VHEC's former Executive Director Roberta Kremer points out that museum employees must always ask *why* it is important to remember atrocities. For many survivors, remembering is damaging and it may be that museums are not appropriate venues for discussing trauma at all. Furthermore, the time that is required before people can address a traumatic subject and begin to commemorate what was lost is often more than one generation. Trying to remember recent atrocities may

not serve anyone's needs as much as forgetting.<sup>95</sup> It follows that if the rationale for teaching about genocide is to promote positive social engagement and intervention, then what needs to be remembered is actually examples of resistance and action, alongside discussion of the real complexities, limitations and dangers associated with becoming actively engaged. When the overall goal is social responsibility, then museums that provide examples of how individuals and communities have attempted to take action will be more successful in inspiring change than those that focus either on the horror or hopelessness of the world's human rights cases. It may be that individual experiences of trauma should be allowed to fall silent within public space, while examples of how individuals responded in the face of atrocity should be emphasized.

Some of the VHEC's most interesting exhibitions are those that I define as healing exhibits, which focus on rebuilding community connections between different generations that have been impacted by the Holocaust. In 1999, *The Gesher Project* brought together child survivors and adult children of survivors to meet over a six-month period to examine how the Holocaust had affected their lives. Facilitated by a group of artists and psychologists, these experiences were primarily explored through painting and writing, using creative approaches as a means of healing Holocaust trauma (VHEC 2013). The exhibition was well-received when it toured throughout Canada and had a strong impact on visitors. A representative from the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Museum explained that “[t]he images and poems that appeared in the Gesher Project represent the kinds of bridges and interactions that are so necessary and universal to all people touched by the horrors of the Holocaust. They represent the inter-connectedness of all of us, and the need to promote healing through sensitive dialogue and exchange” (Ramm-West 2002). For trauma survivors who may feel disconnected from others, reclaiming connections to family and community members is an important step in the healing process. If exhibits can harness this potential to build bridges between survivors and those around them, they can instigate real changes within communities affected by trauma. This is perhaps better illustrated through the example of another VHEC exhibit, *Faces of Loss: Remembering Those Who Perished* (2005).

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<sup>95</sup> Roberta Kremer, former Executive Director of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, interview by the author, June 10, 2011.

*Faces of Loss* was exhibited over the course of six months, during which time, community members were asked to submit photographs of family members who had died during the Holocaust. Some people were initially reticent to participate; however, over the course of the display period, an exhibition that began with around fifty images grew to include over four hundred photographs, overtaking the VHEC's entire exhibition space. The display changed continuously as more images were added every week, requiring the established layout of the photos to be re-arranged (Sevy-Fua 2010: 75-83).

One of the purposes of the exhibit was to treat each person as an individual instead of a number, personalizing the Holocaust story; in the case of this exhibit, each person represented was related to a member of Vancouver's current community. These relationships, as well as the duty to remember that many survivors feel they carry, were emphasized. Relationships were used to counteract the abstraction and de-personalization that larger institutions often create by virtue to discussing the Holocaust as a historical event affecting millions. Regarding this strategy, the exhibit's curator (also Executive Director at the time) emphasized that “[t]he touchtone with survivors is not the history of the Holocaust but *that moment* when they lost *that beloved person*” (Roberta Kremer, quoted in Sevy-Fua 2010: 81). For many participants, having photographs of their relatives displayed served as a way to preserve their memory. Yet, the opening of the exhibit demonstrated that much larger processes were at work.

Some individuals found attending the opening emotionally difficult and in several cases reported some form of post-traumatic response. One participant stated “I found this exhibition overwhelming, so many pictures, so many people... I just could not look at the pictures anymore ... It sort of reminded me when I entered Auschwitz” (quoted in Sevy-Fua 2010: 122). These responses are not unexpected, as for survivors of extreme trauma, addressing the traumatic subject is always likely to illicit this kind of emotional response. However, bringing these feelings up in a safe and supportive environment can also lessen some of this emotional intensity in the future, perhaps allowing some aspect of the memory to become integrated. For most families that participated, the exhibit, though difficult, also served as a bridge between generations that allowed silent memories to surface and become integrated parts of the families' personal histories.

Many of the Vancouver survivors had spoken very little about their pasts to their children, and yet wanted younger generations to know what took place. The paradox between not being able to speak and yet needing to tell is a conflict that many survivors of extreme trauma have difficulty reconciling (Herman 2001: 1). In this case, *Faces of Loss* became a mechanism by which survivors could address their losses, and the VHEC was perceived as a safe enough space for participants to disclose their memories. Sevy-Fua (2010) points out that this is primarily because the museum is part of the Jewish Community Centre, and therefore perceived as an extension of the individuals' private sphere and daily life (Sevy-Fua 2010: 131). The fact that the VHEC was founded by survivors and is integrated in a centre that many community members attend for other reasons is an important part of why participants were willing to donate images, attend a potentially triggering opening event, and begin to discuss the images. Unexpectedly, *Faces of Loss* acted as a silence-breaker, as survivors began to 'introduce' their lost relatives to their living family members. The images allowed children and grandchildren to ask survivors questions about the person who had died, and for survivors, the exercise of introducing their relative to the community was safer than having to recount the traumatic details of their deaths (Sevy-Fua 2010: 141).

The intergenerational discussion that began at the opening continued throughout the display period, as survivors who were more reticent to speak had the opportunity to observe peers who were discussing their own memories. In the six months during which *Faces of Loss* was displayed, using the images as an initial platform for disclosure became normalized within the community. In fact, a number of community members who did not have photographs of their loved ones approached the museum, seeking ways to participate. The community's eagerness to engage with the exhibit demonstrates that individuals genuinely felt that the exhibition was not simply a triggering reminder, but a needed healing initiative.

## **7.2 Reconnecting Community**

The fact that a museum can play a part in reconnecting survivors to family members is also demonstrated by another community coping with Second World War trauma, that of Vancouver's Japanese Canadians. Though the experiences of Japanese Canadians during

the war were much less severe than those faced by Jews, the community is similarly recovering from wartime experiences that have had a lasting intergenerational impact. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, the BC government seized the opportunity to solve what was perceived at the time as the province's longstanding 'Japanese problem' (Broadfoot 1977: 46). Under the pretense of security, the government drew upon the War Measures Act to suspend civil rights and to authorize the forced removal of the entire community from a hundred miles of the coast, where virtually all Japanese Canadians in Canada resided. In the 1970s, government documents were released that indicated that the Japanese Canadians had never been considered a military threat to BC, and that the community had been removed due to racism (Sunahara 1981).

Though their experiences varied greatly, many Japanese Canadians spent the duration of the war in internment camps or working on farms in extremely difficult conditions (Taylor 2004). Vancouver's once thriving Japanese neighbourhood around Powell Street was effectively reduced to a ghost town, and eventually all Japanese Canadian property was sold off. Even at the end of the war, citizens were not permitted to return to Vancouver. The community became dispersed throughout Canada, and a number of individuals were 'repatriated' to a war-torn Japan, where some of the Canadian-born had never before visited (Miki and Kobayashi 1991). Many in the community had considered themselves to be proud Canadians, and they experienced being labelled enemies and exiled as highly traumatic (Sugiman 2009: 193). Being confined at Vancouver's Hastings Park before being sent to their other designations was especially difficult, as citizens were housed in livestock buildings, where living conditions were unfit for human habitation. Survivors recollect the degradation of living with maggots and sleeping in horse stalls, which reinforced the feeling that they were being treated like animals instead of human beings (Sunahara 1981: 58). Some individuals stayed at Hastings Park for up to six months before being interned elsewhere. Though conditions in the camps and farms were less humiliating than at Hastings Park, the housing provided had not been constructed to withstand the Canadian winter, and all survivors remember the struggle of trying to keep the temperature above freezing in shacks that were little more than standing boards (Taylor 2004: 66).

On some level, many internment survivors believed that these events had been their fault, and following the war, they coped with their experiences primarily by attempting to become invisible. The Issei (first generation immigrants) worked hard to rebuild their lives during the 1950s and 1960s, while the second generation Nisei, who had been children or teenagers during the war, married Euro-Canadians and attempted to raise their children to be as Canadian as possible (Adachi 1991: 346). These parents never discussed their wartime experiences with their children, which resulted in identity confusion in the third generation Sansei. Today, the intermarriage rate of Japanese Canadians is 95%, the highest of any ethnic minority in Canada. Many attribute this fact to shame that Japanese Canadians still feel about their racialized identities and the fact that some feel the need to overcompensate in order to prove their loyalty to Canada (Sugiman 2009: 195). Some Issei did eventually move back to Powell Street, living in poor conditions in the one-room boarding houses of the Downtown Eastside. Yet, for the most part, the Japanese Language School and Buddhist Church remained the only indication of a Japanese presence on Powell Street, which had once contained over 570 Japanese Canadian businesses (Greenaway 2011).

In 1977, the centennial of the arrival of the first Japanese immigrant led to a number of celebrations, which re-awakened the cultural pride that had lain dormant for so long within the community. Organized by a group of Sansei and post-war immigrants, one of the main events was the Powell Street Festival, which for the first time since the war brought the dispersed community members back to the Powell Grounds, which had once been the playing field of the community's popular Asahi baseball team.<sup>96</sup> The post-war immigrants did not carry the same shame that many of the established Japanese Canadians did and were quite proud to be Japanese (Masutani 2010: 8). Similarly, the Sansei were looking to discover the Japanese heritage that had never been a part of their lives. The festival was an overwhelming success, drawing over 7000 people. Not only did it seem to breathe new life into the community, but it opened up an avenue to address and heal from wartime trauma, as the community celebrated their ethnic identity publicly for the first time since the uprooting (Izumi 2005: 322). The centennial year allowed Japanese Canadians to

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<sup>96</sup> This park has historically been known as Powell Grounds to Japanese Canadians, but is more commonly referred to within Vancouver as Oppenheimer Park.

begin to speak about the past and for younger generations to coax the older Nisei and Issei into examining the possibility that they had been subject to injustice and that the internment had not been their fault (Masutani 2010: 32-33).

The same year, the volunteer association, Tonari Gumi, organized a group of over seventy Issei to plant 21 Sakura trees in the Powell Grounds, as cherry trees are significant in Japanese culture. With the planting of these Legacy Sakura, the Issei were ceremonially re-rooted on Powell Street, where the festival would become an annual event. To the seniors who participated, the trees signified their belonging as Canadian citizens (Greenaway 2008) as well as the community's permanent link to Powell Street. Takeo Yamashiro, the former executive director of Tonari Gumi, recalls that in his thirty years working with the Issei, they had never spoken about their wartime experiences. The trees served as a needed memorial to the lost Powell Street community, and later, would also stand as a memorial to these Japanese pioneers, who in their old age, would not always be with the community.<sup>97</sup> Out of the celebrations, a grassroots movement for redress also emerged, and activism on the part of Japanese Canadians throughout the country eventually led to government compensation and the abolition of the War Measures Act (Miki and Kobayashi 1991: 121).

Although it is commonly traced to this time period, the re-rooting of the Japanese Canadian community was not a singular event, and has rather been a continual process that has been ritually unfolding for the past thirty-five years. For safety reasons, community members are not interested in returning permanently to the area; the majority of Japanese Canadian organizations and services have moved out of the Downtown Eastside to neighbourhoods where women and seniors feel more comfortable.<sup>98</sup> However, community members have not been able to let go of the neighbourhood that was once such a part of community life. They are therefore engaged in a variety of actions that metaphorically reclaim territory, rooting themselves to Powell Street despite the fact that most no longer live in this area and have no plans to return. The Powell Street Festival is an annual event, in which many Japanese Canadians take back Powell Street, if only for one weekend per year. Pilgrimages to other sites are also taking place, as the spaces of internment are also

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<sup>97</sup> Takeo Yamashiro, Interview by the author, February 22, 2011.

<sup>98</sup> Takeo Yamashiro, Interview by the author, February 22, 2011.

being reclaimed by survivors attempting to come to terms with the past (McAllister 2010: 134). Bus tours to the former internment camps are ongoing seventy years after the war.

The Nikkei National Museum (NNM) is an institution that is fully embedded in community life and thus also actively engaged in assisting internment survivors and their descendants to make peace with the uprooting. Founded partially from redress funds, the museum is part of a seniors housing complex, which also serves as a community centre that is home to organizations like the Japanese Canadian Citizens Association and Japanese Canadian Human Rights Committee. Like employees at the VHEC, those at the NNM focus primarily on school programs to do with Japanese Canadian internment, and they are committed to using the internment experience to educate younger generations about the potential for civil abuses during times of war. However, those at the museum also organize walking tours of Powell Street and Hastings Park, and bus tours that bring seniors back to the places in BC where they were formerly interned. These initiatives cannot be described as museological, but follow from the premise that the museum's primary purpose is to serve the community's needs.

Recent projects at the museum include working with other community organizations to interpret the spaces of the Japanese Canadian past, not within the museum walls, but at the diverse locations where the events unfolded. Hastings Park is currently the site of the annual Pacific National Exhibition, which many Vancouver residents visit each year. However, many are unaware that this was once a space of internment. After entering into discussions with the Vancouver Parks Board, members of the Japanese Canadian community successfully lobbied for an interpretive display area within the Livestock Building, which will commemorate the wartime experiences of Japanese Canadian survivors (Hanazawa 2010). The NNM's director and curator, Beth Carter, is involved in developing interpretive labels to be placed at Hastings Park, as well as at important sites along Powell Street.<sup>99</sup> Museum staff have also provided permanent interpretation about the internment at the Museum of Vancouver. However, at the NNM, exhibitions are more likely to be curated for members of the Japanese Canadian community; this audience has different needs, which equally entail being able to commemorate, discuss, and figuratively return to the area that was lost.

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<sup>99</sup> Beth Carter, NNM Director, Personal communication, January 26, 2011.

When I was at the museum in 2011, exhibitions aimed to commemorate the vibrancy of pre-war Powell Street. A smaller exhibition in the halls of the community centre focused on the importance of the Asahi baseball team, which was a source of pride for the community during the pre-war years, as the Japanese Canadian team was the winner in numerous championships. Another display, entitled *Lost and Found*, aimed to reconnect community members to the past by asking them to identify people in historic photos from the collection. While also filling in missing archival information for the museum, the photos displayed what life had been like for the pioneering Japanese, and individuals could look through photos to see if they would be surprised by images of their own unidentified grandparents or of childhood photos of themselves.

The community felt especially strongly about honouring the vibrancy of pre-war Powell Street, which has often been overlooked or replaced with the narrative of internment. The result was the development of the exhibit *Monogatari: Tales of Powell Street (1920-1941)*, which opened in May 2011.<sup>100</sup> Curated in collaboration with Japanese Canadian seniors, the exhibit focused on daily life, from what school had been like, what people did for fun and how these new immigrants had supported each other. The exhibit relied on text quotations and oral recordings of individuals talking about their lives, as well as historic photographs and objects from the time. Each object is especially important, given that Japanese Canadians were only permitted to bring one suitcase each when they left for Hastings Park, and the rest of their belongings had been sold by the time they were released from interment. Any non-essential items saved from Powell Street would have had great sentimental value, adding meaning to items like the wedding dress featured in the exhibit. Film footage also featured crowds lining the streets during royal visits to the area, as well as some of the Asahi baseball games.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the exhibit was a map of Powell Street, where historic buildings and businesses had been marked. Next to this display, there was a comment wall, where visitors had been encouraged to write their Powell Street memories on post-it notes. However, in practice, some visitors to the exhibit had been using the post-it notes to mark additional addresses on the map, indicating where their families had once

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<sup>100</sup> A smaller exhibit, *The Untold Story of Powell Street (1900-1941)* also opened at the Japanese Language School.

resided or owned businesses. Again, members of the community marked their metaphorical return to the area, staking a claim to residences that had been sold to Euro-Canadians without any profits having been returned to the original owners.

What is striking is that *Monogatari*'s narrative of vibrancy displaced any focus on the trauma of dislocation, and yet, this trauma was not absent. The experience of trauma was integrated into the structure of the exhibition, simultaneously unexpected, abrupt, and irrevocable. After focusing on the positive aspects of Powell Street throughout the exhibition, a closing panel marked a sudden end to the exhibit, much like the events at Pearl Harbor had done to the vitality of the community itself:

On December 7, 1941 Canada declared war on Japan following the attack on Pearl Harbor. In 1942, due to racism and political and economic opportunism, almost 22,000 people of Japanese ancestry were uprooted from their homes in BC and sent to various internment sites – almost half of those people came from the Powell Street area.

Families were separated and all homes, personal properties and businesses were confiscated and sold by the Government without permission. Japanese Canadians had no freedom of movement until wartime restrictions were removed in 1949. Very few ever returned to live in Powell Street (NNM 2011).

