Which Genocide Matters the Most? An Intersectionality Analysis of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights

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Introduction

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) in Winnipeg, scheduled to open in 2014, is "envisioned to be a national and international destination, a centre of learning where Canadians and people from around the world can reflect and be inspired about human rights" (CMHR, 2013). Geographically, the CMHR is located on Indigenous territory at a historical meeting place where the Assiniboine and Red Rivers join. The CMHR is the vision of CanWest founder, the late Israel Asper, as a place where Canadian students could learn about human rights. What began as private initiative in 2003 soon attracted state attention and in 2007, Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced that the Canadian government would recognize the CMHR as a national museum and earmark $100 million towards its $310 million construction, setting aside another $22 million for its operating budget. In 2008, the CMHR was established as a federal Crown corporation and has received additional funding from the Government of Manitoba ($40 million), the City of Winnipeg ($23 million) as well as private donations from the Friends of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the Forks Renewal Corporation (CMHR, 2013). Through a

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study of national-level community responses to this state funded museum, we examine how public spaces and public identities are imagined, questioned and legitimized by members of the public. As A. Dirk Moses states, over recent decades "museums have tried to forge new relationships with their publics by problematizing issues and encouraging visitor reflection, rather than conveying high culture to the passive masses" (2012: 216).

The CMHR is mandated "to explore the subject of human rights, with special but not exclusive reference to Canada, in order to enhance the public's understanding of human rights, to promote respect for others and to encourage reflection and dialogue" (CMHR, 2013). Yet, in 2009, when a content advisory committee was established to determine which human rights abuses would be featured in the museum, it was recommended that the CMHR position the Holocaust as "a separate zone at the centre of the museum, showing the centrality of the Holocaust to the overall human rights story" (CMHR CAC, 2010: 62). While there are numerous stakeholders involved in the discussions and debates around the museum's curatorial goals, this paper focuses on one such well-publicized and controversial debate: the CMHR decision to create a separate and prominent Holocaust museum which has prompted various groups whose nations and populations have experienced genocide to make demands that the museum provide equal treatment of other national and international atrocities. This has resulted in a "Pandora's box of irreconcilable traumatic memory competition" (Moses, 2012: 218), a type of "Oppression Olympics" whereby groups compete for the mantle of the most oppressed without dismantling dominant structures and discourses that generate the dominant standards of a competition. This competition between oppressions operates within the current context of recognition politics in Canada, whereby groups must align themselves with singular identities when articulating claims to the state and public institutions. What is at stake, then, is the ability of identity-based groups to move forward on contentious political and policy issues.

The Oppression Olympics is an evocative term used by feminist intersectionality scholars to describe intergroup competition and victimhood (Hancock, 2011: 4). It echoes Novick's (2000) concept of "victimization Olympics" whereby groups are pitted in a morbid competition of historical oppressions, and Rothberg's notions of "memory wars" whereby "memories crowd each other out of the public sphere" (2011: 523) and "competitive memory" which operates as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources (2009: 3). Our use of the Oppression Olympics echoes these two concepts, but differs in that it not only emphasizes that different histories of structural violence are connected and relational but also seeks to disrupt the stability of group identities claiming public recognition, precisely because intersecting processes of identity formation construct the political realm and are produced as political.

Abstract. The Canadian Museum of Human Rights, scheduled to open in 2014, is envisioned as a place to learn about the struggle for human rights in Canada and internationally. Yet the museum has faced controversy because of the centrality of the Holocaust in the overall human rights story, prompting other groups whose nations and populations have experienced genocide to make demands that the museum provide equal treatment of other national and international atrocities. Through a feminist intersectionality lens, we examine this "Oppression Olympics," whereby groups compete for the mantle of the most oppressed, as a case study of the problem with hierarchies of difference. Drawing on intersectionality theory, we ultimately provide an alternative lens and policy direction to the apparent impasse between competing communities.

Résumé. Le Musée canadien pour les droits de la personne, dont l'ouverture est prévue en 2014, est envisagé comme un lieu d'apprentissage sur la lutte pour les droits humains au Canada et dans le monde. Cependant, le Musée a suscité la controverse en raison de l'accent qu'il met sur l'Holocauste dans l'histoire générale des droits de la personne, et il a incité d'autres groupes dont les nations et les populations ont connu le génocide à demander un traitement équitable d'autres atrocités nationales et internationales. Sous l'angle de l'intersectionnalité féministe, nous examinons ces « Jeux olympiques de l'oppression », dans lesquels des groupes concourent pour le titre de plus opprimé, comme une étude de cas du problème des hiérarchies de la différence. En s'appuyant sur la théorie intersectionnelle, nous fournissons une optique et une orientation politique alternative pour aborder l'impasse apparente entre des communautés concurrentes.

In this paper we utilize intersectionality theory first to apply the Oppression Olympics framework to a study of public discourses surrounding the content of the museum, as a case study of hierarchies of difference; and second, we illustrate the potential of intersectionality theory to provide an alternative lens and policy direction that transcend the Oppression Olympics. Five key features characterize intersectionality. First, intersectionality shifts the analysis from one factor to multiple interacting factors and the relationship between them. Typically, the focus is on the mutually constituted and relational dynamics between interacting identities, categories of difference and systems of power and processes of differentiation (Dhamoon, 2011a). Second, intersectionality emphasizes the importance of examining various levels of differentiation and the relationship between them. This can include, for instance, an analysis of personal biography, groups or communities, and systems and social institutions. Third, intersectionality shifts the focus from a binary-based understanding of difference (for example, power/powerless, oppressed/oppressor) to an analysis of the varying amounts and types of penalty and privilege that shape social locations and systemic power relations (Collins, 1990; Dhamoon, 2011a; Hankivsky, 2011; Hankivsky and Cormier, 2009; Razack, 1998). Fourth, intersectionality emphasizes that struggles for justice do not arise in isolation but are instead deeply interrelated to one another precisely because they are constituted and sustained in relational and interactive ways through a matrix of power. Finally, the normative and theoretical drive of intersectionality is a critique of the work and vehicles of power; it is a tool for social justice (Hankivsky and Cormier, 2009).[1]

Drawing on CMHR materials, media reports and official statements by relevant stakeholders we focus on the public discourses that have produced an Oppression Olympics. We begin by identifying the main issue about the museum's content and the ways in which community responses, largely present in the mass media, both reproduce and challenge an Oppression Olympics impasse. While there is established scholarship on the primacy of the Holocaust (Bauer, 2001; Katz, 2001; MacDonald, 2010; Moses, 2012; Rosenbaum, 2009; Rothberg, 2009;), the scholarship on the CMHR is still emerging and to date has largely been limited to the field of museology (for example, Carter and Orange, 2012; Orange and Carter, 2012) A. Dirk Moses (2012), in particular, has led the way in situating the CMHR debates about the "uniqueness of the Holocaust" in the larger field of genocide studies. Our study is not specifically about genocide studies, although, as we contend, intersectionality has implications for the study of genocides; rather, we contribute to the limited scholarship on the content of the CMHR, and demonstrate the applicability of intersectionality to studying the production of subjects and public spaces. We specifically offer a solution to the apparent impasse by showing how intersectionality can provide a critique of dominant forces of power. This lens, we contend, presents an alternative to the apparent impasse, one that foregrounds a relational approach attuned to difference and signals a useful direction for bringing together groups and communities which are typically categorized as having competing interests in other contentious politics and policies.

At Issue

From the very outset, the CMHR has been plagued by controversies about how it best represents "the subject of human rights." In particular, the content of the museum, which "lies at the heart of a museum, [and is] the foundation and the framework upon which the whole meaning-making, storytelling experience is based" (CMHR CAC, 2010: 2), has been the trigger and focus of the criticism. Deep divisions exist in relation to which cases of human rights violations should be exhibited, how much space should be allotted to each case, and whether or not featured examples should be housed in permanent or temporary galleries and exhibitions. The emergent debates and controversies in regards to CMHR's content and how it will define the museum can be distilled into one key issue detailed below: the primacy of the Holocaust.

According to the president and CEO of the CMHR, Stuart Murray (2011), the content of the CMHR was supposed to be an "ideas museum" that avoided any hierarchy of suffering in its treatment of hate, oppression and discussion of human rights.[2] And yet, a key recommendation

made by the Content Advisory Committee in its final report is that "the museum should position the Holocaust as a separate zone at the centre of the museum, showing the centrality of the Holocaust to the overall human rights story and in promoting the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with its grounding in the idea of common humanity" (CMHR CAC, 2010: 62).

As Ira Basen observed in his *Globe and Mail* article in August 2011, "No recommendation was more predictable. A human rights museum without a Holocaust gallery would not have been true to Israel Asper's original vision and much of the early private fundraising was done under the assumption that the Holocaust would be prominently featured." What is arguably less well known is that the focus on the Holocaust is actually entrenched by Bill C-42, introduced by the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages to the House of Commons on February 11, 2008. The bill created a new Crown corporation called the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and set out the corporation's purpose, capacity and powers by amending the *Museums Act*. According to Bill C-42, the CMHR "will house the largest museum gallery in Canada *devoted to the subject of the Holocaust"* (Mahabir, 2008: 5, emphasis added). Moses (2012) points out that the CMHR was initially conceived by Israel Asper as a Holocaust museum, and the (literal and symbolic) centrality and prominence now given to the Holocaust could be considered a political compromise. Thus the official pedagogical rationalization of the museum as a site of learning about the history of human rights is in fact overshadowed by the primacy assigned to the Holocaust.