If visitors would have liked to have known more about the events that followed, it was not provided by this particular exhibit. This was not an exhibit about trauma, but one that focused on reconnecting survivors to the positive memories, sense of identity, and homes that they had had before being dislocated from the area. However, I argue that the exhibit was also very much about the internment experience.

*Monogatari* was a healing exhibit, allowing the elderly community members involved to remember what was lost, revisiting the way of life that had been taken from them in order to find closure with what happened in the years following. The exhibit took place in a safe location, where many seniors also live. It was made an extension of their homes, and admission to the museum is always free by donation. Nisei survivors have had very different internment experiences: some had been well protected by their parents and did not experience the war as traumatic, while others are still distressed by the events that took place. It is possible that the exhibition may have allowed these individuals to connect with their internment experiences while simultaneously, and safety, avoiding them. It also enabled older generations to show their children and grandchildren exactly how strong the

community had previously been and how much had been lost. Though many in the youngest generation have grown up with the Powell Street Festival, it is difficult for them to truly understand what life had been like in the area when almost nothing remains.<sup>101</sup> *Monogatari* was one means of bringing the neighbourhood back to life, in a way that the festival is simply not capable of doing. The NNM may have been translating between generations by historically recreating the neighbourhood. By using historic film footage, photos and artifacts from the time, the *feeling* of Powell Street was recreated in a way that survivors could not have explained to their descendants.

It is significant that the kinds of narratives created by those at the museum are those that are considered emotionally safe for all generations of Japanese Canadians, and in particular, internment survivors. This is more obvious when examining what is *not* being exhibited by the museum.

The redress movement of the 1970s and 1980s led to a lasting spirit of activism within the community. It is not surprising that, in 2008, when news reached the community of city plans to redevelop the Powell Grounds and remove some of the Sakura trees, an ad-hoc coalition immediately formed to halt the development. The group comprised representatives from the Powell Street Festival Society, Tonari Gumi, the Japanese Canadian Citizens Association and Japanese Language School and called themselves the ‘Coalition to Save the Legacy Sakura of Oppenheimer Park’. The symbolism of the trees was not overlooked, and in a letter to the Parks Board, one community member wrote, “If the trees are uprooted, then the action will no doubt be read as a reminder, not simply of an unfortunate casualty of remodelling, but of the mass uprooting of Japanese Canadians” (Miki 2008). Other members of the coalition recall that the threat to the Legacy Sakura was important, as for the first time, 4<sup>th</sup> generation Yonsei were becoming involved in the activism that has defined the community since the 1970s. After gathering over 1800 petitioning signatures, writing to city officials and proposing numerous alternatives to the Parks Board, the group was successful in saving all but two of the Sakura, and this has been seen as a success by those involved.

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<sup>101</sup> This sentiment was expressed by some of the teenage volunteers I spoke with at the Powell Street Festival in 2011.

When the group proposed the idea of an exhibition on the Coalition's efforts, members of the museum's board felt that the subject matter was too controversial. This was met with some consternation on the part of the Sansei involved, who generally view the museum as conservative compared to the grassroots movements taking place and who did not perceive any controversy in the subject.<sup>102</sup> Some younger community members are critical of the museum's penchant for displaying safe topics. However, the individuals who sit on the board at the NNM and its attached community centre are also predominantly Nisei survivors, and they therefore have different associations with activism, which may bring back conflicts stemming from the internment. When I spoke with members of the Japanese Canadian community, I was struck by the amount of ambiguity present in how individuals actually interpret the uprooting. As Raymond Nakamura, the museum's Education Coordinator explained, many community members are very self-conscious of making political statements. They are very aware that Jews were being exterminated during the same time; they are thus reluctant to make their own lesser experiences into a political demonstration.<sup>103</sup> It seems that the redress movement has given the community an official stance that what happened to Japanese Canadians was wrong and some individuals remain dedicated activists. However, on a day to day basis, community members of all generations are still trying to reconcile how they are 'supposed to feel' about their history. Those at the museum are therefore engaged in exhibiting topics that are considered safe and appropriate by all generations. This may mean that some of the most interesting events taking place in the community will not be exhibited for some time. However, overcoming trauma is often an intergenerational process, and this means that the time frame for exhibitions must similarly be adjusted to accommodate the needs of the most vulnerable members of the community at any given time. Furthermore, it is survivors who understand what subjects are uncomfortable and should be avoided in public display.

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<sup>102</sup> Joji Kumagai, Former director of Tonari Gumi and member of the Coalition to Save the Legacy Sakura, Interview by the author, July 21, 2011.

<sup>103</sup> Raymond Nakamura, Former Education Coordinator at the NNM, Interview by the author, February 15, 2011.

### **7.3 Approaching the Legacy**

The legacy of residential schools is different from the cases presented above due to the fact that injustices against Aboriginal peoples are ongoing matters of extreme traumatization that are not confined to the past. However, by using the examples above, it becomes possible to delineate more successful methodologies for working with trauma than the methodologies commonly employed by most museums working with Aboriginal peoples. I emphasize the need to adopt a survivor-based methodology, as the personal experience of trauma can only be understood from within the survivor community, and community members are the only ones who will be able to direct healing initiatives and museum protocols.

What both the VHEC and NNM have in common is that they are using exhibitions to accomplish something *more*. The exhibit, *Faces of Loss*, resulted in unexpected acts of healing and was able to assist Holocaust survivors to safely address the trauma that was most often kept silent. *Monogatari* was able to bring back the lost neighbourhood from which so many Japanese Canadian internment survivors felt disconnected. Employees at each institution are employing what I refer to as Survivor Methodology – one that is premised upon the shared understanding of the survivor experience and that works in conjunction with (instead of in opposition to) the emotional and cognitive difficulties faced by those suffering from trauma.

Survivor Methodology is premised upon four main principles:

*a) Acknowledgement.* The lived experience of trauma is deeply personal. For those who may have faced human rights abuses, the traumatic incidents may in fact be the most personal aspects of the individual's experience to date. It is very important to survivors that their experiences are witnessed and validated by others. As trauma fundamentally creates a sense of self-doubt or weakness, survivors require continual acknowledgement from others that what transpired was not their fault and that the harmful actions were morally wrong (Minow 2000: 245). This is best accomplished when the survivor's experience is given importance in its own right and not made part of macro-level social concerns, universal or global trends, or academic theory. When the personal experience of trauma is used to illustrate other concerns, the experience for the survivor is one of disrespect, exploitation,

and often, retraumatization. Rather, larger social concerns should be used as a foundation to illustrate the personal experiences of those concerned, which deeply require external acknowledgement in order for survivors to recover.

*b) Sensitivity.* Working with communities of survivors in any regard requires enhanced sensitivity, particularly in relation to traumatic events from which survivors may be recovering. A fundamental understanding of how to conduct sensitive research is required by museum employees, who may require specific training before attempting to curate on sensitive subjects (Dickson-Swift et al. 2008: 104). Unless employees have a very good understanding of the situation being represented and have also pre-established a strong relationship with the survivor community, the level of sensitivity required can only be achieved from within the survivor community. Members of the community inherently understand what issues may be distressing and are likely to have more refined intuition in regards to cultural differences and attitudes toward the traumatic incidents under consideration. A good rule of thumb is that unless specifically requested by the survivor community, museum employees should never attempt to represent the trauma of another group. When someone outside of the survivor experience attempts to do this, it is experienced by the survivor as unpredictable, threatening, and likely to trigger intense emotions if or when the individuals involved accidentally say or do the wrong thing. Rather, sensitive exhibitions should be curated within community museums, community centres, or in cases where mainstream museums are involved, solely by members of the survivor community and with limited involvement by museum curators.

*c) Control.* In communities of trauma, each individual may have different needs and be at different stages in a healing process. Some community members may need to speak about their experiences, while others need to avoid or numb them (Culbertson 1995: 169; Bisbey and Bisbey 1998: 34). Different generations may have experienced the traumatic events differently or may have conflicting views on what is appropriate to discuss in public. In such situations, it is common that one person's need to seek validation and justice is exactly what will trigger and retraumatize another who is not yet ready to address their own pain. Healing on a community level is inherently dangerous, often requiring generations before

all parties are comfortable talking about what happened. When the trauma being represented is within living memory, then it is imperative that each individual has full control over their own level of participation or withdrawal. Museum employees should not set up pre-determined healing events or exhibitions and expect all community members take part. The best exhibitions or events may be those that invite community members to engage in an open-ended and safe way, with the expectation that some may initially respond favourably, and more will participate in time.

*d) Empowerment.* Communities suffering from trauma may sometimes feel powerless or voiceless (Figley and Kleber 1995: 78). Part of the recovery process is for survivors to learn to assert themselves again when a sense of personal strength may have been stolen from them through violence. Survivors need to speak to what has happened to them personally and to their communities. Regaining a sense of identity and cultural strength can be an incredibly empowering experience for those who may have previously struggled to cope with confusion and pain. Giving voice to these experiences in exhibitions simultaneously brings out a sense of pride and enables survivors to see the progress their communities have made along the path to recovery. When museum employees design exhibitions about another group's trauma, they are robbing survivors of the opportunity to regain their own voices, contributing to a sense of powerlessness and demoralization. When survivors can direct their own healing, they are able to regain a sense of control over their lives and re-establish a secure sense of self. Exhibitions should therefore be community initiatives, planned and directed by survivors and their descendants when it feels right for survivors to do so.

The central tenets of rationale and medium should form the foundation of discussions about the legacy of residential schools. Aboriginal peoples may find that they have different rationales for curating about the legacy in their own community centres and in mainstream museums. I argue that in either case, the primary rationale for curating about the legacy should be the healing of Aboriginal individuals, families and communities. Healing from an Aboriginal perspective is not defined in psychological terms, but is equally tied to rebuilding Aboriginal knowledge systems, economies, and acquiring self-

determination (Kelly 2008: 22; Rice and Snyder 2008: 53; Green 2012: 138). The reason that communities should exhibit the full truth of colonial trauma is to help Aboriginal individuals of all generations, in both urban and remote areas, to understand how colonialism has affected them personally so that these individuals can begin or continue journeys of self-directed learning, recovery and empowerment as Aboriginal people. The secondary rationale for curating about the legacy is to educate all Canadians about Canada's colonial history in order to motivate non-Aboriginal people to take political action. Although Aboriginal peoples continue to make progress toward self-determination, political changes have in many ways been painfully slow and are often subject to an overwhelming amount of bureaucratic red tape. Unless non-Aboriginal peoples are also willing to lobby the Canadian government for major reforms, it is unlikely that changes on the scale that are required will take place.

The medium for exhibiting the legacy should be chosen by each survivor community. Thus far, the exhibitions on residential schools have been either displays of historic photographs or artwork created by children at residential school. This has primarily been the result of a lack of artifacts related to the schools. However, museum employees and communities may want to rethink whether photographs are the most appropriate medium for exhibiting this particular topic, as images of classrooms, school uniforms and other changes in appearance undergone by the children may be highly triggering for residential school survivors. Those within the communities involved will be better able to evaluate the level of distress caused by these images and whether they should be employed. However, they should not underestimate the psychological risks associated with displaying materials related to the residential school experience. Removing the use of artifacts and images from exhibitions may beg the question, What medium is left to exhibit? Some museum employees may immediately point to the fact that Aboriginal societies are oral cultures and that perhaps, audio and video testimonies will be useful. Unfortunately, these mediums will be equally triggering, and are also subject to additional problems, for example, the cognitive disconnections that make narrating trauma difficult, particularly when the use of Aboriginal languages was subject to harsh punishment, and survivors may not feel that English or French are the right languages to express their experiences. Giving testimony may either be premature for some survivors, or an

experience that those who have already testified in court and at TRC hearings do not wish to repeat. It may also be the case that survivors are simply not willing to provide testimony within what are perceived as unsafe, educational institutions. I therefore suggest that there are other ways of approaching the legacy that are not dependent on triggering historical materials or on survivors displaying their vulnerability in public through oral testimony. The key is in curating exhibitions that are legacy-centred without being trauma-centred. This requires a fundamental change in the way that museum employees and communities conceive of exhibiting, shifting away from displaying the primary subject (residential schools) and focusing instead on safer, related subjects that are easier for survivors to discuss and for community members and other visitors to witness.

There is a wealth of potential topics on residential school survival, resistance and strength that can be used to empower generations of Aboriginal peoples, while simultaneously educating non-Aboriginal Canadians about the realities of being an Aboriginal person in Canada today. Aboriginal peoples are consistently protesting, blockading and resisting the encroachment of oil companies on their lands, the maltreatment of Aboriginal women, as well as any government policies that continue to stand in the way of Aboriginal title and treaty rights. These peaceful initiatives often demonstrate patience, determination, wisdom and perseverance. For example, the Athabasca Chipewyan Nation has begun to attend the Royal Dutch Shell's AGM in the Netherlands in order to voice their concerns about environmental protection (Flegg 2013). Numerous protest marches are taking place, some of which have covered over 4,400 kilometers. At the 2008 and 2011 Walk4Justice, a group of walkers marched from Vancouver to Ottawa to protest at Parliament, and the 2011 walk included one elder in her 70s.<sup>104</sup> In 2013, an expedition of Cree youth made a similar journey from northern Quebec in winter temperatures of close to -60°C. The Journey of Nishiyuu carried a message of cultural strength, attempting to demonstrate to First Nations across Canada that the Cree Nation are still carrying the sacred laws of their ancestors and do not intend to surrender their land (Nishiyuujourney.ca 2013). I am often inspired by the activism taking place across the country, which is seldom given sufficient recognition or portrayed in a positive

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<sup>104</sup> I was fortunate to attend the rally on Parliament Hill at the 2011 Walk4Justice, in which walkers described their personal experiences of marching across Canada in support of loved ones who had disappeared or been murdered.

light by the mainstream media. Yet, it is clear to me that each of these events would make excellent exhibitions about community strength and recovery.

Other potential exhibition topics include Aboriginal leaders who are increasingly receiving honours in recognition of their contributions to the fields of law, education and human rights, the strength of elders who have continued traditional teaching, tributes to Aboriginal youth activists, Aboriginal community members who have successfully completed university degrees, ongoing land and resource claims, successful court cases against the Canadian government, the identity of urban Aboriginal youth, strategies for language revitalization, youth sports teams, the process of renaming Canadian landmarks in their traditional Aboriginal names, community housing, the strong networks that exist between Aboriginal nations and other indigenous peoples, the challenges of communities that live on both sides of the Canadian-US border, the successes and struggles of communities in the process of becoming self-governing, the growing Aboriginal hip hop scene, Aboriginal justice initiatives, community programs that are successfully assisting Aboriginal peoples to overcome addiction, suicide prevention measures, Aboriginal businesses and tourism, women who have escaped from sex work, Aboriginal community and support workers, and the history of organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations, Native Brotherhood and the Native Women's Association.

Each of these topics has great potential to initiate dialogue about the legacy of residential schools, though some may not yet be considered safe subjects for exhibition. My point is that a variety of potential legacy topics already exist, which would allow communities to make connections to Canada's colonial history while focusing on examples of resistance and empowerment. This may be especially important for Aboriginal youth, many of whom are struggling with self-doubt and the loss of a positive Aboriginal identity. It is not a matter of ignoring or denying the root of the problems, but about using other aspects of community life to safely engage with the root cause. Moreover, while Aboriginal peoples are facing many social problems, there is also much to be celebrated. It may mean slight shifts in the way that topics are currently displayed: a display about cultural revival may be reinterpreted in light of what community members have had to overcome, also explaining why traditions may have broken down. Perhaps the introductory galleries, that so often state the local bands have always been practicing their cultures, are

reinterpreted to include the fact that the bands have continued to pass on their cultural traditions despite generations of youth having been estranged from their parents and elders, who are often the traditional teachers. The continuation of culture is an amazing feat of survival, which deserves to be acknowledged in exhibits.

The extent that residential schools are discussed will depend on individual survivors and communities. Some communities may find it extremely distressing to discuss how residential schools have affected their nations, and yet also feel that the legacy needs to be represented to other Canadians. In these cases, communities may initially feel safer discussing political struggles and avoiding the subject of school abuse. However, in time, discussions may become more direct. It is important that community members not feel pushed into addressing the legacy in ways that they are not yet prepared to handle. The problem with any kind of mass event, like court trials or TRC hearings, is that while some individuals are ready to address trauma, far more are pushed forward and forced to deal with the issue. Exhibitions are no different and require small steps to begin with. Communities may only be able to address very small parts of the trauma at once, and the process of exhibiting may be one that grows and changes over the course of the next fifty or one hundred years. Museologists and Aboriginal communities should expect a progression from displaying cultural vitality to cultural recovery, from political struggle to economic recovery, from cultural loss to the loss of children, and from not addressing abuse to displaying genocide. This process may be unpredictable, distinct for each band or Nation, and subject to a long-term trajectory that mirrors the recovery of each community.