The museum's focus on the Holocaust has been advanced through a number of arguments: 1) that it was the catalyst for international human rights law, specifically the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide[3]; 2) that it is the best documented and commemorated genocide; and most recently 3) that it represents "the archetypal collapse of democracy into genocide from which human rights lessons can be drawn" (Moses, 2012: 233). Accordingly, in its international human rights cluster, the CMHR is proposing one permanent gallery focusing exclusively on the Holocaust and another entitled Breaking the Silence (previously named Mass Atrocities) which will include the five genocides—including the Holocaust (repeating twice in the same cluster space)—recognized by Canada's Parliament. The other genocides are the genocide by Serbian forces in Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina (recognized in 2010); the Holodomor (recognized in 2008), meaning murder by death by starvation, whereby millions of Ukrainians died in 1932–1933 "through seizures of food deliberately aimed to starve out the nationalistic pro-Ukrainian peasantry, thereby eliminating a serious threat to the integrity of the Soviet empire" (UCC, 2008); the Armenian geno-

cide (recognized in 2004), which was carried out between 1915 and 1918 and again between 1920 and 1923 when Armenians were subjected to expulsions, expropriation, abduction, torture, massacre and starvation by the Turkish government and heads of the Ottoman Empire; and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda (recognized in 2004) when up to a million Tutsi people died at the hands of state-backed Hutus. While these genocides are thus acknowledged, the tension arises from the Holocaust's centrality and CMHR's "Holocaust uniqueness agenda" (Moses, 2012: 215). Indeed, there are competing ideas about whether a national museum should focus on genocides recognized by the federal government or whether as a museum that emphasizes public engagement should focus on the demands of local groups seeking to have their histories of suffering represented.

Responses from Affected Communities

A number of prominent national community groups and organizations have responded to the plans for the CMHR raising serious concerns over the content, structure and decision-making processes related to the museum.[4] These concerns echo issues raised in genocide studies more broadly, which, as David MacDonald notes, have included an "exclusivist" position in which the Jewish experience of the Holocaust is deemed unique, "relativist" positions in which limited comparisons are made between the Holocaust and other genocides, and "multiple holocaust" (small "h") position where a continuum of holocausts exists. For example, the Canadian Polish Congress (CPC) protests the CMHR's planned "inequitable display of what has happened in the world that has gone against human rights" (cited in Adams, 2011), and the lack of balance and interpretation in the exhibitions that are planned. Quoted in the *Globe and Mail*, Teresa Berezowski, CPC President, argues that having

> a separate, permanent room that says "the Holocaust" leaves you questioning what the value is of all the other people who died otherwise ... Without minimizing the Holocaust, we just feel that whole idea of "mass atrocities" has to be rethought and perhaps have a larger display area in which the Holocaust, the Holodomor, the Armenian genocide, those things, [are] part and parcel of that. (Adams, 2011)

Thus, in this case, the CPC argues that if a mass atrocities section is to be established in the museum, then a central focus should be on the injury caused to Poles and other Eastern Europeans by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. The Central and European Council of Canada, which represents three million Canadians of Latvian, Estonian, Lithuanian, Hungarian and Slovak descent, among others, has gone so far as to call for "an embargo

on any further or incremental funding" until there is an independent review of the museum's contents and a new board created (Adams, 2011).

Further, George Shirinian, Armenian Canadian scholar and executive director of the International Institute for Human Rights and Genocide Studies (IIGHRS), does not dispute that the Holocaust is the best known or best documented genocide but he also notes that the Armenian genocide, which claimed more than 1.5 million lives in Turkey in 1915, is "the precursor and prototype of modern genocide" and as such requires "special attention" (Adams, 2011).

It is important to note, as has Moses, that Indigenous Canadians "have been conspicuously absent from the debates, perhaps because attention has been focused on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that has been investigating the fate of Indigenous children in residential schools or because the museum includes a dedicated gallery to Indigenous experiences" (2012: 217). This absence raises questions about the comparative genocide approach, in which scholars such as David E. Stannard (1992) and Ward Churchill (1997) deploy the vocabulary of the Holocaust as a means to articulate Indigenous suffering and refuse the Holocaust uniqueness thesis. Moses notes that comparative debates about Jewish and Indigenous atrocities have prompted a zero-sum game in which critics see "equations with the Jewish Holocaust as anti-Semitic and as the occlusion of its world–historical meaning" (2010: 18), or conversely as the denial of genocides against Indigenous peoples.

Arguably, the Ukrainian community has been the most vocal but also divided in its responses, signaling that no organization represents all members of a social collective. The Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC), an umbrella organization representing 1.2 million Canadians of Ukrainian heritage, has called for a separate "permanent and prominent" gallery dedicated to the Holodomor, as well as the internment of 6000 Ukrainian immigrants during 1914–1920 period under the Canadian *War Measures Act* (see UCC 2009, 2011). In comparison, Luciuk, representing the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association (UCCLA), states that "public funds should not be expended to promote the conceit that any one community's suffering is somehow more worthy of memory than that of all others" (Luciuk, 2011). This position differs from that of the UCC and has created tensions and rifts within the Ukrainian Canadian community.