Unfortunately, there is simultaneously a sense of urgency to many of the issues being discussed. Allowing sufficient time before addressing residential schools is challenging when ignorance among non-Aboriginal Canadians contributes to ongoing marginalization and violence against Aboriginal peoples. The first step of recovery for any survivor is to re-establish safety (Herman 2001: 3) or little healing can take place. Educating the non-Aboriginal public may be impetus enough for some communities to decide to engage with this material straight away. I suggest that by focusing initially on non-violent legacy exhibits, communities also ensure that non-Aboriginal peoples feel secure as visitors. Examples of empowerment can be inspiring to all Canadians if displayed in ways that emphasize connectivity instead of opposition. It is important that

visitors are not made to feel attacked or disproportionately responsible for government and church crimes, as this will only contribute to the colonial guilt that creates barriers between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Rather, settlers should be given insight into the worldview, hopes, dreams and real struggles of Aboriginal communities in their determination to become strong, self-governing peoples.

While community members have often avoided displaying weaknesses in museums because they do not wish to be viewed as victims, speaking honestly about the context of their lives can create an affinity with Aboriginal peoples and can encourage compassion. Aboriginal communities may be surprised at the degree that non-Aboriginal Canadians truly wish to engage with them, to learn about their lives and knowledge of the territory, and to re-establish relationships. Settlers often do not know how to reach out to Aboriginal peoples; in fact, they are almost always terrified of offending them. While it is true that some settlers are racist, far more are well-intentioned but paralyzed when it comes to making real connections to Aboriginal individuals. Visiting exhibitions about residential schools may increase this sense of paralysis and guilt among settlers. Yet, visiting exhibitions that feature examples of resistance and activism in face of the legacy of residential schools may inspire settlers to become actively engaged. Moreover, exhibits are excellent opportunities for speaking directly to settlers and inviting them to become allies.

Many settlers truly want the living conditions of Aboriginal communities to improve and for a fair relationship to exist between Aboriginal peoples and the government of Canada. However, they do not know how to help or what Aboriginal peoples want them to do to affect change. Their inaction stems in part from the historical denial that has affected them for generations. Yet, on a more practical level, it is also a matter of not having been given any instructions. Settler passivity may indeed be a truly Canadian problem. While Canadians think of themselves as inherently nice people, they also mind their own affairs and consider interfering in other people's problems to be rude and aggressive. It is not that they do not wish to help Aboriginal peoples achieve self-determination, but that, like any good Canadian would, they are politely waiting to be asked. If Aboriginal communities can use exhibits to communicate to settlers how they too can contribute to change – for example in educating their children about colonialism,

signing petitions, writing to MPs and joining protests – settlers may realize that their participation in reconciling Canada is both valued and needed.

If Aboriginal community members are given sole jurisdiction over curating about the legacy, as I argue they should be, then non-Aboriginal museum employees may find themselves at a loss to know what to do about their permanent exhibits. This only goes to highlight how much mainstream museums are in need of skilled Aboriginal curators and other Aboriginal community liaisons on permanent staff. While temporary legacy exhibits can be curated by Aboriginal communities, coming to agreement over permanent galleries requires successful Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships that are not premised upon fear, anger and guilt. Remedyng the way that museums present history may require all parties to stop and take several steps backward in order to evaluate where their relationships currently stand. It may be time for museum employees and Aboriginal communities to return to the discussions that took place in the late 1980s and to accomplish the healing work that was so hastily pushed to the side in the hope of partnership.

## **SUMMARY OF PART THREE**

- a) Truth and reconciliation commissions are quickly becoming the preferred method of addressing historical injustice.
- b) The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada is the first of its kind to focus on the rights of indigenous peoples and on the experiences of children.
- c) Thus far, the clearest path to reconciliation has been outlined in the report of the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples, created in 1996.
- d) Museum employees can assist reconciliation by adopting a survivor-based methodology when attempting to curate about the legacy of residential schools.
- e) Avoiding the use of graphic materials and focusing instead on reconnecting survivors with their families and communities are necessary components of legacy exhibitions.
- f) By displaying examples of community empowerment instead of trauma, exhibitions are more likely to be experienced as healing by survivors and also have a greater chance of inspiring visitors to take political action. Exhibits that focus on community recovery instead of abuse narratives are more likely to result in reconciliation in the long-term.

## CONCLUSION

### RE-ESTABLISHING THE CIRCLE

#### ***8.1 Summary and Initial Conclusions***

The question of reconciliation is one that is currently making its way to the forefront of academic and governmental debate in Canada. However, during these initial stages, a full plan for moving forward has yet to be determined. In this text, I have focused on how reconciliation affects the museum field so that museologists may be better prepared as they continue to build collaborative partnerships with Aboriginal peoples. Like other countries initiating processes of reconciliation (Attafuah 2004; Silove et al. 2006; Long 2008), what is first required is a review of historical resources in order to uncover what has gone wrong between the parties involved and what must be done for the relationships to be repaired (Chapman and Ball 2008: 144). In Canada, reconciliation must begin with a re-examination of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

I have argued that Canada is a Métis nation, which has been derived from a combination of European and Aboriginal influences. It is a premise borrowed from John Ralston Saul, who argues that Canada's early history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partnership still profoundly affects the psychology and informal behaviour of Canadians (Saul 1998). A review of academic resources reveals that until the signing of the Royal Proclamation in 1763, interactions between Aboriginal peoples and newcomers were primarily positive, as different groups built mutually beneficial relationships through the fur trade (Van Kirk 1980; Conrad et al. 1998; Belmessous 2004; Dickinson and Young 2008).

From its 16<sup>th</sup> century origins in New France, almost all of Canada's first settlements were the result of the fur trade, and this economy dominated the landscape for nearly two and a half centuries. Working closely with Aboriginal communities, fur traders became increasingly proficient in navigating Aboriginal languages and cultural protocols, relying on their allies for success in the new world. These were not merely political alliances; trade relationships were usually solidified through marriage between fur traders and Aboriginal women (Dickason 1985; Van Kirk 1980; 2002). Though colonial authorities consistently argued the need to develop agricultural communities in Canada, for the first two hundred years of settlement, these often failed to generate any surplus crops (Bumstead 1992: 224).

It is therefore not surprising that those settlers who succeeded in Canada were those with a flexible attitude, who were not opposed to adopting local customs.

The fur trade persisted into the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the Hudson's Bay Company, and yet the large influx of settlers who arrived following the Seven Years' War (1763) greatly affected the integrated lifestyle, which had been created through years of alliance-building. Better able to recreate European institutions, the newest settlers were less dependent on Aboriginal peoples for survival (Conrad et al. 1998: 442). Moreover, many of the British who arrived during the Victorian period were decidedly racist (Fisher 1977; Perry 1997; Edmonds 2010). The new population quickly grew to outnumber the established settlers before these newcomers had time to acculturate to local ways of behaviour. Pressure to choose white women over Aboriginal women infiltrated all segments of society, including the fur trade, and mixed marriages became highly disparaged (Van Kirk 1997: 151).

With Confederation, the new Canadian government brushed away many of the policies upheld by the imperial government. Within a decade, it had created the Indian Act (1876), which curtailed Aboriginal freedom of movement and removed many personal and group rights from Aboriginal communities (RCAP 1996a: 101). By 1879, the government had also created a national system of residential schools to assimilate Aboriginal children, and the Indian Act prevented Aboriginal parents from intervening without serious repercussions (Sinclair 2009).

Up to seven generations of Aboriginal youth attended residential schools, with the last school closing in 1996. Intended to prepare the students to enter the Western world, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada reveals that the schools were more often sites of institutional abuse (TRC 2012a, b). Generations of youth, some as young as four years old, were removed from their families and raised in a setting devoid of love; many emerged from the school system unable to feel any emotion, prone to alcohol and drug abuse, and with limited parenting skills (Grant 1996: 250; Stout et al. 2003: 42). The school system resulted in the breakdown of Aboriginal communities, as unhealthy behaviours learned in the residential schools were also imported back onto reserves. School survivors had limited coping skills and often treated their own children as they had been treated when young (Mussell 2005: 61). One reason that the schools were able

to remain in operation for such a long period of time is that the non-Aboriginal population was primarily kept in ignorance. The public school system that has educated the settler population has rarely made mention of Aboriginal peoples, and when it has, it has often stereotyped them as lazy, drunk or violent. At the same time, school text books have espoused inaccurate myths about the country's foundations, glorifying settlement while omitting subjects like treaties, land theft, the Indian Act or residential schools (Furniss 1999: 59; Carleton 2011: 102-104; Francis 2011: 176). The result of this national myth-making is not only a concerning level of ignorance about Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Bednasek et al. 2010: 429). It extends to affect the way that settlers view themselves and their place in the country.

In countries where one segment of the population has attempted to destroy one another, there is often a process of extreme traumatization that has taken place (Becker 1995:107). While extreme traumatization most affects those who have been persecuted and oppressed, it also affects oppressors and bystanders, who may wish to deny the violence. Entire societies are built upon processes of denial that have evolved over generations (Cohen 2001: 11), and Canada is no different. Many Canadians are made very uncomfortable by Aboriginal peoples, as their presence brings unaddressed colonial guilt to the surface (Saul 2008: 32). By providing an overview of museological theory as well as examples from museums, such as the Museum of Anthropology, Museum of Civilization and Canadian Museum of Human Rights, I have attempted to illustrate that settler denial is pervasive, even among those who work closely with Aboriginal communities.

Saul argues that despite the fact that Aboriginal peoples are denied and generally omitted from the mainstream, Canada is profoundly Aboriginal (Saul 2008). Canadians may believe the country's foundations are European, yet the principles Canadians live by are actually Aboriginal in origin. The Aboriginal consciousness that permeates the country is unavoidable. To prove this point, Saul identifies key Aboriginal values that have now been adopted as Canadian social values. Examples include: diversity, balance, inclusion, peacekeeping, negotiation and minority rights. None of these are recognized as Aboriginal concepts within the mainstream (Saul 2008: 54). Yet, Saul goes further than this, arguing that by continuing to deny Aboriginal cultures, Canadians are also depriving themselves of the opportunity to truly succeed as a nation. It is only by recognizing, identifying and

accepting an Aboriginal component to the Canadian identity that the country as a whole can settle its past and move forward.

I argue that the establishment and later denial of a Métis nation is deeply felt within the museum field. While museologists have often discussed the entanglement between museums and colonialism (Cranmer Webster 1988; Doxtator 1988; Tapsell 1998; Simpson 2001), they have yet to fully acknowledge the extent that the legacy of residential schools affects their relationships with Aboriginal communities, as well as their museological practice.

Since the late 1980s, museum employees have been confronted by residential schools in various ways, and they have responded with a combination of compassion for those affected and denial of the circumstances. When Aboriginal protesters began to challenge issues of representation at key exhibitions like *The Spirit Sings* (1988), museum employees posited their institutions as politically neutral, arguing that collections were held in trust on behalf of the public. Many considered it a duty not to bow to the agendas of interest groups (Ames 1988: 83). Yet, community groups did not always view museums this way. The Lubicon Lake Cree criticized *The Spirit Sings* because the exhibition's budget was provided by a grant from Shell Oil, a company responsible for extracting oil on Lubicon land. Though the exhibition was very successful and involved an unprecedented level of Aboriginal involvement, the Lubicon also presented a clear message to museologists: one could not support Aboriginal peoples while also partnering with those who were acting to destroy them (Harrison 1988: 6).

Museums continued to come under fire in 1989, when members of the Black Canadian community in Toronto accused the Royal Ontario Museum of racism for its *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibit, and members of the Kwakwaka'wakw nation had a collection of confiscated potlatch regalia repatriated from museums, including the National Museum of Man (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization) (Cranmer Webster 1990; Saunders 1997). Across the country, Aboriginal and minority criticisms of museum practice sometimes landed those in the field on opposite sides of the debate, feeling attacked and destabilized within their roles, which they had always viewed as altruistic (Phillips 2011). The *Preserving our Heritage* conference was convened as a means of discussing the issues that had been raised by *The Spirit Sings* boycott, and the resulting

Task Force report, *Turning the Page* (1992), demonstrates that museum employees took Aboriginal criticisms seriously; they quickly committed to co-management with Aboriginal peoples (Hill and Nicks 1992: 82). What has not previously been discussed is the fact that these challenges coincided exactly with mounting tension over residential schools, which began to reach a peak in the late 1980s.

In 1988, Haig-Brown published the first book of survivors' accounts, and in some communities, the dysfunction caused by the schools was becoming unmanageable. Then, in 1990, Grand Chief Phil Fontaine publicly disclosed his experience of sexual abuse in a CBC interview that was broadcast across Canada (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 1990). While viewed as a courageous act, it also brought the issue of school abuse into the public eye, making it difficult for survivors to continue to avoid the subject (Stanton 2011: 2). When museum employees moved to collaborative partnerships in the 1990s, this relationship-building phase coincided with many residential school survivors providing testimony and prosecuting their abusers in the federal court system (Flisfeder 2010). For child abuse survivors, testifying in court is an extremely difficult process, which frequently involves bringing up the frustration, anger, futility and grief that has been suppressed for decades (Fournier and Crey 1997: 75). Yet, during this process, survivors were also creating art, reviving cultural practices, and meeting at museums in order to help the institutions arrive at more respectful practices (Harper 1996; Jonaitis 2004). I do not wish to minimize the legitimate challenges that were being mounted against museum practices, but to point out that these were not only what they appeared to be. What transpired in museums was often a high level of emotion being directed at museum staff, which sometimes related to museums, and sometimes related to larger issues. Artist-warriors (Houle 1991: 32), and others like them, made public stands against museums because they saw legitimate problems with museological practice. The emotion behind those stands, however, often crossed the boundaries into unresolved trauma stemming from the lived experience of violence. By the 1990s, the effects of residential schools had entered the museum field, though the schools remained a taboo subject for exhibition.

The stress of collaboration was often amplified, as many museums were facing financial constraints, which placed undue strain upon their employees. Personnel at a variety of museums faced cutbacks throughout the 1990s, and those who remained within

the institutions were often left with unmanageable workloads. While some individuals chose to leave the field, many more responded to the challenges by working harder and putting in more hours (Hood 1998: 38). These conditions have not changed, with many employees facing ill health and personal burnout while they try to navigate relationships with Aboriginal community members. Little has been done to alleviate the working conditions that are increasingly being identified by employees as unsustainable (Brown, D. 2004: 16-17).

The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation of Canada may indeed inspire the museum field to make serious changes. The TRC is the first truth commission in the world to focus on indigenous peoples, and one of its primary mandates has included public education about the legacy of residential schools (IRSSA 2006, Schedule 'N'). Yet, it is only in recent years that attempts have been made to address this legacy in museums. Permanent galleries at times reference the subject, yet only do so in minor ways that do not adequately explain what transpired.<sup>105</sup> Temporary exhibitions about residential schools have not necessarily been museum initiatives, and have primarily originated with a charitable organization that supports residential school survivors (see Legacy of Hope 2013). While museum employees have developed relationships with Aboriginal community members, the majority of these relationships have not been strong enough to successfully collaborate on issues to do with residential schools, or reconciliation more generally. This is also evidenced by a number of attempts to curate about trauma on the related issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Although staff at both the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and Museum of Anthropology have sought to address this subject in exhibitions, the result of their endeavours has thus far been to anger those concerned (Canadian Museum for Human Rights 2010: 31; Museum of Anthropology 2011).

In the case of *The Forgotten*, MOA staff attempted to use one non-Aboriginal woman's artwork to illustrate the case of murdered and missing women in Vancouver. However, local activists from the Women's Memorial March felt that this was primarily an Aboriginal issue; they argued that the way that the artist had portrayed the women

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<sup>105</sup> References to residential schools have been made by the Surrey Museum and North Vancouver Museum & Archives, visited in 2011.

concerned did not seem respectful from an Aboriginal viewpoint.<sup>106</sup> When the activists became involved in redesigning the exhibition, tensions became unmanageable, and the group eventually pulled out of the process. The exhibit's cancellation indicates that even those who are experienced at collaborating with Aboriginal communities may not have developed the skills to work with such sensitive topics (Museum of Anthropology 2011).

As curating about colonial trauma appears to be a weak point for museums and Aboriginal communities, I have sought to understand the successes of other Canadian survivor groups, who have had more time to heal from their respective histories and to develop successful ways of exhibiting their community's experiences. Following the example of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre and the Nikkei National Museum, I recommend a survivor-centred methodology, which places the healing needs of survivors first and public education second. When survivors' needs are placed first, exhibitions are sometimes able to accomplish *more*, bringing community members closer together with a better understanding of their own shared experiences. The most successful exhibitions curated by other survivor communities have been those that accomplish something beyond the exhibit and have been able to reconnect survivors with their families and communities (see Sevy-Fua 2010). This is an important part of the healing process because survivors of trauma may feel dislocated or disconnected from those around them (Herman 2001: 51). Exhibitions that create safe ways for survivors to speak about their experiences with their loved ones can be beneficial, also opening up avenues for future discussion. This may be important for future exhibitions about residential schools.