The UCCLA's position is congruent with that of the International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (IIGHRS) in that both organizations have suggested an alternative to the impasse, one where no separate galleries should be dedicated to any single history or group. All 12 galleries, they contend, should be "integrated (and inclusive),[5] comparative and thematic" (Basen, 2011). This stands in contrast to the Holocaust-as-unique thesis, which Rothberg states can be dangerous

because "it potentially creates a hierarchy of suffering (which is morally offensive) and removes that suffering from the field of historical agency (which is both morally and intellectually suspect)" (2009: 9). The IIGHRS, in particular, has argued that a comparative approach to genocide would be completely in line with Canada's official policy of multiculturalism, specifically the *Multiculturalism Act* of 1971, which seeks to "encourage and assist the social, cultural, economic and political institutions of Canada to be both respectful and inclusive of Canada's multicultural character" (IIGHRS, 2011: par. 13). And, according to a March 2011 Nanos Research poll, paid for by Canadians for Genocide Education and UCCLA, Canadians would prefer one exhibit that covers all genocides equally rather than one zone dedicated to a singular genocide.[6] An integrated and inclusive approach is in tune with an intersectionality perspective (as will be detailed below). However, it seems to be unacceptable to some Jewish groups who adopt an exclusivist approach (see, for example, Chatterley, 2011) and the UCC and other Ukrainian groups (Adams, 2010b), both of whom want to see permanent and prominent galleries for the Jewish Holocaust and the Holodomor.

There is no doubt that the CMHR is an extremely emotional issue. As Roger Smith argues, "members of each group feel that their own trauma is unprecedented, the most important, and tend to inflate their experience to the level of historical uniqueness, as they naturally feel their own pain more immediately. Thus, it is understandable that the reaction to the CMHR's announced allocation of galleries has been polarized and adversarial" (2011). Interestingly, no level of government has become directly involved in the controversy and no level of government now regards the museum as an electoral asset (Moses, 2012: 233). The government of Canada, through its Heritage minister, has gone on record to state that because the CMHR is an arm's-length organization, it is "responsible for its own exhibits and programming," (Spokesperson for the Canadian Heritage Minister, quoted in Adams, 2010a).

Analyzing the CMHR Controversy from an Intersectionality Perspective

The CMHR and the Oppression Olympics

From an intersectionality perspective, the current controversy can be best understood as an "Oppression Olympics" (Hancock, 2011; Martinez, 1993), where groups fight over the mantle of the most oppressed in order to gain recognition in the CMHR. This is a controversy rooted in issues of power. As Dhamoon explains, "The Oppression Olympics is dependent on a competition between marginalized groups, in which time, energy

and resources are deployed to quantify and empirically prove who is the most oppressed" (2011b: 13). This competitive preoccupation importantly turns attention away from the different forces of domination that constitute and sustain a competition and that are inextricably structurally and ideologically linked, thereby making it practically impossible to parse out singular categorizations of "victim" status. But in constructing the CMHR controversy as an Oppression Olympics, exclusionary historical narratives, ethnocentric practices, and dominant nation-building processes are normalized.

Hancock's conception of the Oppression Olympics specifically elucidates five effects of power. Drawing on the community responses, discussed above, we consider these effects of power. First, the Oppression Olympics produces "leapfrog paranoia" (Hancock, 2011: 6), whereby there is competition for victimhood status. In the case of the CMHR this leapfrog paranoia is certainly evident in which intergroup relations are premised on which genocide is the worst, and indeed the controversy itself arose because of the dominant claim that the centrality of the Holocaust merits "a permanent home and major focus in the museum" (CMHR CAC, 2010: 43). Further, as described by *National Post* writer Jonathan Kay (2011), there is so much jousting about which group is most victimized that the resultant effect is that a museum tallies up the radical extremes of victimhood by focusing primarily on the suffering of one group as a sort of model for all other suffering. The only outcome of this dynamic is a zero-sum game, in which only one genocide can be deemed "the worst," as if lives lost and drastically changed during genocide are measurably more valuable in some contexts and less valuable in other contexts.

Second, the Oppression Olympics generates "willful blindness," which, according to Hancock "emerges from a persistent vision of oneself or one's groups as solely victims" (2011: 11). The effect is to not only "a sport of who's the purest victim" (11) but also the erasure of the agency of the group deemed to be victim and assumptions that the logic and practices of genocide are enacted in similar ways. In the case of the groups willfully blind to the equal (and different) significance of genocides of other groups, a dichotomy emerges (for example, Holocaust versus Holodomor) which invisibilizes other numerous genocides and populations (for example, Indigenous genocides, the Armenian genocide and so forth). Moreover, and further to Hancock, the Oppression Olympics in this case relies on unified categorizations of Jewish people and Holocaust experiences, while the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany against the Roma people, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Russians and those marked as homosexual are sidelined. This presumed linked between collective memory (of the Holocaust) and group identity (Jewish identity) necessarily produces exclusions, where it is assumed that groups *own* memories and experiences (Rothberg 2009: 6).

Third, the Oppression Olympics is characterized by "movement backlash" (Hancock, 2011: 13). In our case study, movement backlash occurs because of the idea that the gains of some groups/organizations create a new class of formerly privileged "victims" who are now unfairly disadvantaged. In the context of the CMHR, there are indications that those members of the Jewish community arguing for more prominence for the Holocaust are entering into this kind of movement backlash, whereby there seems to be fear that their hard-won recognition of the Holocaust—in both academia and in practice—would somehow undermine recognition of this terrible history if other genocides were given equal prominence. In other words, it is argued, the "privilege" now assigned to the Holocaust as the gold standard by which to compare other atrocities should not be changed. As Beachler succinctly puts it:

> The most disturbing aspect of the comparative suffering debates is the extent to which the arguments about one's own group must lead to the denigration of the suffering of others. It is as if suffering is a limited commodity, and genocide—as the most precious brand of commodity—must be especially guarded, lest its attribution to other groups lead to a diminution of its value. (2011: 86)

Fourth, "defiant ignorance" is a "defense mechanism designed to resist responsibility for *and* advantage from inegalitarian traditions" (Hancock, 2011: 15). As Hancock notes, the logic of defiant ignorance lies in denying the validity of the information presented and withdrawing from it as if it was irrelevant. This feature of the Oppression Olympics is evident in media reports about the CMHR; for instance, in January of 2012, in articles written by Paul Turenne (2012a; 2012b), both the *Toronto Sun* and *Winnipeg Sun* reported that Canadians have little interest in visiting a museum for human rights, indicating a corrosive lack of interest in critical components of histories. At the same time, defiant ignorance also raises the role of decision and knowledge experts in the CMHR controversy. For instance, a majority of the members of the original board of trustees were past members of the advisory council which had actually lobbied for the museum project, and thus serious questions arise about their ability to be objective and inclusive in their advice (Luciuk, 2011). The lack of diversity in the Content Advisory Committee has also been raised (Moses, 2012).

Finally, Hancock identifies the "compassion deficit disorder" as evidence of the Oppression Olympics. The compassion deficit disorder is a product of failed responses to an injustice because those affected are seen to be "less than human and therefore politically expendable" (Hancock, 2011: 16). On a global scale, the often-quoted phrase of "never again" regarding the Holocaust and other atrocities, genocides continue to occur around the world and distant Others are easily ignored. This is a product

of intersecting racial and class-based histories that have fostered distinctions between the global South and North; and, on a national scale in Canada, there continues to be indifference as well as deliberate denial for the ongoing colonial violence against Indigenous people (Blackstock, 2008; Jacobs and Williams, 2008; Murdocco, 2010).

Ultimately, as Hancock concludes, "Each dimension in the Oppression Olympics thwarts rather than facilitates democratic deliberation and political solidarity within and between politically relevant categories of difference" (2011: 4). Building on Hancock's conception of the Oppression Olympics, we contend that intersectionality not only helps to describe and explain the dynamics surrounding the CMHR, it also offers some important political directions for navigating the competition of genocides so as to disrupt existing hegemonies and inhibit the construction of new ones. We turn to these alternate directions next.

A State-Based Recognition Approach?

The Oppression Olympics dynamic that is shaping controversies about the content of the CMHR might suggest that in as much as the CMHR is a federal Crown corporation, the Canadian state and government could address the tensions by extending acknowledgment or recognition of other genocides. While no doubt provincial and federal governments and other agents of the state will continue to be actors in the establishment and operations of the CMHR (for example, as funders and regulators), an extended program of state recognition of genocide may also not fully address the challenges facing the CMHR about its content. This is because the list of groups seeking recognition of genocides is growing, and limited resources and space will likely promote a longer Oppression Olympics list; in June 2010, for instance, MPs Sukh Dhaliwal and Andrew Kania presented a motion in the Canadian Parliament to declare the massacre of Sikhs in India in 1984 as genocide. As well, there are other genocides, histories of ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity that have not had the same profile in historical recognition discussions in Canada, including those in Cambodia, Palestine and Darfur, raising questions whether the exclusivist, relativist, and multiple debates within comparative genocide studies will extend to other atrocities.

Moreover, the state itself is implicated in human rights abuses and ongoing colonialism in Canada (Coulthard, 2007; Thobani, 2007); for instance, in February 2013 Human Rights Watch published a report called "Abusive Policing and Failures in Protection of Indigenous Women and Girls in Northern British Columbia," outlining the human rights failures affecting Indigenous females. Further, as Wendy Brown (1995) warns, wounded attachments (in this case, attachment to particular genocides) based on identity claims (for example, Jewish, Ukrainian, Armenian) can

evoke and reiterate past and continued suffering. In addition, the state has not acknowledged all national or international atrocities. As Alexander Laban Hinton (2012: 13) urges, we need to ask why certain cases are forgotten, remembered, recognized or intentionally hidden or written out of history.[7] In the case of Canada, this question leads us to foreground the willful ignorance of the Canadian state that implicates Canadian officials, policies and structures in genocide and ongoing settler colonialism against Indigenous peoples (Cardinal, 1999; MacDonald and Hudson, 2012; Neu and Therrien, 2003). As we point out in the final section, if agents of the state do seek to disrupt the Oppression Olympics plaguing the CMHR content debates, this will require further resources for competing groups to dialogue; as well, there will need to be more space and tools for advancing discussions and scholarship on interlocking matrices of power that challenge identity politics and liberal conceptions of individuated genocides.