I have focused on developing a methodology for curating about residential schools, as this is the primary way that museums are implicated in reconciliation. However, after reviewing the situation, I have also concluded that this is only one component of a larger issue. I have attempted to illustrate that, although collaboration has resulted in successful exhibitions and programs on other subjects, the relationships that have developed between museum employees and Aboriginal collaborators often do not *feel* right. I argue that the remaining tension stems from the fact that, in many cases, these relationships have not been

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<sup>106</sup> Gloria Larocque and Corinthia Kelly, Women's Memorial March Committee. Interview by the author, February 25, 2011.

fully reconciled. It is my view that the Métis nation concept may be the key to solving this problem.

If there is a Métis subconscious to Canada, then there are several implications. The Métis nation paradigm suggests that Canadians may intuitively feel comfortable working in partnership with Aboriginal communities. Museum employees frequently discuss the events of the late 1980s and early 1990s as a revolution. Yet, what has not been pointed out is how quickly those in the museum field also responded to requests for change. In outlining a way forward, the Task Force report, *Turning the Page* (1992), used words like: mutual appreciation, mutual interest, co-management, co-responsibility, commonality and equal partnership (Hill and Nicks 1992: 82). These were not new ideas. What the document actually described was a return to alliances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples for mutual benefit in the heritage sector: the re-establishment of the Métis nation. Though it was not articulated in this way, it was a methodology that had succeeded for centuries during the time of the fur trade. Museum employees felt uneasy about being criticized, yet they readily adopted the proposed principles. Furthermore, collaboration was generally successful, leading to a host of co-management agreements, loans to individuals and communities, and a remarkable array of collaborative projects (Phillips 2011: 137).

Subsequent to challenges by other indigenous peoples, museums in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the United States also adopted versions of collaboration. There were many similarities between the Canadian situation and the events taking place in museums internationally. However, the criticisms being raised also related to local circumstances, and this word had a different meaning and methodology in each area. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Maori protocols, such as sharing food, were made formal parts of meetings, and museums began to employ Maori personnel at all levels. Many museums now follow a *mana whenua* model, by which the local Maori tribe is responsible for any *taonga* held on their traditional lands. The museum's primary collaborative relationship is therefore with the local tribe and not necessarily with the originators of the artifacts being

displayed (Butts 2003: 121).<sup>107</sup> By contrast, the Canadian means of collaborating is very Aboriginal. Collaboration is done through alliances, building permanent networks between museums and communities or community centres. These have primarily remained separate entities, which work together on joint projects for mutual benefit.

Alliance-building has not been limited to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships. Canadian museums also house collections by a number of minority groups. When museum employees learned to collaborate with Aboriginal communities, they found this methodology so successful that they began to employ the same methodology when working with other communities. For example, in 2001, staff at the Museum of Anthropology curated *The Spirit of Islam: Experiencing Islam through Calligraphy*. Though museum staff had no previous experience working with Vancouver's Muslim communities, they employed the same collaborative model that had been developed for work with Aboriginal communities, and the exhibit was highly successful. Not only was *The Spirit of Islam* well-attended, but the employees and community involved felt that the exhibit process had bonded them together.<sup>108</sup> In other words, museum staff discovered that an Aboriginal protocol and not a European one, was a superior method for Canada's non-Aboriginal communities to work with each other.

I suggest that, like alliance-building, other Aboriginal protocols may indeed function better in running Canadian institutions than the ones that are currently being employed. Perhaps if further protocols were identified and outlined, museum employees would again be able to find more successful modes of working together than the ones currently in use. Ideally, these would extend beyond collaboration with local Aboriginal communities and into the organizations' general operations.

## **8.2 The Circle as Protocol**

The problems that I have discussed in relation to museums are not those that can be solved quickly, and those in the field are well aware of this fact. Museums in Canada are also subject to complexity, in which generalizations do not always prove valid. Yet, despite the

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<sup>107</sup> *Mana whenua* indicates a tribe's power stemming from their traditional territory or authority over the land. *Taonga* (treasure) is a term applied to Maori cultural heritage. Maori artifacts may be considered members of the tribe and are sometimes treated as kin.

<sup>108</sup> These comments were made by MOA curator, Carol Mayer, at the BC Museums Association's annual conference, October 2010.

inherent risks in attempting to do so, there is also a need to look beyond individual cases and institutions to see what patterns emerge and whether solutions can be created. The full process of reconciliation requires the generation of new ideas that surpass current structures and practices and are able to lead citizens into a more peaceful and harmonious era (Wilson 2001: 13-15). In considering reconciliation in the museum field, there is one concept that has become clear to me as a path forward. If Canada truly is a Métis nation, then the one structure that most reflects a return to balance for Canadians is the Circle, with its emphasis on the philosophy of relatedness, relationships and unity (Pranis 2007: 65; Hodge et al. 2009: 214).

It is my view that the best format for museum employees to discuss their relationships, the effects of residential schools and to conduct work of any kind is in a Circle, reflecting perhaps the one philosophical concept that unites the diverse Aboriginal communities across the continent, as well as many other indigenous peoples. According to Isaacs (1999), “no indigenous culture has yet been found that does not have the practice of sitting in a circle and talking” (Isaacs 1999: xvi). In Canada, the Circle is used among Aboriginal peoples for council meetings, ceremonies, healing, sharing and teaching (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005: 65). Symbolically, the Circle represents a holistic view of the universe, in which all people and things are intimately related. Within a Circle, no hierarchy exists, and similarities are emphasized (Julien et al. 2010: 115). “[E]ach aspect is connected with and hence inseparable from every other. No part can be cut out and thrown away without violating the quality of the circle as a whole. A circle also conveys balance – that each aspect is held in a balanced relationship with the whole” (Pranis et al. 2003: 68-69). Circles are perceived by Aboriginal peoples to be non-authoritative and egalitarian, and Aboriginal leaders have long stressed that their communities and societies are Circles, in which settlers are respectfully invited to take part (Saul 2008: 29).

These Circles only function when all participants are united and working cooperatively. Just as there is no hierarchy, there are also no sides. Within a Circle, all participants unite in support of a common goal, and no one person has authority to make decisions about that goal. The Circle is ruled by consensus, reflecting the equal value of each participant (Pranis et al 2003: 17; Julien et al. 2010: 121). Cyndy Baskin, of the

Mi'kmaq Nation, writes, "Circles are the methodology used for all endeavours, such as teaching and decision-making, and they represent our cultural protocols, values, and epistemologies. If we as Aboriginal peoples want to conduct research, why would we not use the circle?" (Baskin 2005: 180). As Canada is an Aboriginal territory, it is likely that the Circle is a superior protocol for almost all museum endeavours, regardless of Aboriginal involvement in a particular project.

Working in a Circle offers communities a forum for working through their differences to find a common truth. It can be a demanding process, but the outcome of Circle work is often mutual understanding, trust, and transformed attitudes, lives and relationships (Pranis et al. 2003: xiv). By talking in a Circle, participants come to understand other viewpoints, and the sharing that takes place can lead to positive solutions that everyone has a part in creating. In most museum work, employees can become preoccupied with the project taking place, forgetting to slow down and address the inherent complexities that may be limiting them from working with communities. Often, emotions are brushed to the side as those involved attempt to concentrate on their curatorial or other museum roles. The result has often been the eruption of negative emotions in the work place, leaving hurt feelings among all participants. Over years, working in this kind of tense environment has resulted in layers of discomfort and mistrust that have gone unaddressed. The collaborative process has sometimes been one filled with joy and success, alongside blatant criticism, anger, misunderstanding and self-doubt. Circles presume that because differences are inevitable, conflicts are a natural part of life. However, by responding to difference in a way that is respectful, honest, open and compassionate, conflicts can lead to personal growth as well as a deeper connection to others. In a Circle, participants can explore constructive solutions by asking 'How can we help this individual transform their negative energy and pain into positive energy and healing?' (Pranis et al. 2003: 20).

Before museum employees and Aboriginal communities can begin to think about incorporating the residential school experience and other aspects of colonialism into their permanent exhibits, it is imperative that they first ensure the foundation of their own

relationships are strong enough to handle such personal and important work.<sup>109</sup> It is actually a process of reconciling collaborative relationships before work on residential schools begins. However, all parties may find that these are not separate issues. It may be that speaking about their relationships is indeed a matter of discussing the effects that the schools have had on Canadian society and how they have personally affected each person involved in the Circle.

While I will provide a general overview of Circle work, it should be noted that it does not follow any specific tradition, and that across Canada, communities each have distinct understandings of the best protocols for working together. Museum employees should request that elders in the local community guide the process and set the guidelines for how the Circle will operate. Aboriginal elders or other distinguished members of the community will also be those most qualified to moderate the Circle. Museum employees should differ to their leadership in this regard.

In most Aboriginal traditions, certain procedures are followed to prepare the participants for the Circle work that will take place. This will vary in each community, but may involve saying prayers or smudging with sage or other herbs (Graveline 1998: 133).<sup>110</sup> While the West has made effort to separate religion from the workplace, Aboriginal traditions acknowledge that humans are fundamentally spiritual beings and that being spiritually centred is what allows each individual to conduct their work according to core values, such as Respect, Honesty, Trust, Humility, Sharing, Inclusivity, Empathy, Courage, Forgiveness and Love (Pranis et al. 2003: 47). In Canada, ritual procedures that occur in public settings are always non-denominational and are meant to be inclusive rather than making those with differing beliefs uncomfortable. Acknowledging the presence of a Creator may assist the Aboriginal community members present to feel that the work is being conducted in a good way and is also a means of indicating to non-Aboriginal

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<sup>109</sup> Aboriginal peoples use the term *work* to describe important ceremonial events and endeavours. Often, gatherings may have both an informal component (such as eating together) and a formal component (speech-making, discussions, the passing on of titles and so on). The latter components are general described as ‘the work’, denoting that they are spiritual endeavours and must be taken seriously by those in attendance. Coming together to discuss a serious matter like residential schools would also be considered work.

<sup>110</sup> Burning herbs, such as sage, sweetgrass and cedar, has long been used as a means of clearing away negative energy so that healing can take place. In a smudging ceremony, the smoke is used to cleanse a person’s body and spirit from negative emotions, preparing the individual for the work that will take place.

participants that the work, while of a serious kind, is also one of positive intention and acceptance.

Before any work begins, all participants in the Circle will be expected to introduce themselves. Introductions are important. There is a reason that that one question ‘Where are you from?’ is so vital and has such depth in Canadian society. There is something inherent in that question that all Canadians seem to understand, but that perhaps only Aboriginal peoples have retained as a formal part of their protocols. When two people meet, it is a way of asking ‘Who are you and how do you see the world? How are we related?’ Canadians understand this question very deeply. There is an acknowledgement that culture, ethnicity and language matter. They define our worldviews to such an extent that any two Canadians must first address this question before they can move onto other concerns, and that as often happens, when the question is not addressed, individuals feel inherently misunderstood and misrepresented in conversation. There is a clear sentiment among Canadians that unless you first know where they are from, you will not know how to interpret their words. It is protocol that is deeply embedded in the Aboriginal philosophy of relatedness and in the structure of the Circle that does not assimilate, but retains the unique worldview of each member of society.

Following a Western tradition, an introduction made by a museum employee may only entail that person’s name and position within the institution. This can lead to immediate problems because those arriving to meet with the employee for the first time may feel that they know nothing about them. It leaves the newcomers guessing as to where the individual stands and whether they can be trusted. For a Circle to work well, more information is required as part of an introduction. In any Circle, participants generally also provide insight into their own cultural background as well as how they are approaching the topic at hand because of that background.

Communities may choose to use a Talking Piece to help remind participants who the current speaker is (Graveline 1998: 138). In a Circle, only one person shares at a time, and all others are expected to listen respectfully until this person is done. Moving around the Circle, each person is given an opening to share and must hold all of their comments until it is their turn. The reason for using a Talking Stick or other object is to ensure that everyone who wants to speak has the opportunity to do so without interruption, without

being scolded or being offered solutions to their problems. In a Circle, the person with the Talking Piece offers up for evaluation the things that they know about the topic in terms of their own lived experiences. The next person in the Circle does not correct or try to fix the perceived problems that have been presented, and neither agrees or disagrees with what has been said. Rather, when the Talking Piece is passed in their direction, they speak to their own lived experiences and knowledge, trying also not to repeat what has already been shared by others. Taking part in a Circle entails recognizing that each person is on a separate path and each has acquired experiential knowledge that is of value. When everyone has spoken and shared what they know about the problem, a solution is sometimes apparent. Sometimes the inspiration for problem-solving comes to participants later, and sometimes, more talking and sharing is required (Graveline 1998: 138). When a large number of participants are present, it may also be helpful to form an inner and outer Circle. In these cases, only participants of the inner Circle are speakers, while members of the outer Circle can gain through active listening.

Coming up with solutions to problems can only be accomplished if participants are listening actively and truly trying to hear and understand what is being shared (Graveline 1998: 138). Each person is responsible for being attentive, for not letting their minds wander when someone is speaking, and for not spending time rehearsing what they will say instead of listening to the current speaker (Cahill and Halpern 1992: 47). Learning to listen actively is sometimes a longer process for those who are not used to working in a Circle, as is learning to speak from the heart, with the emotions. “In Talking Circle you speak your own voice, describe what your own experience has been. You have the opportunity to express what you feel is in your heart to say. The point is to speak ‘from your heart,’ of what moves you, of what spirit moves through you when the sacred object reaches your hands. To choose words with care and thoughtfulness is to speak in a sacred manner” (Graveline 1998: 139). Speaking and listening from the heart each require practice. However, as participants become more comfortable with Circles, emotions are shared more freely, which creates an atmosphere of compassion, considered the foundation of a positive and strong community. This is the opposite of how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples sometimes work together, holding all of their emotions inside until they reach a boiling point and are let loose.

Enough time should be put aside for the Circle, and most endeavours actually require a series of ongoing Circles for the work to be completed in a good way. Western time is often an obstacle to using Circles (Graveline 1998: 139), as it imposes an end to processes without taking into account the spirit of the encounter, the dynamic interactions taking place, the natural ebb and flow of emotions in a group setting, or the fact that when all participants come together with open hearts, the Circle seems to direct itself in unexpected ways. “Because Circles deal with emotions, personal stories, and volatile issues, participants need to stay together to work everything through, if not to full resolution, at least to some balanced stopping point” (Pranis et al. 2003: 108). Circles are inherently healing structures (Baskin 2005: 184); within a Circle, very deep connections are found between participants that promote a sense of spiritual unity and mutual regard. While sitting in other formations can enable a secular, Western experience, the Circle is a very powerful structure – sitting in a Circle and listening to others with an open heart is personally transformative. Learning when to end the Circle is a matter of learning to gauge when transformation and healing are taking place, and when there is a natural pause as this work is completed (Graveline 1998: 140). Just as a ritual opening may be employed, communities may also wish to include an official closing to the Circle to complete the work in the right way.

Any Circle has the potential to be an intimate experience, as the structure of the gathering automatically assures that each person’s whole self is represented. Because Circles address all four components of a person – the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual – any topic is likely to bring up strong emotional responses from the participants involved. Museum employees should be respectful when this occurs and listen quietly when pain and anger need to be voiced and released (Baskin 2005: 185). They should also be aware that sitting in a Circle may provoke strong reactions within themselves that they may not have been prepared for. This may initially be quite uncomfortable for some employees who are not used to addressing their emotions at work or who may think of themselves as representing an institution or curatorial role. Circles require each participant to take part first and foremost as a human being with thoughts, opinions, emotions, and life experiences that affect their point of view. Whether someone is a curator, director or other museum employee is of little relevance compared to that

individual's cultural, and gender-specific identity, as well as the things they have experienced in their lives that affect the way they see the particular topic being discussed.

In a Circle, no one is pressured to reveal information that is too personal or that they do not wish to share. However, in considering the legacy of residential schools, it may be appropriate for employees to address their own knowledge or ignorance of the subject, how they were educated, how they came to learn about the legacy, and also, how they *feel* about this legacy given their own cultural identity and life context. While there is no pressure to do so, this may also be a time for self-disclosure, as revealing any personal experiences of violence or abuse can also create an affinity between survivors in the Circle and identify a shared understanding of trauma. When it comes to sensitive research, many researchers find that a certain level of self-disclosure is appropriate, particularly when asking research participants to reveal such personal information about themselves (Liamputpong 2007; Dickinson-Swift et al. 2008). Self-disclosure should not be used to appropriate the pain of Aboriginal participants in the Circle or to make the legacy seem like it is about the museum employee. However, appropriately giving voice to a personal experience of violence or witnessing can promote a sense of equal power relations among participants, also letting other survivors know that they are in safe and compassionate company. Moreover, any non-Aboriginal employees who have experienced violence may wish to identify any problems they have in being able to discuss residential schools. Employees who are sensitive to the stories being discussed may wish to explain this and to limit their participation if it interferes with their own self-care. However, if any employee wishes to withdraw from the Circle when certain stories are being told, it is necessary that the reasons are explained, or it may be interpreted as uncaring and disrespectful toward the person who is sharing. The protocol for dealing with emotional overwhelm should be discussed among all participants before any work is underway, so that there are appropriate avenues for taking time out, as well as support available to all participants, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

Bringing one's entire self to the Circle will initially make many museum employees nervous, as it automatically requires the individual to come face to face with their own denial, discomfort, guilt or self-doubt about working with Aboriginal peoples. Moreover, it requires them to speak about these emotions. However, these are precisely the things that

non-Aboriginal employees need to identify and give voice to in order to develop successful relationships with Aboriginal communities. One of the primary problems with the way that collaboration has previously taken place is that in giving priority to Aboriginal voices, there has not often been a place for museum employees to voice their own feelings about working in museums, which has often been tense, confusing, and burdened with the entire weight of living in a colonial country. Using Circles in the workplace can relieve much of this tension. As one individual, whose organization had moved to a Circular model, commented, “What is really important comes out, and it never did before. It stayed in the offices and in whispers. That’s what made the meetings dishonest – and difficult. Well, sometimes it’s difficult in Circles too, but in a different way. It’s a good difficult, because it is honest and safe” (quoted in Pranis et al. 2003: 235). We must remember that relationships are reciprocal and involve equal exchange between the parties involved. This means that everyone’s feelings deserve an opportunity to be voiced, heard and validated. It is likely that acknowledging the guilt, sense of futility and discomfort in front of Aboriginal partners is enough for non-Aboriginal people to feel some sense of relief and to move onto listening to the needs of the Aboriginal community members present.

Graveline (1998) points out that using Circles in the classroom has proven successful with non-Aboriginal participants, and that many of her students responded favourably to using Aboriginal methodologies in class. One student, Cindy, stated “The Talking Circle is a nice place because at least there’s a place that people can tell what they want to say and it allows different opinions. For me, this Circle reflects the whole environment in Canada” (quoted in Graveline 1998: 141). Another non-Aboriginal participant stated “[I]t was quite enlightening for me. What really impressed me was the fact that it is very open and it is very easy to express your feelings. I was quite taken back as a matter of fact ... I was walking around on a cloud for about a week. I felt tingly for about a week. It was really good” (quoted in Graveline 1998: 142). As these quotes demonstrate, non-Aboriginal museum personnel may find that working in a Circle feels intuitively right, and that it is a more productive and positive experience than the kinds of meetings that have sometimes erupted into conflict.

Participation by non-Aboriginal peoples requires an overall teaching of local protocols by Aboriginal community members, which will vary between traditions. It also

requires practice. One common problem that emerges in Circles between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants is that it is a challenge for many non-Aboriginal individuals to learn to listen in the way that is required (Breton 2005: 19). Many non-Aboriginal people are used to speaking before they have truly thought about what another person has said. They want to respond right away and have difficulty not interrupting others. They instinctually want to contribute and sometimes assume that their personal contribution or opinion is the one that matters. There is also a need to try to fix things, rather than letting solutions reveal themselves in the right time (Graveline 1998: 147).

The change to working in a Circle may initially fill museum employees with some trepidation. However, just as alliance-building has proved successful for museums, Circles may quickly become a preferred methodology, providing employees with the tools to manage the tensions that have so often placed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples on opposite sides.

### ***8.3 The Circle as Museum Methodology***

I have demonstrated that the Circle has vast potential to assist museum employees and Aboriginal collaborators to reconcile their relationships and built a stronger foundation of trust. Yet, the values inherent in the Circle also have positive potential for defining museological goals. I therefore argue that, in addition to using talking Circles when working with Aboriginal communities, the Circle should also become the primary theoretical paradigm for museum work. The incentive for doing this is to move beyond reconciling individual relationships and to assist reconciliation within Canadian society. The Circle may assist a larger process of decolonization that will be necessary if Canada is to take reconciliation seriously.

#### *The Circle in Theory*

In the past, collaborative theory has emphasized a sense of disconnection and separation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Museologists have either conceived of themselves as passive bystanders in decolonization or positioned themselves in opposition to their Aboriginal partners. For example, when curators became facilitators of exhibitions (Phillips 2011: 195), they neutralized their own roles in decolonization, becoming absent in

the processes of empowerment taking place in Aboriginal communities. When museums became theatres or forums for debate (Phillips 2005: 104), employees were not seen as active debaters. Instead, the museum itself was personified and then neutralized as a mere venue. Eventually, these venues were recognized as spaces of contact, and it was revealed that museum employees were in fact heavily engaged in conflict with Aboriginal communities (Clifford 1997: 192). The challenges launched by artist-warriors (Houle 1991: 32) and other Aboriginal peoples have not diminished, as evidenced by MOA's recent exhibition, *The Forgotten*. Museological research is still subject to potential hostage situations, in which inadvertent mistakes or insensitivities by museum personnel are frequently met with anger on the part of Aboriginal partners. This contributes to a sense of guilt and paralysis among museum employees and does very little to address the root of the anger being voiced.

After twenty-five years of collaboration, perhaps it is time to recognize that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples are all part of the same Circle, working toward the same goal of decolonization in their own unique ways. Rather than positioning themselves in opposition to each other, it may serve everyone's needs to unite in support of this common goal. When the Circle is used as the primary theoretical paradigm of museum research, then museum employees and Aboriginal communities are conceived as united in mutual respect in their ongoing relationships within a shared territory (Kelly 2008: 28). The Circle calls on museum employees to recognize the unique relationship that Aboriginal communities have to the land as well as their ongoing authority to direct their own affairs and to become self-governing nations. It also asks that Aboriginal peoples recognize that those who work in museums are now part of their social networks and to value and respect their positive intentions in museum work. This relationship paradigm has best been articulated by RCAP in its principle of recognition.

The principle of mutual recognition calls on non-Aboriginal Canadians to recognize that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants and caretakers of this land and have distinctive rights and responsibilities flowing from that status. It calls on Aboriginal people to accept that non-Aboriginal people are also of this land now, by birth and by adoption, with strong ties of love and loyalty. It requires both sides to acknowledge and relate to one another as partners, respecting each other's laws and institutions and co-operating for mutual benefit (RCAP 1996a: 20).

When Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples fully recognize each other, the central values that come to govern collaboration are those that apply to Circle work more generally: Respect, Honesty, Trust, Humility, Sharing, Inclusivity, Empathy, Courage, Forgiveness and Love (Pranis et al. 2003: 47). Museum endeavours should also be recognized as spiritual endeavours that must be accomplished in a good way, in good faith between those concerned. While negative emotions will inevitably be brought to the surface, there are more positive ways that these emotions can be managed. Currently, intense emotions often surface as unexpected outbursts that lead to tension within the relationships. However, in a Circle paradigm, when negativity arises, museum employees and Aboriginal community members attempt to remember their shared values. They subsequently choose their words carefully, and they do their best to react in a compassionate manner that promotes unity between those present (Pranis et al. 2003: 20). Other diverse groups who collaborate with museums should also be asked to do so in a Circle and to recognize the shared values listed above.

### *The Circle and Display*

The majority of museums currently use the concept of progress as a means of structuring their historical displays, a tactic that Bennett (1995) points out was originally developed to display a model version of society, in which indigenous peoples were phased out as time progressed. Institutions, such as museums, were ideological spaces that displayed the differences between ‘civilized’ nations and ‘primitive’ peoples alongside a historical timeline that generally placed European nations at the pinnacle of achievement (Bennett 1995: 77). In Canadian museums, Aboriginal culture and achievements are primarily used as an introduction to history, implying that an Aboriginal influence to society is only located in the past.<sup>111</sup> Though the voices of minorities often subvert the narrative of progress by inserting competing memories into the gallery space, these are not strong enough to override the structure of the galleries themselves.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, despite curatorial efforts to be inclusive, structuring history in a linear fashion has often resulted in the omission of local Aboriginal communities in favour of presenting an idealized version of settlement.

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<sup>111</sup> See for example the galleries at the Museum of Vancouver, North Vancouver Museum & Archives and Langley Centennial Museum, visited in 2011.

<sup>112</sup> See the Surrey Museum, Museum of Vancouver and Royal BC Museum, visited in 2011

This runs contrary to the intentions of these groups as well as those curating the exhibition spaces.

If the Circle were used as the underlying structure of history galleries, then the notion of progress, as well as any false myth-making could be easily removed. If we employ a Métis nation model, then Canadian society is envisioned as an inclusive Circle that gradually expands to accept new, distinct peoples (Saul 2008). Moreover, history is not linear, but follows cyclical time, as more and more individuals and groups are integrated into society (Marker 2011: 100). In many ways, this concept accurately reflects Canadian society, in which waves of immigrants from increasingly diverse countries are welcomed to the territory and given a distinct place in the country's culture. New groups are not asked to assimilate, but to integrate (Meer and Modood 2012). They are each respected for their unique identities and worldviews within an expansive network of complex relationships.

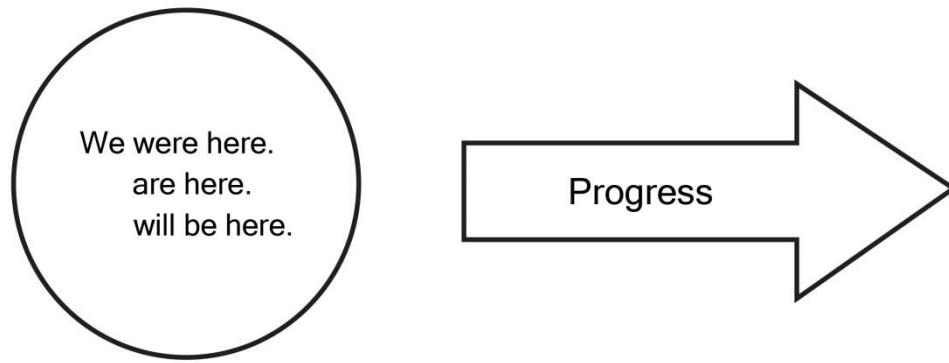
Adopting a cyclical view of time automatically changes the themes and topics that may be displayed within the gallery space. When time is conceived as Circular, “it is not a linear progression of people and ideas in time, but rather a spiralling of events and themes that appear and reappear within circles of seasons” (Marker 2011: 100). This may initially seem difficult to conceive for many Canadians, and yet, a further exploration reveals that this paradigm allows well for the discussion of major events in Canadian history, including those that have previously been omitted.

In the Circular paradigm, the starting place is the local territory, as the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and their lands and resources is considered one of sacred stewardship. According to Marker (2011), for Aboriginal peoples, the past is always located in the local, traditional territory, and that territory is viewed as the fixed point around which all other things revolve (Marker 2011: 102-105). The local Aboriginal community should therefore be presented as those who provide the foundation for place, as only they possess authority in the territory when all others are permanent visitors. Yet, the local territory also grounds settlers in place, in the community into which they have been integrated. Identifying territory as a core Canadian value is also one step to remedying the confused sense of identity that many Canadians have, as they struggle to define their place

in the country to which they may have been born, but do not feel they truly originate (Cohen 2007: 3).

When land and its resources are identified as core Canadian values, then topics like local resources and environmental protection become key parts of the Canadian story. Displays do not promote the ideology of progress. Rather, the established Circle of society simply becomes more complex. As other settlers arrive in the traditional territory, relationships are emphasized, and museum displays reflect the ongoing interactions between Aboriginal peoples and other communities that have taken place since contact. By using relatedness as another primary theme (Pranis 2007: 65; Hodge et al. 2009: 214), it becomes possible to discuss intermarriage, shared industries, racism, colonialism, residential schools, decolonization, and many other interactions that are specific to each location. The local Aboriginal community remains a foundation in all time periods and does not disappear within the gallery space. The Circle of society simply becomes more complex within their territory.

The current model for historical display places Aboriginal peoples in the timeless space before history begins. There is little room for Aboriginal peoples once progress takes hold:



**Figure 5 Primary Model for Museum History Galleries**

By contrast, the Circular model I suggest uses Aboriginal peoples as a foundation for society, and builds upon that foundation as they are joined by more settlers in the traditional

territory. The Circle expands and becomes increasingly complex, reflecting the addition of diverse community members:



**Figure 6 Suggested Circular Model for Museum History Galleries**

By adopting a Circular model of display, museum employees may begin to eliminate the problem of a hidden history from their galleries. Not only would this method allow the survival of Aboriginal peoples within the narrative, but it would also provide a framework for discussing interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples instead of portraying these parties as segregated. In an integrated history, Aboriginal, minority and Euro-Canadian views are presented, sharing the commonality of territory. While complexities may be discussed, these peoples are not polarized on different sides. History begins at home, contributing toward a secure identity for immigrants that is based in Canada.

#### *The Circle and Social Responsibility*

Lately, the definition of social responsibility has been changing in museums. Some scholars have suggested that those in museums have a responsibility to display social issues within their institutions (Sandell 2002; Gijssen 2008; Janes 2009; MuseumsEtc 2009, 2010; Frederick 2011: 26), and the public also seems to agree that addressing controversial subjects is necessary for museums to maintain their relevance (Cameron 2005: 220). Some go further, suggesting that social responsibility is not simply a matter of what issues the museum displays, but also what the museum does to alleviate the social concerns being

represented (Sutter and Worts 2005: 131). Museum employees are not only being asked to display social issues, but to engage with those issues directly. Janes (2008) has criticized museologists for refusing to make necessary changes that would see museums become relevant and sustainable institutions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He argues that museums must become socially embedded in their environments as active parts of the community (Janes 2008: 20). As socially embedded institutions, museums would respond to greater objectives that benefit society at large. They would become central to their communities' long-term planning, playing a role outside of their own purpose (Gijssen 2008: 46).

Perhaps it is time that museums were given new relevance in Canadian society. While some are questioning the sustainability of museum practice, I suggest that the key to social responsibility lies in reconciliation. As sites of public education, museums have a responsibility to correct omissions in Canadian history that continue to result in the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples throughout Canada (Francis 1997; Carleton 2011; Osborne 2011; Reid 2012). However, they must also act as embedded institutions that play a role in shaping the future of their local community and the country at large. This may mean being active designers of a more equal society, where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples share a fair relationship that is both respectful and mutually beneficial (RCAP 1996a: 20).

The concept of social-embeddedness can also be articulated in a Circle framework. When society is envisioned as an inclusive Circle (Saul 1998) that encompasses diverse communities, then institutions, such as museums, are embedded in an expansive network of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Where collections are diverse, the museum is part of many communities, which are each connected in the Circle of society. In this Aboriginal framework, all peoples and things are intimately related (Baskin 2005: 172; Castellano 2008: 386; Hodge et al. 2009: 214; Julien et al. 2010: 115). This means that what happens in one part of the Circle cannot be divorced from any other part. Moreover, if any one part of the Circle is out of balance, then the entire Circle becomes unbalanced (Pranis 2007: 65). Following this model, the health and wellbeing of a museum's communities is therefore directly tied to the health and wellbeing of the institution itself. For that institution to remain relevant and sustainable, it must contribute to the overall balance of the whole. Within the Circle, greater accountability to the group is placed on each individual. It is not

just a passive responsibility to do no harm, but an active responsibility to support and nurture the wellbeing of the other (Pranis 2007: 65). This means that respecting the goal of self-determination and a fair relationship with Canada also necessitates action on the part of non-Aboriginal members of the Circle.

When protesters first mounted criticisms against *The Spirit Sings*, they argued that museum employees could not claim to support Aboriginal peoples while ignoring the poor social conditions of their lives (Harrison 1988: 6). In response to the boycott, Michael Ames called support for the exhibition a political stance *for the objects* (Ames 1988: 83). Yet, I am asking those in the museum field to be willing to make a stand *for the people*. It is my view that one cannot respect a relationship with Aboriginal peoples unless willing to support the relationship in deeds and not merely in words. The social responsibility that employees bear is thus not only in curating about socially relevant topics (Frederick 2011: 26) or even in displaying the legacy of residential schools (IRSSA 2006, Schedule ‘N’). It is also in assisting communities to become self-governing, as a matter of rebalancing the Circle, which has become destabilized. This may mean at last acknowledging that museums are made up of individuals with spiritual values and moral intent. Remaining politically neutral is akin to supporting the status quo of marginalization that concerns the very people with whom museum employees are collaborating.