A Non-Hierarchal Comparative Approach

A non-hierarchal comparative approach, we contend, which resonates with David MacDonald's (2010) conception of multiple holocausts, is preferable over an Oppression Olympics and a state-based recognition approach when setting the content for the CMHR. A non-hierarchal comparative approach would serve to move away from the Oppression Olympics, a shift that seems to be apparent within some organizations concerned with the content of the CMHR—where, for instance, the UCCLA has argued that the CMHR's galleries should be thematic, comparative and inclusive—and within genocide scholarship (Bloxham, 2008; Finkel and Strauss, 2012; MacDonald, 2008, 2010; Rothberg, 2009). For example, Finkel and Strauss compare macro factors (such as intergroup relations, regime type, ideology, leader strategies), meso factors (such as subnational regions and communities, political parties, civil society, political networks) and micro-level factors (such as individual civilians). MacDonald (2008) uses case studies on the Armenian genocide, Chinese holocaust, Aboriginal genocide in Australia, the situation of the Maori in New Zealand, and the war and genocide in former Yugoslavia to demonstrate what the Jewish Holocaust represents as a universal symbol and how this symbol has been used in other contexts.

Rothberg (2009, 2011) develops a theory and practice of multidirectional memory, which works against the logic of competitive memory based on a zero-sum game. Rothberg (2009: 6) argues that his comparative method serves to illustrate how the Holocaust can render other genocides visible and grievable without centring the Holocaust, and shows that political consciousness about the Holocaust emerged in the context of struggles of decolonization and independence by subjects of Euro-

pean colonialism during 1945 and 1962. For Rothberg, a multidirectional memory approach refuses the notion of the public sphere as pregiven in which already established groups engage in struggle and instead reconfigures subjects and public spaces into productive dynamic sites of negotiation. With regards to the CMHR, the International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies has also stated that "It is our belief that the comparative approach to various cases of genocide, based on the principles of inclusiveness provides such scholarly standards, whereas allocating a whole gallery to only one case, while lumping all others into a single gallery ... relativizes and thereby trivializes all those other cases" (Smith, 2011).

A non-hierarchal comparative approach is compelling but, as Moses says, "Whether the similarities are more significant than the differences is ultimately a political and philosophical, rather than a historical, question and, as we have seen, the answers are driven by passionate, extra-historical considerations" (2010: 18). While adopting a comparative method, MacDonald (2010) is cautious of its pitfalls. He demonstrates that when the Maori in New Zealand deployed the discourse to describe their experiences of colonial violence, an outcry of criticism led to charges that Maori and Jewish suffering was conflated and that the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust was denied; in response, charges of denial about indigenous genocide gained further legitimacy. While comparisons of legacies of atrocities are helpful, they can also produce competition and denials of suffering (MacDonald, 2010).

An Inessential Solidarities (Rather than a Fruitless Oppression Olympics) Approach

To draw out the structural–relational dynamics between experiences without collapsing into Oppression Olympics, we propose that the non-hierarchal comparative approach be complemented by an intersectionality lens. Perhaps the most promising insight about the CMHR oppression Olympics that arises from an intersectionality lens is that "inessential solidarities" (Abdou et al., 2009) can avoid the sense of competition between genocides while simultaneously addressing the logic of domination or what Patricia Hill Collins calls "a matrix of domination," namely the "overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop and are contained" (2000: 251–71).

This intersectional approach to examining power importantly reveals that precisely because all social groups and histories are constituted in and by a dominant matrix, and thus interact, all groups and histories are implicated in the conditions that create and sustain relations of privilege and penalty (Razack, 1998). This suggests that we cannot extract ourselves out of the social production of difference because we are either

directly benefiting or being injured by it, and/or the social meanings attached our differences are constituted and organized in relation to other Othernesses. As such, genocides are not separate isolated incidences but intersecting practices that uphold dominant discourses. The precise nature of this dominant matrix needs more investigation of the kind offered by Rothberg (2009, 2011) who illuminates the "relationality of different histories of racial violence" in his study of American articulations of the Holocaust, slavery, and genocide of Indigenous peoples. While genocides vary according to historical period, region, territory, economy, demography and nature of violence (Finkel and Strauss, 2012: 63), nation building is constitutive of genocidal practices and human rights abuses. For example, Smith (2005) illuminates how sexual violence during the American Indian genocide glorified European masculinities and consolidated American authority over the land while dispossessing Indigenous peoples. In his analysis of the relationship between indigenous and Jewish atrocities, Moses (2010: 33) states that "What is required, then, is an account of European modernity that links nation building, imperial competition and international and intra-national racial struggle to the ideologically driven catastrophes of the twentieth century." This link—competition between European-originated rival projects of nation building (whether Nazi Germany or colonial Canada)—situates genocides in the matrix of power, where European norms constitute the structures of domination.