Rather, exhibitions should serve to challenge the public to engage in the political process by displaying different aspects of the legacy and inspiring social change. Employees may also wish to consider how their organizations can use their resources to assist the land and resource claims or other attempts at restitution that communities may be engaged in. Much can be learned from community museums, in which employees serve the needs of survivor communities first and design exhibitions that specifically support the communities’ political goals. Both the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre and National Nikkei Museum provide anti-racism education and partner with organizations that have an overt political agenda. For example, the NNM maintains a relationship with the Japanese Canadian Human Rights Committee, which continually lobbies for minority rights. Museum employees may do well to think about how their institutions can become actively involved in the fight for fair treaties and Aboriginal self-government. This may be

more beneficial than any general attempts to display ‘social issues’ while simultaneously divorcing the museum from the issues concerned.

#### **8.4 Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, the Circle is a methodological tool with vast potential to assist in collaboration with Aboriginal communities. The Circle may guide practice by providing a means of repairing Aboriginal-museum relationships, defining a new theoretical paradigm and changing the format of permanent history galleries. However, some museum employees may wonder whether an Aboriginal influence should be adopted to this extent, and what the incentives are for non-Aboriginal peoples to make such drastic changes in their institutions.

In countries that are undergoing similar processes of decolonization, there is a small but growing sentiment that decolonization must not only entail the correction of discriminatory policies and the acceptance of indigenous self-government and education. It is also a matter of indigenizing the mainstream by having the dominant society accept an indigenous component to their own identities and institutions (Coopes 2009; Price 2012). I believe that there is a greater Aboriginal influence in museums than many employees are aware of, and that furthermore, much of the frustration they experience in their positions (Brown, D. 2004: 16-17) may stem from the very fact that their institutions have *not* thus far been indigenized.

In examining how the Circle may apply to collaboration, a further question I have had is whether its overall structure can be employed to heal the tense relationships that currently exist between management and other employees in work environments that are increasingly being recognized as toxic.<sup>113</sup> Toxic work environments are created when organizations enter into financial crisis; with little resources to spare, managers may turn to bullying tactics in order to get results from their employees. In these institutions, employee morale is low, while a breakdown in strategic planning and problem-solving often also occurs (Kimura 2003: 28-29). The question of funding is ongoing in the museum field, and while there are no simple answers to the overall problem, it does seem to me that effective

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<sup>113</sup> This theme was prevalent among those I interviewed for this work, although names have primarily been omitted to safeguard the privacy of those concerned.

planning needs to be reinstated in many institutions. Employees that I have spoken with in BC have discussed the fact that they have many good ideas for the long-term future of their organization's operations. However, these frequently lay by the wayside, as employees spend their time overseeing the short-term objectives of various managers. Stress and frustration are common, and yet, it is my view that the problem is not only financial, but also structural, and simply one effect of the long-suppressed Métis nation.

The majority of museum operational structures are currently based on a hierarchical model that originated in Europe (Bennett 1995: 66). While various operational structures exist, there is a general model for Canadian museums, in which assistants report to the heads of departments, who each report to a director, who is answerable to a board of directors. As the board of directors often has little to do with the daily operations of the museum, the director is perceived as being at the top of the hierarchy. As such, the director has authority to govern the institution and to make decisions. In this model, employees serve their superiors, and all are ultimately serving the director. The majority of museums that I have encountered officially follow some variation of this model. Unfortunately, the way that Canadian museums actually operate is in complete discord with this structure. Unofficially, their practices often follow a very general Aboriginal framework, though depending on the institution involved, employees may know little about Aboriginal organizations and therefore may not recognize the origins of their behaviour.

One of the primary differences between Aboriginal and Western organizations is that Aboriginal organizational models do not often follow a hierarchical structure. In a recent study about Aboriginal leadership values, Julien et al. (2010) interviewed fifteen Aboriginal leaders from various organizations across Canada. Though participants came from a variety of Aboriginal backgrounds, several commonalities were identified by those being interviewed. The responses indicated that Aboriginal organizations tend to be flexible and non-hierarchical structures that focus more on group relations than on any one individual or group of individuals having control over others. Some Aboriginal languages and traditions do not have a word for leader, and several participants struggled to identify with this concept. This is because Aboriginal leaders are more often considered humble servants to the community, and no one person is always in charge. The respondents indicated that it is more common that many are leaders at different times depending on the

needs of a particular project. Reflecting the structure of the Circle, decisions are often made by consensus, rather than by one person who is seen to have authority. Decisions also take into account the long-term effects of the organization and the community (Julien et al 2010: 116-120).

The fact that this is sometimes how museums informally operate is perhaps more evident in institutions that have developed strong relationships with Aboriginal communities. For example, when new exhibitions are developed at MOA, each project is assigned a project team in the form of a Circle of participants who will oversee its development. The leader is determined according to a particular project and may rotate. Planning meetings and operational protocols in general reflect many of the values that are associated with Aboriginal organizations. This is obvious in the way that *The Forgotten* was initially approached by those at the museum. When presented with the question of whether to host the exhibition, the director brought the issue to the museum's employees, who spent three weeks discussing each of their perspectives and views on the subject, as everyone's views were valued. They reached an overwhelming consensus that MOA was not the right venue for Masik's artwork.<sup>114</sup> Though the exhibit was accepted despite the employees' reservations, they still decided by consensus that Shelton would become the project curator, and together, a Circle of employees was elected to oversee the exhibition. When employees met with members of the Women's Memorial March Committee, they again formed a separate working Circle comprising committee members and museum staff. Everyone's views were heard and minor decisions were made by consensus. Members of the committee and museum staff had equal authority. When Shelton cancelled the exhibit, it was not without consulting all other MOA employees who were involved in the project. Though final decision-making authority was given to the director, the employees involved felt that the cancellation was a group decision.<sup>115</sup>

Not all museums recognize these practices. However, even at museums that do little collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, such as the Vancouver Maritime Museum and National Nikkei Museum, I have observed some variation of Circular protocol. Moreover, in institutions where discord has been emerging between employees and managers,

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<sup>114</sup> Jennifer Webb, MOA Communications Manager. Interview by the author, February 9, 2011.

<sup>115</sup> Sarah Carr-Locke, Assistant Curator of *The Forgotten*, Email to the author, September 12, 2013.

confrontations often reflect a deep seated conflict between Aboriginal and European values. Employees often react strongly against top-down leadership methods and actively resist leaders who attempt to exert their own authority. Surprisingly, non-Aboriginal employees seem to expect their managers to surrender decision-making and to serve their employees and communities in the way that an Aboriginal leader would. The assumption that this should be happening seems deeply internalized by employees. As one of my interviewees explained, “What the managers forget is that public servants do not work for the managers, they work for the public, as do the managers”.<sup>116</sup> When things are perceived to go wrong, it is often because the operational structures of the museums involved still allow for individuals at the top of the hierarchy to override the consensus-based discussions that take place daily among employees. The eventual breakdown that occurred during *The Forgotten* was perhaps nothing more than a momentary lapse in judgment, in which the director chose to exercise the authority provided to him by his position instead of trusting the intuition of those in his Circle. The formal hierarchy of the institution enabled this to happen, and there were consequences.

Although no one I have spoken to has advanced the argument in these words, museum employees have demonstrated a desire for consensus based decision-making, which is deeply representative of the structure of the Circle (Julien et al. 2010; 116). It is a protocol that stems from the Métis nation that continues to affect Canadian behaviour and runs against the institutional structures reflective of the colonial state. When decisions are made by consensus, staff members feel that they are valued members of the organization, and the risk of poor decision-making is minimized. Judging from the high level of discord present in BC’s museums, museologists may want to consider moving toward a Circular operational model in the future. Such a model would allow for consensus based planning and decision-making among employees and managers, alleviating the discord caused by differences in formal and informal protocol.

If the Circle were imported into museum operations in the ways that I have described, then museums would be further along the path to decolonizing their institutions. It is not simply something that can be done to make things more comfortable for Aboriginal

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<sup>116</sup> Nanci Dunbrook, Programs Assistant and Volunteer Coordinator at the Vancouver Maritime Museum, Personal Communication, July 11, 2013.

communities. Museum employees may also find that doing so is of mutual benefit, creating more functional workplaces for the employees themselves.

In considering the early discussions surrounding reconciliation in Canada, it is clear that non-Aboriginal peoples are sometimes left out when it comes to creating a plan for the future. Aboriginal peoples identify reconciliation as the healing of Aboriginal individuals and communities, which may necessitate language revitalization (Flamand 2011: 73; Galley 2011: 224), self-determination (Kelly 2008: 22; Green 2012: 138) and the government redistribution of lands and resources (Rice and Snyder 2008: 53). They also identify the need for non-Aboriginal peoples to acknowledge the harm that has been done through Canada's assimilationist policies (Castellano 2008: 385). However, I argue that if Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples are part of the same Circle, then non-Aboriginal Canadians should not remain passive in this process.

After twenty-five years of collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, it is time for museum employees to make their commitment to decolonization known, by acknowledging that the museum field is not neutral when it comes to the rights of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and indigenous peoples throughout the world. I have discussed the act of collaboration as one of building alliances, in which museum employees and Aboriginal communities work together for mutual benefit (Hill and Nicks 1992: 82). However, Aboriginal activists have a different definition of what it means to be an ally. Allies are those who are willing to act alongside Aboriginal peoples to challenge the larger oppressive power structures within Canadian society (Gehl 2013). If museologists are to consider themselves allies to the communities they work with, then this is not only a museological commitment, but also a political commitment, which bears the responsibility of taking appropriate action to correct the injustices that remain within Canadian society. In a Métis nation, reviving a society that is intentionally based upon allyship within an inclusive Circle may indeed be the way forward.

## POSTSCRIPT

After completing my doctoral viva, I had the opportunity to visit MOA, where a new exhibit on residential schools, titled *Speaking to Memory: Images and Voices from St. Michael's Residential School* was on display. The exhibit primarily followed the format of other exhibits on the subject, using a combination of photographs taken by a former student at the Alert Bay school, as well as text panels and documents. Individual quotes were provided by survivors who attended St. Michael's and these were augmented by one lone artifact: a former mixer from the school's cafeteria. Strikingly, curator Bill McLennan had also taken contemporary photographs of the inside of the now dilapidated school, which still stands on Kwakwaka'wakw land. These were blown up to full scale, creating the haunting impression of being in the school. It had been 12 years since MOA hosted *Where are the Children?*, which had both impressed me with its content and disappointed me with its failure to reach visitors.

When I was visiting *Speaking to Memory*, a similar story unfolded. One visitor entered the exhibit and proceeded to frantically take photographs of the images on display, randomly and without stopping to seek out the subject of the exhibit. A father came in with three children who advanced the theory that the museum must have an exhibit on Indians because "Indians steal toys", to which the father agreed. The kids then proceeded to draw pictures in the visitor comment book while the father texted on his phone. One woman did seem to read through the panels, taking them seriously. Yet, at no time during my stay did a single visitor go over to the section of the exhibit featuring quotes from survivors, or spend more than two minutes reading the information available.

I do not doubt that this exhibit and others like it do reach a certain percentage of their visitors. However, there may be better ways to engage with the subject than have thus far been explored. It is a question of imagination, requiring both Aboriginal communities and museum employees to think outside of the box to bigger goals and more innovative approaches. It may be the case that exhibitions designed to assist communities in healing are also those that will prove interesting to visitors, accomplishing more effective education in areas where it is so duly needed.

## **APPENDIX 1**

The following article has been previously published in the journal *Museum Anthropology*, Vol 36(1), p. 4-17, 2013. This article has been reformatted and included as part of Chapter 3 of this thesis.

## PAMELA MASIK AND THE FORGOTTEN EXHIBITION: Controversy and Cancellation at the Museum of Anthropology

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the exhibition process behind Pamela Masik's *The Forgotten* at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology. Set to open in February 2011, the exhibition featured 69 portraits of missing and murdered women from the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. Masik's work is highly controversial, and the museum chose not to proceed with the exhibition after local Aboriginal activists from the Women's Memorial March intercepted the curatorial process. I argue that the way the museum staff negotiated the collaborative process reflects a contact zone mentality that has been deeply internalized in museums. This normalization of conflict poses the risk of negatively affecting relationships with communities and ought to be rethought by those in the field. [missing women, Downtown Eastside Vancouver, contact zones, controversy, colonialism, Women's Memorial March, Pamela Masik]

In February 2011, the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology (MOA) had planned to exhibit the work of Pamela Masik. Masik's project, titled *The Forgotten*, had come to be a central focus for debate, with strong opinions voiced both for and against her work. Her portraits of 69 missing and murdered women from the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver have raised several questions as to the nature of representation, voice, and ethics that will be quite familiar to museum scholars. MOA's choice to accept and later cancel the exhibit has been met with confusion on the part of the public as to the museum's true position. Although the staff at the museum believed they were contributing to dialogue on one of Vancouver's most pressing social issues, the result of their endeavors alienated the very people with whom they were hoping to collaborate. When a group of advocates from the Downtown Eastside intercepted the curatorial process, the staff members were suddenly thrust into a long-standing confronta-

tion between Masik and the Downtown Eastside community. The museum's attempts to navigate the relationships among all parties stem from museological theory and practice that have evolved within the institution over the last 20 years. However, this practice may be at the root of what could have become one of the biggest controversies in the history of Canadian museums. As a former MOA employee and current museology student, I was conducting research at the museum at the time leading up to the exhibit's cancellation. My aim is to depict the exhibition process for others, as it may be time to reexamine some of the frameworks commonly taken for granted within the discipline. I focus in particular on James Clifford's (1997) contact zone theory, which I argue has had the unintended effect of normalizing conflict within museums to the detriment of community relationships.

### MISSING WOMEN IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Although the current figures are difficult to ascertain, it is estimated that close to six hundred Aboriginal women have disappeared or been murdered in Canada in the last 30 years.<sup>1</sup> Across the country, over four thousand women are missing or have been murdered, with Aboriginal women being far more likely to go missing and five times as likely to die at the hands of violence (Amnesty International 2004:23).<sup>2</sup> In British Columbia, incidences have become well known in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver and off of Highway 16 between the cities of Prince George and Prince Rupert. Yet, this is also a nationwide problem, with other high-risk areas in Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg (Jacobs and Williams 2008:134).

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside has long been posited as a place of degradation and social ills.<sup>3</sup> However, the stereotypes assigned to the Downtown Eastside have been changing in recent years as residents push for a different view of their community. Those who live in the area stress the neighborhood's focus on acceptance (Zuluaga and Walia 2011). For many people with mental health issues or addictions, this is the one place where they have found acceptance without judgment. This is a neighborhood where people still know each other and are actively involved in community life. On many occasions, it has been called the most vibrant neighborhood in Vancouver, with a character of its own that residents would rather

retain than have blighted by city planners with an eye toward redevelopment. Though revitalization may seem like the answer to many of the neighborhood's social problems, it also poses a grave risk to many residents who survive mainly because of the strong community connections they have. The potential for redevelopment and the ensuing dispersal of residents weighs heavily on the well-being of these residents, whose stance remains that they have a right to exist and to have a say in strengthening their own community (Pedersen and Swanson 2010:5). Resistance to neighborhood gentrification is often deeply entwined with artistic production and enacted through activities that lay claim to Downtown Eastside spaces. Community art projects stake a claim to property that stands in contrast to both housing developments and higher profile galleries perceived to be encroaching on community space (Blomley 2004; Enright 2010).

However we construe the Downtown Eastside, we also cannot gloss over the real problems faced by residents living in this area. When compared with other places in Vancouver, the neighborhood does have a higher proportion of people living in poverty and a high prevalence of HIV and hepatitis C infection, as well as high rates of addiction and mental illness (Planning Department 2009:7; Zuluaga and Walia 2011). Young people often come to the neighborhood escaping abusive upbringings, initially finding the Downtown Eastside a much safer and welcoming environment than home. Many women are engaged in survival sex work, and the lack of affordable and safe housing contributes to a risk of assault. Local battles over safe shelters for women, access to medical care, and improved social services are ongoing.

Unfortunately, the area is also now known for the number of women who have gone missing from the neighborhood since the 1980s. Because the women involved were mainly sex workers, many of them suffering addictions and seen to be leading a high-risk lifestyle, little if any attention was initially given to investigating their disappearances. Though friends and family members lobbied police forces, they were consistently met with barriers and were told repeatedly that their family members were probably not missing and had chosen to move elsewhere or to disappear (Cameron 2010:92). Police portrayed the missing women as transient individuals, despite the fact that families insisted they had always kept regular

contact. The images of women who were loved and connected to their families despite addiction problems and involvement in the sex trade did not fit with police stereotypes concerning the missing. Despite the ongoing endeavors of advocates for the area, women continued to go missing throughout the 1980s and 1990s with little done to solve the cases. When those in the neighborhood became concerned that at least one serial killer was frequenting the area, they were repeatedly told by police that there was no evidence of serial murder and that the disappearances were not related to each other (Cameron 2010:253).

The arrest of Robert Pickton in February 2002 launched the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) into a murder investigation that would prove to be the largest in Canadian history. After years of insisting the disappearances were not connected and dedicating few police resources to the cases, the RCMP found themselves involved in something far beyond what they could have imagined. The details have been covered extensively by the media, with the DNA and remains of over thirty women now recovered from the Pickton farm.<sup>4</sup> The high-profile case struck a chord with the public, as the details of the trial were slowly unveiled and sensationalized by the press. Again, families of the victims were subjected to extreme insensitivity as they navigated the court process. A lack of support services for families and limited involvement and communication with authorities occurred at all levels (Cameron 2010:598–602). When Pickton was convicted on six counts, justice was served for some families. However, most women would never have their murders go to trial, and for other families, there were still no clues as to what had happened to their missing loved ones. Furthermore, the levels of violence faced by Downtown Eastside residents have not changed since the Pickton trial. This grave problem is not characterized by the vagrancy of one individual but rather is characteristic of larger socioeconomic problems that place some women at greater risk.

At a public forum in January 2011, activists and community workers met to discuss an inquiry into the actions of the Vancouver police.<sup>5</sup> Speakers of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descent stressed the importance of understanding the case of murdered and missing women as an Aboriginal issue. Although this is also an issue of poverty that affects women of

other ethnicities, a greater number of Aboriginal women have gone missing from the Downtown Eastside and across the country. Aboriginal peoples view the situation as part of the legacy of colonialism that has devalued Aboriginal women and placed them at greater risk for violence. Gladys Radek and Bernie Williams spoke on behalf of the Walk4Justice, which Radek began as a response to a similar situation outside Prince George.<sup>6</sup> On Highway 16, known as the *Highway of Tears*, 32 women have gone missing between Prince George and Prince Rupert, where it appears that a serial killer is at work, targeting Aboriginal women living in communities along the length of the highway. Little media attention had been given to the disappearances until one white woman went missing. At that point, the largest search and rescue mission in British Columbia's history was launched, indicating that when it comes to the value of a life, it really does depend on who you are. For communities that have had to deal with the ongoing presence of violence, coupled with the repeated disappearances of friends and family members, the loss is unimaginable.<sup>7</sup>

The situation is made worse when violence against Aboriginal women is often overlooked or ignored by the RCMP. Racism within the police forces is an ongoing problem stemming from the role that the RCMP has historically played in enforcing the Indian Act. Originally named North-West Mounted Police, the police force was created in 1873 as a self-contained instrument of the law entrusted with magisterial powers. The force was developed to assist European settlement by preventing Aboriginal resistance to colonization, and some scholars argue that the investment of such powers in the context of isolation effectively rendered the force a separate government (Nettelbeck and Smandy 2010:359). In Vancouver, the Downtown Eastside is also considered prime real estate by developers, and some Aboriginal residents feel that those in power are still seeking to remove them from their traditional territory so that development can take place.<sup>8</sup> At the forum, Angela MacDougal, a non-Native activist stated, "We cannot ignore the fact that law enforcement in this country has been created with the very purpose of removing indigenous people off the land. And it is still the land. It has always been the land."<sup>9</sup> Some residents view racism and the potential value of real estate as the

primary reasons why police appear unconcerned when Aboriginal women in the Downtown Eastside are murdered or disappear.<sup>10</sup>

As discussions about the missing women continue in the media, those in the Downtown Eastside also continue to commemorate the people who have been lost. Most of this commemoration takes place privately. However, with so much denial on the part of public officials, remembering the missing women has increasingly become a public affair, as the spaces of violence are reclaimed by the community.<sup>11</sup> Vancouver's largest memorial event, the Women's Memorial March, takes place on Valentine's Day, where a group of family members, friends, and activists has been walking every year since 1991. When crowds gather at the Carnegie Community Centre, they are led by family members who carry banners and a memorial quilt in honor of those who have disappeared. The group blocks off the intersection of Main and Hastings for around half an hour, as the public gathers to the sound of drumming and the names of the disappeared are read aloud. The march then proceeds through the Downtown Eastside, stopping at sites where women were murdered or were last seen. At each spot, the area is smudged with sage and a rose is laid down in remembrance: red for the murdered and yellow for the missing. The group stops outside the police station, forms a rally demanding justice for those subjected to violence, and finishes the march in Oppenheimer Park. The community then gathers for a feast at the Japanese Language School. In 2011, the 20th anniversary of the march was marked with two weeks of memorial events. In heavy rain, over four hundred people joined the final march. During the 2010 Olympics and in better weather, the march has been estimated to include over five thousand people, showing that awareness and concern is also growing among members of the general public. Marches now also take place on this date in ten other cities across Canada.

It is unsurprising that a number of artists have chosen to portray the issue at hand (see Kovacic 2007; Townsend-Gault and Luna 2003). Pamela Masik's project was set to open at the Museum of Anthropology in February 2011. *The Forgotten* comprises 69 larger-than-life, 8'x10' portraits of missing and murdered women from the Downtown Eastside. Her intention was to make each portrait so large that it

could not be ignored and to take this message to those sections of the public who may not be aware or who choose not to see how many women who live in the Downtown Eastside are treated. She does not envision herself as a spokesperson for friends and family of the missing women and has always maintained that she speaks only for herself as an artist. Being moved by what was happening, she saw her art as a means of creating social change (Masik 2010a).

The paintings were based on photographs of the disappeared, some of which were provided by family members and others that were taken from mug shots, which are often the only available photos released to the public. As part of the process of dealing with the subject, Masik included references to the violent fates to which the women were subject, in some cases slashing and abusing the portraits or including pieces of plastic packaging and other references to remains found at the Pickton farm. Although she is aware of concerns that people may have about the way these women are portrayed, she wanted to represent the truth of what happened in a way that would force people to stop and really think about the issue.

I believe this controversy I face will someday subside and I will be led to do the right thing so the intention of this work—to create awareness and dialogue—will be embraced in a positive way by those who I truly want to help. My hopes are that this project becomes a platform for discussion, confronting issues much of society hasn't wanted to face. [Masik 2010c:para 1]

The mantra she developed for the collection is: everyone has the right to a dignified life (Masik 2010b).

Like many artists, Masik also uses her art as a means of working through issues from her own past, and the emotional process of creating described throughout her blog indicates that the resulting portraits are as much about her as they are about the missing women. As if to further prove this point, Masik painted her own portrait as part of the series, though without the intention to display it. Masik has lived on the Downtown Eastside and volunteers by teaching art classes for local women. Many of the women she works with are friends of those who have disappeared and consider themselves survivors. Noting that art has helped her work through abuse that she has suffered, she feels strongly about teaching art

to others as a mode of healing as well as giving back to the community. When she began work on *The Forgotten*, Masik started to attend meetings of the Women's Memorial March Committee. However, she quickly fell out of favor with the group when they suspected her motivations had less to do with assisting the march and more to do with promoting her art.<sup>12</sup> Advocates of the committee have been the most vocal of all of her critics in questioning her intentions, her artwork, and its proposed location at MOA.

In February of 2011, I sat down with two representatives of the Women's Memorial March Committee, Gloria Larocque and Corinthia Kelly, to better understand their concerns. The position of these advocates for the Downtown Eastside community was not necessarily that the art should not be shown but that problems existed with the process behind the art, which involved questions of ethnicity and representation. A primary concern was the extent to which the families of the missing women had been consulted before such paintings were to be displayed in a public institution. A secondary concern was their awareness that MOA's interpretation was focused more generally on violence against women and would therefore gloss over the specific situations of the women involved, which, due to factors of ethnicity, were experientially different. A third concern emerged over issues of representation and the need to represent the subject in a sensitive way.

According to Larocque and Kelly, for many family members and friends of the missing women, *The Forgotten* represented an indignity and further exploitation of the women's lives. Although Masik may not have had better photos to work from, mug shots are an embarrassment, often taken at a person's worst moment, they explained. This is not the way that anyone would want to be remembered, they argued, and certainly not the way that anyone would want to be permanently memorialized. Though it was not the intention of the artist to create a memorial with her work, the paintings still act in this way. Considerable discussion regarding what forms a public memorial should take to communicate the right message typically precede the creation of a memorial. The advocates provided the example of the Women's Memorial March as an event that honors the women and respects the different wishes of family members. For example, in some Aboriginal traditions, it is

disrespectful to speak a person's name after death. These names are not read aloud during the march. By contrast, the advocates felt that instead of remembering the lives that these women had, the exhibit's title implied the women were of little importance—a view that friends and family had been fighting very hard to combat. The term *forgotten* was seen as an indignity within the community. As Larocque explained,

That's like saying that all of our hard work ... twenty years in the making of trying to remember and trying to get society to remember, [is forgotten]. She comes in and promotes something like "we forgot these women" ... but her saying we forgot these women is silencing the families that have been demanding justice, that have been demanding and seeking some kind of reprisal, away from what they see as lack of action. There are many women that will *never* be found, whose killers will *never* be admonished. They [the families] will *never* get the satisfaction of closure. But they never forgot.<sup>13</sup>

Other fears surround the sensationalism to which the Downtown Eastside is often subject. This is an area made famous by the largest case of serial killings in Canadian history, where journalists and photographers often traverse in the hope of feeding the interest of the public. Kelly and Larocque explained to me that for those involved, this sensationalism only provides more trauma and exploitation of what is a very profound pain. For friends and family, their trauma has been sensationalized in the press for the last 20 years, often without consideration for the further harm this causes. The advocates wondered: Should this be made into an afternoon outing, where wealthy citizens can go to the museum, talk about how terrible the situation is over dinner, and, in effect, use the tragedy for entertainment value? Is respect being afforded the families when an institution endorses this? A particularly pressing concern of the advocates was whether suitable permission had been obtained from *all* of the families for the work to be shown.

In our meeting, Larocque and Kelly also expressed concern about the theoretical frameworks chosen by the museum, which had initially become known to them through publicity for the exhibition and coordinating events. By positing the issue of violence as one affecting all women worldwide, advocates felt that the

museum was quick to adopt a feminist framework. Gender was used as the basis of who was being targeted for violence and why. Although no one would argue against the fact that this is an endemic problem facing women, the use of feminist frameworks also had the unintentional consequence of making invisible any discussion of race. The museum would be using portraits of a decidedly local phenomenon involving both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women. The problem is that experientially, the issues that led women to the Downtown Eastside, perhaps into drugs and perhaps into sex work, were different. The reasons these women were marginalized were different, and the reasons they were victimized were different. The artist's perspective that this kind of violence is everyone's issue showed that "[s]he had no awareness of how different the world is for Aboriginal women. She didn't know."<sup>14</sup>

In the course of my research, I have repeatedly returned to the following perceptual problem: when a white woman is assaulted, it is because she is a woman; when an Aboriginal woman is assaulted, it is because she is Aboriginal. When an Aboriginal woman is assaulted, it is inherently embodied, experienced, and interpreted differently by the survivor, who cannot easily separate the experience from the legacy of colonialism and may, in fact, view the act decidedly through this lens. Moreover, this difference is important enough to make any gender-based interpretation of violence in the Downtown Eastside insufficient. Using portraits of the missing women to illustrate a women's issue would in fact silence the individual experiences of those involved, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

The inclusion of Aboriginal women also raised questions about representation. Although Western attitudes usually favor freedom of information and expression, the issue of representation is quite different within some Aboriginal traditions, particularly in British Columbia. In Northwest Coast cultures, imagery and the rights to create and display it are often subject to hereditary title, in which art is directly linked to inherited privileges that are ceremonially transferred from one generation to the next (Ostrowitz 1999:22). Artists accept a responsibility to transmit the history of their people in accordance with the spiritual values of the group, and works of art are thought to embody the cultural philosophy and worldview of the community (Miller and Pavel

2008:40). Museums in British Columbia are well aware that, in Aboriginal communities, ownership of intangible culture, such as songs, stories, and the rights to represent something artistically, is of primary importance. I do not intend to imply that anyone has strict ownership rights over who can and cannot discuss the subject of missing women, but I do wish to stress that in Aboriginal communities a different level of consideration exists regarding the presentation of imagery and the responsibility that comes with knowledge. When I broached this subject with the advocates, they agreed that there were cultural differences involved and that representing these women in the particular manner that Pamela Masik had done felt intuitively wrong to them as Aboriginal women. They had difficulty imagining any Aboriginal artist choosing such a graphic means of portraying the subject, and they expressed concern that such a sensitive issue was not being represented “in a good way,” an Aboriginal expression that indicates something should be done in a spiritual way.<sup>15</sup> They viewed Masik’s graphic portrayal as problematic when roughly one-third of the missing women were Aboriginal and when the exhibit was set to open at MOA, a space that is supposed to represent Aboriginal voices. These concerns led the advocates to approach the museum to ensure that MOA was sufficiently addressing the issues. As the museum’s exhibition process reveals, the staff were aware of these complexities; however, they were not prepared for the sensitivities that arose when the Women’s Memorial March became involved in the exhibition.

### **THE FORGOTTEN AND THE MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

When Director Anthony Shelton first saw works from *The Forgotten*, he was immediately struck by the paintings and thought that they raised an important issue that needed to be discussed.<sup>16</sup> He and Masik shared the same vision of using the paintings as an initial platform for bringing attention to the larger issues concerned. With the museum’s recent renewal completed, one of its aims is to have a role in discussing contemporary social issues.<sup>17</sup> The museum has often posited itself as a place of confrontation and debate—a venue that does not shy away from controversy but rather values the institution as a space of dialogue. However, the staff had not yet worked out a

suitable methodology for creating exhibits based on controversial local issues.<sup>18</sup>

When the concept for the exhibit was pitched to the museum’s exhibitions committee, a large number of the staff began their own lengthy dialogues on whether there was justification for accepting the exhibit and what potential problems could arise. The exhibit was not accepted lightly, and for about three weeks, the staff debated some of the major questions involved. Many people had gut reactions against taking the exhibit and saw the way the women had been portrayed as degrading. Questions were raised as to whether MOA, as a place for Aboriginal art, would be seen as exploiting Aboriginal women. They also wanted to know how family members of the missing women viewed the art and to what extent they had been involved in Masik’s process. Despite these reservations, Shelton had a vision for the exhibit and firmly believed that the issues needed to be discussed. As one member of the staff recalled, Shelton felt strongly about discussing the larger issue of violence against women worldwide, and there really was no argument against that.<sup>19</sup> After these discussions, the staff came on board to try to create an exhibit that would showcase Masik’s artwork and also communicate some of the larger issues about violence against women. The exhibit would ideally be issue driven and not art focused. Because the vision was Shelton’s, he and the rest of the staff decided that he would be the primary curator.

The museum contacted faculty from around the university who they thought would have expertise to contribute. These included representatives from the department of Women’s and Gender Studies, First Nations Studies, the First Nations House of Learning, and Humanities 101 (a university program for Downtown Eastside residents). By extending the conversation outward, the museum hoped to be able to curate an exhibit that gave suitable interpretation alongside Masik’s artwork and discussed the global implications of violence. From the outset of the exhibit process, it had become clear that Masik’s work should not stand alone at the museum. Although the museum does not always do collaborative exhibits, they recognized problems of representation, and they questioned the fact that one woman’s voice could speak for this issue. MOA staff began to discuss possibilities with UBC collaborators for a lecture series, film screenings, and

other events that could accompany the exhibit to make up for its lack of interpretation. Several professors thought *The Forgotten* would fit well with their course curricula and planned sections of their classes to address the exhibit and its subject matter.

Meanwhile, MOA began to arrange for others to be included. Given the sensitivity of the subject at hand, they wanted to provide special services to family members and close friends, and they discussed having a separate opening or a cleansing ceremony to close the exhibit for those close to the women. Reaching family members for these events was difficult; although the museum would ordinarily have made contact with all involved parties before an exhibit was accepted, in this case the artist became the mediator between MOA and the Downtown Eastside community. Masik had initially contacted a victim services representative at the RCMP to send out a letter to their family contacts on her behalf. As one would expect, some families came forward and others did not respond. In a meeting at the museum, Masik explained to MOA staff that she had researched all of the women's stories and that she wanted to respect the families (Museum of Anthropology 2010a). She said that families had been generally supportive, but, for example, one woman did not like the way the piece of her sister was painted and found it emotionally difficult. MOA decided to use Masik's contact at the RCMP to get in touch with the families again. They thought their best strategy was to contact the people they could and wait for other family members to approach the museum. In the meantime, MOA staff also discussed how they could provide bus tickets to Downtown Eastside residents to get to the events and whether they should contact Downtown Eastside organizations for assistance, particularly in reaching friends of the missing women and others who should be afforded family status. In looking for speakers for the public opening, they considered asking members of the Women's Memorial March Committee (Museum of Anthropology 2010b).