Further to Hancock, the Oppression Olympics approach fails to address the ways in which all group experiences, including minority group experiences, are connected not just because of shared victim status but also because groups are complicit in the othering of Others. As Andrea Smith (2006) shows in the context of white supremacy, even while there are different pillars of whiteness—such as slavery, genocide and colonialism, and Orientalism and war—when marginalized groups participate in maintaining these three pillars they too are implicated in the oppression of Others. In the case of the CMHR, this is precisely what is happening. When Jewish groups or the UCC in Canada present their particular histories as if they were prior and primary and seek recognition of their collective history of suffering on these terms, they are effectively (even if unintentionally) operationalizing the logic of white supremacy and colonialism, and participating in a structure of complicity that legitimates settler colonialism and the dispossession of Indigenous land. Put differently, the seductive prospect of being recognized by the state and the CMHR is a technology of white supremacy and necessarily implicates minorities in the oppression of others, even as those minorities experience exclusion and oppression. Instead of participating in this logic, Andrea Smith (2006) urges vigilance in how this logic is internalized.

As well as emphasizing the overall structure of domination that is constituted through intersecting histories and the relational character of genocides, an intersectional lens illuminates that human rights violations, including genocide, are not homogeneous. Intersectionality reveals how experience is incommensurable with the categorized representation of linear identity mobilized in human rights law (Cooper, 2008: 2) and more specifically within current legal and political framings of genocide. This stands in contrast with the exclusivist approach where the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust necessitates a homogeneous bounded group identity. The genocide against Indigenous peoples in Canada, for example, did not occur through colonial tactics alone but through intersecting gendered, ablest and religious norms that form a dominant matrix. As such, there are differences not only between genocides but also *within* genocidal practices. Differences *within* groups need to be addressed so that the relations of power within those groups can be addressed in the content of the CMHR. A comparative approach would attend to differences between groups and linkages between histories of violence. However, such an approach risks equating different technologies of genocide and models of victimization (Rothberg, 2011: 534) and would be less attentive to the differences *within* groups that emerge from intersecting forces of power. As Jones notes, "The creation of competitive groups ignores the fact that 'categorizing' humans by nation, ethnicity, race, religion does not depict the reality that such identities never exist in isolation and, moreover, the alleged stability and integrity of these groups is very much open to question" (2010: 34). It is our contention that what is required to confront the Oppression Olympics surrounding the CMHR content is the formation of inessential solidarities.

Inessential solidarities, state Abdou and colleagues (2009), are based on common interests among diverse communities, not common identities (for example, Jewish, Ukrainian, Indigenous, Armenian), while still centring situated knowledge in liberation struggles. Drawing from Levinas, Abdou and colleagues illuminate how inessential solidarities promote "infinite responsibility," whereby we act with a sense of responsibility for the freedom of others. They argue that inessential solidarities entail accepting the unknown, a willingness to accept difference and avoid the tendency to subsume Otherness, to adopt humility in face-to-face encounters, to avoid the imposition of labels and categories, to listen and just be quiet sometimes, and to recognize our culpabilities.

An intersectional lens promotes inessential solidarities, specifically by disrupting the notion of unified and singular injustices. Such a disruptive ethos can generate crisis about the power dynamics between groups affected by injustice. This unraveling of intersecting privileges and penalties is an opportunity to learn about relations of structural implication and the rationalities of domination, rather than singularly claiming the

mantle of the most oppressed. Moreover, precisely because intersectional processes of differentiation produce a matrix of domination, it is essential to ask how a claim to uniqueness (as is claimed for the Holocaust) or a claim to equation (such as equations between the Holodomor, Indigenous genocide, and Jewish Holocaust) replicates or mimics the dominant order. Confronting these power dynamics can produce profoundly hard moments and requires intentional reflection on the operations and effects of a matrix of domination (Dhamoon, 2009), and alternative protocols of engagement that are more attentive to forces of power, which we signal next.

Practical Implications

In practice, for those competing for space and recognition in the CMHR, a non-hierarchical-comparative and an inessential solidarities approach could lead to the following changes in both the process and content of the museum, although we concede that some of these changes may be difficult or more long term as they involve challenging fundamental structures of power:

State-Oriented Action

- The federal government should make changes to the *Museum Act* relating to CMHR to ensure that an intersectional lens is used in drafting and designing all policies and legal instruments. This would necessarily make impossible a human rights architecture that prioritizes the subject of the Holocaust, and would foster appointments of individuals to key decision-making positions from academic, community and government sectors who are well-versed in intersectionality as a tool to understand varying degrees and form of penalty and privilege.
- The CMHR should move beyond single dimensional understanding of oppression and inequality in the context of human rights and genocide, which it has already stated it seeks to do (CMHR, 2013).
- The federal government and the CMHR should facilitate and create meaningful opportunities for the networking of the community groups and organizations that have engaged in the CMHR Oppression Olympics discourse.
- The CMHR could promote critical appraisals of UN conventions and instruments, because settler nations continue to deny or water down the relevance of Indigenous populations as nations (Cooper, 2008).
- Within the museum galleries, the CMHR could make linkages between structures and causes of genocides and human rights violations (for

example, how the tactics of genocide against Indigenous peoples relate to internment during the First and Second World Wars).
- The CMHR could further promote critiques of gendered and homophobic settler colonialism throughout the content and activities of the museum, which the CMHR has started to do recently, especially since the CMHR reinforces Indigenous dispossession by declaring itself a national museum (and thus by default assuming the legitimacy of the Canadian nation rather than the local Indigenous nation).
- The CMHR should encompass multiple interpretations by groups affected by genocides and human rights violations.
- The CMHR should document accounts of how all involved in CMHR—the government, the CMHR board and staff, and different groups debating the content and structure—are "implicated in different forms and degrees, in the conditions that structure and uphold a matrix of domination" (Dhamoon, 2011b: 26).

Community-Oriented Action by Civil Society Actors

Community-oriented action by civil society actors would involve those stakeholders that have been active in the debates to date, as well as those who have been made marginal or absent, such as Indigenous communities. They could:

- work towards making structural links between national and international genocides, human rights violations and atrocities that are and also are not currently acknowledged by the state;
- build non-statist and non-unified relations (rather than seek recognition and legitimacy through stand-alone permanent sections in exhibition) that promote encounters of listening and learning rather than goals of gaining full knowledge about those marked as Others;
- develop protocols of engagement that are attuned to the intersecting forces of power that uphold differing degrees and forms of penalty and privilege (for example, how Jews, Ukrainians and Sikhs benefit from settling on Indigenous lands and how they continue to experience varying degrees and forms of discipline and punishment because of past and contemporary human rights violations and genocides) or how power operates among Indigenous peoples to produce material distinctions between First Nations and Métis (for instance) and Indigenous men and women;
- share multiple interpretations of past and present structures and events within and among groups so as to draw out variations within social groups and to reveal and disrupt the logics of domination.

These changes, we contend, would in fact be consistent with the intention of the CMHR not to be a memorial or genocide museum and to

focus instead on lessons learned. Such changes would advance understandings of overarching themes that repeat themselves in human rights violations, their relevance for contemporary society and how they can provide insight for action in relation to human rights violations today.

Conclusion

The CMHR has been plagued by controversy rooted in an identity-based Oppression Olympics, where groups are competing for recognition by a public institution through a hierarchy of oppressions. This is despite the fact that in one of its key recommendations, the Advisory Committee on the CMHR stated that "The museum should not take sides... The museum should embrace the complexity of human rights and avoid oversimplification and easy answers; it should not shy away from conflict, or attempt to erase differences of opinion or perspective" (CMHR CAC, 2010: 87). The avoidance of oversimplification, erasure of differences, and the inevitability of conflict, we have argued, can be mitigated by deploying the tools of intersectionality. Ultimately, our application of intersectionality to a case study of the CMHR offers some directions for navigating the controversies about content, and if accompanied with political pressure, potentially provides an alternative approach to the current Oppression Olympics.

Notes

1 By critique we broadly mean a praxis that radically contextualizes and disrupts the meanings of texts or symbols, which has discursive and structural–material effects. For further discussion about the critical capacities of intersectionality as a tool for political theory and practice see Crenshaw (1997), Dhamoon (2011a), Hancock (2007), Hankivsky (2011) and McCall (2005).

2 For an important historic overview of events including the process and outcomes of two parliamentary hearings on the CMHR see Moses (2012).

3 According to a *Winnipeg Free Press* article, April 3, 2013, museum staff acknowledged that this relationship has been oversimplified and may exaggerate the actual historical connections between the two. In its present conceptual articulation the museum has de-linked causal relationship between the Holocaust and the Universal Declaration (Rollason 2013).

4 We are mindful that our analysis may not be representative of the variety of opinions within each community, but we attempt to provide an analysis of the positions most highlighted in the media.

5 The terminology of "inclusive" was emphasized in a personal correspondence with Lubomyr Luciuk (May 28, 2012).

6 It is important to note that in July 2012, the CMHR did sign a memorandum of understanding with the Memorial in Commemoration of Famines' Victims in Ukraine, a move that the museum stated would help them better understand the Holodomor.

7 Hinton (2012: 13) notes a typology in genocide studies: a triad which focuses on the Holocaust, Armenian Genocide and Rwanda; a twentieth-century core that focuses on the Holocaust, Armenians, Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur and Indigenous

peoples; a second circle composed of East Pakistan, Kurdish case, Guatemala, Nimibia, Kosovo, Carthage, settler genocides, Ukrainian/Soviet; and a periphery, which includes events in Indonesia, Argentina, specific cases of Indigenous peoples, Assyrian and Greek cases, East Timor, Burundi, Maoist China, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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