By August 2010, much had been done by way of discussion in the museum, but there had been little in the way of action when it came to making contact with the Downtown Eastside community. Furthermore, the community had begun to speculate as to what the museum was doing. Everything came to a head very abruptly when, on August 12, 2010, mem-

bers of the Women's Memorial March Committee sent an e-mail to the museum that voiced their concerns about *The Forgotten* and a roundtable discussion that was scheduled the following day at Harbour Centre through Simon Fraser University.<sup>20</sup> The e-mail to Anthony Shelton stated,

As an artist, Ms. Masik has the right to freely express herself. ... We are dismayed though, that your University would choose to endorse her project and lend her your credibility and support as a representative for women in the Downtown Eastside or as an artist whose work fits in at the Museum of Anthropology.

First Nations women, the life givers, are best empowered by inviting them to be heard in a respectful and honourable way. We have, in our midst, many powerful and articulate First Nations women ... [who] would have been more appropriate choices since they have demonstrated their awareness and commitment to accurately and respectfully honour women living on the margins.<sup>21</sup>

Sections of the letter were strongly worded, calling for the museum to cancel the exhibit immediately. Members of the committee were advocates for Downtown Eastside residents and were aware of responses from within the community. One committee member explained to me, "Women that I know, street sisters to the women who were killed, were devastated—just enraged. And so I felt really certain about what their position was."<sup>22</sup> Shelton and his assistant curator, Sarah Carr-Locke, attended the Simon Fraser University symposium the following day to gain a better understanding before responding to the women's letter. The symposium was hosted by a group of scholars who were primarily working in feminist frameworks. The scholars were quite shocked when a group of women stood up and refused to let Masik speak.<sup>23</sup>

The artist responded defensively, stating that she had been receiving threatening phone calls because of *The Forgotten*. She demanded the group stop threatening her and stated her rights to freedom of expression. She later recounted the event in a blog post:

I could have stood before the microphone and said anything because it was not acknowledged anyway. These women are so blind and deaf to any greater perspective on the issues, that illustrate[s] they are not theirs to own. Many women over the years have experienced very similar stories despite the differences in class, race, ethnicity and sexuality. I have been discriminated [against], among the many things named, a “white privileged” woman. Despite sharing some things about my story, my past experiences, my wounds weren’t as big as theirs. How could I understand their plight? I sat there taking bullets. [Masik 2010a:para 1]

Carr-Locke recalls what happened as the floor was taken over by speakers and the audience listened to six or seven survivor stories by those who had been sexually assaulted in the Downtown Eastside or attended residential schools. Masik, who had been receiving threats over her work and who had now been attacked at a public event, reacted emotionally and did not seem to understand the viewpoint being presented to her: that for the individuals involved, colonization had been a traumatic experience, and they experienced Masik’s artwork as a continuation of this trauma.<sup>24</sup> For the museum’s part, the staff suddenly realized the magnitude of what they had become involved in. They later learned that several panelists had pulled out of the event early, refusing to participate in a dialogue with the artist. This was a sign of things to come.

The following day, Shelton responded to the Women’s Memorial March Committee. He invited them to talk with the museum staff and offered the alternative of meeting somewhere more convenient to them. The group met at the museum in October, by which time the exhibit opening was only four months away. When the Women’s Memorial March Committee presented their concerns to MOA, they were told that the exhibit would not be cancelled and that the museum had a professional obligation to Pamela Masik. However, the museum staff were sympathetic to the women’s concerns and wished to involve them in the exhibition. The museum staff began to hold a series of separate meetings with the committee as they attempted to redesign the exhibit in a way that would work for everyone. The main

concept came under the heading of *Recall, Remember, Respond, React*, which would have included Masik’s *The Forgotten* project as one section of the exhibit, another exhibit put together by the Women’s Memorial March Committee that would voice Downtown Eastside perspectives, and a detox area where visitors could reflect, recover, and find information about what they could do to help the cause. The museum planned to provide pamphlets from Downtown Eastside organizations and lists of contact details for local Members of Parliament. The hope was that, along with being confronted by Masik’s artwork, visitors would also gain an understanding of the issues at play and be challenged to act.

With only three months until the opening, advocates who had come forward to challenge the exhibit were suddenly placed in the position of curating it, something quite outside their expertise. This collaborative project may have worked given a longer time frame, but there was not time for the museum to properly guide them in this process. Furthermore, it was becoming clear that opposition to the exhibit threatened to overrun the museum’s goal of promoting dialogue. Masik was hesitant to do any public appearances in association with the exhibit after the symposium at Simon Fraser University. Organizations from the Downtown Eastside refused to be associated with Masik in any way, even in providing promotional materials about their services. Some UBC professors decided they would not be comfortable taking their classes inside the museum as long as the Masik exhibit was featured. Filmmakers who had originally agreed to show their films recanted their participation. Moreover, at this stage, the Women’s Memorial March Committee confirmed that, although they were working with the museum, they also would be protesting outside for the duration of the Masik exhibit. Eventually, the committee decided they did not want to be associated with the Masik content at all and pulled out completely. It should be noted that this was the committee’s decision; however, Kelly and Larocque still wished to work with the museum.

During this time, something strange had begun to happen behind the scenes of the museum’s exhibit meetings as the staff began to realize that the protest might actually serve everyone’s needs. The museum’s main goal was to facilitate discussion and debate and

garner attention to this controversial issue. However, they were quickly losing any programming they had, with an artist who would not be a public spokesperson, and with all other parties refusing to be associated with her content in any way. Although the museum hoped to bring the community in to debate Masik's work, it was a debate in which the community refused to engage. MOA was essentially stone-walled on all sides, and their only real option was to hang *The Forgotten* paintings on their own, letting Masik's voice speak for the issue. This was the very thing they had been trying to avoid from the exhibit's inception. Yet, the staff wondered if the protest could be of benefit. There would be ample discussion and attention to the exhibit, and the Women's Memorial March Committee would also succeed in getting their views heard on an even grander scale than planned. After 20 years of taking a public stand against violence, a highly publicized protest at a world-class museum could serve their needs well. As the collaborative process was failing and tensions rising, some museum staff wondered if perhaps the best thing to do would be to mount a controversial exhibit and let it all fall apart.<sup>25</sup> It was, however, at this point in mid-January that Shelton decided to cancel *The Forgotten* exhibit entirely because of his concerns that *productive* dialogue would not ensue and that going ahead with the exhibit as it was would only cause further distress to those most affected by the issues (Museum of Anthropology 2011, emphasis mine).

## DISCUSSION

When I first heard about the possibility of the Women's Memorial March Committee actively protesting at MOA, I have to admit that I was excited. As a museology student who has been schooled in the major political shifts occurring in the discipline and the effects of *The Spirit Sings* and *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibits on Canadian museums in the late 1980s (see Ames 1988; Butler 2008; Clifford 1997; Harrison 1988), I have a certain fondness for museum controversy. Both of these exhibits came under scrutiny from Aboriginal and other minority groups, which led museums to question their presumed authority within their respective institutions.<sup>26</sup> These highly publicized protests contributed to the formation of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, which ushered in an era of tense collaboration

between source communities and museums in Canada throughout the 1990s (Assembly of First Nations and Canadian Museum of Civilization 1992). During this time, Canadian scholars readily adopted James Clifford's (1997) contact zones theory, in which he explained both *The Spirit Sings* and *Into the Heart of Africa* as cases of conflict between cultures. Borrowing from Mary Louise Pratt, the contact zone was defined as:

the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. [Pratt 1992:6–7]

Clifford stressed that the interactions taking place within museums were subject to asymmetrical power relations that fit within this definition (Clifford 1997:192). Since then, museum workers have internalized the notion of working within this space of conflict by adapting their own practices to accommodate the tensions often brought out by community work. Museum curators and other staff appreciate the fact that Aboriginal communities challenge their practices, and some have even adopted a vision of confronting visitors to highlight the difficulties of operating as a colonial institution that is in the process of decolonization. It is not always clear how visitors interpret these practices. Recently, there has been an increased focus on museums as socially relevant, and, in one study, a survey of MOA visitors showed that 82 percent felt the museum had a social responsibility to exhibit controversial topics (Cameron 2005:220). Despite this willingness on the part of the public, visitors are perhaps less appreciative of having their own expectations challenged within museums (Crane 1997:45). Yet, at times, conflict has fueled discussion and has almost come to be seen by museum workers as another tool of education. Many questions were raised by *The Forgotten*, but there is only one that I wish to address: Is it possible that the museum field has become too caught up in a conflict mentality to the detriment of its communities or its public?

In knowingly mounting an exhibit this controversial, MOA may have risked damaging its existing relationships with Aboriginal communities throughout the province. Many communities have connections to

family members living in the Downtown Eastside, and violence against Aboriginal women is also an acute issue throughout the province. We can only speculate as to whether people would have joined the Women's Memorial March Committee in protest, but it seems clear from the strong reactions of Downtown Eastside residents and the general public that this was a very real possibility, if not a certainty.<sup>27</sup> I believe that had MOA proceeded with the exhibit, the reaction could have been incredibly detrimental to the institution. Shelton's decision to cancel the exhibit avoided a controversy that could have surpassed *The Spirit Sings* and *Into the Heart of Africa* in public backlash.

I argue that there is a problem stemming from the fact that museum workers are so well versed in the academic theory of their daily practices. Many museum workers have been trained to be aware of the links between museums and colonialism, and they are conscious of the ethical stance of each of their actions. Even a gift shop worker at the museum has to face a series of ethical dilemmas each time they come to work. Am I of Aboriginal descent? Do I have a right to be here and talk about these things? Can I accept my role here or am I complicit in colonialism? The pressure only increases for curators and other staff members who must grapple with the political tensions of working in this environment on a daily basis. In this specific case, the museum saw itself as a space where dialogue could result in real social change. The museum's director believed the institution could mount Masik's artwork even if most staff members disagreed with the project. Some members of the staff felt positive about going ahead with the exhibition, knowing that their own contacts were ready to protest it. Moreover, in light of Clifford's contact model, *all of this made sense*.

What I am referring to in this case is not an active attempt to be controversial, to confront visitors, or to facilitate or mediate conflict. I am pointing to the effect that working in a naturalized contact zone has had on the subconscious minds of those who work there—people who, when faced with a very serious conflict, were able to conclude that the conflict was positive or beneficial. Those involved in the exhibition have extensive experience working with communities; some have seen the museum through 20 years of collaboration, with all of the difficulties and tensions that have arisen from negotiating those rela-

tionships. They are not naïve or insensitive; rather, they are extremely adept at navigating colonial encounters. At this particular institution, the museum has been made a space of contact and conflict, and the staff have become so accustomed to working in this discomfort that it has become second nature. The ongoing tension that arises in the institution has been normalized so that it is no longer experienced as unexpected or alarming. Both MOA staff and representatives from the Women's Memorial March Committee agree that their meetings were quite intense and emotional. For the staff, it has become part of their job descriptions to navigate such encounters rather than avoid them. Meeting with a group of protesters would simply be seen as another example of the kinds of interactions that the staff face when they come to work. To illustrate this point, those involved in the meetings made it clear that they were quite comfortable should the women mount a protest against them. They are used to relationships being tense. The museum's role was to offer a space for discussion despite the conflicts that arose from contact among divergent groups. The museum supported both Masik and her protestors and tried to be a space where dialogue over the issues could occur. However, the museum's role as facilitator was rejected both by the community involved and by the public. When *The Forgotten* was cancelled, the public outcry was scathing toward the museum, with people targeting UBC, MOA, and the director as those responsible for the entire affair.<sup>28</sup>

Though the worst of the potential controversy was avoided, it took a long time for the museum staff to actually cancel the exhibit. It took ongoing meetings in which advocates for the Downtown Eastside community repeatedly stated that the exhibit would be devastating for people, the refusal of third parties to become involved, and the threat of a major protest before a decision was made. I argue that this is due to the subconscious modes of operating that have evolved out of an institution running in what I would call the perpetual contact zone mentality. By this I mean that conflict is internalized as normal and therefore not disturbing. The problem is that when tension is normalized, it becomes very difficult to gauge when it is part of a normal working relationship with a community and when that community is actually trying to tell the museum its actions are

unacceptable. In some cases, working through difficult issues can lead to healing, and there are rare examples of exhibitions successfully being a part of this process (Sevy Fua 2010). Yet, when those concerned communicate that museum involvement will not result in healing and will rather re-entrench the trauma, museums must be prepared to listen.

At the time when the concept of the contact zone was initially applied to museums, it was clear that any conflict in museums was a result of a broken system. Museums had been forced to face themselves as colonial institutions and were attempting to change from spaces of contact to spaces of partnership. Now that those partnerships have evolved, are we misinterpreting the signs of conflict that still remain? It may be time to reexamine our attitudes toward conflict and to see conflict for what it is: a sign that those partnerships are still in the process of being created and that the relationships with communities are not yet at a place where they can be deemed fully successful. It is only when we remove the contact zone mentality that it becomes possible to see why a particular partnership may be failing.

As an alternative, I suggest that museums adopt a reconciliation mentality. The concept of reconciliation is currently emerging into the forefront of academic thought in Canada as the country attempts to come to terms with its colonial history (Castellano et al. 2008). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was established in 2008 to investigate the impact of the residential school system on Aboriginal peoples, and it will complete its hearings by 2014. The intergenerational impact for Aboriginal communities, known as the legacy of residential schools, includes high levels of addiction, suicide, and family abuse (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2012:6). The high number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada has also been posited as a part of this legacy (Jacobs and Williams 2008:133). As the full force of colonial trauma is for the first time emerging into mainstream politics, it may also be time for those in museums to consider the potential for reconciliation within their own institutions. Adopting an attitude of reconciliation entails listening to Aboriginal communities, understanding that residential school survivors and their descendants are in the process of healing, and moving toward relationships that are built on mutual under-

standing and trust. Although some could argue that this is what museums have been attempting to do in the last 20 years, there are clear differences in the kind of issues that communities were willing to address in museums throughout the 1990s and what they are ready to discuss now. If museums and communities truly wish to exhibit the legacy of colonialism, then it is imperative that all parties be ready to face the truth of that legacy. This means understanding the signs of conflict, such as extreme emotions, as symptoms of trauma that require a high level of sensitivity and care. When viewed as a sign of trauma, conflict becomes the first indication to museum staff that their sensitivity is required in all aspects of the exhibition process. This awareness may be of benefit for museums as they attempt to represent the more violent aspects of colonial experience.

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#### **NOTES**

1. As of March 2010, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) had 582 cases recorded (NWAC 2010:i). The term Aboriginal encompasses Canada's first inhabitants, including Inuit, Métis, and First Nations. Though the communities I discuss are primarily First Nations, I retain the term Aboriginal throughout the text, which reflects the terminology most often used by scholars and activists in discussions of missing women in Canada.
2. As of September 2011, the Walk4Justice had compiled a list of close to 4,200 women.
3. For a history of the Downtown Eastside, see Sommers 2001.
4. See also Cameron 2010 for a detailed examination of the Pickton investigation.
5. Missing Women's Inquiry Community Forum, January 19, 2011.
6. The Walk4Justice led walkers from Vancouver to Ottawa in 2008 and 2011 to protest at Parliament.
7. For more information on violence against Aboriginal women in Canada, see Amnesty International 2004, Anderson et al. 2010, Welsh 2006, and Zuluaga and Walia 2011.
8. No treaties have ever been signed, rendering the Greater Vancouver area unceded Coast Salish territory.

9. Angela MacDougal, Missing Women's Inquiry Community Forum, January 19, 2011.
10. Angela MacDougal, Missing Women's Inquiry Community Forum, January 19, 2011.
11. Publications on memorials in the Downtown Eastside include Burk 2010, Culhane 2003, Cultural Memory Group 2006, and Welsh 2006.
12. Corinthia Kelly and Gloria Larocque, interview by the author, February 25, 2011.
13. Gloria Larocque, interview by the author, February 25, 2011.
14. Corinthia Kelly, interview by the author, February 25, 2011.
15. Corinthia Kelly, interview by the author, February 25, 2011.
16. Anthony Shelton, personal communication, November 30, 2010.
17. In 2010, the museum completed a \$55.5 million renovation and expansion project (see Museum of Anthropology 2010c).
18. Anthony Shelton, e-mail to the author, June 15, 2011.
19. Jennifer Webb, interview by the author, February 9, 2011.
20. The Symposium, entitled *Absence, Silences, Action & Voice* in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, featured a roundtable discussion on Masik's work, yet was not affiliated with MOA or UBC.
21. Women's Memorial March Committee, e-mail to Anthony Shelton, August 12, 2010.
22. Corinthia Kelly, interview by the author, February 25, 2011.
23. Sarah Carr-Locke, interview by the author, January 17, 2011.
24. Sarah Carr-Locke, interview by the author, January 17, 2011.
25. Jennifer Webb, interview by the author, February 9, 2011.
26. This shift in thought was concurrent with challenges by indigenous peoples to other museums worldwide, which faced similar criticism. See Kelly et al. 2003 and McCarthy 2007.
27. When the exhibit's cancellation was announced, online comments on the subsequent newspaper articles indicated very emotional reactions on the part of the public (see Lederman 2011).
28. See online comments in Lederman 2011.
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